

A Curriculum Guide to

The Ability, Book 2: *Mindscape*

by M. M. Vaughan

The discussion questions in this guide correlate to the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.6.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7) (SL.6.1, 2, 3, 4) (W.6.1 A-D, 2 A-F, 7)

About the Book

Christopher Lane returns to Myers Holt Academy, a secret school where Chris and five other students use their mental powers to solve criminal cases. When he returns from vacation, he must face the knowledge that he killed a boy using his Ability. Can he control his power? Chris has no one to turn to for help with his dilemma. At the same time, the boy's twin brother, Ernest, is seeking revenge for his brother's death, while also dealing with a loveless, revengeful mother of his own. Will Chris survive against these odds and find happiness in his life? Will Ernest succeed in his quest to avenge his brother's death?

Prereading Discussion Topics

1. Have the students summarize the main events in sequential order of the first book, *The Ability*.
2. Discuss a time when you told the truth and no one believed you. How did you feel?
3. Describe a situation in your life that had a tragic ending. Was there anything that could have been done to prevent the tragedy? Did you have someone to help you through that difficult experience?
4. Have you ever experienced peer pressure? How did you handle the situation? Looking back, were there ways to influence your peers to your way of thinking?

Discussion Questions

1. Revenge is a dish best served cold. What does this proverb mean? How is it related to this story?
2. What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)? How does this condition relate to Dulcia? Chris? Were any of Chris's classmates affected by this syndrome?
3. When Chris returned to Myers Holt after vacation, he was greeted by Lexi. Soon she realized Chris had not been practicing his Ability. He reminded Lexi that they were instructed not to use it outside of school, but she confessed that she did use it, and more than once. Chris used his

Ability to protect himself from his old classmate Kevin. Lexi used it against her older brothers. They both broke the rules. Discuss whether either of them was justified in using their Ability.

4. Sir Bentley stated that Chris had integrity. Chris wished to help the twin brother of the boy he killed while using his Ability. What is the definition of integrity? Was it integrity or guilt that Chris felt?

5. After the tragic event at the Antarctic Ball, Sir Bentley decided the students needed to have a way to cope with their emotional trauma. He hired a school psychologist, Hugh Valedictoriat. His credentials included working with soldiers who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Discuss his method of helping the students: sand play, teddy bears, singing. How did the students react to his sessions? Should Mr. Valedictoriat have been provided with some background information on the students before their sessions? Consider the confidentiality laws psychologists must obey.

6. Whenever Chris got angry, his Ability became more powerful. He had not learned to control his emotions. One of his first assignments was to enter Dulcia's mind to learn more about her planned revenge, whether there were others involved in the attack, the name of her son, and her home address. Knowing Chris's emotional state after killing Dulcia's son and his superior ability to gain access into other people's minds, do you think Chris is the best student to trust to access Dulcia's mind? Chris was worried he was losing control of his Ability. Should he have confided this information to Sir Bentley before he attempted to access Dulcia's mind? If Chris had not been chosen, who would be the one to try to access her mind? Use references from the text to defend your answer.

7. Sir Bentley explains to Chris what happened the night Anna Willows, aka Dulcia, was kidnapped. The students at the time were trained to the best of their ability to use Inferno, which was then to be used on some blackmailers. Depending upon the severity of the Inferno, a person's mind could be completely destroyed. Ethically speaking, was this a subject students should be taught? Remember, students can only use their Ability while they are twelve years old. Was this an appropriate subject for students of this age? Would students be able to understand the consequences of their actions?

8. Dulcia is able to block Chris's attempt to enter her mind. Even after losing the Ability, one can still block access to one's mind. The students were taught to use a scramble block. At the next attempt to enter Dulcia's mind, it was planned that the other students would help Chris. This attempt was to be a team effort. How did they prepare for this next assignment?

9. Ms. Lamb's teaching style did not improve during this term. She was intimidating, especially to Daisy. When Chris used his Ability to calm Daisy so she was able to answer Ms. Lamb's question, Ms. Lamb accused Chris of helping Daisy cheat. Was that true? Did Daisy know the answer? What was Chris's consequence for helping Daisy?

10. Philip was going to research if there were any laws against Ms. Lamb's teaching style and report his findings to Sir Bentley. Chris was adamant that Philip not do that. What was Chris afraid would happen?

11. By using his Ability in the safety of his home, Darkwhisper Manor, Dulcia's son Ernest was able to watch Sir Bentley and Chris leave the prison where his mother was confined. What did he fear Chris would do? Was Chris's assignment the same as Ernest feared it was?
12. What is the purpose of computer-simulated training, such as Professor Ingleby's think tanks? Other than in this book, have you ever heard of such training? What, if any, is the practical use of this type of training?
13. Even though Chris was nervous about his control over his Ability, and it seemed to take time for Chris to adjust to his think tank, he was still the first one to arrive at the programmed prison. What does this infer about Chris's Ability?
14. How did the computer-generated teachers—Cassandra, Astra, Bathasar, Prometheus, Mars, and Zeno—correspond to the learning styles of their students? Which teacher would you prefer?
15. Why was teamwork so important in accessing Dulcia's mind? How important was friendship in making the team work well together?
16. Discuss the different reactions the students had when they learned Dulcia had escaped from the prison. Why was Chris so shocked at their reactions?
17. How did Sir Bentley handle the situation of an escaped prisoner, a guard who had Ability used on him by Ernest, and a warden clearly fearing the loss of his job?
18. Once Dulcia was free, what did she propose should be the next step that she and Ernest should take? Who did Dulcia say caused Mortimer's death? How did Ernest react to Dulcia's comment: "And now, my son, we continue with my plan, of course. Your brother's death won't make any difference—I still have you, and that is all I need"?
19. How did the balance of power between Ernest and Dulcia change? Why would Dulcia allow Ernest to access her mind? What did Ernest learn when he accessed Dulcia's mind? How did this information so readily affect his plan for revenge?
20. As the students began to help solve criminal cases, they needed to learn what part of the mind would hold the information they were seeking. How did Sir Bentley help them determine which area to search? Refer to the text for an accurate answer.
21. How did the mind of Valentino Brick differ from other minds Chris and Daisy had accessed?
22. No one believed Chris when he said he saw the twin to the boy he had killed. How does it feel not to be believed when one is telling the truth? John said, "The boy only said what he thought he saw." Did this help Chris? Did John sound as though he believed him?
23. Who ate John's chocolate bar? Under what circumstances was it eaten? Why do you think the author added this scene into the story? What purpose does it serve?

24. What did John confide to Chris? Why did he tell Chris? What did John say about friendship? What advice did John give to Chris about wiping away Chris's mother's sad memories?

25. Chris continued to see Ernest whenever he went out. These sightings caused problems when the supposed boy was not Ernest. Chris was viewed by his friends as the boy who cried wolf. His teachers and Sir Bentley were concerned about his mental health. Would it have helped his friends to understand if they had accessed his mind to experience what it was like to kill someone? What does the phrase "the boy who cried wolf" mean?

26. Ms. Lamb began coming to class inexplicably happy. The students decided Chris should access her mind to learn the reason for her happiness. Though he considered it appropriate to access someone's mind to solve a case, why did Chris believe it was terrible to enter Ms. Lamb's mind to find out whether she was in love or not? Why did Chris submit to peer pressure?

27. Describe the relationship between Daisy and Chris. Provide scenes from the story to support your findings.

28. What did Daisy do for Chris to help him learn how to find Ernest?

29. While accessing Ms. Lamb's mind at the Death Screamer's performance, Chris noted that whenever he accessed a mind he never broke the rules of normal behavior. What does this tell you about Chris's personality?

30. Chris attempted to apologize to Ernest for killing Mortimer as it was an accident. Ernest refused to accept the apology and informed him he wanted Chris to die, "An eye for an eye." What does this tell you about Ernest's personality? What does "An eye for an eye" mean?

31. What makes Ron Stiller and John Walker the perfect security guards for the students at Myers Holt Academy?

32. Chris's Ability was very strong. Ernest's Ability may not have been as strong as Chris's but he had something more powerful. What did Ernest have? How did he use this power?

33. The school officials at Myers Holt Academy repeatedly stated they would take care of Chris's mother, yet every time Chris went home the house was unkempt and his mother obviously mentally disturbed. Why were the school officials unable to help? How did Chris feel when school personnel visited his home and saw the condition of his home?

34. Despite the way Chris's mother treated him, he was surprised how concerned he was when she was missing. Compare and contrast Chris's feelings toward his mother and Ernest's feelings toward Dulcia.

35. How did Chris's friends and the instructors, security guards, and administrators react once it was learned from the ransom note that Chris had been telling the truth all along? Why did Chris request that no other students accompany him to the meeting with Ernest?

36. How did Chris feel entering Hunter Reid's mind after he had a chance to meet him and spend time with him?
37. What did Chris do to make Ron and John suspect Chris had spoken with Ernest even though he said Ernest never showed up?
38. Was Chris correct when he said, "Friends support each other. Friends believe in their friends. Do you understand what I'm saying? I have no friends."?
39. Why did Chris leave the note with the coordinates to Ernest's house underneath his pillow before leaving to meet Ernest?
40. When Chris arrived at Darkwhisper Manor, he discovered his mother on the rim of a balcony, her hands bound and her hair wild. "You can't do anything to her that will guarantee her death. Your Ability won't let you." Why wasn't Ernest concerned?
41. What helped Chris's mother return to reality?
42. How did Chris escape from Ernest's trap? Did this change his thoughts on friendship?
43. What changed Chris's mind that led to his attempt to rescue Ernest? What did Chris mean by saying saving Ernest was the right thing to do? What does this say about his personality?
44. What was Ernest's reaction when Chris came back to save him?
45. With fire surrounding both boys and the building falling down all around them, how did they manage to escape? What does this tell you about their personalities?
46. Ernest was taken to Myers Holt while Chris was taken to the hospital. How was it determined that Ernest would not harm anyone at the school? Where will Ernest stay now that he has no family?
47. Rather than playing a mean prank on Ms. Lamb as a going-away gift, what did Daisy suggest they do? Was her suggestion successful?
48. What role does John Walker, the security guard, play in Chris's life? Reference the text to support your point of view.
49. On a child's thirteenth birthday the Ability is lost but the knowledge gained through the use of the Ability is retained. What happened on Chris's thirteenth birthday? Why did this happen? Make a prediction for the next book in the series.

Activities

The activities in this guide correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (SL.5.4) (W.5.1A - D, 2A – E, 7) (RL.6.6)

1. Write a creative short story using your Ability that describes a famous person's mind. Is there anything unusual about this mind? Use descriptive language to allow your audience to visualize what you see. Read your creation out loud to the class.
2. Write a short paper discussing the topic of revenge with references to *Mindscape*. Be sure to include Dulcia and her life spent seeking revenge against those she feels deserted her in her time of need, Ernest's need for revenge against his mother for her treatment of him and Mortimer, Ernest's need to revenge his brother's death and Ms. Lamb's desire for revenge after Chris accesses her mind. Use facts, details, and quotations to support your position on this topic.
3. Research the name Dulcia. What does this name mean? Genever is an anagram. Does the name have any significance to the story?
4. What is the climax of this story? Have the students read aloud the section of the text referring to the climax of the story. Rewrite the climax of the story from Mrs. Lane's point of view. How does the rewritten story compare to the original text?
5. Have the students attempt to use the scramble block. Use a simple song such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." One student starts singing the song, then have others in the class sing along. Quietly, one student starts to stagger the song so it is not in order. Slowly add other students singing out of order. How long does it take for the original student to lose concentration and sing out of order? Allow other students the opportunity to try this experiment.
6. Sir Bentley asked the students to solve a robbery. The object stolen was a work of art entitled, *The Guilt of the Rich* which appeared to the untrained eye as a loaf of bread. Other art pieces exhibited at the time include *A Portrait of Death as a Young Man* and *This is the Center of the Universe*. Have the students choose one of these art pieces, and using the written descriptions from the book, draw, mold, or paint a copy of it. Research online, visit a museum, or read articles about modern art. How is this style of art defined?
7. Have the students dress up as their favorite character from the story. Then have the characters speak to the class explaining their importance to the story.

This guide was written by Lynn Dobson, who has worked in the East Brookfield Elementary School Library for twenty-two years.

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