

Reading Group Guide for

Charlie Thorne and the Lost City

By Stuart Gibbs

About the Book

Charlie Thorne is a genius. Charlie Thorne is a fugitive. Charlie Thorne isn't even thirteen. After saving the world, Charlie is ready to take it easy in the Galápagos Islands. That is, until she's approached by the mysterious Esmeralda Castle, who has a code she knows only Charlie can decipher. In 1835, Charles Darwin diverted his ship's journey so he could spend ten months in South America on a secret solo expedition. When he returned, he carried a treasure that inspired both awe and terror in his crew. Afterward, it vanished, but Darwin left a trail of clues behind for those brave and clever enough to search for it. In a daring adventure that takes her across South America, Charlie must crack Darwin's two-hundred-year-old clues to track down his mysterious discovery. However, when an ancient hidden treasure is at stake, people will do anything to find it first. Is Charlie smart enough to know who she can trust?

Discussion Questions

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Charlie Thorne and the Lost City* as reflective writing prompts, or alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

1. In the book's prologue, readers learn that Robert FitzRoy, the captain of the HMS *Beagle*, is ready to abandon Darwin; Darwin has repeatedly delayed the ship's departure from Ecuador without providing an appropriate rationale for doing so. Darwin finally tells FitzRoy, "I saw many incredible things on my journey . . . they all paled compared to this. Everything I have ever encountered in my life pales compared to this." In what ways does the opening scene set the stage for the events to follow? Explain your answer using examples from the book.
2. Given his behavior in the prologue, why does Darwin go to such great lengths to keep the lost city and the missing link from being discovered? How do you feel about Darwin's decisions? Explain your answers.
3. As a large hammerhead shark swims under her surfboard, Charlie is filled with excitement rather than fear. What can you infer about Charlie based on her reaction? Describe other scenes throughout the book that support your conclusion.
4. Part one, "The Edge of the Earth," opens with the following Darwin quote: "Nothing can be more improving to a young naturalist than a journey in distant countries." What do you think Darwin means by this? In what ways can this be seen as a call to action? Explain your answers.
5. Though she works hard to remain inconspicuous in Puerto Villamil, Charlie had "already become legendary among the few who lived there. Even surfers with decades of experience mistimed a wave on occasion, but Charlie never did. Somehow, she was always exactly where she needed to be." Why does Charlie's ability ultimately cause her to be in danger?

6. Charlie speaks “over a dozen languages and could understand many more.” In what ways does Charlie’s affinity for languages work in her favor? Do you know any words in any of the languages she speaks?

7. Puerto Villamil, on the southern fringe of Isla Isabela in the Galápagos Islands, is about as far from civilization as one can get. Why do you think feeling that she’s on “the very edge of the earth” appeals to Charlie? In what ways does isolation offer her a sense of security?

8. Charlie was “always on the lookout for things that were out of the ordinary. When you lived your life on the run, you had to stay attuned to your surroundings at all times.” What are some of the challenges and benefits to Charlie’s lifestyle? Do you think she enjoys living the way she does? Explain your answers.

9. CIA Director Jamilla Carter realized that “finding Charlie Thorne was of paramount importance to the CIA. And they needed to find her before anyone else did.” Consider the CIA’s motivations: Do you believe they have Charlie’s best interests at heart? Based on what you’ve learned about her, what makes Charlie a great asset to the CIA? Explain your answers using examples from the book.

10. Darwin’s carvings on the tortoise suggest he has knowledge of “the greatest treasure in human history.” How do you interpret his statement? Share your ideas of what the word “treasure” means to you.

11. After Charlie deciphers Darwin’s code, Esmerelda tells her, “Apparently, I came to the right person. You figured that out immediately when an entire team of scientists couldn’t do it in two days!” Why is Esmerelda so surprised that Charlie has been able to accomplish this? Do you think her reaction is typical or atypical to the responses Charlie usually receives for her work?

12. How does Charlie misjudge Esmerelda? What does this reveal about Charlie?

13. Describe Charlie based on what you’ve learned about her in *Charlie Thorne and the Lost City*. Are there any new traits you’ve learned about her character that surprise you?

14. As they begin to travel down the Amazon, Charlie asks Milana, “What have you been up to since betraying my trust a few months ago?” What can you infer from their exchange?

15. Charlie believes that what they have uncovered in the Amazon needs to remain secret. Do you agree or disagree with her evaluation? What do you predict the outcome would be if the knowledge did get out?

16. Ivan Spetz, the Russian agent after Charlie, is a formidable foe in many ways. What makes him so dangerous? Are there any ways in which he and Charlie are actually alike? Explain your answers using examples from the book.

17. Readers learn more about ecotourism efforts in the Amazon as well as the Galápagos Islands. In what ways do such opportunities support these destinations? Are there any drawbacks you can think of?

18. As they’re being attacked by a seaplane, Charlie devises a plan, telling Dante, “I don’t have time to explain everything!” He retorts by saying, “It’s too dangerous.” Why is he so confident that he knows

what's best for Charlie? Do you agree or disagree with this belief? Based on their interactions in *Charlie Thorne and the Lost City*, what can you glean about Charlie's relationship with her brother? How does it continue to change?

19. What do you think about Milana Moon, given all you've learned about her in *Charlie Thorne and the Lost City*? Are there ways in which Charlie's relationship with Milana is changing as they spend more time together? Explain your answers using examples from the book.

20. Charlie's participation in this mission takes her around the world; besides the new places she sees, what do you think are the most important things she discovers along the way?

21. In the epilogue, readers learn that "Charlie had learned it was pointless to lie low on the fringes of civilization and hope that no one found her. Ivan Spetz had tracked her down, and there would certainly be more people like Ivan. So it made sense to keep moving, to never stay in the same place for long. That wasn't necessarily an easy life, but it was certainly less boring than spending the rest of her years in the boonies. The earth was a big planet, and there were plenty of amazing places to see." Reflect on Charlie's outlook for her future: What do you think of her attitude and approach? What would you do if you were in her position?

22. Considering the book's conclusion, what do you predict Charlie's next adventure will be?

Extension Activities

1. In *Charlie Thorne and the Lost City*, maintaining secrecy around the discovery of Darwin's missing link is a major fictional plot point. Read "What is the missing link?" at LiveScience (<https://www.livescience.com/32530-what-is-the-missing-link.html>) to better gain a better understanding of the term. Next, utilize your library's resources to further research this evolutionary theory. Taking what you've learned, engage in a classroom discussion where you share what you've found to be most interesting about your new knowledge. What other information about Darwin or evolution would you like to know?

2. Early in the book, readers learn about a tortoise whose shell is carved with a message from Darwin; this makes the creature likely two hundred years old. Learn more about how the ages of animals are regularly determined by reading this guide to aging animals from National Geographic: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/130730-aging-animals-fish-cats-science-primate-oldest-animal-clam>. After reading, talk as a small group about what've you learned. Did anyone have questions that were left unanswered? Come up with a plan to work together to discover the answers to any outstanding questions.

3. In the book's prologue, readers observe Darwin returning to the HMS *Beagle* in Ecuador after forcing the crew to wait for him as he engages in a mysterious mission. Research to discover more about Darwin's time on the HMS *Beagle*, being sure to learn more about the following:

When did Darwin's HMS *Beagle* journey take place, and where did it take him and the crew?

Who were the other important figures on board besides Darwin?

How was the voyage documented?

What were some of the voyage's primary accomplishments?

What were the journey's greatest challenges or obstacles?

After examining what you've learned, engage in a classroom discussion about Darwin's actions and analyze the outcomes.

4. Charles Darwin is often considered to be the most influential scientist and naturalist of the nineteenth century. Using resources from the library and the internet, investigate his life and work, being sure to look closely at the following:

When and where did Darwin live?

What was his educational background?

What were his most important scientific contributions?

What were his goals as a naturalist?

How did his contributions reshape the world?

What other facts did you find most interesting?

After conducting your research, create and share a digital artifact that synthesizes the highlights of your findings.

5. Charlie's mission to uncover Darwin's secrets takes her on a number of grand adventures. Working in a small group, create a map of Charlie's whereabouts that includes all the locations she visits. Calculate the distances she travels from point to point, as well as an estimated length of time the journey takes her. If you could take a similar trip, would you? Upon completion, pair up with another group and compare and contrast your findings. Then engage in a discussion about embarking on a similar adventure. What do you think you'd learn about yourselves?

6. Charlie's quest for answers lands her in the Amazon, where readers are introduced to the Amazon River, the second longest river in the world. Use your school's library or the internet to learn more about the great Amazon, being sure to consider the following:

Where is the Amazon River located?

How long is it?

What animals live near or in the Amazon River?

What makes navigating the river particularly challenging or dangerous?

What are some of the reasons the Amazon River is famous?

Why is the Amazon and the land surrounding it in need of protection?

What are some simple conservation efforts you can make to help care for it?

After completing your research, share your new knowledge with your classmates. Then brainstorm how best to share information about protection and conservation with the rest of your school or community.

7. At the beginning of the novel, readers discover that Charlie has been hiding in the Galápagos to protect herself. Research more about the Galápagos Islands, being sure to focus on the following:

Where are the islands located?

Why are they considered so important?

What is Darwin's connection to this area?

What are the unique types of wildlife found there?

What are the most important conservation efforts happening there?

What makes those efforts challenging?

After discovering answers to these questions, discuss your findings with your class. Next, talk about your own town or state. Are there wildlife areas in your community that need to be protected? Are there conservation efforts taking place? How might you help?

This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, an assistant professor at Sam Houston State University. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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