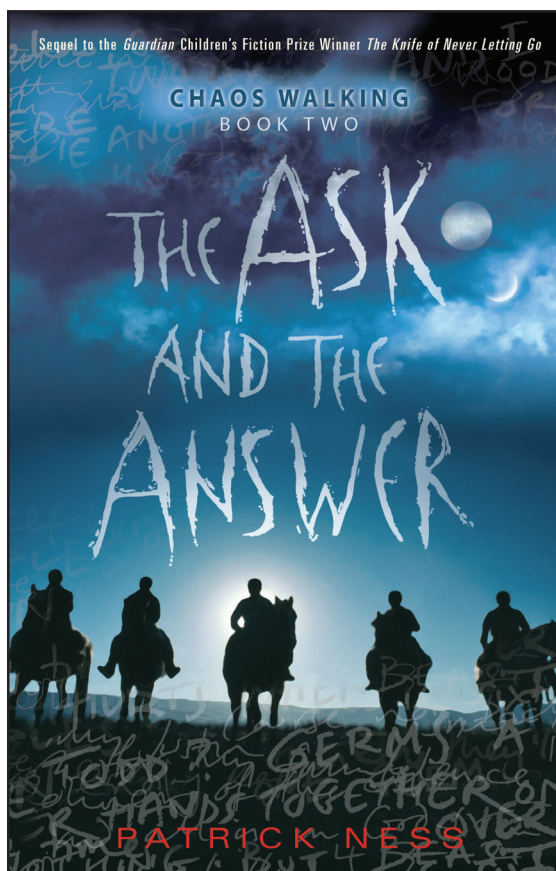


THE ASK AND THE ANSWER

THE SECOND BOOK IN THE CHAOS WALKING SERIES



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It's not that you should never love something so much it can control you. It's that you *need* to love something that much so you can *never be controlled*.

ABOUT THE BOOK

As *The Ask and the Answer* begins, Todd and Viola have reached the end of the journey that began in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. But they do not find healing and hope in the town of Haven. Instead, they find their worst enemy, Mayor Prentiss, waiting to welcome them to "New Prentisstown," where they are pushed into separate lives: Todd faces impossible choices when forced to join the Mayor's oppressive new regime, the Ask, while Viola is swept into Mistress Coyle's ruthless activities and those of the mysterious Answer. In alternating narrations, Todd and Viola, torn by the conflicting messages they receive from those they interact with, struggle to understand what it means to be human and what it means to love. As the clouds of war begin to gather, Todd and Viola's faith and trust in each other will be tested again and again. In a *Booklist* starred review, Ian Chipman says, "If *Knife* provided the cut, this follow-up provides the fester."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the first question that Mayor Prentiss asks Todd when he wakes up at the beginning of the book? Even though the Mayor already knows the answer to the question, why does he persist in making Todd answer it? Why does Todd refuse to answer the question? What does it symbolize when, on page 19, he finally answers the question?
2. Authors often use figurative language to describe people, places, and events in their stories. In *The Ask and the Answer*, Patrick Ness uses similes, metaphors, and personification to help us see, smell,

hear, taste, and feel what the characters experience. Below are some examples of figurative language from *The Ask and the Answer*. As you are reading, look for additional examples of each. What impact does Ness's use of figurative language have on you as a reader?

- A simile uses "like" or "as" to compare two things.

Page 308: "The blackness starts to overwhelm me, starts to fall over me like a blanket, like water rising above my head."

Page 152: "Her expression is solid as stone."

- A metaphor is an implied comparison between two things.

Page 445: “The snake of the army slithers up the hillside.”

- Personification gives human qualities to something that is not human.

On page 214 Corinne says, “There’s so much life here, Viola. So much, in every corner of every forest and stream and river and mountain. This planet just *hums* with it.”

3. Patrick Ness writes Todd’s voice in the vernacular. He writes like Todd actually speaks, with errors in grammar and spelling. For instance, on page 9 Todd says to Mayor Prentiss, “I ain’t afraid of you. . . . I ain’t afraid to die.” On page 260, Todd describes the work on the monastery like this: “We’ve nearly dug all the trenches and blocks for the foundayshuns to be poured, something Davy and I are sposed to supervize even tho it’s gonna be the Spackle who know how to do it.” What does Todd’s use of poor grammar and spelling tell us about him?
4. The concept of the Noise again plays a significant role in *The Ask and the Answer*. Author Patrick Ness talks frequently about the fact that we live in a noisy world, a world in which teens have less privacy than they have ever had. As the book opens, Todd notices right away that Mayor Prentiss and some of the other men of Prentisstown have no Noise. On pages 26–27, the former mayor of Haven, Con Ledger, tells Todd about the cure for the Noise and how it was developed. Who takes the cure and who does not? Mayor Prentiss tells Todd on page 286, “A man who can control his Noise is a man with an advantage.” How does Mayor Prentiss use Noise and the cure to control those under his power? How do other characters like Todd and Wilf use their Noise? Can teens today control the noise around them? What impact can the ability to control noise, or not, have on you personally?
5. How does the addition of a second first-person narrator impact *The Ask and the Answer*? How would the story have been different had only Todd told it? In the third book of the Chaos Walking trilogy, *Monsters of Men*, a third narrator is added. Any guesses as to who that might be?
6. The relationship between Todd and Viola drives this story. When Todd wakes up at the start of the book, his first thought is about Viola and where she is. When Viola wakes up at another location, her first

word is “Todd?” Both Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle understand the power of this relationship. Todd realizes on page 118 that Mayor Prentiss has used this relationship to his advantage. He thinks, “Mayor Prentiss has used her to control me. *Duh*. Any effing idiot would know it. If I don’t do what they say, they kill her. If I try to escape, they kill her. If I do anything to Davy, they kill her.” Describe the relationship between Todd and Viola. What makes it special? What makes it enduring? In what other ways does their relationship allow others to manipulate them?

7. When “President” Prentiss first addresses the citizens of Haven/New Prentisstown, he tells them on page 40, “You *are* conquered. You are defeated. And I read to you your doom. . . . But it is not I who conquered you. . . . It is not I who has beaten you or defeated you or enslaved you. . . . You are enslaved by your idleness. . . . You are defeated by your complacency.” What does he mean by this statement? Do you agree with him? What options did the people of Haven have in terms of their response to the arrival of Mayor Prentiss and his army? What would the pros and cons of these different options have been? What can we learn from the people of Haven by their actions, or lack thereof, when Mayor Prentiss and his army arrive?
8. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, the boys of Prentisstown become men when they kill another human being. In that book, Todd kills a Spackle. The people of the New World do not regard the Spackle as human. What does it cost Todd when he kills the Spackle? Even though he tells Mayor Prentiss on page 10 he has killed, is Todd really capable of taking a human life? He claims to have killed Aaron, one of the antagonists in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, when he says on page 11, “I done what Aaron wanted! I murdered him! I became a man by yer own laws.” Why does he make this claim? Speaking about Todd on page 423, Viola says, “But he couldn’t, could he? He couldn’t and still be himself. He couldn’t and still be Todd Hewitt. The boy who can’t kill. The *man* who can’t. We are the choices we make.” In the end, is Todd a killer? How do you see him as a result of his choices?
9. Mayor Prentiss repeatedly tells Todd that he is capable of leading others. On page 18, he tells Todd, “You could be a leader of men, Todd. You have proven

yourself very special.” Do you agree with this assessment? What qualities does Todd have that would make him an effective leader? What qualities does he have that might deter him from being successful in this role? Do you believe that Mayor Prentiss is sincere when he makes these statements? On page 49 Mayor Prentiss says, “Come, Todd. . . . Ready to be a leader of men?” At this point, is Todd ready? As the story progresses, do his feelings about being a leader change?

trustworthy. On page 50, Todd asks Mayor Prentiss how he can know whether the Mayor is keeping his promise not to harm Viola. Mayor Prentiss says, “You don’t. . . . I want your faith in me, Todd, and faith with proof is no faith at all.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How do you personally define *faith*? On page 333, Mistress Coyle says, “Either you trust me, Viola, or you do not. . . . Which will it be?” Think about examples from your own life in which you have been asked to have faith without proof.

10. What is the role of gender in *The Ask and the Answer*? For much of the book, men and women are essentially separated. Why do you think Patrick Ness has chosen to separate them? Do the men and the women in the story operate in the same way? Explain. Think about how Mayor Prentiss, the leaders of New Prentisstown, and Davy treat women. How does Mayor Prentiss use the treatment of women to manipulate both the women and the men in the story?
11. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Todd had a dog named Manchee. Describe that relationship and how it developed. In *The Ask and the Answer*, Mayor Prentiss gives Todd a horse named Angharrad from his private herd. In the beginning Todd has no knowledge of horses and is very skittish about riding her. Describe how the relationship between Todd and Angharrad develops throughout the second book. How does it parallel his relationship with Manchee?
12. Think about Mistress Coyle and Mayor Prentiss in terms of their leadership styles. Compare and contrast how they lead. Who is more effective? Why? On page 95, Corinne says that according to Mistress Coyle, “being a leader is making the people you love hate you a little more each day.” Is this true? If so, are Mistress Coyle and Mayor Prentiss successful? Give examples. Mayor Prentiss tells Viola on page 129 that “Leadership isn’t grown. . . . It’s *taken*.” Is this true? Do Mistress Coyle and Mayor Prentiss develop into leaders, or do they simply seize control? What about Todd and Viola? Explain. Look up the words *totalitarianism* and *tyranny*. How do they relate to the leadership styles of Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle?
13. Todd and Viola constantly wonder who or what they can trust and have faith in. Both Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle claim that they are trustworthy. On page 50, Todd asks Mayor Prentiss how he can know whether the Mayor is keeping his promise not to harm Viola. Mayor Prentiss says, “You don’t. . . . I want your faith in me, Todd, and faith with proof is no faith at all.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How do you personally define *faith*? On page 333, Mistress Coyle says, “Either you trust me, Viola, or you do not. . . . Which will it be?” Think about examples from your own life in which you have been asked to have faith without proof.
14. To *redeem* means to reform or make amends. Davy does and says many cruel things to Todd, the Spackle, and the women of New Prentisstown. On page 54, Davy’s father says of him, “I know my son is a liar. . . . I know he is a bully and a brute and ignorant of the things I hold dear. But he is my son. . . . And I believe in redemption.” What is the irony in this statement? Observe how Davy grows and changes throughout the book. Do you believe that Davy deserves to be redeemed by the end of *The Ask and the Answer*? Explain. Does Todd deserve redemption for the terrible things that he feels he has done? On page 395, Viola tells him, “We all fall, you said. . . . We all fall but that’s not what matters. What matters is picking yourself up again.” If we all fall, do we all deserve redemption?
15. Todd struggles throughout *The Ask and the Answer* with the question of what it means to be human, especially in regard to the Spackle. When he and Davy are first assigned to overseeing the imprisoned Spackle, Todd thinks on page 59, “There’s so many of ’em, so many long white faces looking back at me, their eyes too big, their mouths too small and toothy and high on their faces, their ears looking nothing like a man’s. But you can still see a man’s face in there, can’t you? Still see a face that feels and fears—And suffers.” Todd recognizes their humanity and vows that he will treat them well and protect them. What are some examples of the less than humane ways the Spackle are treated by the guards, Davy, and Todd? Do the Spackle do anything at any time to “deserve” this treatment? How is it that Todd gets through these situations? Think of instances from history in which certain groups have not been treated humanely. What have been the consequences of these events? Why is it that such inhumanity continues?

16. Ivan is a man that Todd and Viola met in Farbranch in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. On page 62 of *The Ask and the Answer*, he tells Todd, “You go where the power is. . . . That’s how you stay alive.” He is referring to the fact that he is now working for Mayor Prentiss. Think of instances from history where people have gone “where the power is” in order to survive. Have you ever done this in your own life, even though you disagreed with the person in power? Does Ivan redeem himself at the end of *The Ask and the Answer*?
17. Mistress Coyle tells Viola on page 91 that “information is power.” On page 455, Mayor Prentiss tells Todd, “If you can control information, you can control others.” One way those in power can control others is by restricting the flow of information. Think of all the ways Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle control the flow of information. For instance, they will not give Todd and Viola information about each other. By controlling this information, they are able to control Todd and Viola. Also, Todd cannot read, so the information and advice left to him by his mother is meaningless. Give some examples of ways the flow of information is controlled in both *The Ask and the Answer* and in our world, and the impact this has. What might be the author’s message about information, knowledge, and education?
18. On page 430 of *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Ben tells Todd that “War makes monsters of men.” On page 102 of *The Ask and the Answer*, Mistress Coyle tells Viola, “If you ever see a war . . . you’ll learn that war only destroys. No one escapes from a war. No one. Not even the survivors. You accept things that would appall you at any other time because life has temporarily lost all meaning.” Does this hold true for the characters in this series? Give examples from history and contemporary times that support and negate these statements.
19. In chapter 11, Todd learns that his new job is to “number” the Spackle. Why and how is this done? How does it impact Todd? How does it impact Davy? What are the repercussions of this act? In Chapter 30, we learn that the numbering does not end with the Spackle. Explain. How do these events parallel events in our own history? What are the consequences of such actions?
20. Both Todd and Viola are orphaned. Review what happened to each of their parents. On page 148, Mayor Prentiss tells Viola, “I know how lonely you must be, and nothing would please me more than if, one day, maybe, you could consider me as your—” How do you think he meant to finish this statement? On page 384, he says to Todd, “I came into this town with one son . . . but it has blessed me with another.” Is he sincere in these statements? Describe Mayor Prentiss’s relationship with his own son, Davy. What does he want from his son? What does Davy want from his father? If he has his own son, why does he want or need Viola and Todd to be his children?
21. “We are the choices we make” is Mistress Coyle’s motto. This statement is repeated several times in *The Ask and the Answer*. What do you think this statement means? How is it supported by the actions of the characters? Consider the character of Corinne. Review pages 296–299. Does Corinne’s fate support or negate the belief of some characters that “we are the choices we make”? Is this statement true in your own life? Explain.
22. In chapter 19, Viola meets Lee, who is part of the Answer. Discuss his background. Review their conversation on pages 272–273 and 333–334 as they talk about weapons, war, and killing. How does Lee respond when Viola cries? What does this show us about their relationship? What do you think Ness’s purpose was in creating the character of Lee?
23. Describe 1017. How is he different from the other Spackle? How is Todd’s relationship with 1017 different from his relationship with the other Spackle? What happens to 1017? What impact does this have on Todd?
24. Define *genocide*. Give some examples of historical and contemporary genocides. See pages 305–310. Who commits the act of genocide in *The Ask and the Answer*? What is the purpose of the genocide? What message does this send to the reader? Who survives this genocide? How and why does this character survive?
25. How did the Answer and the Ask get their names? Compare and contrast the two in terms of their purpose and their operation.

26. There many scenes of torture in *The Ask and the Answer*. In chapter 29, Mayor Prentiss forces Todd and Davy to witness the torture of a woman. What is his purpose in making them watch? What does he claim is the purpose of using torture? Does the torture accomplish anything? How do Todd and Davy respond to what they witness? How did you as a reader respond? What do you think the lesson is here?
27. Discuss the development of the relationship between Todd and Davy, from Davy calling Todd “pigpiss” to Davy calling Todd a friend and a brother. What do you think causes Davy’s feelings for Todd to change? Is there evidence that Todd’s feelings about Davy also change as the story progresses? What are usual ways that friendships may develop between people who do not like one another?
28. Do the members of the Answer and Mistress Coyle deserve the moniker “terrorists”? Defend your opinion.
29. “Never love something so much it can be used to control you,” Mayor Prentiss tells Viola and Todd on page 486. Later, on page 494, Viola thinks, “The Mayor’s wrong—He’s wrong forever and ever—It’s not that you should never love something so much it can control you. It’s that you *need* to love something that much so you can *never be controlled*.” How do these statements apply to Todd and Viola? How do they pertain to your own life?
30. Describe how author Patrick Ness sets up the third and final volume of the Chaos Walking trilogy, *Monsters of Men*. The final volume is a story of war. Mayor Prentiss says on page 519, “Finally, we come to the real thing, the thing that makes men men, the thing we were *born* for, Todd . . . War.” At the end of *The Ask and the Answer*, what factions does it appear will be involved in this war? For what reason, and to what purpose, will they be engaging in this war?

ABOUT PATRICK NESS



Patrick Ness was born on an army base in Virginia, where his father was a drill sergeant. As a child he also lived in Hawaii, Washington state, and California. As a young adult, Patrick Ness studied English literature at the University of Southern California. In 1999 he moved to London, where

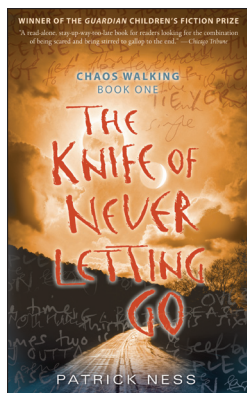
he has lived since. He has taught creative writing at Oxford University and written book reviews for several publications. Most of his time is spent writing.

The books in the Chaos Walking trilogy have won many awards. Most recently, *Monsters of Men* was short-listed for the 2010 W. H. Smith Children’s Book of the Year. It also appears on several “best books of 2010” lists.

Interesting facts about Patrick Ness include that he was a goth as a teen, has a tattoo of a rhinoceros, is a certified scuba diver, will not eat onions under any circumstances, is a marathon runner (and says he gets his best ideas while running), was accepted into film school but turned it down to study writing, wrote a radio comedy about vampires, and always knows the last line of his books before he starts writing.

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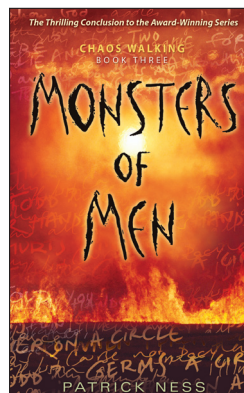
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A U.S. Board on Books for Young People Outstanding International Book

A *Publishers Weekly* Best Children's Book of the Year

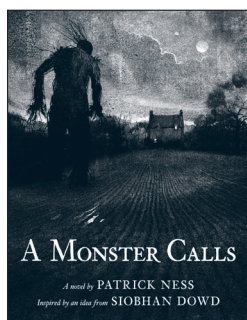
★ "This is science fiction at its best, and is a singular fusion of brutality and idealism that is, at last, perfectly human."

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★ "As in his preceding books, Ness offers incisive appraisals of violence, power, and human nature, and with the series complete, it's clear that he has crafted one of the most important works of young adult science fiction in recent years."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

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A Monster Calls

★ "From a premise left by author Siobhan Dowd before her untimely death, Ness has crafted a nuanced tale that draws on elements of classic horror stories to delve into the terrifying terrain of loss."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

★ "Beautiful in its execution, and fearless in its honesty."

—*Booklist* (starred review)

★ "A profoundly moving, expertly crafted tale of unaccountable loss."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

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This discussion guide was written by Terri Evans, media specialist at Champlin Park High School in Minnesota. In 2010, Patrick Ness visited Champlin Park High School to spend three days discussing *The Knife of Never Letting Go* with the nearly 3,500 students and staff who had read the book over the summer.



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