

A Curriculum Guide to

Story Thieves

by James Riley



About the Book

Owen thinks life is too ordinary to be exciting, at least until he discovers that one of his classmates, Bethany, can literally jump into books and become a part of the story. When Owen discovers her secret, he tricks Bethany into taking them into his favorite book, *Kiel Gnomesfoot and the End of Everything*; Owen wants to meet his hero Kiel and to help save Kiel's teacher, the Magister from his death at the hands of the evil Dr. Verity. Having warned her new friend not to interfere with the story, Bethany is shocked when Owen saves the Magister, and sets in motion a cataclysmic adventure that involves fictional characters escaping their books and creating havoc in the real world. Bethany and Kiel must fight to return order in the real world while Owen and the cyborg genius Charm must fight to bring peace to Kiel's fictional warring worlds of Magisteria and Quanterium. Just as long as everything goes according to the story.

Prereading Activity

The below activity aligns with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (W.4–6.2) (RL.7.2)

Explain to students that one of the novel's main characters philosophizes, "Sometimes the impossible is the only thing that makes sense!" Discuss this quote with students and ask them when and if this statement has ever proven true for them. Ask students to write and share historic, scientific, or medical examples to support the view expressed in this statement.

Discussion Questions

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (L.4–7.1, 3) (SL.4–7.1)

1. What is Owen's initial reaction to jumping into books with Bethany? What causes Owen to faint?
2. Why does Owen want to visit the book *Kiel Gnomesfoot and the End of Everything*? What reason does he give Bethany?
3. Why doesn't Bethany's mother want her to read books? In spite of her mother's admonitions, how does Bethany read books without getting caught?
4. Why does Bethany finally relent and take Owen into a book? What does she hope to gain from Owen if she takes him?

5. What does Owen do while he and Bethany are in the book that makes Bethany so angry? How do the two friends respond to each other?
6. When Owen returns from the book, how do the Magister and Kiel follow Owen back into his room?
7. How does the Magister control Owen against his will?
8. Why does Bethany possess magic? Why does the Magister want her power? When Bethany realizes the Magister has taken some of her power, why is she so upset by his interference?
9. Once Kiel and the Magister are released from their book, what does the Magister want Bethany to do for him? Why is the Magister so intent on releasing the fictional characters from their books?
10. When Bethany has the chance to escape from the Magister, why does she choose to return to rescue Kiel? How do they escape?
11. What is ironic about the fact that Kiel and Owen have similar personalities as do Bethany and Charm? In what ways are Kiel and Owen similar? In what ways are Bethany and Charm similar?
12. How do Charm's knowledge of magic and the science world and Owen's knowledge of computers in the real world help them escape the computer virus robots?
13. In the real world, Kiel and Bethany battle the Magister and the fictional characters he is bringing to life, while in the fictional world Owen and Charm battle science and robots. How could this situation be considered a parallel universe? What are the goals of each couple? How are their actions similar?
14. Why does the Magister want to send all authors to a fictional place? How does Bethany save Jonathan Porterhouse? What does Bethany give up in order to save him?
15. When Owen realizes he would have to die to save Magisteria, what does he want to do? How does it make him feel about himself? Why is Owen so confused about what is real and what is fictional?
16. Why does Charm want to stop Dr. Verity, the leader of Quanterium? What is Dr. Verity's plan?
17. When the Magister takes Kiel's magic away from him, how does Kiel continue to help Bethany? What helpful advice does he give Bethany?
18. How does the title of the book relate to the story? Who are the story thieves?

Writing and Research Activities

These activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (W.4–7.1) (RL.7.1) (RL.4–7.3) (L.4–7.1, 2)

Story Book Connection

Ask students to select a book they would want to jump into and to write a persuasive nomination of the book as “Best Book for Young Readers to Jump Into.” Students should write a rationale for their desire to adventure into the selected book based on their connections to the plot, setting, characters, archetypes, themes, and/or personal interests. Ask students to draw the cover of the book and to include a self-portrait of themselves as part of the cover illustration. Display the nomination forms and book covers in the classroom.

Good vs. Evil

All the characters in *Story Thieves* face choices between right and wrong and good and evil. Ask students to write about a time they personally had to make a choice that marked a stepping-stone on their life journeys. Students should state what their choice was, the decision they made, and the results and impact of their choice.

A Poem for Two Voices

In the real world, Kiel and Bethany battle the Magister, while in the fictional world Owen and Charm battle science and robots. Ask students to select a partner and to write a poem for two voices, each partner assuming one of the couples’ perspectives and situation. Poems should include alternating lines for each character as well as additional unison lines. Poems should also reflect the conflicts the characters face in the novels. Each set of partners should practice and present their poem to the class.

Author’s Craft—A Visual Presentation

In *Story Thieves* the author creates two separate settings—one world of reality and one world of fiction—and a plot that weaves the characters and the two worlds together in an engaging, action-packed story. Ask students to select four separate, favorite passages of the novel that demonstrate the finesse of the author in creating the following areas: (1) specific, believable settings, (2) interesting and well-defined characters, (3) impeccable pacing and story line, and (4) the universal theme of good versus evil. Have students work in small groups assigning each group one of the above four topics. Have students discuss the author’s technique with regard to the assigned topic and share their selected passages. Then have students prepare and present an “Author’s Craft” presentation with visual display and illustrations, selected passages, and explanations of the author’s technique.

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