

A Curriculum Guide to

Story Thieves: Pick the Plot

by James Riley

About the Book

Owen Connors loves his ability to jump in and out of books, but being trapped in a time-travel book with no control over his destiny leaves him apprehensive. As Owen travels through time in both fictional and nonfictional worlds, he encounters his older self along with villains and friends he has met before—and some he hasn't. He learns how to adapt his speed to fight evil and, on more than one occasion, saves his own life and others'. Owen has two goals: to free himself from the Jules Verne Memorial Time Prison by gaining the exit code, and to save Bethany from being split into two so that both worlds will remain connected. All of this is a mighty tall order for a young boy.

Prereading Activity

The activity below particularly addresses the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.7.2) (W.4-6.2).

Adelaine, a magician from Atlantis, says, "Fear of the unknown will drive even the bravest to terrible deeds." Discuss this quote with students and ask them if/when this statement has ever proven true for them or anyone they know. Ask students to write and share historic, scientific, or medical examples to support the view expressed in this statement.

Discussion Questions

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (L.4-7.1) (L.4-7.3) (SL.4-7.1)

1. Why is Owen so desperate to escape the Jules Verne Memorial Time Prison? Which character does he meet who becomes an integral part of this adventure?
2. Why does Owen talk to the readers? What does he know that Kara doesn't?
3. When Owen and Kara first meet, Owen doesn't know who she is, but Kara knows Owen from the past. How is this possible?
4. What is a paradox? Why is Kara unaffected by paradoxes?
5. What is the TSA? Why is it so important in resolving the mystery of the two worlds?
6. What power does the Countess possess? What deal do Owen and Kara make with the Countess to save their lives?

7. How does Nobody's plan aim to separate the fictional and nonfictional worlds? Whose life is in danger if Owen can't stop Nobody?
8. List the ways Owen could have been killed by the readers.
9. What lesson does Nobody want the readers and Owen to learn? How does he plan to teach them?
10. Who are some of the superheroes that Owen and Kara meet in Jupiter City? How has the mood of the city changed since Owen was there with Bethany?
11. What are the differences between the naturalists and the magicians of Atlantis?
12. How does time, past, present, and future play a role in every situation Owen encounters?
13. What special gift does the Magister impart to Owen? Why does the Magister think Owen needs the gift?
14. What is Kara's destiny? How does she attempt to change it? How is Owen affected by Kara's destiny?
15. Owen tells Kara, "We've all been at the mercy of other people." In what ways are Owen and Kara at the mercy of others?
16. How does Delores almost destroy Owen and Kara? How does older Owen save them?
17. What happens when Owen enters the correct code into the Exit Door?

Writing and Research Activities

The activities below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.7.2) (W.4-7.2) (L.4-7.1) (L.4-7.2) (L.4-7.1)

Kara Dox and Owen—Comparison

Kara and Owen have formed a close friendship throughout the book; as they interact, they realize that they have known each other in multiple time periods. Ask students to draw a Venn diagram listing the similarities and differences between the two characters' personalities. Then write an essay comparing and contrasting the two characters to present to the class.

What Is Your Conclusion?

There is more than one ending presented in the book. Ask students to select the most satisfying conclusion and support their selection from the text, taking into consideration characters' motivations and personalities. Have students write a paper justifying their selection to share with the class. Then have students participate in a panel discussion focused on the pros and cons of the different conclusions.

A Poem for Two Voices

Ask students to select a partner and write a poem for two voices, each partner assuming one of the characters' perspectives and situations. 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. Find more details and examples of a poem for two voices [here](#).

Dark vs. Light

Ask half of the students in the class to make a list of the evil characters, including their motives, plans for the world, and personality traits. Ask the other half of the class to make a list of the good characters, including their motives, plans for the world, and personality traits. Pair one student from each group to create a poster representation of "Dark versus Light." Students should include pictorial representations of their characters, appropriate quotes from the book, and descriptions of the characters' plans for the world. Students should use colors to represent the two sides, and may also include symbolic representations to convey the battle between the Dark and the Light.

Time Travel between Worlds

Owen and his friends not only travel between fictional and nonfictional worlds, but also through time periods. Ask students working in small groups to write a script that will illustrate each world, including how the worlds interact and how traveling through time impacts the characters' journeys. Then have each group perform their skit for the class.

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