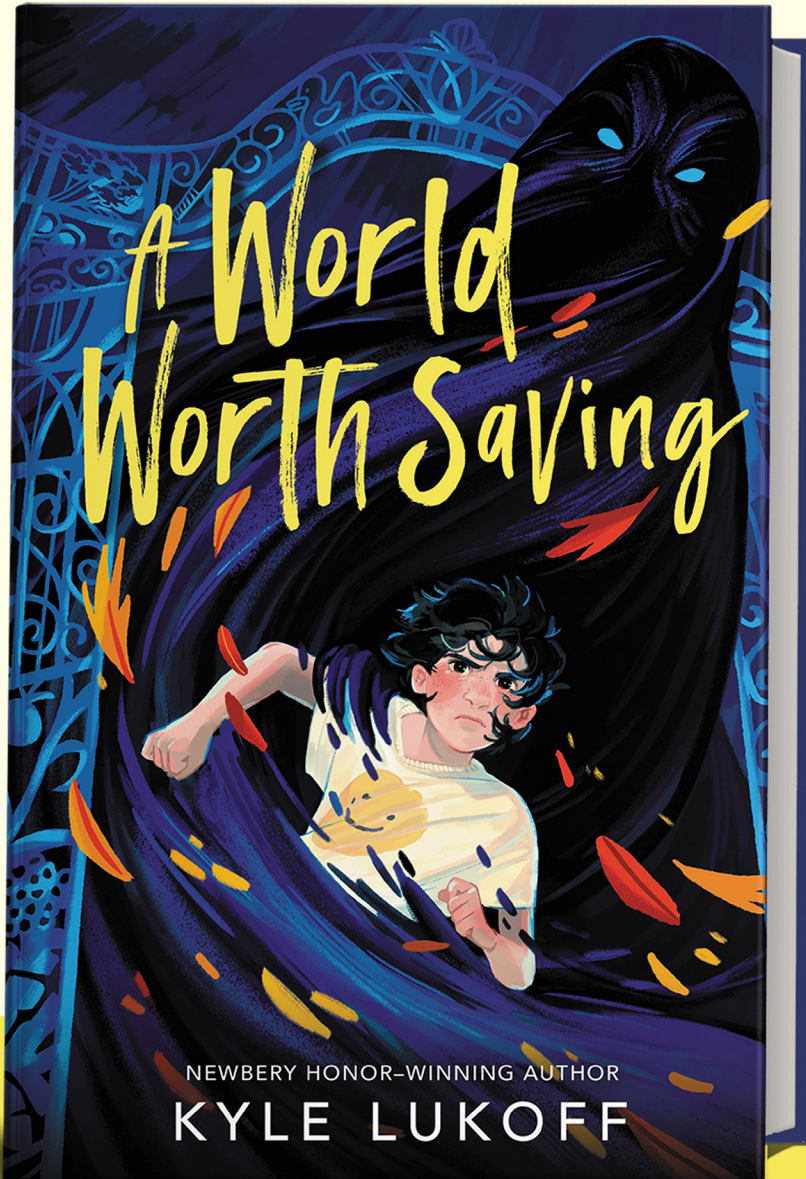


AN *Educator's Guide* TO



"A page-turning adventure [that] is
NOTHING SHORT OF MAGIC."

—RICK RIORDAN,

New York Times bestselling author of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*



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PRAISE FOR
A World Worth Saving



"POWERFUL AND AWAKENING."

—*KIRKUS REVIEWS*, starred review



**"A STUNNING POWERHOUSE
of fantasy and real-world issues."**

—*BOOKLIST*, starred review



"SATISFYING [AND] HORROR-TINGED . . .

This **SUPERB FANTASTICAL ADVENTURE**

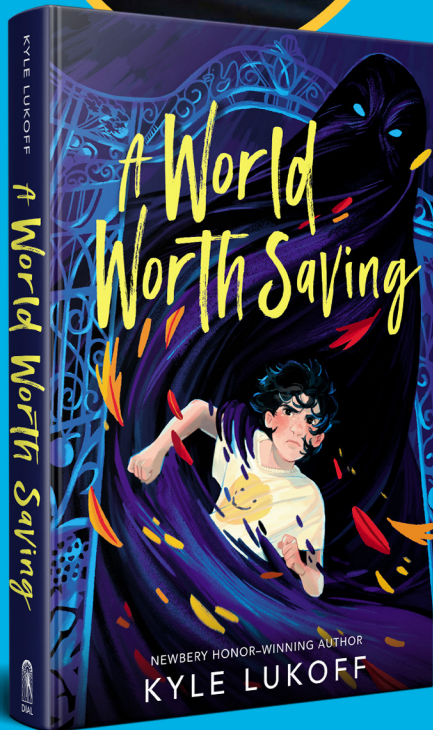
tackles serious real-world
problems faced by queer youth."

—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*, starred review



**"A TIMELY TITLE FOR
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS
AS WELL AS PARENTS,
TEACHERS, AND LIBRARIANS."**

—*SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*, starred review



Author Photo © Marvin Joseph

About The Book

**A GROUNDBREAKING, ACTION-
PACKED, AND ULTIMATELY UPLIFTING**
adventure that intertwines elements of Jewish
mythology with an unflinching examination of the
impacts of transphobia, from Newbery Honor winner
Kyle Lukoff

About The Author

**KYLE LUKOFF IS THE
AUTHOR OF MANY BOOKS FOR
YOUNG READERS.**

His debut middle-grade novel, *Too Bright To See*, received a Newbery Honor, the Stonewall Award, and was a National Book Award finalist. His picture book *When Aidan Became a Brother* also won the Stonewall. He has forthcoming books about mermaids, babies, apologies, and lots of other topics. While becoming a writer he worked as a bookseller for ten years, and then nine more years as a school librarian.

This guide was written by Talya Sokoll (They/Them), a school librarian right outside of Boston. They love to read and have served on a number of award committees including the Stonewall Children's & Young Adult Literature Award, the Sydney Taylor Book Award, the Morris Award, and the Rainbow Book List. They are the faculty advisor to the Jewish affinity group and the Queer affinity group at their school and are currently pursuing a master's degree in Jewish professional studies at Gratz College, where they get to study extensively about golems. They have had the joy of knowing Kyle for many years and are absolutely delighted at the opportunity to create the guide for this amazing book. It is from Kyle that they first heard their motto: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the task, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it." (Pirkei Avot 2:16)

Dear Educators,

There is a lot going on in the world, and books can be not just a great escape but also hope and “a window, a mirror, and sliding glass door” (Dr. Rudine Simms Bishop) for young readers. We are so appreciative that you provide these opportunities of growth and hope for the young people in your classrooms and libraries. The note below from the guide writer explains more of the goal for this guide, but we thank you so much for all you do and for sharing *A World Worth Saving* with your readers.

SINCERELY,
Penguin Young Readers School & Library Marketing

A NOTE TO EDUCATORS

The content of this guide is meant to provide jumping-off points for discussions and activities you can use to supplement the reading of this novel. While this book includes heavier themes, among them transphobia, homelessness, antisemitism, and suicidal ideation, it is also full of the joy of self-discovery, the power of community, and the love of friends. At a time when more and more schools are taking books off of the shelves, we encourage you to lean into the joy and wonder of *A World Worth Saving* and commend you for finding a space for this title to work its magic.

Before teaching students about gender and related topics, you, the teacher, must feel prepared and knowledgeable. There is a vast amount of information online, some of which is incorrect and harmful. If you feel like you need to brush up on your knowledge or just want a quick refresher, we recommend looking at the following resources in advance of teaching this wonderful book:

[*Trans Kids: Being Gendered in the Twenty-First Century* by Tey Meadow](#)

[*Supporting Transgender Students* by Alex Myers \(updated in 2024\)](#)

[GLSEN Resources for Educators](#)

[GLSEN Resources for Students](#)

[What some Jewish sources say about gender identity](#)

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES & CONSIDERATIONS



01. INTRODUCTION TO FOLKLORE & MYTHOLOGY

Throughout the course of this book, the main character, A, meets many magical creatures from Jewish mythology, including a golem, multiple ibbur, and many sheydim. Some of these creatures are good, some are evil, and some are more complicated. Each of them plays a special role in Jewish cultural mythology that is explained over the course of the novel. For a pre-reading activity to get your students to connect the text to their own understanding of folklore and mythology, ask them to pick a myth or folktale from their own cultures to share with the class. This can be something related to their identity, their religion, their family history, or just a story that their parents told them growing up (think: *Elf on the Shelf*). It could even be a story they've learned from, another book they have read like Rick Riordan or the Rick Riordan Presents books, or the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* TV show. Have them write a short summary of the story and an explanation of why it is important to them (no more than a paragraph or two!). Share out to the larger class and learn about each other!

02. INTRODUCTION TO GENDER

One of the main themes of the book is A's identity as a trans boy. Many students who read this book will have different levels of understanding of terms related to gender. To prepare them for this book and make sure they are all on the same page, explore one or more of the following resources:

- [Trans Youth Equality Foundation list of terminology](#)
- [The Trevor Project: provides a comprehensive overview of terminology as well as an explanation of transphobia \(age level: MS, HS\)](#)
- [Lesson plans for educators from United 4 Social Change](#)



03. INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM

For students who are unfamiliar with Judaism, it is important to give them an overview before beginning the book. This can be brief or extensive, but some good resources to start with are:

- [Britannica Kids article](#)
(easier reading level)
- [Britannica Students article](#)
(more challenging reading level)
- [BBC Bitesize](#)
- [From History.com](#)
- [Overview of Judaism from the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum](#)
- [What is Reform Judaism?](#)
(the kind of Judaism that A identifies with)
- [What Is Judaism?](#)
(a slightly different perspective)

04. VOCABULARY

The main character, A, loves words; throughout the book, he uses and thinks with many big words that may be unfamiliar. As you read, underline them or write them down, making sure to look them up so you can understand them and how they are being used in the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01. At the beginning of the book, there are two epigraphs. Before you start the book, think about what you think they mean. As you read through the text and then finish it, go back to these quotes; how does their meaning change over the course of your reading?
02. Right from our first introduction to the main character, we can sense his discomfort with how his parents view him. How does the author's use of A _____ versus the use of A for his name reflect that? What else could it reflect? As you get to know A more, think about how your answer to this question might change.
03. What are A's parents like? What is their relationship like to him? To each other? What was their relationship like before he came out to them as trans, and how did it change? How did that make him feel? How does their relationship change over the course of the story?
04. A goes with his parents to a meeting of a group called "Save Our Sons and Daughters (SOSAD). They meet at a church, which A, as a Jewish boy, feels uncomfortable in. He mentions, "My parents didn't enjoy it either, but they chalked it up to another selfless sacrifice they were making to get their 'daughter' back" (9). Why might they all be uncomfortable in this space? What does it say about A's parents that they willingly go into this space despite their discomfort with it?
05. Throughout the book, A uses the alphabet to calm himself down in times of stress and/or anxiety. What does he do specifically? Why do you think it helps? What are some healthy tactics you can use to calm yourself down when you are feeling agitated or stressed?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

06. Over the course of the book, A goes from silently experiencing the world around him, including his parents' transphobia, the attacks on his friends, and more, to proudly proclaiming who he is and using his voice to stand up to evil and hate. How does this transformation happen to him? How does he feel about his lack of voice at the start of the book, and how does that change how he acts over the course of the story?
07. Initially, A is hesitant to accept the quest offered by the golem. Why is that? What changes for him? When the golem says, "You are in the midst of your own creation, which gives you strength beyond imagining" (37), what does that mean and how does it impact A's decision to go forward with the journey?
08. In Chapters 9 and 10, the true nature of Joanna is revealed. What do we learn about her? Who is she really? What is her background and her story and how does that impact her behaviors?
09. Watch this YouTube video: [Tsibele: Mir Veln Zey Iberlebn/ We Will Outlive](#). Then summarize it in your own words, and write up how it connects to the story.
10. This book is titled *A World Worth Saving*. What do you think that means? How does it connect to the story? What does a world worth saving look like to A? What does it look like to Sal? What does it look like to the golem? What does it look like to the other characters?
11. A and Sal spend their first night in a basement, lovingly referred to as the "Transhack." What is this experience like for each of them? What do they learn? How does it help them each on their individual identity journeys? In this space, what do we see revealed about the importance of community?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

12. Partway through the story, A and Sal go to A's former synagogue, Beth Ma'avar, to ask for help. Why does A decide to go there? Why do his past experiences with the synagogue indicate that this is a safe place to go? What is Rabbi Singer like, and how does she confirm A's feelings about the synagogue? "Beth Ma'avar" translates to "House of Transition"; why do you think the author chose this name for the synagogue?
13. Throughout the story, A reveals certain aspects and traditions of Judaism that he knows and other ones that he doesn't quite understand until he researches on his own or is taught by someone he meets. What did you know about Judaism before reading this book? What did you learn? Did anything surprise you?
14. When A and Zev are first chatting, Zev quotes a very famous line from an ancient Jewish text known as *The Ethics of Our Fathers* or *Pirkei Avot*. It states, "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." What do you think this means? Why does Zev share this with A? How does this impact A? How does this message relate to the book? When the quote comes back much later, how does A understand it through the lens of all that has happened to him since his encounter with Zev?
15. When Sal and A meet Zev, the Rabbi's husband, or as he calls himself, the rebbetzer, they have a conversation about demons (152). How does Zev define demons? How does Sal? How about Rabbi Singer? Why do each of them construct the definitions that they do? How might their experiences inform their definitions? Based on their conversation, how do you think A would define a demon?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

16. How do different aspects of Judaism help A along the way? From the very start of the book to the end, A encounters many aspects of Judaism that are familiar to him, as well as new ones that he learns about from the people around him. How does what he knows and learns help him in achieving his goals throughout the story? How does it help him save the world?

17. A meets a lot of demons disguised as people over the course of the novel, from Joanna, the lower demon who runs SOSAD, to Dr. Lagnis, the sheyd disguised as a doctor. He assumes that Congressman Barrow, who is running a transphobic election campaign, is also a sheyd or another kind of demon. But A realizes that Congressman Barrow is all too human. What does that mean for A's understanding of evil? How does that change his perception of what he is fighting for and against? How does that change his perception of himself?

18. Throughout the book, A and Sal spend a lot of time together but also a lot of time apart. How does the nature of their relationship change over the course of the book? What does A feel that Sal owes him at first, and how does that change as A realizes more about himself and the differences between them? At what moment does A realize that he has harmed Sal, and how does the experience he is having at that moment lend him the ability to see that harm? How does A atone for the harm he caused Sal, and what does that say about his overall growth?

19. Is A special? Why or why not? Does it matter? How does his conversation with the golem on page 264 impact his feelings about being chosen for the tasks he must do to save the world?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

20. It is unclear by the end of the book if the magical being helping A is really a golem or something else. Does it matter? Why or why not?
21. Over the course of the book, A hears a voice in his head filled with negative self-talk. It causes him doubt and anxiety throughout his quest, and it isn't until the end of the book that he realizes that the voices might come from the sheydim, the demons who swirl around people unseen, negatively impacting them and their feelings. How does A come to this realization? What does that change for him? What do you think the source is for those voices? When you have negative thoughts about yourself, what are some ways you can work through them and feel better?
22. How does A change over the course of the book? Who helps him change? What does he realize about the importance of community and asking for help? How does he come to those realizations? How does he understand himself and his identity at the end of the book versus the beginning?
23. At many points in the book, all seems lost and the path ahead seems impossible to forge, but A never gives up hope, even in his darkest moments. What are some examples in the book of times when A finds hope? What are the places that he finds it in? Who are the people that give him hope? How do his relationships with people over the course of the novel change, and how does the ending leave him and his community hopeful for what is to come?

ACTIVITIES

CREATE YOUR OWN CREATURE

In the acknowledgments at the back of the book, the author thanks his friend for telling him to write “a book about a golem that protects trans kids.” We see that protection present in A’s interaction with the golem and also, early on, when he is possessed by Dawn, in the form of an ibbur. They have a positive effect on A’s life, and you can read more about both of these creatures [here](#).

After you have done some background reading, encourage students to design their own version, specifically focusing on creating a mythological creature that offers protection. Have them think about who it is protecting. Why is it protecting them? What is it protecting for or against? What kind of physical features might it have to aid in its protection? Take this opportunity to get creative!

Bring a variety of materials for students to design with: colored pencils, clay, string, fabric, markers, blocks, colored paper, glue sticks, pipe cleaners, beads, and anything you can dig up to give your students a chance to make something of their own. Have them design and give a name to their creature. Let them draw, sculpt, sketch, and build. Their creatures can have things in common with the traditional descriptions but can also show their own flair and imagination. If you have especially eager students who want to completely design their own original creatures, let them do so as long as they can fully describe their own creations.

Once you have a whole gallery, find a way to put their creatures on display for other classes or even your whole school. This is a good way to not only spotlight their work but also invite students into the conversations about the book as a whole.

ACTIVITIES CONTINUED

JEWISH ETHNICITY

Many people are surprised to learn that Judaism is not just a religion/religious practice but, for many Jews, also a cultural identity and an ethnic identity. There are at least three ethnic identities associated with Jews based on where their ancestors are from and other factors. This means that although most Jews share the same fundamental beliefs, many aspects of religious practice and cultural identity look different depending on if a person is Ashkenazi, Sephardic, or Mizrahi. For this activity, have students research one of the three groups, learning about their history and ancestry, specific cultural and religious practices, and differences from the other groups. Pick a custom or tradition specific to the group and present it to the other groups, sharing why it is important and what makes it special. Potential categories: wedding practices, food traditions, language, or rituals around holidays. Once each group has presented, make a list of all the topics covered. Have each group pick one that they didn't research before and see if they can find any information on how their "group" interprets that tradition.

For example: The group that researched Sephardic Jews might research practices around naming babies and learn that babies are named for living relatives. The group that researched Ashkenazi Jews could then go and see if that tradition is the same or different for Jews of Ashkenazi descent.

It is important to mention that though these three categories make up the majority of Jews worldwide, there are Jews of many other ethnic identities, including the Kaifeng Jews of China, the Lemba Jews of Zimbabwe, Bene Israel Jews from Western India, and many more, including thousands of Jews by choice, who have come to choose Judaism at a later point in their lives. For more information, read: *What Jewish Looks Like* by Liz Kleinrock and Caroline Kusun Pritchard.

ACTIVITIES CONTINUED

USING YOUR VOICE

One of the main aspects of the book is how A finds his voice and uses it, quite literally, to save the world. Another way students can use their voices for justice is through political advocacy. Using [this interactive chart](#) from the ACLU, which tracks anti-LGBTQ bills currently in progress, find one in or near your state and write a letter to your senator or representative about why they should oppose it. Students could also research other areas of interest that are important to them, such as climate change, immigration, or animal rights, and write letters about those topics as well or instead. The letters can be sent, but they don't have to be; this activity can be used as a tool for students to learn how to advocate for things that are important to them. If you do want to send them, you can use tools like [Find Your Representative](#) or [Find Your Senator](#) to get started.





ACTIVITIES CONTINUED



HOPE QUOTES

Throughout the book, there are many times that A feels almost hopeless, but then someone or something helps him see that he can't give up. Sometimes that is a quote, either from a Jewish text or something said by someone he loves. For this activity, students should pick one of the following quotes about hope. First, they should write what they think the quote means, then how the quote connects to the book and A's story, and finally how the quote can inspire people. This can be in the form of a private journal entry shared only with the teacher or can be part of a group activity where students are grouped and work together based on which quote they pick. To extend this activity, students can also research the story of the person who said the quote and what they think the quote means in the context of that person's life.

"I can't begin to express how remarkable it feels to finally love who I am enough to pursue my authentic self."

—**ELLIOT PAGE, actor and activist**

"Trans people are extraordinary, strong, intelligent, persistent and resilient. We have to be. And we will not stand for the picking and choosing of rights. We still have hope."

—**SAGE DOLAN-SANDRINO, artist and activist**

"Hope is the feeling that the feeling you have isn't permanent."

—**JEAN KERR, author and playwright**

"One must wager on the future. I believe it is possible, in spite of everything, to believe in friendship in a world without friendship, and even to believe in God in a world where there has been an eclipse of God's face . . . we must not give in to cynicism . . . To defeat injustice and misfortune, if only for one instant, for a single victim, is to invent a new reason to hope."

—**ELIE WIESEL, writer and Holocaust survivor**

"We have to be visible. We are not ashamed of who we are."

—**SYLVIA RIVERA, transgender rights activist**

"I know that you can't live on hope alone, but without it, life is not worth living. And you, and you, and you, and you have got to give them hope."

—**HARVEY MILK, politician and activist**

"Hope is part of the human condition and trans people's hope is our proof that we are fully human. We are not an 'issue' to be debated and derided. We are symbols of hope for many non-trans people, too, who see in our lives the possibility of living more fully and freely. That is why some people hate us: they are frightened by the gleaming opulence of our freedom. Our existence enriches this world."

—**SHON FAYE, writer and journalist**