

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO



**“Laughter-fueled
adventure with
fearsome action.”**

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

**“Readers will be
hooked.”**

—BOOKLIST

**“Come for the dragons
but stay for the
suspenseful reveals.”**

—KIRKUS REVIEWS



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ABOUT THE BOOK

There is a secret world of dragons that lurks at the edges of our own. But dragons also live among us. These Slumberers have been human for so long they have forgotten their true selves—until something awakens the dragon within.

Twelve-year-old Alex Evans is about to wake up.

Ever since her father’s death, Alex’s overprotective mother has smothered her with unbreakable rules and unspoken fears. Feeling trapped, Alex’s frustration has become too big to hide away. Burning inside, she erupts into a fierce, fiery roar.

A new school and a new life await Alex on the legendary island of Skralla, one of the last surviving dragon havens. There, she will train alongside other young dragons who are wild, untamed, and—unlike Alex—skilled at transforming and embracing their dragons within.

As dark factions begin to rise, Alex finds herself in a race to unlock her long-dormant power before Drak Midna, the greatest dragon of all, rises again to wage war against the human world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Struan Murray is Scottish and grew up in Edinburgh, the youngest of a large, rowdy family of redheads. His debut novel, *Orphans of the Tide*, won the prestigious Branford Boase Award and was a Guardian Best Children’s Book of the Year. When he’s not writing, Struan is a lecturer in biochemistry at the University of Oxford.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Before you begin reading *Dragonborn*, study the book. Based upon the cover, what predictions would you make about the book's plot? What is your first impression of Alex, the main character? Based on the cover art, what emotions do you think Alex might be experiencing? Examine the paintings that appear on the endpapers (the very first and very last pages of the book). If your copy allows, remove the dust jacket to see the case cover beneath. What clues do these design elements give you about the story you're about to start, and what questions do they raise that you hope to have answered as you read the book?
2. Gather six sticky notes or bookmarks. On three, write "I wonder..." and on the other three write "This reminds me of..." As you read *Dragonborn*, use these flags to mark moments in the story that make you curious ("I wonder why...", "I wonder how...", "I wonder if...") and moments at which you make a connection to your own life ("This reminds me of [a book you've read or movie you've seen]," "This reminds me of [an experience with a friend or a challenge you faced]," etc.). Tuck the flags inside the cover of your book so you have them handy to fill in and place alongside that section of text while you're reading.

READING ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Most of *Dragonborn* takes place on and around the fictitious island of Skralla. Study the drawing of Skralla that appears at the start of the book. Why might an author want to include a map in their fantasy novel? Refer back to this map throughout the story to trace the paths of the characters and to note the locations of major moments in the plot. If visuals are helpful for you, sketch a map of Undwin, "The Secret City" (p. 134), as Alex explores it throughout the book.
2. Alex's rucksack (a sturdy backpack) holds her most precious treasures, "pieces of memory, made solid—one hundred and twenty-six of them" (p. 19). Did you catch that a few of the trinkets appear as spot illustrations above the chapter numbers?
 - a. If you were collecting "pieces of memory," what small items would you tuck into *your* rucksack? Make a list of ten treasures, "pieces of your past" as Oliphos calls them, that bring you comfort or joy (p. 231).

READING ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

- b. At the start of the book, Alex takes her treasures to, “her favorite place,” (p. 19) to spread the objects out on a blanket and admire them. The forest reminds Alex of her dad, and “of when things had been better” (p. 19). Do you have a special place or object that helps you to remember a loved one or to think about a time in your life that makes you happy? Journal privately about this place and the feelings it brings you when you think about it or get to visit.
3. The book begins and ends with letters and is interlaced with the writings of Dr. Archibald P. Puppinsworth (see p. 15, 81, and 215). Are you familiar with the term *epistolary* as a writing device? If not, take a moment to acquaint yourself with this literary form. Why might the author have chosen to use letters and book excerpts as a means of conveying certain information to you, the reader? The writings seem credible as you come across them in the story; do you feel differently about them in hindsight, once Pups’s true nature is revealed?
4. Several people in this story aren’t who they seem to be. There are clues throughout the book—such as Pups’s cough (and its improvement)—but they’re subtle. Did you see these plot twists coming? Which surprised you the most?
5. A few physical items and locations in the book are particularly well described, such as the Phylactery (p. 60 and p. 251), the Devouring Hall (p. 74 and p. 176), and Kaida’s silver necklace (p. 113 and p. 318). Draw a sketch of one of those items, or choose an evocative moment or scene in the book that stood out to you.
6. Create a glossary for *Dragonborn* that defines words critical to your understanding of the book’s people, places, and plot. This word list might include Slumberers (p. 50), The Otherworld (p. 53), waypath (p. 62), drake (p. 71), dwimmer (p. 115), Rompus (p. 118), Skarren-Har (p. 137), or Moot (p. 183).
7. Research the etymological origin of the name, Drak Midna. Do his monikers, “The Cruel Night” and “The Great Darkness,” seem more or less fitting now that you know what his name means (p. 57)?

READING ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

8. If you could design a waypath, “bridge between faraway places” that leads between two points, where would you want your waypath to begin and to end (p. 62)? How would you disguise your waypath so others don’t accidentally find their way through?
9. What are some of the challenges Alex faces in this book? Who or what helps Alex address those challenges? How self-aware is Alex? Do you think Alex is capable of recognizing her own strengths and limitations?
10. Alex’s fear is a constant presence throughout the book. What helps you feel brave when *you* are afraid? Work as a group to brainstorm tips and tricks that fortify you, help you calm your nerves—and if you’re ready—face your fears.
11. *Dragonborn* is an action-packed read, but there are also a few particularly philosophical moments peppered throughout the book that invite readers to stop and reflect. Respond to your favorite of the following quotes, or choose another that made you pause and ponder as you were reading:
 - a. “It’s all out there: the make-believe made real. If you look hard enough, you’ll find that the world is much, much bigger than you thought it was.” (p. 2)
 - b. “You are something incredible. . . . Something out of place in this world. And because of that you’ll never truly be safe.” (p. 43)
 - c. “The thing about changing, Alex, is that you’re not really changing at all. You are a dragon already. You just need the strength to realize it.” (p. 155)
 - d. “You’re afraid of change. Not changing into a dragon, but the change that tomorrow brings.” (p. 234)
 - e. “You have nothing but iron where your heart should be. What’s the point of being strong if there’s nothing you love enough to protect?” (p. 282)
12. What lingering questions do you have after finishing *Dragonborn*? Were all of your pre-reading questions answered over the course of the book? What predictions do you have for the book’s sequel, particularly in light of Drak Midna’s menacing closing letter (p. 309)?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. The dragons we meet throughout the story are as individually distinctive as their human forms. How do you think your dragon form would look? Take a sheet of paper out and draw or write about what your dragon looks like. What color are your scales? Are they smooth, or barbed and sharp? What about your wings—do they hide a second color underneath? What color are your eyes? Feel free to add other distinguishing characteristics such as horns, tail spines, or a mane, as it suits you.
2. On her twelfth birthday, Alex “thought about opening” the letter from her father (p. 34). If you were Alex, would you also have waited to open the letter? Did your initial instinct about whether or not to open the letter change in light of Ferox’s actions? Write a letter to yourself to be opened on your eighteenth birthday. Seal the letter, and tuck it somewhere safe. Let’s see if you can wait until then to open the note! (Try to avoid Rompusses and Ferox in the meantime.) Alternatively, think about this from Alex’s dad’s perspective and write a letter to future generations of people in your family—your children or grandchildren, or a relative’s. What hopes, dreams, and wishes do you have for these descendants? Draw a picture of that future, if you prefer.
3. Trees are a motif that occurs in the myths and folklore of countless cultures, often representing a physical point of connection between humans and that culture’s higher powers. Research a few of the cultures that include a “tree of life” or “world trees” in their mythology. How do author Struan Murray’s descriptions of the Olden Oak (p. 18) and the Waytree (p. 151) align with, or differ from, what you’ve now learned about the symbolism of trees?

