

The Books of Beginning

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



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ABOUT The Books of Beginning

Siblings Kate, Michael, and Emma were spirited from their home when they were very young and raised in a series of orphanages. In *The Emerald Atlas*, they begin to understand the magical forces that took them away from their parents, as well as the quest they must each complete to save their family—and the world! Through this adventure, Kate masters the first book and learns how to use the magic of time in battle against evil forces. In *The Fire Chronicle*, the siblings are separated when Kate becomes trapped in an earlier era while Michael finds and masters the second book, the one that gives the gift of life. Fiery and impetuous Emma must learn to harness her own emotions as she gains control of the third, and most dangerous, of the books in *The Black Reckoning*. Only when the three books are reunited will the world be saved from destruction . . . but will that joining result in the children's destruction instead? This riveting adventure saga—sometimes chilling, sometimes humorous—delves into profound matters, including the very meaning of life and death.

Grades
3-7



BOOK ONE

The Emerald Atlas

PB: 978-0-375-87271-6
HC: 978-0-375-86870-2
EL: 978-0-375-89955-3
CD: 978-0-307-87978-3



BOOK TWO

The Fire Chronicle

PB: 978-0-375-87272-3
HC: 978-0-375-86871-9
EL: 978-0-375-89956-0
CD: 978-0-307-87982-0



BOOK THREE

The Black Reckoning

HC: 978-0-375-86872-6
GLB: 978-0-375-96872-3
EL: 978-0-375-89957-7
CD: 978-0-307-91517-7

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

In the first volume of the trilogy, *The Emerald Atlas*, Kate learns to access the magic of time. Compare her magical time travel to scientific theories of time:

PBS.org/wnet/hawking/mysteries/html/kaku1-1.html

Look up information about the ancient city of Rhakotis, where the Books of Beginning were first created. What evidence has been found to suggest this place actually existed?

 Pre-Reading Activities correlate to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.9



THE EMERALD ATLAS

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why are Kate, Michael, and Emma so sure that their parents will return when they haven't seen them in ten years?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.1

2. Compare the different reception the children get from Abraham, from Miss Sallow, and from Dr. Pym. Why is Miss Sallow so unpleasant to them? When they explore the house, why does Michael want to go through the door that appears in the basement wall? Why does Kate allow them to go through? Why does it take Kate longer than her siblings to accept that magic is real?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.3

3. Who is the Countess? How old is she? Why does she exert such power over the people of Cambridge Falls? Why does she show the children the vision of the society dance in the ballroom? How does she recognize what Kate can do even before Kate knows?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.1

4. What does the Countess mean when she says the book has “marked” Kate (p. 129)? Why does Kate have a connection to the book from the outset, and how is she able to see pictures of past times when she touches its blank pages? Why does the *Atlas* take Kate into the past when she retrieves it in the cavern, and how does she return again without the book?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.3

5. What is the importance of Gabriel in the story? Why does he have such a strong connection to Emma, and she to him? Compare Gabriel's sacrifice at the dam to Kate's when she goes back to the Countess, Michael's when he jumps back on the boat, and Emma's when she returns to Gabriel in the cavern. What do all of these characters have in common?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.2

6. Why does it take so long for the children to learn the true name of the book, the *Atlas of Time*? What information do you think Dr. Pym is still withholding from them? Why doesn't he tell them he knows their parents?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.5

7. Why doesn't Kate tell Michael and Emma that she has seen their mother in the past? Discuss the role that emotion plays in Kate's interactions with the book and her visions of past and future. What does Dr. Pym mean when he says that Kate would only access her power when her heart had healed? How does the trip into the past help that happen?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.4

8. Who is the Dire Magnus and why could he not exist for long on the boat? What is his power over Kate, and how does she resist? How does Kate decide where to take the Countess back in time when she appears in the bedroom?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.6



THE FIRE CHRONICLE

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why did Dr. Pym send the children back to Baltimore? Why does Kate use the *Atlas* to leave without Michael and Emma? What prevents her from returning to them?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.1

2. Why is it important for Michael and Emma to meet Hugo Algernon? What is his connection to the children's parents? Why does Michael feel "a strange, powerful sympathy" for Hugo (p. 54)?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.3



3. What is the importance of the year 1899? Compare Kate's experience of growing up in orphanages to what she observes in the school of magic in the old church. How does she immediately recognize that she is in a good place? How does she feel about Henrietta Burke when she meets her?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.5

4. How does Michael feel when he receives the marble necklace from Dr. Pym in an envelope addressed to "The Eldest Wibberly" (p. 88)? Why does Emma reach for the necklace first? Describe the differences in the personalities of the two youngest siblings. How does their relationship change when Kate is no longer with them?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.3

5. Why does Michael not consult Dr. Pym about the riddle in the chamber under the grave? Why is it important for Michael to work it out by himself? What does Dr. Pym mean when he says to Michael: "I know what you're afraid of. Trust Emma. Trust yourself. You have a good heart. Let it guide you" (p. 121)?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.5

6. Why is Michael reluctant to acknowledge that he is the keeper of the *Chronicle*? Compare Michael's journey into the volcano to his experience in the cave under the graveyard in Malpesa. How do these experiences change him? Why is the concept of duty so important to Michael?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.2

7. What does Gabriel mean when he says: "Each day, by our actions, we decide who we are" (p. 230)? Discuss why Michael likes the quote from *The Dwarf Omnibus*: "A great leader lives not in his heart, but in his head" (p. 233).

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.4

8. How does Kate save Rafe's life in the burning church? What does Henrietta Burke mean when she tells Kate: "You are the only hope he has. You must love him" (p. 332)? What sacrifice does Rafe make to save Kate's life . . . and what does he ask of the Dire Magnus? What do we learn about the character of the Dire Magnus in this volume?










 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.2

9. Compare Michael's decision to use the *Chronicle* to revive the Dire Magnus to Kate's decision to save Rafe's life. How does Michael resist the darkness in the various selves of the Dire Magnus when he uses the *Chronicle* to bring him back?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.6

THE BLACK RECKONING

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Compare the atmosphere of the place where Emma is held prisoner to Loris and the Rose Citadel. How does the Dire Magnus control his forces? Why is it difficult for the various magical races to work together?
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.1
2. Why does Gabriel return to Granny Peet? What does she mean when she says, “Prophecies are tricky things” (p. 36)? What does the Dire Magnus mean when he tells Emma there is one fight she will never win: “The one against your own nature” (p. 48)? What is the difference between Emma’s anger and his? Discuss Dr. Pym’s comment to Kate: “Mercy is a quality never to be regretted” (p. 63).
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.4
3. Why do the children and Gabriel end up in the giants’ country after they rescue Emma? Why does Willy take them to the High City? What does the city mean to the giants? What does it mean to Kate, Michael, and Emma? Why does Gabriel pursue the Secretary?
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.3, 5
4. What does Emma find most disturbing about the world of the dead? How does she learn the two meanings of the word “reckoning”? How does she use that knowledge when she bonds with the *Reckoning*?
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.2
5. How is Gabriel able to defeat Rourke? What, in the end, is the most important weapon he has against the henchman of the Dire Magnus? What is his ultimate purpose in his final fight?
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.2
6. How has the Dire Magnus increased his power over the years? What does Emma learn from the Countess in the world of the dead about the source of his power—“the seat of magic in all of us” (p. 302)? How does she use that knowledge to create a plan to vanquish evil? What does she realize when she sees Gabriel at the moment of her Bonding?
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.3
7. Why does Kate still believe in Rafe even though she knows he is the Dire Magnus? Why does she not tell Michael and Emma that Rafe has been appearing to her at different times? What does Rafe mean when he says to her in the Rose Citadel: “I need you to keep me human . . . Without you, I’m only the monster!” (p. 350)?
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.5
8. What is the question that Emma used to judge the souls of the dead, to choose whose memories would be returned to them? How did she know this was the right question to ask? How did the book help her to accept this great responsibility?
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.2
9. Why does Kate insist on leaving Loris with Rafe? How is Rafe able to remain when all the former selves of the Dire Magnus are defeated? What is Rafe’s final sacrifice and why must he make it?
 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.3

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Locate on a map of the world the various places where Kate, Michael, and Emma travel on their respective journeys. Identify the places they go in the past, as well as the places in the present.

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.1

Look up information about dragons, elves, and dwarves in a folklore encyclopedia. What factual basis, if any, can you find for the existence of these magical creatures in the real world? Compare the quests of Kate, Michael, and Emma to those of youthful heroes in mythology, such as Jason, Theseus, and Perseus.

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.9

Compare the Books of Beginning to other books that contain magical creatures and time travel, such as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Christopher Paolini's *The Inheritance Cycle*, and Michael Scott's six-volume series, *The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel*. In all of these stories, seemingly ordinary young people are called upon to perform extraordinary deeds. How do Kate, Michael, and Emma compare to other protagonists you have encountered in literature?

 Correlates to Common Core Standards CCSS.RL.4-7.10



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author photo © 2010 by Elena Seibert



John Stephens wrote and produced television for ten years. During this time, he read *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman and fell in love with fantasy for young readers. He spent the next several years waking at 4 a.m. every morning to write his first book, *The Emerald Atlas*, before heading to work for the day. John lives in Los Angeles with his family. Visit BooksofBeginning.com and follow him at [@johnrstephens](https://twitter.com/johnrstephens) to find out more.

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