

"A vivid, compelling fantasy that sends you off to a world you will not soon forget." —Norton Juster, author of *The Phantom Tollbooth*



# GABRIEL FINLEY & the Raven's Riddle

GEORGE HAGEN

## Educators' Guide

Includes Common Core State Standards Correlations



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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Gabriel Finley lives with an eccentric aunt in a Brooklyn brownstone filled with family secrets. His uncle Corax vanished at age twelve, and his father, Adam, suddenly disappeared three years ago. Somehow the two are related. When Gabriel's aunt Jaz gives him his father's diary and a key to a writing desk in the study, he begins to solve the mysteries surrounding the strange and ominous occurrences. And when he adopts an orphaned raven named Paladin, he discovers a magical family ability and the two take to the air as one being. They, along with three friends, discover the entrance to Aviopolis, an underground kingdom where Corax, now an evil half man and half raven, holds Gabriel's father prisoner. In the quest to free him, Gabriel and his friends come face to face with good and evil and learn how a powerful necklace called a torc causes corruption when in the wrong hands.




## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Introduce the novel by asking students to define fantasy. Review the common elements of fantasy:

- May explore a unique world  
Often features talking magical creatures
- Blends imaginary and realistic detail
- Often features a magical object
- May explore themes like good vs. evil and greed vs. unselfishness

Ask students to find examples of these elements in works of fantasy they have read. Instruct them to keep these elements in mind while reading the novel.

-  Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 5–7.9; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5–7.1, SL. 5–7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5–7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 5–7.3.



## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Gabriel's mother has been gone since he was a baby, and his father disappeared three years ago. Discuss whether he feels abandoned or just curious about what happened. Describe Gabriel's relationship with Aunt Jaz. Why does he think her eccentric? Explain what she means when she tells Gabriel, "You deserve so much better than me" (p. 14). Why does Gabriel think Aunt Jaz is envious of her brothers?

Aunt Jaz places *The Book of Ravens* on Gabriel's bedside table after he goes to bed. Discuss why she didn't give him the book when he first asked about his father. Debate how much Aunt Jaz really knows about Adam Finley's disappearance. How does she reveal what she knows little by little? Discuss what Gabriel means when he tells his aunt, "*Actually it's not what you say, it's what you don't say*" (p. 54). Explain why Aunt Jaz thinks it important that Gabriel solve the riddles himself.

Gabriel is curious about Corax, his uncle who disappeared at the age of twelve. Aunt Jaz doesn't seem to know what happened to Corax, but tells Gabriel, "Your father probably knows" (p. 9). How does this foreshadow the events to come? When does Gabriel begin to understand the dark side of Corax Finley?

Aunt Jaz tells Gabriel, "You should be paying attention to other voices besides those of grown-ups" (p. 54). Why does she believe that Gabriel understands what she means? What other voices does Gabriel hear throughout the novel? How does he distinguish between friendly and ominous voices?

Paladin's mother, Endora, is careful about giving him information too soon. How does she mirror Aunt Jaz's approach to Gabriel? Explain the warning from Bertolt, "Guard him well, Endora. A lot may depend on this young raven" (p. 37). How does she prepare and protect Paladin? At what point is it obvious that Paladin is Gabriel's raven amicus?

Corax told his secret to his friend, Thomas. How was Corax responsible for his friend's death? Discuss the friendship that develops between Gabriel, Abby, Pamela, and Somes. Why might they be considered an unlikely quartet? How does Gabriel know that he can trust them with his family's secret? Contrast Gabriel's reason for telling the secret with Corax's reason.

Explain Pamela's, Abby's, and Somes's roles in Gabriel's adventure. What do these characters learn about trust as they make their way to Aviopolis? What happens when they cross the Chasm of Doubt? Who is Septimus? Why doesn't Gabriel trust him? Discuss why Septimus thinks that he and Somes are kindred souls. How does he finally choose a side? Who is responsible for that choice? Why does Adam Finley call Septimus an "old thief"?

Explain how the adventure to the underworld changes Gabriel and his friends. How do Somes and Pamela find the courage to confront and change their home life?

Discuss the following simile: "Riddles were like locks to Gabriel. He liked to pry them open and figure out what made them work" (p. 7). How is Adam Finley's diary like a riddle? How does Gabriel teach his friends to unlock riddles? Gabriel especially likes riddles that stretch his imagination. Discuss the riddle that challenges his imagination the most. How is the answer to this riddle a matter of life or death for him?

Adam Finley recorded the following diary entry on November 22: "Tonight I told my father I'm going to become an archaeologist. I'm going to find this torc. Somebody has to make sure that it is kept out of my brother's hands" (p. 99). Explain the archaeologist mention. How does this reveal the reason for Adam's disappearance?

Gabriel thinks that the most interesting entry in Adam Finley's diary is the one about the day his father first paravolated with Baldasarre, his raven amicus. Explain what Adam means when he says, "I was free in a way I had never imagined before" (p. 40). Discuss the theme of freedom throughout the novel. Gabriel frees his father from

Corax and the underground world of Aviopolis. How does the adventure also free Pamela, Somes, and Abby?

Good vs. evil is a common theme in fantasy. How is the sinister portrait of Corax in the study of the Finley home a symbol of evil? Trace the good and evil characters, human and animal, throughout the adventure. In fantasy, good almost always prevails. Other than rescuing Adam Finley, what other good comes from the adventure?

Power is another underlying theme in the novel. Discuss how power may be both good and evil. Cite evidence that Corax loved power as a young boy. How does he carry his love of power to the underworld of Aviopolis? Describe the power of the torc.

Explain the structure of the novel. How do Gabriel's and Paladin's parallel stories and Adam Finley's diary contribute to the development of the plot? What is the climax of the novel? Discuss the purpose of the epilogue.

Discussion Questions correlate to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 5-7.1, RL. 5-7.2, RL. 5-7.3; Craft & Structure RL. 5-7.4, RL. 5-7.5, RL. 5-7.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5-7.1, SL. 5-7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.



## ACTIVITIES

In the epilogue, Adam Finley explains to Gabriel that “dark magic” takes “whatever matters most to you that you’ll forever miss” (p. 370). Ask students to think about the torc as a symbol of dark magic. Why does Adam Finley think the torc holds the answer to why his wife disappeared? Engage the class in creating a progressive story that reveals the whereabouts of Gabriel’s mother. (One student begins the story and points to another student to add to the story. Continue until each student has made a contribution. The last student must draw a conclusion.)

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5-7.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

The word *paladin* means “strong supporter or defender of a cause.” Ask students to consider the role of Paladin in the story. Then have them write a short essay that explains why Paladin is an appropriate name for Gabriel’s raven amicus. Instruct them to refer to specific scenes and use direct quotes from the novel that support their argument. Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling, and grammar.


Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 5-7.1; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.1; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.4, W. 5-7.5.

Discuss the qualities of a hero. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to discuss why Aunt Jaz calls Gabriel’s dad a hero. Then have the group make a list of the heroes and heroines in the novel and write a one-line description of their heroism. Allow time in class for the groups to share their work.


Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 5-7.2; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5-7.1, SL. 5-7.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 5-7.6; Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.4.

## ACTIVITIES (continued)

Gabriel wonders why Aunt Jaz didn't file a missing person's report when she discovered Adam Finley's disappearance. Aunt Jaz says, "I don't believe your father is in a place where the police *could* find him" (p. 25). Have students find out how to make a missing person's report in their city or state. What type of information is required in the report? Then write a missing person's report for Adam Finley. In the case of foul play, family members are often the guilty parties. Include a statement about the suspicion that Corax is responsible for Adam's disappearance. Encourage students to design a Wanted poster as well.


 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.3; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5-7.8.

Have students jot down reasons why Gabriel's twelfth birthday is especially important to him. Then have them jot down why the Ceremony of the Twelves is a significant time for Jonas, the main character in *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Ask them to write a paper that compares Gabriel's birthday and Jonas's ceremony, and the journeys the two characters take. Instruct them to include direct quotes from the novels to support claims and, in a concluding paragraph, discuss the decision that each character makes at the end of the novel. How are their decisions life-changing?


 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 5-7.9; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.1; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.4.

Gabriel finds Pamela's violin music both beautiful and sad. He says he has never thought about how these two feelings could go together. Discuss how dance may also simultaneously convey these two emotions. Allow students to work with a partner or in small groups to choreograph a contemporary dance that is beautiful and sad and interprets a particular scene in the underworld of Aviopolis.


They may elect to dance to violin music or to a narration of the scene.

 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 5-7.7; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 5-7.5.


"I have been changed for good" is the last line in the song "For Good" from *Wicked*, the Broadway musical based on *The Wizard of Oz*. Ask students to write lyrics for a song called "I Have Been Changed for Good" that either Gabriel, Pamela, Abby, or Somes might write at the end of the novel.

 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Craft & Structure RL. 5-7.6; Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.4; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3; Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 5-7.5, L. 5-7.6.

The birds in the novel each symbolize something. Instruct students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to look up the symbolism of the following birds: raven, owl, mockingbird, eagle, goose, sparrow, and robin. Then have them pick one and write a brief essay that draws a parallel between the symbolism and the bird's role in the novel, using direct quotes from the novel to support claims.

 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 5.7.1, RL. 5-7.2; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 5-7.5; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.1; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5-7.7, W. 5-7.9.

Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to research Norse mythology. Have them explore objects like the "ash staff," people such as the dwarfs, and ravens like Huginn and Muninn and use this information to write a brief forward to the novel. They should provide a list of sources.

 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 6-7.9; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5-7.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5-7.7, W. 5-7.8, W. 5-7.9; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5-7.1, L. 5-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3.

# VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

*Gabriel Finley & the Raven's Riddle* may lead readers to discover new vocabulary. Encourage them to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from the context.

Such words may include: *iridescent* (p. 8), *façade* (p. 23), *infinite* (p. 23), *ruthless* (p. 38), *flabbergasted* (p. 39), *defiant* (p. 48), *inquisitive* (p. 55), *dour* (p. 57), *colossal* (p. 60), *elusive* (p. 77), *cunning* (p. 82), *indentation* (p. 94), *dismayed* (p. 103), *voracious* (p. 107), *telepathic* (p. 148), *anthracite* (p. 153), *eddies* (p. 162), *languid* (p. 163), *indignant* (p. 174), *gyrating* (p. 194), *scrutiny* (p. 200), *covetous* (p. 200), *catastrophe* (p. 209), *emanate* (p. 222), *demented* (p. 223), *pillaged* (p. 240), *villainous* (p. 243), *pulverizing* (p. 251), *abrasive* (p. 253), *abyss* (p. 255), *chasm* (p. 278), *parapet* (p. 296), *jaundiced* (p. 297), *sentry* (p. 342), *sustenance* (p. 343), and *untethered* (p. 345).

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary/Acquisition & Use L. 5–7.4.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Hagen is the author of two novels for adults: *The Laments*, a *Washington Post* bestseller and recipient of the William Saroyan International Prize for writing, which *Publishers Weekly* called “a funny, touching novel about the meaning of family;” and *Tom Bedlam*, which was described by *Booklist* as “Dickensian in scope and spirit. . . . Shot through with humor, and populated with a cast of eccentric charmers.”

George had lived on three continents by the time he was twelve. The father of three children, he now lives in Brooklyn, New York. This is his first book for kids. To learn more about the author, visit [GeorgeHagen.com](http://GeorgeHagen.com).

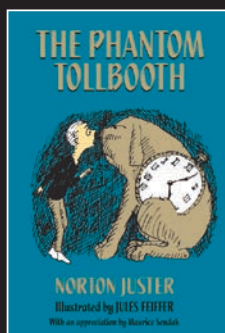
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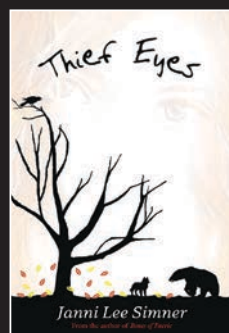
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