

Educator Discussion Guide

THE EXPLORERS: THE DOOR IN THE ALLEY

by Adrienne Kress

Illustrations by Matthew C. Rockefeller

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2019-2020

Grade 3-5

Submitted by Jennifer Miller

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Sebastian is a 12-year-old boy who is good at math and science and wants to be a neurosurgeon. He is a rule-follower, until one day he is on his way home from school with his cousin and best friend Arthur, who accidentally takes a wrong turn. Because of this wrong turn, Sebastian discovers The Explorers Society. After breaking one of the rules of the Society, Sebastian must spend every day after school tidying up the many different rooms housed inside. While there, he meets an array of varying personalities, including the president of the Society, Myrtle Algens. Myrtle tries to convince Sebastian that he needs to let loose a little. He does and steals a secret box that leads him to the interesting discovery of an exploring group named the Filipendulous Five.

Meanwhile, in a different part of town at The Wayward School, Evie is struggling with not fitting in and the loss of her parents who were killed two years ago. Every week, she is invited to dinner at the Andersons', a couple who took interest in her when she was brought to the school by the state after her parents died. During one of these dinners, the Andersons and Evie are attacked. Evie is able to escape after Mrs. Anderson gives her a letter from her grandfather, who she presumed dead. This letter leads her to the Explorers Society where she meets Sebastian. After Sebastian shows Evie the box he found, and Evie shows Sebastian the letter, they discover that Evie's grandfather was the leader of the Filipendulous Five. Though adventure gives Sebastian panic attacks, they set out together to find Evie's missing grandfather and the key that holds the answer to it all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrienne Kress is a writer and actress born and raised in Toronto, Canada. She majored in Drama at the age of 11 at the Claude Watson School for the Arts, and continued to follow this path through post-secondary school, graduating summa cum laude from the University of Toronto with an honours BA in theatre. She then moved to London England to study at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts and stayed for three years, acting in a variety of productions. Inspired by a trip to the town of Bath, Adrienne wrote *Alex and the Ironic Gentleman* while living in London, England. Adrienne is presently living in Toronto where she is continuing her writing, acting and directing careers.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at

<http://adriennekress.com/author/appearances/biography>

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Matthew C. Rockefeller is a freelance illustrator and comic artist from Tucson, AZ, and he loves to depict places and tell stories through pictures. His work has appeared in a variety of formats including

comics, book covers, picture books, and animation. He received his BFA in Illustration at the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2014.

Biographical information taken from the illustrator's website at <http://mattrockefeller.com/about.html>

BOOK AWARDS

2019 Manitoba Young Readers Choice Award nominee

OTHER TITLES IN SERIES

The Explorers: The Reckless Rescue (2018)

The Explorers: The Quest for the Kid (2019)

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Explorers' Societies

To help students understand who explorers are, discuss examples of explorers and some different explorers' societies. Form groups of 3-4 students. Give each group the name of an explorers' organization and the following questions:

1. In what year was your organization founded? Is it still functioning today?
2. Which sciences do the members represent?
3. Where is the headquarters for the organization?
4. How does one become a member?
5. Would you want to be a member of this organization? Why or why not?

Have books from the school or public library and websites on tablets for groups to use. Allow students one class period to research their organizations. The next class period, host a sharing session with the whole class.

Some Explorers' Organizations:

Royal Society, London

Royal Geographical Society, London

Explorers Club, New York City

American Geographical Society, New York City

National Geographic Society, Washington, DC

Royal Canadian Geographical Society, Ottawa

Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, Adelaide

Activity taken from author's website at

<http://www.adriennekress.com/author/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Study-Guide-For-The-Explorers-The-Door-In-The-Alley.pdf>

Footnotes

Throughout the book, the author uses footnotes to add to the humor of the story. To familiarize students with footnotes, begin a discussion asking them if they know what footnotes are and where they have seen them. Dictionary.com defines a footnote as,

“an explanatory or documenting note or comment at the bottom of a page, referring to a specific part of the text on the page.” Site accessed 10/18/18.

The students will watch portions of a video about footnotes with the whole class.

Video: Finding Footnotes and Endnotes:

<https://www.sophia.org/tutorials/footnotes-and-endnotes--2>

Show students examples of footnotes in non-fiction and novels. Discuss what they notice to be different between footnotes in non-fiction and those in novels.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the pig in the teeny hat play a role throughout the novel? What are the other animals in the story and how do they help throughout Sebastian's and Evie's adventure?
2. When does Sebastian first do something unexpected? What does he find when he does? Why is this important?
3. What do Sebastian and Evie decide to do with the information from the wooden box and her letter? How does this affect the events in the story?
4. How does Sebastian's photographic memory affect what happened to the key?
5. Would the Explorers let you become a member of the Society? Using information from the book, why or why not?
6. Analyze the cover image of the book. How does it hint at the content of the story? What does each element tell you specifically?
7. What is the most important event in the story? Use evidence from the text to explain why it is so important.
8. How does Sebastian's job at the Explorers Society slowly start to change his personality?
9. How do the footnotes add to the story? How would the story be different without them?
10. The story is told from the voice of a narrator. Did you still understand the thoughts and feelings of Sebastian and Evie? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
11. Using text-evidence, what might have happened if Sebastian had not burned the key?
12. How does Arthur's wrong turn at the beginning of the story affect Sebastian and the choices he makes?
13. Why are Sebastian's parents so accepting of the explanation of who Evie is and why she needs to stay? Also, why is it easy for Sebastian to get permission for him and Evie to go to Catherine's lecture?
14. Using information from the book about the Filipendulous Five and other members of the Explorers Society, what are some important characteristics for an explorer to have? Who would you include in an explorer group you were in?
15. The Explorers Society has many rooms which Sebastian becomes familiar with during his punishment. How do these rooms help or hurt Sebastian, Evie, Catherine, and Myrtle towards the end of the story when they are escaping from Mr. K and Mr. I?

Further discussion questions on the author's website at

<http://www.adriennekress.com/author/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Study-Guide-For-The-Explorers-The-Door-In-The-Alley.pdf>

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Science:

- In the story, we find out that Sebastian has a photographic memory. Students will watch the video "Finding Your Way" and then discuss with the class if, and how, Sebastian's photographic memory would have helped him in this situation and how they think it will help him and Evie in the next book.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/finding-your-way/>
- The Filipendulous Five's last expedition was exploring the Mariana Trench. They had to create a submarine that would withstand the pressure of the ocean 35,815 ft. down. After looking at designs of two vessels that have made the voyage, the *Trieste* and the DEEPSEA CHALLENGER, students will create their own vessels that will safely nest an egg inside

while being dropped from a two-story window or the roof of the school (only teachers and custodians allowed on the roof).

<https://stem.neu.edu/programs/ayp/fieldtrips/activities/eggdrop/>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/bathyscaphe/>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/news/preparing-failure-part-success/>

Social Studies:

Sebastian and Evie are trying to find pieces to a map that will hopefully lead them to Alistair. Students will break out into groups of three to four. Each group will be assigned a destination around the school (cafeteria, main office, playground, etc.). Groups must work together to create maps from the classroom to the place they were assigned. These maps will be given to the teacher who will cut them into pieces, place in a plastic bag, and give to a different group. Once a group has their new map, they must put it together and find the place where it leads them.

For other map ideas:

<https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Geography/location.html#maps>

Language Arts:

- After looking at examples of other literary animals in human clothing, students will use the pictures they drew in Art to write an adventure story about their animal. The animal can be a main character or supporting character, like the pig in *The Explorers*.
<http://wordspelunking.blogspot.com/2017/03/6th-mmgm-door-in-alley-by-adrienne.html>
- Evie and Sebastian are the main characters in this story, but they are very different. In each chapter we find out more information about what is unique about the two children. While reading, students will fill in a graphic organizer chart comparing and contrasting the two characters' traits. You can use the following chart for students to handwrite or type their thoughts. You can also use chart paper to do this as a whole class activity.

Sebastian	Both	Evie

Art:

- The author includes animals with fairly human characteristics throughout this story, starting with the pig in the teeny hat. It is one of the many ways she imparts humor into the story. Students will choose animals and illustrate them wearing a piece of human clothing, i.e. a hat, a coat, shoes, etc.

Vocabulary:

Ominous	Neurosurgeon	Inhalation
Cartography	Concerted	Filipendulous
Outmaneuvered	Ominously	Archaic
Debris	Blustery	Monotony
Pragmatic	Pronouncement	Treacherous

RELATED WEB SITES

Study Guide for *The Explorers: The Door in the Alley*

<http://www.adriennekress.com/author/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Study-Guide-For-The-Explorers-The-Door-In-The-Alley.pdf>

A PDF study guide for educators to use while reading whole class or to assign for homework.

Adrienne Kress: Author

<http://www.adriennekress.com/author/>

The author’s website links to the books she’s written, including this book and its sequel. There are also links to activities, reviews, and pictures of book appearances Adrienne has done.

Matt Rockefeller

<http://mattrockefeller.com/>

The illustrator’s website links to other books he has illustrated, his social media accounts, and his blog.

The Explorers Club

<https://explorers.org/>

Discover more information about an actual explorers’ society.

Find an Explorer

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/find-explorers/>

Find an explorer and learn more about who they are, their areas of expertise, and what they have explored or are exploring.