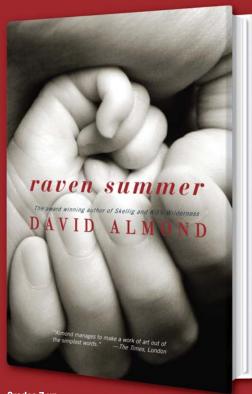
raven summer READERS GUIDE

"Any one of us could be a murderer if they got us early enough. The murderer in all of us is just below the skin."





ABOUT THE BOOK



Grades 7 upDelacorte Press HC: 978-0-385-73806-4

GLB: 978-0-385-90715-6

After Liam and his best friend Max find an abandoned baby girl in the woods beyond his house, his peaceful world and idyllic childhood is shaken as he is forced to confront the existence of human brutality: in the world, in those who were once his friends, and within his own heart.

"It starts and ends with the knife." With this ominous line begins Raven Summer, when Liam Lynch digs up an old knife in the dirt of his backyard garden while playing with his friend, Max. Shortly thereafter, a raven appears and leads the boys to an ancient stone farmhouse beyond his property. There they discover an abandoned baby girl, with a note pinned to her clothing: Please look after her rite. This is a child of God. The baby is placed in foster care, and it is on the day that Liam and his family visit the foundling that he meets Oliver, a Liberian refugee, and Crystal, a troubled teenager who was orphaned as a baby. Via e-mail correspondence with Crystal, Liam learns that Oliver is in danger of being deported back to Liberia, where he is sure to be executed. Liam decides to help his new friends and soon discovers that things are not always as they seem, and that all people, even children, are capable of the most horrific brutality.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Begin a discussion regarding the major themes in the story, such as abandonment, violence, brutality, war, loss of innocence, resilience, the nature of art, fate, and truth. Challenge students to describe and discuss passages from the book that present these themes. Discuss how particular characters are associated with the themes.
- The first line of *Raven Summer* reads: "It starts and ends with the knife." The knife is just one symbol that appears in this story. Discuss other examples of symbolism (the raven, Nattrass, fighter jets, skin, the snakes in the pit, Allison) and what they represent. Discuss how the author uses these and other symbols to convey the story's major themes.
- Discuss how Liam grapples with feelings of leaving his childhood behind. How do his
 conflicting emotions contribute to his actions? Read aloud Liam's self-reflection at the
 bottom of page 36 and continuing through the middle of page 37. Discuss this passage
 as a description of adolescent angst and confusion. Did the author successfully describe
 the often bewildering emotions experienced during adolescence?
- Discuss, compare, and contrast the following lines: "Truth and fiction merge into each other. We try to keep them apart, but how can we?" (p. 30); "The story's told, then fades away, like all the stories in the news" (p. 33); and "It take time to tell the truth, Mr. Lynch." (p. 53)
- Reread chapter 10. How is Nattrass a barometer of Liam's own unexpressed feelings about violence and cruelty? Why does Liam "crack" and attack Nattrass, and how does this episode force Liam to confront his own bloodlust? After they fight, Nattrass whispers into Liam's ear, "You're just like me at heart, Liam. Just like you always were, if truth be told." (p. 47) How are Nattrass and Liam alike? How are they different?
- Liam's mother photographs scarred and bruised skin, dead animals, and other dying and decaying objects, and then blows up the images until they are abstractions that resemble landscapes. Why do you think she is so drawn to these objects? How does this reconcile with her belief that, "We have to nurture the parts of us that aren't savage We have to help the angel in us overcome the beast." (p. 74)
- Over the course of the story the question of what is and isn't art is asked, both by Liam's
 mother, and by Nattrass, whose video simulations of horrific scenes become a big hit in
 the Newcastle gallery. Is something a work of art only if the creator intends for it to be
 art, or can anything, depending on how it is presented, be considered art? What is the
 difference between the *intentions* of Liam's mother's photographs and Nattrass's videos?
 Does art have to be beautiful to qualify as art?
- When Max confronts Liam about Liam's involvement with Oliver, Liam says, "So he's
 nothing to do with us. So we wash our hands of him?" (p. 135) Why is it so easy for most
 people to turn a blind eye to the plight of others? Why do you think Liam is so compelled
 to help Oliver and Crystal?
- When Oliver reveals that his real name is Henry Meadows and begins to recount his
 personal story of being a child soldier in Liberia, he says, "And it is disgusting, no? It is
 beyond belief. But it is not beyond belief. It happens every hour, every day." (p. 176)
 Discuss the concept if institutionalized brutality. Use Oliver's story to draw parallels to
 other parts of the world where children a forced and/or taught to kill for political purposes.

INTERNET RESOURCES

ON IMPRINTING IN ANIMALS:

www.cerebromente.org.br/n14/experimento/lorenz/index-lorenz.html

ON LIBERIAN CHILD SOLDIERS:

- edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/africa/08/31/liberia.child.soldiers.reut/index.html
- www.unicef.org.uk/press/news_detail.asp?news_id=182
- www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR34/006/2004

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DAVID ALMOND grew up in and around Newcastle, England, the setting for *Raven Summer*. One of six children in a large Catholic family, he learned to love print at a very early age: his mother used to take him on outings to an uncle's printing press, where he delighted in watching the pages roll out of the machine. Almond has written many books for children, including *Skellig*, a Michael L. Printz Honor Book, and *Kit's Wilderness*, a Michael L. Printz Award Winner. He lives in Northumberland with his family, "just beyond the Roman Wall, which for centuries marked the place where civilization ended and the wastelands began."

For more information about the author, visit DavidAlmond.com

ALSO BY DAVID ALMOND:















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