

# THE GOLDEN COMPASS

READ THE BOOK, SEE THE MOVIE  
DISCUSSION GUIDE

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Eleven-year-old Lyra Belacqua is an orphan living in Jordan College at Oxford, England, with her daemon Pantalaimon. Her uncle, Lord Asriel—the only relative she's ever known—is often away on secret explorations. When Lyra journeys to the frozen North to save her best friend and other kidnapped children from terrible experiments by a board of scheming scientists, she encounters Gobblers, armored bears, witch clans, haunting secrets and unspeakable dangers. Her guiding light is the alethiometer, the golden compass, a truth-telling device that helps her overcome the forces that threaten her safety as she maneuvers through different dimensions and unknown worlds.

THE BELOVED NOVEL GOES FROM  
THE CLASSROOM TO THE THEATER  
DECEMBER 7, 2007

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION: THE BOOK

- ◆ Ask students to define *betrayal*. How does Lyra betray Roger? Discuss whether she was aware that she was betraying him. Which other characters are guilty of betrayal? How do they justify their actions?
- ◆ The Magisterium has control over the government and science in the England that Lyra knows. How is this evident in the novel? Discuss how the Magisterium uses its forces in different ways.
- ◆ Power is an underlying theme in the novel. Which characters have the greatest power? How do they use it? Discuss Lyra's power. At what point does she realize that she has power?
- ◆ Discuss Lyra's courage as she travels to the North. At what point does she lose her courage? How does she regain it? Discuss whether the alethiometer gives her courage or threatens it.
- ◆ A daemon is an animal manifestation of a person's soul. Discuss the obvious characteristics that Pantalaimon and Lyra share. What about the other characters and their daemons? How are they similar in nature? Ask students to pick a daemon for themselves. Encourage them to share their choice in class.
- ◆ *The Golden Compass* has been described as a heroic novel. Discuss the qualities of a hero. Who are the heroes in the novel? What are their greatest acts of heroism?
- ◆ Pullman tells us that *The Golden Compass* takes place "in a universe like ours, but different in many ways." How do you think Lyra's universe relates to ours?

(CONTINUED)



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## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION: THE BOOK (CONTINUED)

- ◆ Why do you think Lyra is described as an unimaginative child? Discuss how imagination would be dangerous to her. How would it affect her understanding of the alethiometer?
- ◆ What do you think is the author's purpose in creating—and exploring—the world of the armored bear?
- ◆ Are Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter in collusion or are they fighting each other? How and in what way?
- ◆ Discuss Lyra's growth from an innocent child to a more mature individual. At what point in the novel does Lyra first demonstrate a growing maturity? How does the novel explore ideas of innocence versus experience?
- ◆ The novel explores the idea of fate versus free will. Which characters embrace fate and which free will? Can you believe in both?

## BEFORE SEEING THE FILM

Ask students to try their hand at screen writing. Have them pick a favorite chapter from the novel and write it as a screenplay. Ask them to recruit classmates to play the character roles in their screenplay. Students should explain how much of the dialogue is taken directly from the novel, and how much is created to extend the scene. How difficult is it to transcribe prose into dialogue?

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION: THE MOVIE

- ◆ Discuss the use of computer generation in movies to create fantastical characters. Which characters are computer-generated? How are these characters given “soul”?
- ◆ Read about the actors and actresses in the movie. Think about the past roles they have played and their physical characteristics. Discuss why these artists were cast in *The Golden Compass* film.
- ◆ Music plays an important role in movies. For example, *crescendo* (gradually louder) is often used to create suspense or a high point in the movie. Identify the most suspenseful scenes in the movie. How does music enhance the suspense? What places in the movie are *pianissimo* (very soft), *largo* (very slow), and *manando* (fading away) used for musical effect?
- ◆ Discuss the differences between the novel and the film. How does a visual medium affect the point of view of a story? How do you think a screenwriter interprets a novel to bring it to the screen?
- ◆ Think about the setting of the story. Discuss which part of the movie is filmed on location and which part of the set is computer-generated. How is it effective to use both techniques to create Lyra's world? How well do the cities and other locations portray what is described in the book?

**THE GOLDEN COMPASS MOVIE IS PERFECT FOR STUDENTS LOOKING TO FILL THEIR CULTURAL ARTS CREDITS!**

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- ◆ Describe the characters and places portrayed in *The Golden Compass* film. Discuss how they are different from the way students had imagined them when reading the novel. How are they the same?
- ◆ Discuss the use of costumes and set design in the film and how they are used to bring the characters from the novel to life.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- ◆ *The Golden Compass* may be billed as action, adventure, drama, fantasy, or thriller. Discuss how these genres are similar. How are they different? Have students write a movie review of *The Golden Compass* as one of the above genres.
- ◆ Have students write a brief comparison of the novel and the film. Consider scenes included and those excluded. Are the characters faithful to the novel?
- ◆ Just for fun! Have students meet their dæmon using the “Dæmon Generator” at [www.goldencompassmovie.com](http://www.goldencompassmovie.com).

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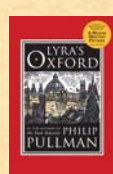
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