

BOOKNOTES

READERS GUIDE

classroom connections

Mythology • Family
Sibling Relationships
Loyalty • Problem Solving

Grades 5 up

about the MythQuest series

Follow contemporary teens Alex and Cleo Bellows as they travel into a cyberworld of mythic imagination to search for their missing father.

When Alex and Cleo's father disappears in the Cyber Museum he created, the children discover a way to look for him by entering mythological worlds through a computer screen. Once each child arrives in the past, he/she transforms into a mythical character and assumes that character's role in the myth. While one sibling enters a myth, the other one communicates through the computer screen and continues to research the possible whereabouts of their father.

In this fascinating series, readers are taken to ancient Greek and Japanese civilizations, and to North America to witness battles between the Plain Indians. The blending of ancient times with 21st-century technology adds interest to the historical myths and gives a new meaning to the word hero. Students will be engaged by the characters and the mesmerizing idea of time travel.



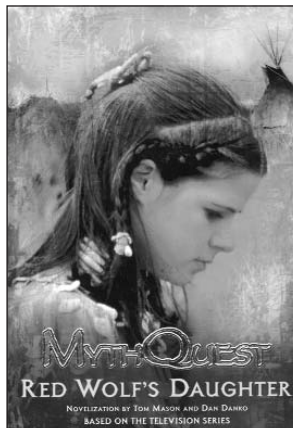
The Minotaur

Tom Mason and Dan Danko
Grades 5 up • Skylark paperback
0-553-48759-0



Hammer of the Gods

John Whitman
Grades 5 up • Skylark paperback
0-553-48760-4



Red Wolf's Daughter

Tom Mason and Dan Danko
Grades 5 up • Skylark paperback
0-553-48761-2



Minokichi

John Whitman
Grades 5 up • Skylark paperback
0-553-48762-0

pre-reading activity

Ask students to research and read different myths from around the world. They can start by checking out the Internet Resources listed on page six of this guide. As students read, have them choose a character they would like to be if they were able to travel in time to the myth. Ask them to explain their choice. Each student can briefly tell the class their myth and the character they have chosen.

about the book

Alex has become Theseus, the Athenian prince sent to ancient Crete as a sacrifice to the horrific Minotaur. Unless Alex can defeat one of the fiercest creatures in all of mythology, he'll have a lot more to worry about than finding his father.

MythQuest: The Minotaur

Tom Mason and Dan Danko



pre-reading activity

Read the description of the Minotaur on page 109 to the class, and then make the following statement: "Imagine you are all alone and you must defeat this creature to save your life and the lives of your family." Have each student draw a picture of the creature, and write a short paragraph answering these questions: What would you do if you had to face this kind of creature in a fight? How do you think you'd defeat him? Students can then share their drawings and paragraphs with the class.

questions for group discussion

1. Alex's family displays loyalty throughout the trauma they are experiencing. Alex and his sister band together to try to find their dad, and they protect their mother from the knowledge of what they have discovered. What other examples of loyalty did you discover as you read the book? How do you show loyalty to your family and friends? What have others done to be loyal to you?
2. Kadilus pretends to be someone he is not, and his deception almost costs Alex and the other Athenians their lives. Is his deception a betrayal? Does he intend to hurt them? Have you ever felt betrayed? What emotions did you feel, and how did you handle the betrayal?
3. At one time Alex's biggest worries were homework and school, but in the face of the Minotaur, his problems seem insignificant and trivial. How do you think his brush with death changes his attitude toward his life at home? What steps do you think he takes to make changes in his relationships and his school work? Do you think about the ease of your life in light of the tragedies occurring in the world right now? What changes have you made or can you make?
4. Alex is the type of guy who has always charmed his way out of trouble, but in Crete his charms aren't working. He had to learn to use his brain and his muscles to survive. What does Alex do to change his way of thinking about himself and his skills in handling problems? Have you ever been in a situation where your usual way of handling things wasn't working? How did you adjust?
5. Alex is motivated to fight the Minotaur to save his life and the lives of his friends, but the courage it takes for him to look death in the face far surpasses anything he has ever experienced before. When have you been called on to be brave and courageous? How did you feel after the situation was resolved?
6. After Alex defeats the Minotaur, he challenges the people of Crete to live peaceably with the Athenians. He says, "Let us go forward from this day, not cheering death but celebrating life." (p. 123) Although you have never had to fight a monster to the death for peace, you have no doubt experienced situations where different groups of students or individuals in your school were not getting along. What could you do in these situations to help bring people together?

about the book

Loki, the trickster god of Norse legends, lies chained to a rock, tortured by the burning venom of a serpent as punishment for offending Thor. Alex enters the myth as Loki's son, Vali, and refuses to let his "father" face such a horrible fate. But if he acts to rescue Loki, will he destroy the very fabric of the universe?

MythQuest: Hammer of the Gods

John Whitman



pre-reading activity

As a class, read aloud several of the Norse myths that include Thor and Loki and discuss the need for people in ancient times to rely on myths to convey the "truths" of their society. Ask students if there are any similarities in the truths of the ancient myths compared to beliefs in 21st-century society. What are those similarities?

questions for group discussion

1. The computer program Dr. Bellows develops and the discovery Alex and Cleo make upon entering the Alterworld is currently an impossibility. (pp. 6–7) However, if travel through a computer became a reality, what time period would you like to visit? Where would you go? Who would you like to meet? What would you do?
2. Alex's father taught him that, "There was a solution to every problem, an answer to every mystery. It was only a question of whether you were willing to work hard enough to find it." (p. 47) Risking his life to travel into the Alterworld, Alex proves his willingness to work hard to find his father. What lessons have your parents or guardians taught you that have helped you through a difficult situation?
3. Even though Alex knows that saving Loki will not bring him closer to finding his own father, he is willing to take the risk because he can empathize with Vali's desire to save his father, Loki, from eternal torment. What does this decision say about Alex as a person?
4. Prior to Dr. Matt Bellows's disappearance, he was well respected by his co-workers and a valued member of the scientific community. However, when he disappears, none of his colleagues stand by him and easily believe that he is a thief who left his family to clean up his mess. What does this say about human nature? Have you ever been in a situation where you found it necessary to stand up for a friend or family member who was falsely accused? Have you ever been falsely accused and needed someone to stand by you?
5. Alex determines that Loki "was an immortal version of every class clown he had ever known—which meant that he was a funny guy until he was playing his jokes on you, and that, he sometimes pushed his games too far." (p. 85) Discuss with your students the characteristics of a class clown. What motivates them? What character traits do they possess? Are they liked, admired, or respected by others?
6. While Alex is stunned by the fact that Loki is willing to give up his life to save his son, Vali, Cleo realizes it is because Loki loves his son. (p. 128) Most parents or guardians are not asked to give up their lives for their children, but parents do make sacrifices for their children out of love. What are some of the sacrifices parents make? How do those sacrifices benefit children, and what do they show about the parent?

about the book

Cleo accidentally touches the screen and emerges amid a battle between the Nez Perce and Blackfoot Indians. As Seeloo, daughter of a Nez Perce chief, Cleo also discovers that both great love and tremendous sacrifice may be required of her before she can get home again.

MythQuest: Red Wolf's Daughter Dan Danko and Tom Mason



pre-reading activity

Ask students to go to the following Web site and find at least one interesting fact about the society, the hunting habits, or the history of either the Blackfoot Indians or the Nez Perce Indians and share it with the class. Go to: www.dist126.k12.il.us/powwow/resources.htm

questions for group discussion

1. When Cleo travels through the plasma screen, she arrives in a Nez Perce village after a Blackfoot attack and finds many dead and wounded warriors. She notes, "The living mourned the dead." (p. 28) In recent years, the citizens of the United States have seen first hand the devastation of an unprovoked and surprise attack. How have "the living mourned the dead" in our country? What American ideals and beliefs have been shaken as a result of terrorism?
2. After the attack, Chief Red Wolf praises his warriors' bravery and effort to fight the Blackfoot in the face of unavoidable defeat. Have you ever been in a situation in which you felt the only possible outcome was defeat? What prompted you to continue in your struggle to overcome the challenge? How was the situation resolved?
3. In an effort to change the deep hatred between their tribes, both Seeloo and Tlesca respectfully stand up to their fathers. Tlesca's father is touched by the courage Seeloo shows when she risks her life to try to bring peace. Often times when one person is willing to stand up for what is right, others are willing to follow. What beliefs do you hold that you would be willing to stand up for? Have you ever been in a situation that required you to face negative peer pressure to do the right thing? What did you learn from the experience?
4. When Seeloo marries Tlesca, she must leave her home, her family, and her friends. Tlesca says to her, "You're leaving your home; I'm returning to mine. It's a much harder journey for you." (p. 105) Have you or a friend ever had to move away from all that was familiar to a new place where you had to make new friends and adapt to a new school? What was the most difficult adjustment?
5. When Cleo returns home, she is withdrawn and quiet. Alex understands how she feels about leaving people you will never see again because he has experienced the same feelings after his journeys into the Alterworld. (p. 116) Have you ever lost a family member or a pet? How did you overcome the pain of their loss?
6. Cleo can use her legs and is out of her wheelchair when she is in the Alterworld. What emotions do you think she experienced when she gained the use of her legs only to lose them again? Do you think she was tempted to stay so that she could continue to run and swim?

about the book

Stories say Yuki-onna, the Snow Woman, drinks the blood of those bold enough to walk through her woods—the very woods Alex must cross as Minokichi, a young Japanese workman. A beautiful woman who emerges from the blizzard may be the greatest danger Alex has ever had to face.

MythQuest: Minokichi

John Whitman



pre-reading activity

Explain to your students that many of the Japanese myths and legends were based, in a small part, on fact. They were used to explain why Japanese society maintained many of the ancient beliefs and customs of its day and why the people lived the way they did. Read several short myths to your students and discuss with them the possible truth or lesson the myth was trying to teach. To get started, use the Japanese Myth Web site: www.st.rim.or.jp/~cycle/myrefE.HTML

questions for group discussion

1. When Alex enters a myth, he is never sure what he looks like until he can see himself in a reflection. “He would see himself as Alex, but everyone inside the myth would see him as he was in the mirror, as the character he had become.” (p. 18) Who would you like other people to think that you are: someone from another time, someone famous, or a family member? Why would you choose that person?
2. Cleo and Alex keep their mother in the dark about their activities with the Cyber Museum and their journeys into the ancient myths. They justify their lies and deception because they do not want to worry her, and they do not think she would believe or understand what was happening. Have you ever justified your less-than-honest actions? What excuses did you use to validate your behavior?
3. Alex swears to the Yuki-onna that he will never tell a soul about witnessing the death of Mosaku, and he keeps that promise for years out of fear of death. When he does finally tell his wife, Yuki, about what he saw, she leaves him in anger with a threat to his children’s lives. Have you ever been asked to keep a secret? Were you able to keep the secret or did you succumb to the pressure to tell it all? If you have revealed a secret, what kind of problems did you create? What lesson did you learn from the experience?
4. When Max explains Gorgos’ evil nature and his role in mythological society, he tells Cleo and Alex, “The gods banded together and somehow trapped him in that stone,” exemplifying working together to overcome evil. (pp. 50–51) What events demonstrate how our society banded together to stop evil? Have you ever been involved in a situation that required you to work with others to achieve positive results?
5. Alex feels comfortable with the daily rituals he, Yuki, and their children perform. He is reminded “of all the little gestures his mother and father shared, small comforts created over their years together.” (p. 76) What rituals and gestures are shared in your family that give you a feeling of comfort and safety? Do you and your friends have similar habits?
6. After Alex and Cleo confide in Max, he tells them, “It’s going to be difficult to get [Gorgos] back inside the stone. We’re going to need all the help we can get.” (p. 104) Alex and Cleo respond to Max with hope, but Max is concerned and fearful. He has more knowledge about Gorgos, and is aware of the real danger. Can you think of a time that your parents or grandparents were fearful about something you wanted to do that you felt was perfectly safe? What knowledge or experience could they have had that enabled them to see what you could not?

about the authors

DAN DANKO

Dan Danko has been the story editor on *Pet Alien*, Nickelodeon's *Brother's Flub*, and several other TV series, in addition to writing MythQuest and Malcolm in the Middle novels. Dan has written for animation, comic books, infomercials, and even a video game or two.

TOM MASON

Besides writing MythQuest and Malcolm in the Middle novels, **Tom Mason** has been the story editor on *Pet Alien*, Nickelodeon's *Brother's Flub*, and several other TV series. He has also written for animation, live-action, and even Sony PlayStation games such as Fear Effect: Inferno.

JOHN WHITMAN

John Whitman has written numerous books for young readers, including the Star Wars Galaxy of Fear series and *The Mummy Returns* junior novelization. He lives in California with his family.

internet resources

Greek Mythology

www.messagenet.com/myths

Includes information from the *Iliad* to the fall of the last tyrant.

Selected Chinese Myths and Fantasies

www.chinavista.com/experience/story/story.html

Features short but vivid stories including gods, ghosts, foxes, and spirits with human qualities and human feelings.

Roman Mythology

www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8991/roman.html

Includes profiles of the key Roman gods.

Japanese Myth

www.st.rim.or.jp/~cycle/myrefE.HTML

Features a family tree of the Japanese gods.

on the web

For bios, teachers guides, and more . . .

Visit our FREE online site
Teachers @ Random

www.randomhouse.com/teachers