



Story Summary

Thirteen-year-old Simon's life has been knocked askew ever since his family moved into his deceased grandfather's house. Across the street is his eccentric neighbor Mr. Hawkins, who is laid up with a broken leg. Simon's mother begins sending him over there with dinner for the elderly man, and soon Mr. Hawkins is depending on Simon to fetch old books and manuscript pages from all over his eerie, mirror-filled house. There's one mirror in particular, an ancient Egyptian piece, that keeps showing Simon visions of a disturbing figure emerging from its depths. No one else sees the figure, though—just like they don't see the huge, gaunt dog lurking in Mr. Hawkins' bushes.

As Simon himself becomes increasingly plagued by a mysterious illness, he is powerless to help as his neighbor descends into paranoia about dark forces encircling his house.

The terrible part is Mr. Hawkins is right. Everything is about to get much, much worse.

Michael Bedard is a multi-award-winning author of books for children that blend his love of literature with a flair for the ominous. His novels include *A Darker Magic*, *The Green Man*, and *Redwork*, which won the Governor General's Literary Award and the CLA Book of the Year Award for Children. He has also authored several picture books, including the international bestseller *Emily*. Michael was born and raised in Toronto, where he still lives.

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Ancient Egypt, mystery, supernatural, friendship, chronic illness

BISAC Codes

JUV022040 JUVENILE FICTION / Legends, Myths, Fables / Other

JUV058000 JUVENILE FICTION / Paranormal, Occult & Supernatural

JUV028000 JUVENILE FICTION / Mysteries & Detective Stories

JUV067000 JUVENILE FICTION / Thrillers & Suspense

Reading Level

Fountas & Pinnell:W : Lexile Measure: 860L

DISCUSSION GUIDE

This Discussion Guide will offer a variety of tasks, discussion prompts and questions to provoke thinking and deepen comprehension prior, during, and post reading of the novel. The range of options will allow for students to reach optimal learning and success. These are suggested tasks. As it is not necessary to complete the entire list of suggestions, the educator is encouraged to make choices according to the strengths, needs and interests of the students.

BOOK CLUBS

This guide has been developed for use in classroom book clubs/literature circles. In book clubs, small groups of students (4–8) meet to discuss a book they are reading.

In book clubs, students will:

- support the development of a love of reading
- help students build deep comprehension while engaging in discussions with their peers
- support the development of collaborative learning and critical thinking

Book clubs are student led with students taking turns assuming a leadership role within the group. They meet regularly and set the pace for their reading, deciding as a group how much they will read between meetings. Students take ownership for their learning in a number of ways: they select the book (usually from a pre determined list provided by the teacher), they determine the pace of the reading and prepare for and run their discussions.

Prior to beginning with book clubs, teachers:

- take time to develop and nurture whole class discussions about books while modeling the skills and behaviors needed to collaborate and work together as a book club
- provide guidance, modeling and support
- become familiar with all texts prior to making them available to students

Teachers develop a schedule for book clubs ensuring they provide time for reading and discussion, mini-lessons for any needs that may arise, time for teacher monitoring through observation and conferring as well as student self-assessment.

Key elements:

- Groups meet on a regular basis, with time provided in class to read and discuss their book
- Students use a “reader’s notebook” to write notes, comments, insights and questions while they read
- Students bring their reader’s notebook to each meeting to support their discussion
- Discussion topics may emerge from the students as they read; however the teacher provides discussion topics and provocations to help students engage in rich discussions
- Group meetings are collaborative and open with the groups developing a set of norms for their group
- The teacher serves as facilitator
- Assessment is grounded in teacher observation, student conversations and student self assessment
- To promote a love of reading

Thinking about Assessment...

This Discussion Guide offers a range of prompts, tasks and provocations to support Book Club discussions. While using this guide in the classroom, teachers have a number of opportunities to use observation, conversation and product to assess student thinking and learning. The tasks and prompts offered in this guide are designed to support discussion,

sharing and student thinking while providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate comprehension, extension of thinking and critical literacy. Assessment can include: self assessment and peer assessment, conversations with students through teacher/student conferences, group discussions as well as products created by the students.

For the teacher and student to have a clear, common understanding of the expectations and criteria to achieve success while reading the novels, educators develop learning goals based on curriculum expectations and share them with the students in a language they can understand. Then together, the educator and students co-create criteria to make the path to success visible and clear.

These success criteria are posted in the classroom visible to all students; and they are revised and edited based on the learning and understanding of the students.

As the Book Club meetings are collaborative and begin with the groups developing a set of norms for their group, it is suggested that all groups open each meeting with a reflection of the previous discussion. These reflections can highlight what went well during the discussions; what needs to improve in these discussions; and considerations for the current discussion.

Note:

This discussion guide offers a variety of tasks, discussion prompts and questions to provoke thinking and deepen comprehension before, during and after reading of the novel. These are suggestions only and it is certainly not necessary to complete the entire list of suggested activities/questions. Educators are encouraged to make choices based on the strengths, needs and interests of the students.

Highlighted Curriculum Expectations

Ontario Ministry of Education Language Arts Curriculum K–8

Oral Communication

- 1.2 Active Listening Strategies
- 1.3 Comprehension Strategies
- 2.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding

Reading: Reading for Meaning

- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding
- 1.7 Analyzing Texts
- 1.8 Responding to and Evaluating Texts

Reading: Understanding Form and Style

- 2.1 Text Forms
- 2.3 Text Features
- 2.4 Elements of Style

Reading with Fluency

- 3.1 Reading Familiar Words
- 3.2 Reading Unfamiliar Words

Reading: Reflecting on Reading Skills and Strategies

- 4.2 Interconnected Skills

Media Literacy

- 3.1 Creating Media Texts



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Before Reading

The purpose of these tasks is to develop knowledge and understanding as well as to prompt conversation and discussion about the topics mentioned throughout this novel. In doing so, the hope is that the reader will become engaged as they read, comprehend the issues presented, and develop a sense of empathy for the characters.

1. As a group, define and discuss the role of an archaeologist. How do the artifacts that archaeologists discover impact people's understanding of the past?
2. This text is characterized as a mystery novel. With a partner, research and discuss the key elements of a mystery novel.
3. Why is the element of suspense important in a mystery novel? As a class, describe the ways an author is able to create suspense for the readers. Make a list of these elements. As you read the text, record the elements used by this author, Michael Bedard, to create suspense for the reader.
4. Take time as a class to research the importance of mirrors when explaining traditions in various cultures, with a focus on the Egyptians. Discuss your findings as a class.
5. Define *simile*. Why does an author include similes? Create an ongoing list of similes found throughout this text.
6. This text focuses on several "big ideas." These include courage, family, and loyalty. Record your thinking in your Reader's Notebook and then share with your group.
7. Read the quote at the bottom of the page of Part I. With a partner, share your understanding of this quote. How do you think this connects to the text you are about to read?

During Reading

Chapters 1–5

1. In chapter 1, we get a sense of the relationship build-

ing between Simon and Mr. Hawkins. How has the relationship developed in these chapters? Give examples from the text to demonstrate your answer.

2. Describe Mr. Hawkins' home using words from the text.
3. Give examples from the text that indicate Mr. Hawkins is living a lonely life.
4. Photographs are taken for many reasons. With a partner, discuss these reasons. Share a personal photograph you like. Why was it taken? What memory did this photo spark for you?
5. Mr. Hawkins lets Simon in on his interest in mirrors and the reason he began collecting them. Discuss what you think Mr. Hawkins meant by these words: "...dimmed and corroded by time, but magical still... windows into vanished worlds." (p.21)
6. What is odd about the old mirror that catches Simon's eye in Mr. Hawkins' house?
7. In chapter 3, the author describes an experience of Babs and a mirror. Why do you think the author included this experience in the text? How does this connect to the mirrors in Mr. Hawkins' research?
8. Mr. Hawkins' manuscript is titled "Soul Catchers". How does this pertain to the mirrors and his research? Reread p. 33 in the text and share your understanding and thoughts about Mr. Hawkins' knowledge of this topic.
9. In chapter 4, Simon meets Abbey. How can you tell they will become friends? How are these two characters similar? Different? Create a Venn diagram of their personality traits and continue recording them throughout your reading of the text.
10. How does Abbey react when Simon tells her about Mr. Hawkins' mirrors? Are you surprised by her reaction? Why? Why not?

11. Share your thoughts with a partner about the dog Simon sees in the backyard of Mr. Hawkins' house.
12. Make a prediction about what you think is in the letter Mr. Hawkins has received.

Chapters 6–10

1. Give examples from these chapters in which Mr. Hawkins is showing signs that something is not right. Do you think it is a natural aging process or is there something else bothering Mr. Hawkins? Explain your thinking.
2. Simon once again sees an image in the mirror in Mr. Hawkins' house. Record how this image has changed from the first vision.
3. What do you think Simon's mother is referring to at the end of chapter 6 when she says, "But if this goes on much longer, we'll have to do something" (p. 50)?
4. Every family member has a role and responsibility in the workings of a family. As you read the text, create a chart showing the roles and responsibilities of the four family members in Simon's family.
5. How does the author create the element of suspense in these chapters? Discuss your observations with the group.
6. How does Simon demonstrate courage? Give examples from the text to support your thinking.
7. Record any questions you may have regarding the dog Simon sees in Mr. Hawkins' backyard.
8. How was Eleanor's experience with the old Egyptian mirror similar to Simon's?
9. The setting of an event adds a tone of mystery for the reader. How does the author use setting to create a sense of mystery in these chapters?
10. Compare your predictions about what you thought was in the letter to Mr. Hawkins to what it actually said. Why did this "shake Mr. Hawkins to the core" (p.70)?

What parts of the letter were believable to you? How does the letter highlight the magic of the Egyptian mirror in Mr. Hawkins' house? What is the author of the letter implying in last paragraph?

11. Describe what you think has happened to Mr. Hawkins in Chapter 10.

Part II: Stricken

Read the quote by Randall Hawkins on this page and discuss the meaning with a partner.

Chapters 11–15

1. Compare your prediction made at the end of chapter 10 to what actually happened to Mr. Hawkins. How does this reality make you feel? Why?
2. In chapter 11, the reader meets a new character, Joan Cameron. What do you think Joan's role will be in this story? How do you think her role will impact the story?
3. Chapter 12 begins with a dream. How does the author help the reader distinguish a dream from a present-day event? Is this an effective technique?
4. Why do you think Simon is getting ill? Do you think his illness is connected to any part of the story? Why? Why not?
5. What role does the Egyptian mirror play at the end of chapter 12?
6. How do Simon's parents and sister demonstrate their love and concern for him? Give examples from the text to support your answer.
7. Describe the relationship between Simon and Abbey.
8. Continue to record the family roles and responsibilities in Simon's family. Describe the relationship between Simon and his sister, Babs.
9. How do the events that took place in Chapter 15 add to the mystery of the story? Explain your thinking.



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Chapters 16–20

1. In the second paragraph at the beginning of chapter 16, Simon compares his health to the old Egyptian mirror. Explain why this is an effective and important comparison.
2. With a partner, discuss the results from Simon's visit to the doctor. Clarify any questions or understandings you have regarding this visit.
3. The mysterious visitors once again pay a visit to Mr. Hawkins' house. What do you think they are clearing away? What is strange about these visits? Why do you think Simon is interested in the contents of the boxes?
4. How does the author continue to create a sense of suspense for the reader? Is this effective? Why? Why not?
5. Why do you think it is important for Simon to tell Abbey the story about the mysterious Egyptian mirror? Explain your thinking.
6. At the end of chapter 18, the author allows the reader to read some of Mr. Hawkins' manuscript from his book.
In a small group:
 - a. discuss your understanding of the ancient Egyptian importance of mirrors.
 - b. compare this with what you have read about Simon's experience with Mr. Hawkins' Egyptian mirror.
 - c. record any questions the group may have after reading this chapter.
7. Reread the italicized paragraph on p. 137. How do you think this information will impact Simon's thinking and actions? What conclusions has Simon drawn as a result of this information?
8. Why do you think Simon is suspicious of the woman in the park?
9. At the beginning of chapter 20, we read about Simon and Abbey's plan to find the missing mirror. Do you think the plan will work? Why? Why not?

10. Explain how Abbey continues to show her friendship and loyalty to Simon.

Chapters 21–25

1. On p. 160, the author uses the technique of including similes. Read the simile in the third paragraph: "It was as if the sky had stooped down..." What is the author trying to say in this simile? Identify a few other similes from these chapters. Discuss how the use of these similes helps the reader to create an image in their minds.
2. In chapter 22, readers meet Simon's new neighbors, Alice and James Loudon. Why do you think Simon is suspicious of them?
3. Alice Loudon visits Simon's mom for tea. Make a list of the events that took place during this visit that you found unusual.
4. Discuss with a partner how the behavior of the people in Simon's neighborhood has changed since the Loudons' moved into Mr. Hawkins' old house.
5. Alice Loudon inquires about the missing Egyptian mirror. What reasons does she give to Simon about wanting it returned?
6. Alice Loudon offers a natural remedy for Simon's illness. Why do you think Simon accepts the remedy? What would you have done in this situation? Why?
7. Chapter 25 begins with the sentence, "The more the neighborhood fell under the Loudons' spell, the more uncomfortable Simon became." What is the author implying by this statement?
8. On p. 183, Simon's illness returns. "The debilitating fatigue was back again and draining his strength...since his illness struck." Do you think there is something strange about Simon's illness? Explain your thinking.
9. Simon and Abbey spend time looking through Mr. Hawkins' photo album. What information are they learning from this?



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10. How does the author create suspense for the reader in these chapters? Describe and list the words and events from the story that create a suspenseful atmosphere and setting for the reader. Do you think these writing techniques are effective? Why? Why not?

Chapters 26–29

- The author uses many descriptive sentences. Choose one of the following sentences from page 189 and explain your understanding:
 - “Their actions increasingly appeared to him to be part of an elaborate performance.”
 - “To the casual observer they doubtless seemed the perfect couple. Their lives like something clipped from the pages of a magazine.”
 - “Illness had shaped him to see what others did not.”
- Identify similes from these chapters that stand out to you. Share your simile with a partner.
- List and summarize the unusual behaviors of both Alice Loudon and her dog, Caesar, as observed by both Abbey and Simon.
- Simon realizes “just how important Abbey had become to him (Simon)”. (p. 198) Give examples from these chapters to support this statement.
- Once again, a photo sparks curiosity in Simon’s mind. What photo causes Simon to wonder?
- How does Alice Loudon’s music impact Simon? Explain your thinking using examples from the text.
- List the similarities and differences you have observed between Simon and Alice Loudon.
- Why do you think Joan Cameron requires Simon’s help with the missing Egyptian mirror?
- In Chapter 29, Simon has another vision while looking into the Egyptian mirror. What conclusions can you draw about this event? Provide evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- How does the author create suspense for the reader while reading these chapters?

Part III: The Mummy Room

With a partner, explain your understanding of the quote on page 213. Connect your thinking to the events in the story.

Chapters 30–33

- Add to your list of roles and responsibilities of Simon and his family members.
- Refer back to your list from Chapter 24. Add anything new you have learned regarding how the neighborhood has changed since the Loudons moved in.
- The author uses many descriptive phrases regarding the museum where Joan Cameron works. Highlight a few phrases you found interesting. With a partner, describe the mental images these descriptions create.
- Find similarities between what Simon sees while in the museum and his last vision of Alice Loudon in the Egyptian mirror.
- Create a list of a few of the Egyptian artifacts found in the museum and explain their purpose.
- In Chapter 32, the author mentions “Egyptian magic.” After reading Cameron’s description of the dig, do you think Egyptian magic has played a part in some of the events that have taken place in the story? Why? Why not?
- On p. 233, Simon reminds the reader of Mr. Hawkins’ definition of mirrors being “soul catchers.” Reread this explanation and discuss it as a group.
- In chapter 33, Simon states the following: “She has some mysterious illness, she says, and seems to be rapidly failing. And at the same time, the mirror is decaying—as if the two were somehow connected. But how?” (pp. 237–238)
- Explain how Cameron’s dig described on pages 238–239 changed her.

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10. Do you agree with Cameron that the solution to the Egyptian mirror mystery is to “meet magic...with magic”? Why? Why not?
11. Why do you think Simon and Abbey trusted Cameron with their actions and information about the Egyptian mirror?

Chapters 34–38

1. What examples from chapter 34 lead the reader to believe that magic is at work? Choose one example you find most intriguing. Explain why you chose this example.
2. Why did Abbey think it was important for her to skip school and stay with Simon for several days after Alice Loudon’s visit? What was she noticing about Simon?
3. Summarize the magical lore of the ancient Egyptians that Cameron introduces to Simon and Abbey during their meeting in the café.
4. How does music play a part in Alice Loudon’s life? How is this connected to the magical lore of the ancient Egyptians? Explain your thinking.
5. Explain your understanding around Cameron’s plan to call Alice Loudon back into the Egyptian mirror. Do you think this plan will work? Why? Why not?
6. How did Cameron include Simon and Abbey in her plan?
7. What role does Cameron play in this plan? How do you think Cameron prepared for this role? What qualities did Cameron require in order to fulfill this role? Explain your thinking.
8. In Chapter 36, Cameron confronts Alice Loudon in the museum. What have you learned as a result of this confrontation?
9. Chapter 38 begins with a section using italicized font. What is the reason for this?
10. How does the museum pay tribute to Mr. Hawkins in the last chapter?
11. Do you think Simon’s illness had anything to do with the events surrounding the lost Egyptian mirror? Why?

Why not?

12. How does the author create suspense for the reader in these chapters? Compare your observations to strategies used in previous chapters.
13. Choose a descriptive paragraph you found interesting. Share it with a partner, explaining why this paragraph stood out to you.
14. How does the author leave the reader wondering at the end of this text?

After Reading

1. Create a book trailer to encourage others to read this text. Select appropriate images, text, and music to create an effective trailer to promote the book.
2. Review your list of the roles of the members in Simon’s family. Compare and contrast this to the roles in your own family.
3. Review the questions asked by the class regarding their understanding of ancient Egyptian mirrors and their relevance. How have the questions been answered after reading the text?
4. This text focuses on several “big ideas”. These include courage, family, and loyalty. What else would you identify as a “big idea” in this text? Record your thinking in your Reader’s Notebook and then share with your group.
5. Review the list of elements used by the author, Michael Bedard, to create suspense for the reader. As a group, discuss the most effective ways and explain why they were so effective.
6. With a partner, share the Venn diagram of the similarities and differences in Simon and Abbey’s personality traits. How were your Venn diagrams similar and/or different?



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