



The Marbury Lens: A Study Guide

“I am going to build something big for you.”

The Main Characters:

□ *Jack Whitmore*, a teen who escapes a kidnapping only to run headlong into a terrible accident. Jack struggles to face the enormity of what’s happened to him and where his guilt and doubts are leading him.

- *Conner Kirk*, Jack’s best friend.
- *Freddie Horvath*, Jack’s abductor.
- *Wynn and Stella Whitmore*, Jack’s grandparents.
- *Henry Hewitt*, leads Jack to Marbury.
- *Seth Mansfield*, a ghost.
- *Nickie Stromberg*, Jack’s girlfriend..
- *Ben Miller*, Jack’s friend and companion in Marbury.
- *Griffin Goodrich*, Ben’s younger half-brother.

SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD Jack Whitmore gets drunk and is in the wrong place at the wrong time. He gets kidnapped. He escapes, narrowly, but when his best friend Conner Kirk concocts a scheme to get even with Jack’s abductor, something goes horribly wrong.

Jack is tormented by guilt, and after his California family sends him away to school in England, his paranoia consumes him. Jack is convinced people are watching him, following him.

Someone is.

Henry Hewitt has been waiting for Jack to show up in London, and when he arrives, Henry leaves a pair of glasses in Jack’s care. Through the lenses, Jack sees another world called Marbury.

There is war and disease in Marbury. It is a desolate and murderous place where Jack is responsible for the survival of two younger boys named Ben and Griffin.

And Jack’s best friend Conner is there in Marbury, too. But in Marbury, Conner is trying to kill Jack.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Violence is a major, recurring theme in the book. Jack’s story begins with brutality; and the cruelty inflicted on innocents by others resurfaces again and again -- in Seth’s story, and in what happens to everyone in Marbury. What are Jack’s feelings about the brutal nature of his universe? What does Conner think about it?

2. One of the ideas Smith explores in *The Marbury Lens* is the dynamic found in relationships between males. We see this in the way Jack interacts with Ben and Griffin in Marbury, how he and Conner get along throughout the book, and even to some extent through Seth’s relationship with Davey and Pa. Compare and contrast Jack, Conner, Ben, Griffin, and Seth. When Jack’s in Marbury with the boys, who’s in charge? Who’s in charge when Jack’s with Conner in England or at home in California?

3. Jack, Seth, and Henry all have one terrible thing in common. What is it? How is this similar/ different between the three of them?

“It’s no wonder I became a monster, too.”

4. Jack keeps coming back to his idea of being at the center of the universe. Discuss the importance of this image as it relates to the entire book.

5. Along with that image mentioned in question 4 (above), Smith once wrote that *The Marbury Lens* reveals layer upon layer: There are worlds within worlds, stories inside of stories, the past trapped in the present, and monsters inside of people. How many examples of these layers can you find?

6. In *The Marbury Lens*, there is enough room for readers to make their own decisions about what is real. What do you think? Is Marbury real? Is Henry real? What clues are you given that Henry really exists?

7. There are many turns in the book that deal with being or feeling trapped, and then escaping. Is Marbury a trap for Jack, or does he escape something when he goes there?

8. So much of what we learn about Marbury comes only in bits and pieces throughout the story. Discuss the boys’ finding the train, the passengers, the soldiers. What might have happened there?

9. Based on the clues provided in the novel, what explanation could you give for what’s going on in Marbury?

10. Jack endures so many profoundly powerful events through the course of the novel. How does he change by the novel’s end? How does Jack mature over the course of his story?

11. Everything in Marbury seems to be without color. There are no stars at night, and the sky never gets completely dark, but contrasts are sharp there. Why all the “colorless” imagery?

12. Discuss the role of setting in the narrative (California, London, Blackpool, and the locations in Marbury).

13. What do you find out about what happens to the boys after they arrive at the walled city of Grove in Marbury? How has Ben changed by the end of the book?

14. How would you describe the “voice” of the novel? Is Jack an empathetic character, despite his obvious anger and frustration? Give examples of Jack’s tone in his narration.

15. In the beginning, Jack seems uncomfortable and inept at telling lies. He fumbles over explaining his injured ankle to Stella. But the Marbury lens has some major effect on Jack in this regard. Discuss the lies Jack tells later in the book.

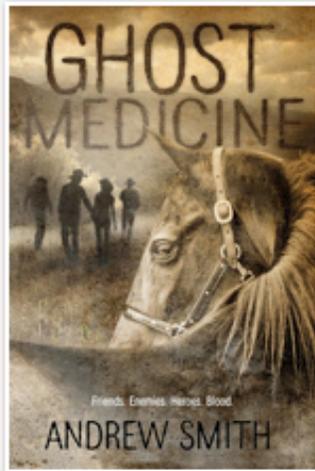
16. Discuss the wooden horse Nickie shows Jack and Conner at the airport. Where did it come from? What is its significance? Do you think Seth may have intended it as a message to Jack? How do the boys play off Nickie’s finding the horse, and what does it tell you about Conner and how he may have changed?

17. In the beginning of the book, Jack mentions that the things that happen turn him into a monster. In fact, the only people Jack finds in Marbury that he knows from this world *are* monsters. Do you think Jack becomes a monster by the end of the story?

18. In the final lines of the book, Jack makes a decision to do something. What does he do? Is it the act of “a monster”? Is he doing the right thing? Can Jack help himself?

19. **AND THE FINAL QUESTION:** Would you go there? Even for “just a peek”?

Other books by Andrew Smith



GHOST MEDICINE - An ALA/YALSA “Best Books for Young Adults, 2009”

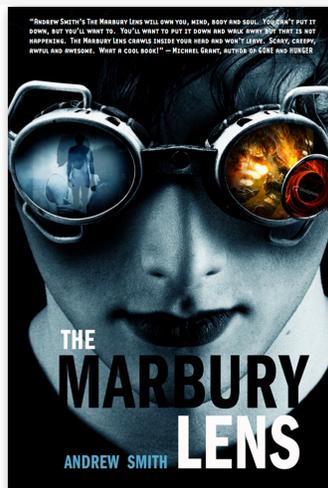
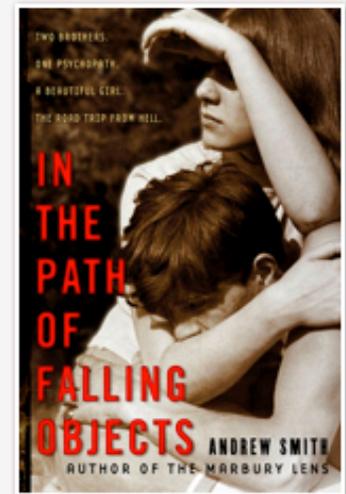
“Smith’s first novel... defies expectations via its sublime imagery.” -- *Publisher’s Weekly*, starred review

“A pitch-perfect coming of age tale destined to be held aloft alongside other classics” -- *VOYA*

IN THE PATH OF FALLING OBJECTS - An ALA/YALSA “Best Books for Young Adults, 2010”

In the summer of 1970, after their older brother is shipped off to Vietnam, sixteen-year-old Jonah Vickers and his younger brother, Simon, wander across New Mexico looking for what’s left of their family. They soon find themselves hitching a ride with a violent killer and a lost girl who can’t make any distance between where they are and what she’s running from.

“A brutal but mesmerizing road trip that steers an unswerving course toward tragedy... older teens will be riveted.” -- *Kirkus Reviews*



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