

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR THE SKYBOUND SAGA

FOR USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE STANDARDS



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ABOUT THE SERIES

The Skybound Saga is a young-adult fantasy trilogy about the memories that haunt us, the histories that hunt us, and the bonds of blood between us.

★ “London’s world-building is exceptional, and the story has twists and turns to keep readers engaged . . . A well-crafted fantasy featuring diverse characters, this book is a strong selection for all libraries serving teens.” —*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “With political intrigue, epic battle sequences, jolts of romance, and strong female and queer characters, there’s a lot to pique readers’ interests here. But it’s the unique world-building and beautifully complex sibling relationship that make this a must-read. Readers will be swept away in this book’s talons.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“With dynamic world building . . . this trilogy opener is a captivating, layered adventure that explores the bonds of siblings in an unforgiving world. Stock up—this one will make the rounds.” —*Booklist*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex London is the beloved author of *Black Wings Beating* and *Red Skies Falling*, as well as the middle-grade series *Tides of War*, *Dog Tags*, and *The Wild Ones*. His YA novel, *Proxy*, was an ALA Top Ten Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers and was included in their 2014 Best Fiction for Young Adults List. A former journalist who reported from conflict zones and refugee camps, Alex now lives with his husband in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. The standards listed throughout are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for grade eight, but the activities and questions can be applied to multiple grade levels. Please adapt the activities and questions to meet the needs of your students. You know your students better than anyone else!

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What do you know about birds of prey such as falcons and eagles? What other animals are predators? In what situations can humans be considered predators, and how do they differ from animals that are?
2. What role does political power play in forming a society? Give examples of political power being used for good. Contrast these with examples of abuse of power. How can such power be kept from getting out of control?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *BLACK WINGS BEATING*

1. Describe Kylee and Brysen's father. Even though he dies before the story starts, how is he important throughout? Why was he so cruel to Brysen? What effect did it have on the boy? How does Brysen think his father died? When do you find out how he really died?
2. Why didn't their father beat Kylee? How did the father's treatment of Brysen affect the relationship between the twins? How does Brysen feel about Kylee and her abilities? How does she try to protect him, and why?
3. What role does Ma play in the story? What is her background and what are her religious beliefs? Why doesn't she protect Brysen? How do the twins feel about her and how do they treat her?
4. What role do birds of prey play in the lives of the Uztari and in the Six Villages? How are they important to Kylee, Brysen, and their father? Describe the fights in the battle pits.
5. What is Dymian like? Why does Brysen love him? How is Brysen's view of him distorted? Give examples of how Dymian hurts Brysen. What happens to Dymian at the end, and why?
6. The Tamir family has a lot of power in the Six Villages. Who are they? What do they do commercially? How do they treat others? Explain the role of Goryn in the story. What does he want? What is the relationship between the Tamirs and the kyrgs?

7. What is the geography of Uztaar and the regions around it, including mountains, steppes, and so on? What is the weather like? How has the geography affected the history of the area? How does it affect the politics and conflicts during the story?
8. Describe the Owl Mothers and the covey of boys. What powers do the Owl Mothers have? Who are the boys and why do the Owl Mothers take them in? How does drinking the sap from the blood birches affect the boys? What interactions do Brysen, Nyall, and Kylee have with the Owl Mothers and the covey?
9. Why does Kylee call the Hollow Tongue “poison”? She thinks, “It had only led her to trouble all her life.” Why does she think this? Why does she want Üku to teach it to Brysen and why does Üku refuse?
10. Substantial flashbacks fill in parts of the past to help readers understand the story. Find examples of flashbacks and analyze how they are introduced and what they add. Compare this technique to telling a story in strict chronological order and discuss how that might have been done in this novel.
11. Kyrg Bardu’s hawk master talks about opposites, adding that “Power is, and will forever be, tethered to its own weakness.” Apply this idea to different characters in the novel who have power, and try to identify their weaknesses.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *RED SKIES FALLING*

1. Talk about the Hollow Tongue and its role in Kylee’s and Brysen’s lives. How does it make Kylee valuable to powerful people? What can Brysen do with it and how does he find out? What emotions or circumstances trigger each of them to be able to use the language effectively?
2. What are Anon’s goals? What do his followers think he is doing? What are his beliefs about the ghost eagles, and what are those beliefs based on? Why does he want to capture Brysen and Kylee? Discuss his strategy of having fighters in pairs, and what makes a pair strong.
3. Where did Brysen meet Jowyn, and what is their relationship at the beginning of the book? How does it evolve during the story? Why is Brysen convinced that Jowyn will leave him? Who has Brysen lost before?
4. While planning to kill Anon, Brysen “was sure that he could—in spite of all evidence of his past failures—show the world that he mattered.” Why is it so important to Brysen to seek glory? Why does he feel that an everyday life is not enough for him?
5. Kyrg Ryven says to Kylee, “You’ve got no power, and yet you feel responsible for everyone.” Who does Kylee feel responsible for? How has her sense of responsibility dominated her life? How has it expanded recently? What aspect of her background created this feeling?
6. Kylee also feels a desire for revenge. When Ryven asks against whom, Kylee replies, “Everyone.” Who does she mean by “everyone”? After that reply, she “felt the rage she’d been carrying inside her for as long as she could remember spread wide its wings and soar.” Why is she angry? Why does she feel manipulated? How does her sense of responsibility relate to her anger?
7. Who is Grazim and what are her strengths? What is her background? She describes herself as ambitious. What does she want to attain? Why does she go to the Kartami camp with Kylee, and what does she do there? How do she and Kylee feel about each other, and how does that change in the course of the novel?

8. Describe Kyrg Ryven, his political position, and how he treats Kylee. What are his ambitions, and how does he hope to achieve them? Who are his allies? What is his relation to the ghost eagle? Explain what he does to Vyvian and why.
9. Several characters talk about the theory of opposites, one aspect of which Kylee describes as “All things are bound to their opposites.” What are some examples of opposites in this theory? In what way are they bound to each other? Do you agree with the idea? Why or why not?
10. Power is a topic throughout the novel. Who wants power and what do they want to do with it? Who doesn’t have power? Discuss the role of power in the relationship between falconers and their birds, which Kylee thinks of as “power disguised as kindness.” Find and discuss imagery in the novel that compares human interactions to animal predators and their prey.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *GOLD WINGS RISING*

1. How does Brysen end up finding the egg? Why do you think he’s the one to find it? Who else wants the egg, and why? What is the significance of the egg to the ghost eagles? When and why does it change colors?
2. During the story, Brysen starts to shift his priorities from seeking glory to nurturing the egg. Find some scenes that show this. Why does the egg matter so much to him? When do he and Kylee disagree about what to do with the egg? What are the points or decisions about which they disagree?
3. How has the twins’ mother changed from the past? How does she act in the cave that surprises her children? Why doesn’t she go with them to deliver the egg? Talk about her comment, “I’ve carved the same circles in the sky for so long, my wings don’t bend any other way.”
4. Kylee’s mother tells her, “Fly new circles.” What new circles does Kylee fly? How do her priorities change throughout the novel? Describe how she used to be, how she changes, and what causes the changes.
5. Grazim changes in the course of the novel as does her relationship to Kylee. What is she like at the beginning? What is she like at the end, and what are her aspirations as the novel closes? Describe her relationship with Kylee and how it changes, giving specific examples.
6. Describe the battle boys, their relationship to one another, and the roles they play in the plot. What motivates them, including Nyall, to help Brysen and Kylee? What happens to Nyall? How about Kheryn? Discuss Nyck’s role in the government at the end of the trilogy and why he might, or might not, be good at it.
7. Discuss the main three kyrgs and their relationship to power. Why does Kyrg Bardu order the massacre of the council? How is it carried out? What happens to Kyrg Ryven, and why? Why is Kyrg Birgund allowed to be part of the government at the end?
8. What story do the tattoos on Jowyn and the dead covey boys tell about the ghost eagle and the egg? Why do Brysen and Kylee believe it’s important to read the story? Talk about the theme throughout the novel of the power of storytelling, including the reason that Kylee travels the land listening to stories at the end of the book.
9. One of the dualities explored in the story is the tension between young and old. When does this tension come up with the Owl Mothers? How does it manifest itself in Kylee’s family, and in the story

told by the tattoos? Discuss why Kylee thinks, while reading the tattoos, “It was a kind of comfort to know this struggle was as ancient as it was common.”

10. Describe Brysen’s relationship with Jowyn and how it evolves. How does Nyall feel about Kylee? Why doesn’t she respond in kind? Find places where she reflects on her feelings about romantic and sexual relationships, and discuss those reflections.
11. Talk about this excerpt and the importance of grief in the novel: “All her life, she fought and protected and avenged and survived, but she never once *grieved*, not properly. The ghost eagles had fought and provoked and killed and died, but perhaps they, like her, had never grieved for what they had lost, all that had been taken. When the past was unforgivable and unchangeable, what else could a person do?”

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Have students research the concept of reconciliation in South Africa after apartheid ended as carried out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which collected and made public stories of human rights violations. Once they’ve done the research, they should meet in small groups to discuss the concept and relate it to the end of *GoldWings Rising*.

CCSS.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

2. One of the best-known poems of the twentieth century is William Butler Yeats’s “The Second Coming.” Share the poem with the class and ask them to draw connections between it and the trilogy, or parts of the trilogy, in terms of content, imagery, and tone.

CCSS.RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

3. Ask students to write essays on the imagery used throughout the trilogy around predators and prey, and falconers and their birds. Which relationships in the novels are described in similar imagery? How are the images used to explore power? How are they related to love?

CCSS.RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

4. In a powerful, moving scene in *GoldWings Rising*, Kylee, Brysen, and Grazim read the ghost eagle’s story from tattoos on the bodies of dead covey boys. Invite students to explore the use of tattoos historically and in contemporary society to tell stories. Have them use digital sources to find such tattoos and prepare a multimedia presentation about their choices.

CCSS.SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

CCSS.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

5. In *Red Skies Falling*, Kylee gets a letter from Brysen. Ask students to write at least four more letters between the twins. The letters should reflect specific events and emotions from the novels. The ones from Brysen should echo the style of his letter to Kylee. The ones from Kylee should reflect the kind of person she is.

CCSS.RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
CCSS.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

6. Invite students to watch the official video trailer for the series at the link below. Have them analyze it in terms of content, imagery, and impact. Then have students work in pairs to create their own trailer, combining images, text, and sound. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkgB75eppoA>)

CCSS.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
CCSS.SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

7. The trilogy diverges from gender stereotypes and also includes characters whose pronouns are they/ them. Ask students to participate in a reader's theater activity that ignores gender identity. Small groups should choose a scene with lots of dialogue and convert it into a reader's theater script to be read aloud. Students should draw characters' names from a hat to decide who reads which role, regardless of gender identity. (About reader's theater: <http://www.aaronshp.com/rt/Tips.html>)

CCSS.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
CCSS.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
CCSS.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

8. Duality is a theme throughout the trilogy, referring to bonded pairs like heal/harm, birth/death, young/old, truth/falsehood, light/shadow, good/evil, and others. Ask students to explore the idea of opposites in a form of writing they choose, such as essay, short story, poem, song lyrics, graphic novel, and so on. The writing should reference the trilogy but can also have personal or other elements.

CCSS.RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.
CCSS.W.8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence
CCSS.W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
CCSS.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Kathleen Odean was a school librarian for seventeen years and now gives workshops for educators on new young-adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award selection committee and served on other Newbery and Caldecott committees. She has an MLS and an MA in folklore from the University of California at Berkeley.