8. Why did the kidnapper embark on his spree? Do you think any one individual—even Joel—could have stopped him?

9. At the end of the novel, the “Professor Fitch” Melee team of Joel and Melody impress their audience because “…they were two students who didn’t just duel. They fought. They understood.” (p. 369) What is the difference between fighting and dueling? How might Joel and Melody’s perceived weaknesses in Rithmatics have led to this impressive victory? Have you ever struggled with a weakness, such as a learning difficulty or family problem, that has ultimately made you stronger?

10. What are your feelings about Nalizar at the end of the novel? Do you think he was trying to harm or save Joel and Melody during their heroic encounter with the kidnapper?

11. Where is Joel at the end of the novel? How would you describe the danger facing the world now that the kidnapping mystery has been solved? What role do you feel Joel ought to play in this ongoing battle?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BRANDON SANDERSON is the New York Times bestselling author of books including Warbreaker, Elantris, and The Mistborn Trilogy: Mistborn, The Well of Ascension, and The Hero of Ages, as well as The Stormlight Archive, a multi-volume epic that began in 2010 with The Way of Kings. He has also completed the final books in Robert Jordan’s The Wheel of Time® series—The Gathering Storm, Towers of Midnight, and A Memory of Light—based on Jordan’s notes and material. Sanderson teaches writing at Brigham Young University. He lives in Utah.

“Deep and richly invented.... Sanderson at his best.”
—ORSON SCOTT CARD

“[Sanderson is] brilliant and has an imagination I’ve only seen in the likes of Stephen King and J. K. Rowling.”
—JAMES DASHNER, New York Times bestselling author of The Maze Runner and SYLO

“This high-spirited, exciting story will appeal to readers of all ages.”
—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, starred review

“A fun read with a unique take on fighting where if you can’t draw...you die.”
—D. J. MACHALE, New York Times bestselling author of Pendragon

“Fantasy readers should devour this well-crafted mix of action and setup.”
—KIRKUS REVIEWS, starred review

ABOUT THE RITHMATIST

More than anything, Joel wants to be a Rithmatist. Chosen by the Master in a mysterious inception ceremony, Rithmatists have the power to infuse life into two-dimensional figures known as Chalklings. Rithmatists are humanity’s only defense against the Wild Chalklings—merciless creatures that leave mangled corpses in their wake. Having nearly overrun the territory of Nebraska, the Wild Chalklings now threaten all of the American Isles.

As the son of a lowly chalkmaker at Armedius Academy, Joel can only watch as Rithmatist students study the magical art that he would do anything to practice. Then students start disappearing—kidnapped from their rooms at night, leaving trails of blood. Assigned to help the professor who is investigating the crimes, Joel and his friend Melody find themselves on the trail of an unexpected discovery—one that will change Rithmatics—and their world—forever.

Bestselling author Brandon Sanderson brings his unique brand of epic storytelling to the teen audience with an engrossing tale of danger and suspense—the first of a series. With his trademark skills in world-building, Sanderson has created a magic system that is so inventive and detailed that readers who appreciate games of strategy and tactics just may want to bring Rithmatics to life in our world.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The information, activities, and discussion questions which follow are intended to enhance your reading of The Rithmatist. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.
1. Author Brandon Sanderson is known for writing epic fantasy stories. Go to the library or online to find the literary definition of the term “epic.” Write a short essay explaining how The Rithmatist fits into the category of epic novels—or how it doesn’t. If you have read other epic novels, such as The Eye of the World by Robert Jordan, Dragonriders of Pern by Anne McCaffrey, or Harry Potter by J. K. Rowling, you may include comparisons to these in your essay.

2. In addition to its epic qualities, The Rithmatist has features of a steampunk or gearpunk novel. Go to the library or online to learn more about the elements of steampunk and gearpunk literature. Then, using descriptions from the novel, create an illustrated poster depicting steampunk and gearpunk images, concepts, or scenes from the novel.

3. Imagine that you are a non-Rithmatist scholar of things Rithmatic, such as Joel aspires to be. Using information from the novel, create a PowerPoint or other type of illustrated presentation explaining Rithmatic lines, shapes, and defenses, or the relationship between Rithmatists and ordinary people. Share your presentation with friends or classmates.

4. In the character of Melody, write a journal entry describing your first morning spent with Professor Fitch and Joel. How do you feel about the prospect of a summer of remedial tracing?

5. Near the end of the novel, Joel returns to his former home and his father’s workshop. In the character of Joel, write a journal entry describing your emotions as you step back through the doorway. Or, write a journal entry comparing your experience reentering your father’s space to your experience reentering the inception room as a teen instead of a grade school child.

6. The novel makes reference to a real book from literary history. Mary Rowlandson’s seventeenth-century narrative of being held captive by Native Americans has been called America’s first bestseller. Go to the library or online to learn more about Rowlandson, her experience, and her publication. Then, write a short essay explaining why you think Brandon Sanderson chose to feature this particular historical work in The Rithmatist.

7. Melody invites Joel into town for ice cream and, when he can’t afford the cost, she covers it. In the character of Joel, write a journal entry describing how you feel about the prospect of a summer of remedial tracing?

8. The Rithmatist is set in an alternate America with different technology, boundaries, and an ongoing threat posed by the wild chalklings at Nebrask. Do any of these differences call to mind societal or governmental concerns happening in your real world? Bring in two or three current newspaper clippings that reference subject matter that makes you think of the novel. For each clipping, write a two- to three-sentence description of the connection you see between the novel and the news report.

9. Examining a clockwork-infused coin given to him by Melody, Joel starts to consider the element of time. What conclusions might you draw about the relationships between Rithmatists and others in the greater world?

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