

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR THE MIDNIGHT CHILDREN

FOR USE
WITH COMMON
CORE STATE
STANDARDS

ABOUT THE BOOK

In the dead of night, a truck arrives in Slaughterville, a small town curiously named after its windowless slaughterhouse. Seven mysterious kids with suitcases step out of the vehicle and into an abandoned home on a dead-end street, looking over their shoulders to make sure they aren't noticed.

But Ravani Foster covertly witnesses their arrival from his bedroom window. Timid and lonely, Ravani is eager to learn everything he can about his new neighbors: What secrets are they hiding? And most mysterious of all...where are the adults?

Yet amid this shadowy group of children, Ravani finds an unexpected friend in the warm and gutsy Virginia. But with this friendship comes secrets revealed—and danger. When Ravani learns of a threat to his new friends, he must fight to keep them safe, or lose the only person who has ever understood him.

Full of wonder, friendship, and mystery, *The Midnight Children* explores the meaning of “home,” what makes a family, and what it takes to find the courage to believe in yourself.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Gemeinhart lives in a small town smack dab in the middle of Washington state with his wife and three young daughters. He was lucky and grateful to be a teacher-librarian in an elementary school for thirteen years, where he got to share awesome books with awesome kids. He loves camping, cooking and traveling. In addition to his upcoming *The Midnight Children*, he is also the author of the critically-acclaimed *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*, *The Honest Truth*, *Some Kind of Courage*, *Scar Island*, and *Good Dog*.



THE MIDNIGHT CHILDREN

BY DAN GEMEINHART

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be a family? What makes family important? What different kinds of families do you know? What role does family play in your life?
- What makes a character an effective villain in a novel? What kind of villains do you find scariest?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Talk about the epigraph and how it fits with, and foreshadows, the story. Find other examples throughout the book where the narrator uses the word *soul*. Is it a word with which you are familiar? What does it mean to you? How does the narrator use it? Why do you think he uses *soul* so often?
2. Why is Rav so lonely at the beginning of the book? What makes him feel like he doesn't fit in? How does he feel different from those around him? Relate his loneliness to Virginia's question, "You ever have the feeling that you are exactly where you belong?" (p. 149) Where is the one place he feels like he belongs at that point, and why? What does that place tell you about him?
3. Describe Rav's mother and how he feels about her. How does she treat him? What does she like to do? What is she good at? How does she treat Virginia? Talk about the scene in which Rav's father explains why he married Rav's mother and how that relates to the father's feelings about his son.
4. Discuss how Rav feels about his father early in the book. How are he and his father different? Are there any ways they are similar? Explain why Rav thinks that "Being a disappointment to his father was not a new feeling." (p. 18) What changes in their relationship by the end of the story, and how do you know something has changed?
5. Describe how Donnie treats Rav, giving specific examples. Why do you think Donnie acts like that? How do Rav's reactions to Donnie change over the course of the story? What helps Rav change? Discuss why Virginia is so angry when Donnie says, "Then don't be such a *girl*." (p. 67)
6. How does Rav meet Virginia? What does he like about her? What does she like about him? What has her life been like in the past? How does she deal with kids like Donnie? Why is she so excited to learn how to play the

piano? Discuss the narrator's observation about Virginia and Rav: "Sometimes, when two souls find each other in the darkness, the darkness goes away." (p. 71)

7. The Ragabonds have existed for a hundred years. What are some of the rituals that they've developed? Describe the book *Always and Forever* and explain why it's important. What is the role of the Shepherd? How is life difficult for the Ragabonds that Rav meets? Who helps them, and how? Explain what the Ragabonds mean by magic and describe each Ragabond's Special.
8. Tristan tells Rav about the wolves "looking for us." (p. 113) How does he describe them? The Hunter is one such wolf. What do you learn about him in chapter four? Give examples of foreshadowing in that chapter. How does the author use chapters about the Hunter to build suspense? What makes the Hunter an effective villain? How do the children deal with him when he is chasing them? How do they defeat him?
9. When Rav agrees to be an angel, Tristan says, "Now say what you are." (p. 121) First Rav thinks of himself using the words *worthless*, *strange*, *lonely*, and *pathetic*. But then he realizes that those words "had been given to him." What does he mean by this? Who has defined him that way? What caused him to start thinking of himself differently? By the end of the book, what words do you think he might use to define himself?
10. Why is entering the raft race important to Rav? How does Donnie try to stop him? Explain how Rav and Virginia come up with a boat and improve it. How do the other Ragabonds help them? Even though he and Virginia don't win, how is the race a victory for Rav?
11. Rav's paper route brings him in contact with various people in the town, most of whom don't seem happy with their work. Describe the people who run the newspaper, café, bakery, and slaughterhouse. What would they rather be doing? What has Rav's mother given up that she used to love? How have things changed for those people by the end?
12. The narrator makes it clear early on that "This story, like all stories, is about choices." (p. 6) What choice does Rav make when Donnie is trapping a cat? What does it tell you about Rav? What are some big choices that Rav makes and what are their consequences? What choices does Virginia make that have important consequences?
13. "Stories are about choices, yes. But they're also about mistakes." (p. 140) Describe some mistakes that Rav makes which turn out to be important, and explain why they matter. What mistakes do other characters make that are important?
14. At the end of the book, what is the town's new name and how does it symbolize the changes there? How have Rav and Virginia helped the town change? Why does Rav describe changes in their lives and the town as a happy ending? Why does Virginia disagree and call it a happy beginning?

READING ACTIVITIES

1. According to the narrator, stories are about both choices and mistakes. Hold a discussion about this idea. Then ask each student to write a short story that includes a big choice and a big mistake. Have them meet in small groups to workshop their stories before writing final versions. [CCSS W3, W5, S1](#)
2. The newly named town of Someday has a café, bakery, newspaper, and slaughterhouse. What else does it need? Have students work in pairs to imagine another business that would fit in with the spirit of Someday. They should make a poster advertising the business, giving details and including a paragraph about why it's a good addition to this town. [CCSS RI, W2](#)
3. Ask students to choose one of the Ragabonds and consider three aspects of their life: (1) What they miss about the time before they were a Ragabond. (2) What they like about being a Ragabond. What they like about their new situation at the end. Then students should prepare a short monologue to record or share orally that gives the character's viewpoint about those aspects of their life. [CCSS RI, W3, S1](#)
4. Rav loves to design, build, and paint birdhouses. Invite each student to design an imaginative birdhouse that could hang in Rav's special grove. Have them create a color picture of the birdhouse or, if possible, create it in three dimensions with paper, cardboard, or wood. Then as a class discuss the author's use of imagery, noting how much comes from the natural world, especially birds. Have students meet in small groups to locate the bird imagery in the book and discuss what the comparisons convey and the affect they might have on readers. Students may need to look up birds that are unfamiliar to them. [CCSS RI, R4, S1](#)

“like a windblown wren” (p.23)

“like a goldfinch” (p. 36)

“as a sparrow” (p. 45)

“as a nighthawk” (p. 69)

“like a sunrise lark” (p. 90)

“like a sudden flock of starlings” (p. 99)

“like the persistent *caw* of a crow” (p. 131)

“as a chickadee” (p. 155)

“his voice was a sparrow” (p. 210)

“as a falcon” (p. 249)

“like a hawk seeing a rabbit” (p. 257)

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