

THE EMERALD ATLAS

READERS GUIDE

THE FIRST BOOK IN A
GENERATION-DEFINING FANTASY
TRILOGY



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ABOUT THE BOOK



Kate, Michael, and Emma have been bounced from one orphanage to another for 10 years. Only Kate has a vague memory of the night they were separated from their mother and father, but all three have faith they will be reunited with their parents some day. When they arrive—after traveling by train, boat, and carriage—at their mysterious new orphanage in Cambridge Falls, New York, strange events take over. An old coachman, a cranky housekeeper, a time-traveling wizard are the only inhabitants of their new home, and an ancient book of magic they discover in a secret room draws the children into an amazing adventure through time and space. They must call on all their combined courage, cleverness, and powers of reason to keep up with the whirlwind of events that gradually bring them closer to learning what really happened to their parents.

Grades 3-7

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PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students look up information about the ancient cities of Rhakotis and Alexandria. Have them research the question “Is Time Travel possible?” using the How Stuff Works website at science.howstuffworks.com/science-vs-myth/everyday-myths/time-travel.htm.



“MY FRIENDS, WE HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN THIS DAY WOULD COME.”

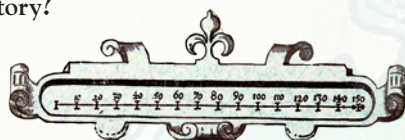
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why are Kate, Michael, and Emma so sure that their parents will return when they haven't seen them in 10 years?
- What is the importance of the scene in the orphanage with Mrs. Lovestock? Why does Kate say things that keep Mrs. Lovestock from adopting them?
- Why is Kate so sure the boat will come when they reach Westport, even when nobody has heard of Cambridge Falls?
- Compare the different reception the children receive from Abraham, from Miss Sallow, and from Dr. Pym. Why is Miss Sallow so unpleasant to them?
- When they explore the house, why does Michael want to go through the door that appears in the basement wall? Why does Kate allow them to go through? Why does it take Kate longer than her siblings to accept that magic is real?
- What are the Screechers—the *morum cadi*—and why are they so frightening? What does Kate learn about them from Gabriel that helps her later? What is the difference between the *morum cadi* and the *salmac-tar*?
- Who is the Countess? How old is she? Why does she exert such power over the people of Cambridge Falls? Why does she show the children the vision of the society dance in the ballroom?
- After telling Dr. Pym her story, why does Kate feel “oddly light”? (p. 75) What is the effect that Dr. Pym has on the girls? Who is Dr. Pym?
- What does the Countess mean when she says the book has “marked” Kate? Why does Kate have a connection to the book from the beginning, and how is she able to see pictures of past times when she touches its blank pages?
- What does the Countess mean when she says, “There is no such thing as chance when it comes to magic”? (p. 126) How does she recognize what Kate can do even before Kate knows?
- Discuss the importance of Abraham in the story—both in the present and in the past.
- What is the importance of Gabriel in the story? Why does he have such a strong connection to Emma, and she to him? How does he know so much about the land? Discuss the children's feeling that “something about [Gabriel] demanded the truth.” (p. 154)
- Why does Kate follow her visions in the cavern instead of following Gabriel's instructions? Did she do the right thing?





- Compare Granny Peet to Dr. Pym. Does she heal Emma and Gabriel by magic or by medicine? What makes Emma become friends with Dena after they start out fighting?
- Why did Hamish make a deal with the Countess? What does he hope to gain by finding the Emerald Atlas? Why does Michael stand up to Hamish in the dwarves' throne room and what is the importance of his actions?
- What is the Emerald Atlas? What powers does it have, and who is able to access its power? What do you think happened to the other two Books of Beginning?
- Why does the *Atlas* take Kate into the past when she retrieves it in the cavern, and how does she return again without the book? Is Dr. Pym controlling these movements?
- Why is Cavendish, the the Countess's Secretary, the first one to tell Kate the book's name? What does he mean when he says, "the *Atlas* is an ocean of power"? (p. 290)
- Why doesn't Kate tell Michael and Emma that she has seen their mother in the past? Discuss the role that emotion plays in Kate's interactions with the book and her visions of past and future. What does Dr. Pym mean when he says that Kate would only access her power when her "heart is healed"? (p. 235) How does the trip into the past help that happen?
- Why does it take so long for the children to learn the true name of the book, *The Atlas of Time*? What information do you think Dr. Pym is still withholding from them? Why doesn't he tell them he knows their parents?
- Why does Kate go back to the Countess after the battle in the cavern and tell no one else she is going? What does she mean when she says that time was like a river that "had a will of its own . . . you had to be willing to sacrifice . . . you had to force it to change"? (p. 332)
- Who is the Dire Magnus and why could he not exist for long on the boat? What is his power over Kate and how does she resist?
- Compare Gabriel's sacrifice at the dam to Kate's when she goes back to the Countess, Michael's when he jumps back on the boat, and Emma's when she returns to Gabriel in the cavern. What does each of these characters have in common?
- How does Kate know where to take the Countess in time when she appears in the bedroom? Do you think this is the last Kate will see of the Countess?
- What is the prophecy that involves all three of the children? What predictions can you make for what will happen in future volumes of this story?



POST-READING ACTIVITY

Have students compare **The Emerald Atlas** to other books in which ancient volumes are the focus of the story. Matthew Skelton's *Endymion Spring* involves a blank book in a library at Oxford University that was named for an apprentice of Gutenberg's and contains all the knowledge of the world. In present-day Oxford, a boy named Blake finds the book and fights to keep it safe. The plot of Michael Scott's series, *The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel*, also revolves around a powerful book, the codex of Abraham the Mage, which is said to contain the secrets of immortality and has been used for centuries by the alchemist Flamel and his wife, Perenelle. A present-day teenage brother and sister, the "twins of legend," are catapulted through time and space as they acquire ancient powers to keep the codex from falling into the wrong hands. Their adventures are recounted in *The Alchemist*, *The Magician*, *The Sorceress*, *The Necromancer*, and *The Warlock*.



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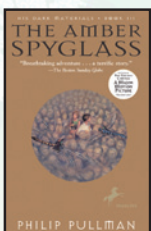
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Author photo © 2010 by Elena Seibert

John Stephens spent 10 years in television, and was executive producer of *Gossip Girl* and a writer for *Gilmore Girls* and *The O.C.* He holds an MFA from the University of Virginia.

John and his wife have a dog named Bug and live in Los Angeles. Visit **EMERALDATLAS.COM** to find out more about *The Emerald Atlas*, the *Books of Beginning*, and John.



**“John Stephens’s
new fantasy has everything—action,
humor, well-realized characters and
the smarmiest villainess since the
white witch of Narnia.”**

—Kathy Jarombek,
Perrot Memorial Library, CT

**“A Tolkien for 10-year-olds . . .
the whole family will enjoy this
fresh adventure.”**

—Angela Sherrill,
Bookseller, 57th Street Books, NY

**“A great book. . . .There was
a lot of magic, adventure
and mystery.”**

—Travis, Age 11

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prologue at EMERALDATLAS.COM**