

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Common Core abbreviations used in this guide:

RL – Reading: Literature

RI – Reading: Informational Text

W – Writing

SL – Speaking & Listening

For the complete Common Core State Standards, visit corestandards.org/ELA-literacy.

ABOUT THE BOOKS

Vicky Alvear Shecter is the author of the middle-grade *Secrets of the Ancient Gods* series, which includes the titles *ANUBIS SPEAKS! A GUIDE TO THE AFTERLIFE BY THE EGYPTIAN GOD OF THE DEAD* and *HADES SPEAKS! A GUIDE TO THE UNDERWORLD BY THE GREEK GOD OF THE DEAD*. In *ANUBIS SPEAKS!*, Shecter uses the voice of Anubis, one of the Egyptian gods of the dead, to narrate a hair-raising and dangerous journey through the afterlife. Along the way, Anubis explains many of the myths and customs of ancient Egypt—with a dash of humor and gore.

Shecter turns her attention to Greece in *HADES SPEAKS!*. She lets Hades narrate his own story in this informative and entertaining look at the beliefs, practices, and mythology of the ancient Greeks. Hades takes the reader on a journey to his home—the House of Hades. As he makes his way through the underworld, Hades describes each setting and shares many of the funerary customs of ancient Greece.

This educator’s guide is a starting point for discussions about the books, as well as a roadmap for future research. The discussions and activities suggested in this guide match Common Core goals and standards. Fifth-grade standards are listed below each activity.

ANUBIS SPEAKS!

QUICK QUESTIONS

- Who is Anubis? [RL 5.1]
- How did the battle between light and dark take place every day for the ancient Egyptians? [RL 5.1]
- How was the Nile River a symbol of the ancient Egyptians’ religion? [RL 5.1]
 - Who is Ra? Why did he leave earth? [RL 5.1]
 - Who is Apophis? What role did he play in the battle between light and dark? [RL 5.1]
- How did the Egyptians use mythology to explain things they could not understand (such as sunrise and sunset)? [RL 5.1]

DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE ARTS—INFORMATIONAL TEXT

- In this book, Anubis takes a journey through the afterlife, which takes place at night. The ancient Egyptians believed the sun died each night and then rose, reborn, the next morning. The sun’s journey became a metaphor for the afterlife. What did the ancient Egyptians believe happened in the afterlife? How did they prepare themselves? [RI 5.1]
 - Animals play an important role in Egyptian mythology. In fact, the ancient Egyptians often combined animal and human features to depict a god. For example, Anubis is typically depicted bearing the head of a jackal and the body of a man. Why did the Egyptians use animal features to depict gods? What is the significance of the jackal and why is it associated with Anubis, the god of the afterlife? [RI 5.1]
 - Praying to the gods and honoring the gods were at the heart of ancient Egyptian culture. How did ancient Egyptians honor their gods? What did ancient Egyptians request from their gods? How did the way the Egyptians acted before death affect their afterlives? [RI 5.8]
 - The ancient Egyptians were keen observers of the natural world, which influenced their mythology. Why is the scarab beetle one of the most sacred symbols in ancient Egypt? [RI 5.1]
 - Many animals play significant roles in the afterlife—from crocodiles to

baboons. Name some of the animals Anubis encounters during his nighttime travels through the underworld. Explain their significance. [RI 5.2]

- Anubis is the god of the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians believed that a person could live forever in the afterlife as long as they retained their body. Consequently, the Egyptians became experts on mummification. What were the rites and rituals the priests performed to prepare a body for burial? Why was the heart so important? [RI 5.1]
- Ancient Egyptian nobility began preparing for their afterlives when they were teenagers. Why did ancient Egyptians begin thinking about the afterlife when they were so young? [RI 5.1]
 - Tomb building and decoration were labor-intensive and a big business. What was depicted on the walls of tombs and on the rolls of papyrus? Is the *Book of the Dead* really a book? [RI 5.1]

LANGUAGE ARTS—SPEAKING & LISTENING

- Different cultures throughout the world have creation myths that detail how the world began and how people came to live in it. Have students research other myths and folktales from cultures around the world. Then, each student can retell one of these tales in his or her own words to the class. Discuss the different stories and determine their similarities and differences. [RI 5.5; SL 5.2]

LANGUAGE ARTS—WRITING

- The Egyptian civilization was one of the richest and most advanced cultures of the ancient world. They created the first paper from papyrus. They established a calendar that became the basis for the Western calendar. Today, their pyramids, statues, and temples continue to amaze people. Their system of government was stable and prosperous for thousands of years. Here is a link that provides more information on this incredible culture: ancientegypt.co.uk. Have students select one of ancient Egypt’s contributions to civilization and research a short paper on that contribution. [W 5.7]
 - The ancient Egyptians also invented hieroglyphics (a form of writing that uses symbols). In the book, Anubis spells out “Anubis is great” in hieroglyphics (page 80). As a class, discuss how we use symbols now when we write—particularly electronically. What purpose do these symbols serve in modern communication? Have students depict their name using “glyphs” or symbols representing letters in the alphabet. [W 5.2; SL 5.1]
 - Oftentimes in Egyptian mythology, one animal could represent both good and evil. For example, a snake protecting a granary from mice was a good thing. A snake that could kill with its venomous bite was not. While snakes could represent an Egyptian king’s power, the snake Apophis threatened the ancient Egyptians’ very existence. Have students create their own mythological creatures, explain their characters’ roles, and describe their characters’ physical appearances. [W 5.2]
 - Ask students to imagine they are Egyptian pharaohs. What would they like left in their tomb to go with them on their journey to the afterlife? Ask students to describe their essential items and explain why they chose those things. [W 5.8]

SOCIAL STUDIES—GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

- The author shares that the Greek writer Herodotus called Egypt “The Gift of the Nile.” Where is Egypt located? How was ancient Egypt different from the nations that surrounded it? Why was Egypt known as the breadbasket of the ancient world? What are the black lands? What are the red lands? [RI 5.7]
 - The Nile River was enormously important to the culture of ancient Egypt, so it is at the heart of Egyptian mythology. Why was the Nile so critical to life in Egypt? [RI 5.7]
 - The ancient Egyptians never used chariots or other wheeled vehicles to transport the dead through the desert to their tombs. Why not? [RI 5.7]
 - In ancient Egypt, women had more rights than in other ancient civilizations, though they rarely served as pharaohs. However, the queen Hatshepsut was one of the most successful pharaohs and her reign was long. What were her achievements? [RI 5.7]
 - Who built the pyramids? What was buried around the pyramids? How were the pyramids protected from grave robbers? [RI 5.7]

EXTRA CREDIT

- The pharaoh Khufu built the Great Pyramid—the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World still standing. What were the other six wonders? [RI 5.9; SL 5.1; W 5.1]
 - Perhaps your students have heard of other pharaohs—Cleopatra and Tutankhamen, or King Tut, are two recognizable names. What is significant about these two pharaohs? [RI 5.9]
 - The Rosetta Stone was discovered in 1799 in a town in the Nile Delta. What is it and why is it so important? [RI 5.9]
 - Students can examine how Egyptians made use of the Nile—from fishermen and farmers to pharaohs traveling on royal barges. Have each student write a piece from the point of view of an ancient Egyptian and describe why the Nile was so critical to him or her. [W 5.2]
 - The ancient Egyptians were master shipbuilders. Share the PBS program “Building Pharaoh’s Ship” with your students. For more information, visit pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/building-pharaohs-ship.html.



HADES SPEAKS!

QUICK QUESTIONS

- Who is Hades? Who are his siblings? Who were their parents? [RI 5.1]
- Who is Persephone? Who is her mother? [RI 5.1]
- How did the ancient Greeks incorporate the gods into their understanding of the natural world? [RI 5.1]
- How did Greek mythology explain the afterlife? [RI 5.1]

DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE ARTS—INFORMATIONAL TEXT

- The journey to the underworld begins in the Grove of Persephone. How does Hades describe this place? According to Greek mythology, what happens to the earth while Persephone lives in the underworld? [RI 5.1]
 - Hades talks about his “monstrous minions” (page 9). What is a minion? What are some of the creatures found in the House of Hades? [RI 5.1 and 5.4]
 - In Greek mythology, there are five rivers that separate the upper world from the underworld. To get to the underworld, a soul must cross one of them called the Styx. How do the dead get across? Who is Charon? [RI 5.1]
 - The ancient Greeks “performed a number of rites, or ritual practices, to appease the dead and keep Melinoe’s ghosties away” (page 28). What were some of the funerary rites the Greeks performed? [RI 5.1]
 - Many of the rituals were designed to help the dead in the afterlife. For example, what was the significance of placing a gold coin in a dead person’s mouth? [RI 5.8]
 - Who is Cerberus and what does he look like? What are his responsibilities? [RI 5.1]
 - Hades lives in the Black Palace. Outside of it, there is a pomegranate orchard. Why are pomegranates important in Greek mythology? [RI 5.8]
 - Who are Thanatos, the Keres, Hypnos, and Hekate? What do they have to do with the underworld? [RI 5.1]
 - Who are the inhabitants of the Fields of Asphodel? Who dwells in the Elysian Fields? What is Tartaros? [RI 5.1]

LANGUAGE ARTS—SPEAKING & LISTENING

- In ancient Greece, myths were considered the story of Greek history. Throughout *HADES SPEAKS!*, the author shares many Greek and Roman myths and several stories from epic poems. Have students pick different stories from the book (the myths of Orpheus and Eurydice, Cupid and Psyche, Sisyphus, Perseus, etc.) or from other sources. Have students tell the myths in their own words to each other. [RI 5.1; SL 5.2]

LANGUAGE ARTS—WRITING

- Hades shares an ancient ghost story called “The Haunted House of Athens” by a Roman writer named Pliny the Younger (page 38). This story is a warning to people to bury their dead correctly or risk being haunted by ghosts. Have students write their own ghost stories. [W 5.3]
 - The Fates were three goddesses in Greek mythology who wove the threads of life and determined a person’s fate. Hades says, “no one—not even we Olympians—can break away from our fates once these goddesses set them” (page 46). What if you could weave the fate of your own life? Have students write three things about their future they would like to be able to predetermine. [W 5.1]

SOCIAL STUDIES—GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

- Greece is often called the “Cradle of Western Civilization.” Hades says this about the ancient Greeks: “[They] lived more than 2,500 years ago and were

responsible for many of the things you take for granted today, such as democracy, freedom of speech, theater, money, the Olympic Games, and crazy politicians” (page 12). Have students write an informative essay about something from ancient Greece that still is part of our lives today. [W 5.2 and 5.7]

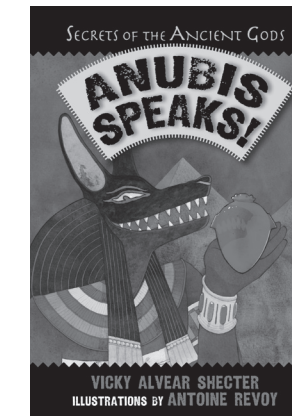
- At first, the ancient Greeks believed that only heroes came to Elysium. Over time, however, they began to believe that “virtuous ones” could also be eternally blessed. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are famous Greek philosophers who the ancient Greeks believed resided in the Elysian Fields. What is a philosopher? What is the Socratic Method? What is the Platonic Ideal? What is logic? [RI 5.4 and 5.9]

EXTRA CREDIT

- Hades talks about Herakles (Hercules) a lot—and he doesn’t seem too fond of him. He also describes several of the Labors of Herakles. What are the Twelve Labors of Herakles? Why did Herakles have to complete the tasks? [RI 5.9]
 - Hades also brings up Harry Potter several times. For example: *Both the Greeks and Romans sometimes referred to me as “He Who Must Not Be Named.” Yes, that’s right. Way before Voldemort and Harry Potter, the ancients were afraid to call my name out loud.* (page 8)

Can you think of anything else from the Harry Potter series that calls to mind Greek mythology? [RI 5.5]

- Throughout the book, the author describes several plants and trees that held special meaning for the ancient Greeks. For example, when a person died, cypress branches were nailed over the door as a sign of mourning. What are some other examples of things from the natural world that held special significance for the ancient Greeks? [RI 5.1]
 - The author mentions characters from three epic poems: *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* (both by the Greek poet Homer) and *The Aeneid*, by the Roman poet Virgil. What does *epic* mean? Who are some of the characters from these poems? [RL 5.1]
 - What do the names of the planets have to do with Greek mythology? [RI 5.7]
 - The author writes, “in ancient Greece, a silent funeral was an oxymoron” (page 30). What is an oxymoron? Can you think of other oxymorons? [L 5.4]
 - There are many words and phrases from Greek mythology that are familiar to us today—over 2,500 years later! Look carefully in this book and in other sources for the origin of each of these words or phrases: *mint, Pandora’s Box, tantalizing, Achilles’ heel*, and *stoic*. [L 5.5]



Anubis Speaks!
A Guide to the Afterlife by the Egyptian God of the Dead
By Vicky Alvear Shecter
Illustrated by Antoine Revoy
978-1-59078-995-7
Ages 10 and up
Grades 5 and up
\$16.95



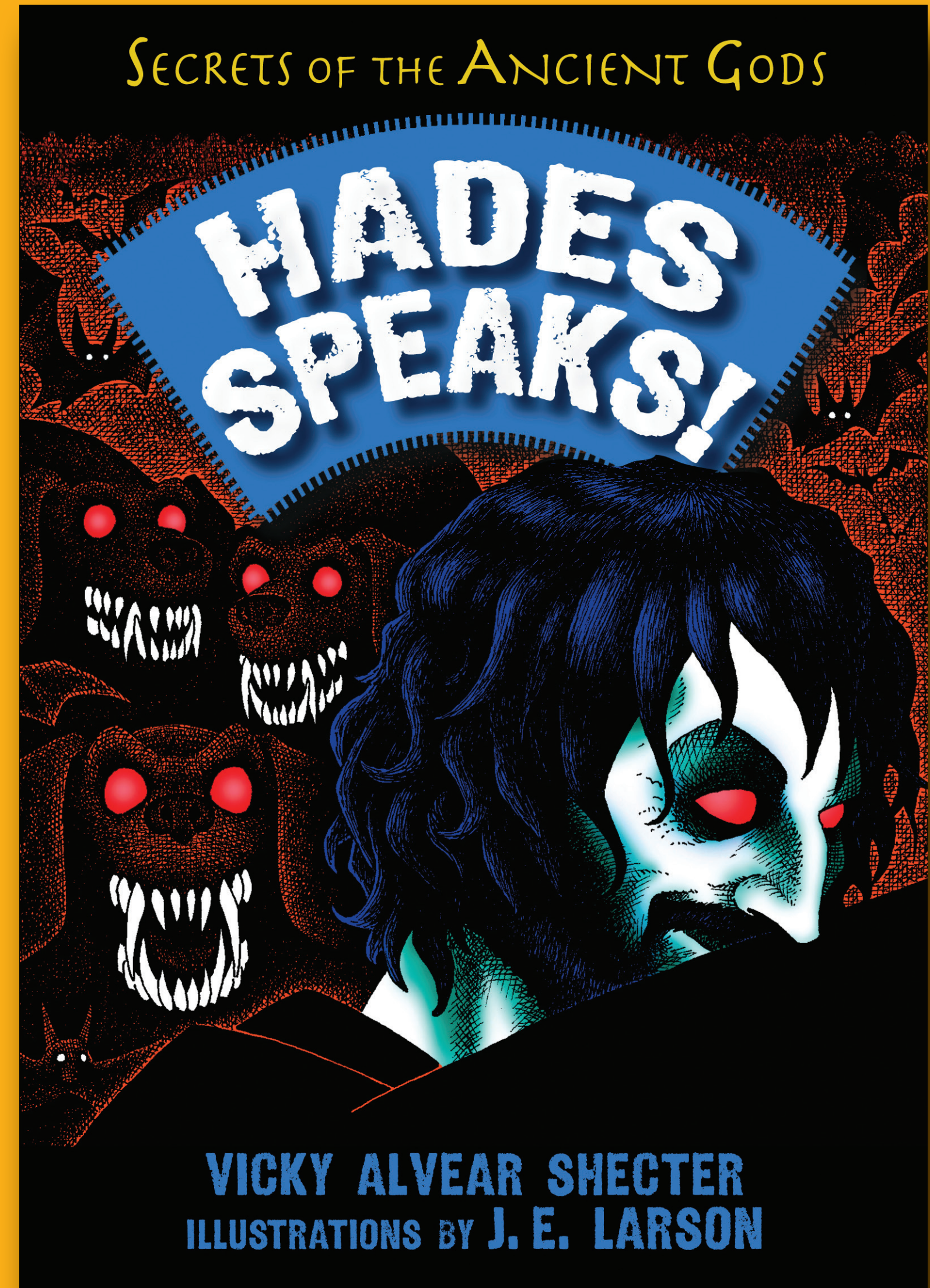
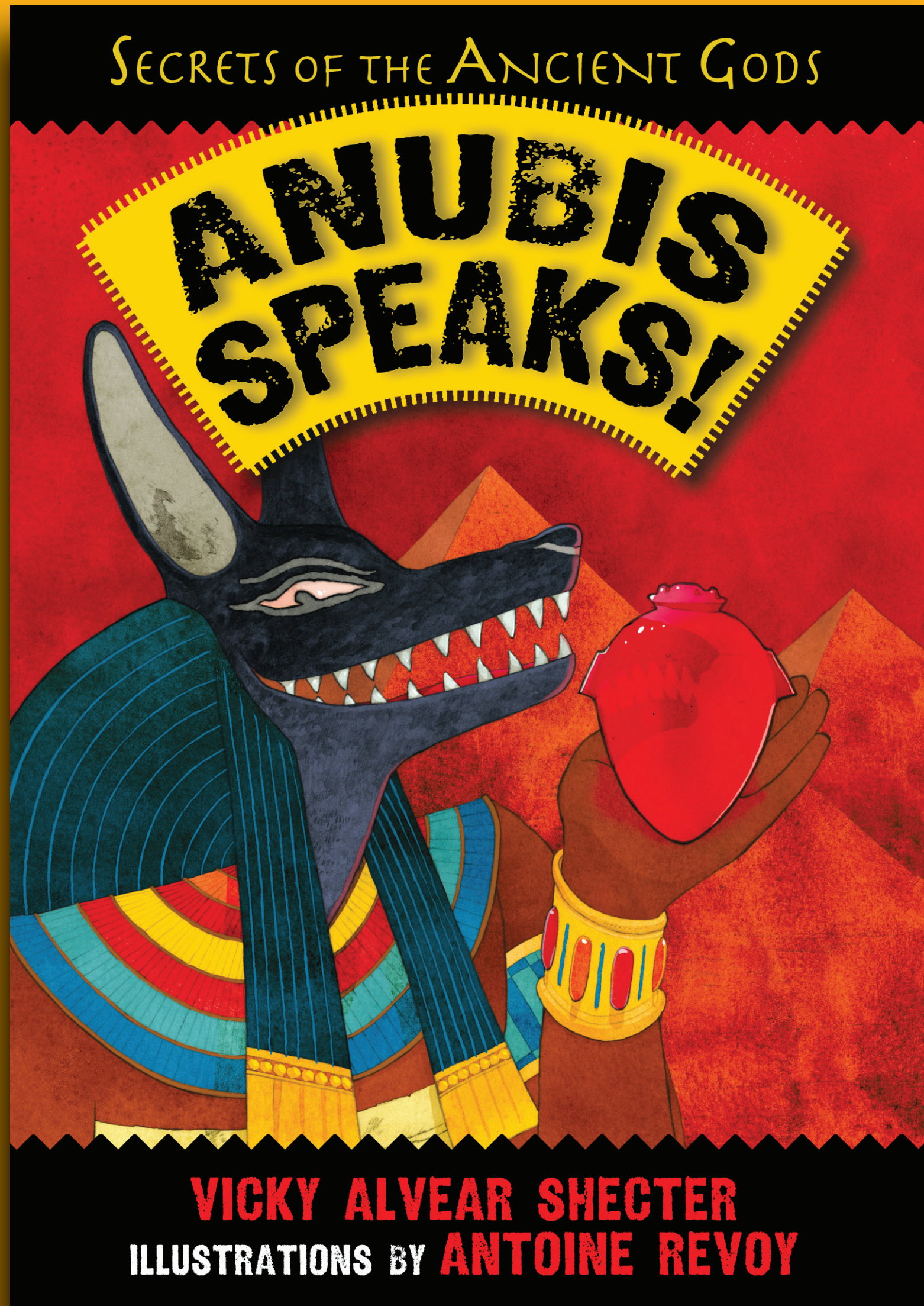
Hades Speaks!
A Guide to the Underworld by the Greek God of the Dead
By Vicky Alvear Shecter
Illustrated by J. E. Larson
978-1-62091-598-1
Ages 9–12
Grades 4–7
\$16.95

This guide was created by Jane Becker.

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UNCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE ANCIENT GODS!



“Wickedly funny . . . chock-full of interesting information.” —*School Library Journal*