

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



Author photograph by Micah Demoux

**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.

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of all ages.”

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devour this well-crafted mix  
of action and setup.”

—**KIRKUS REVIEWS**,  
starred review

“[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  
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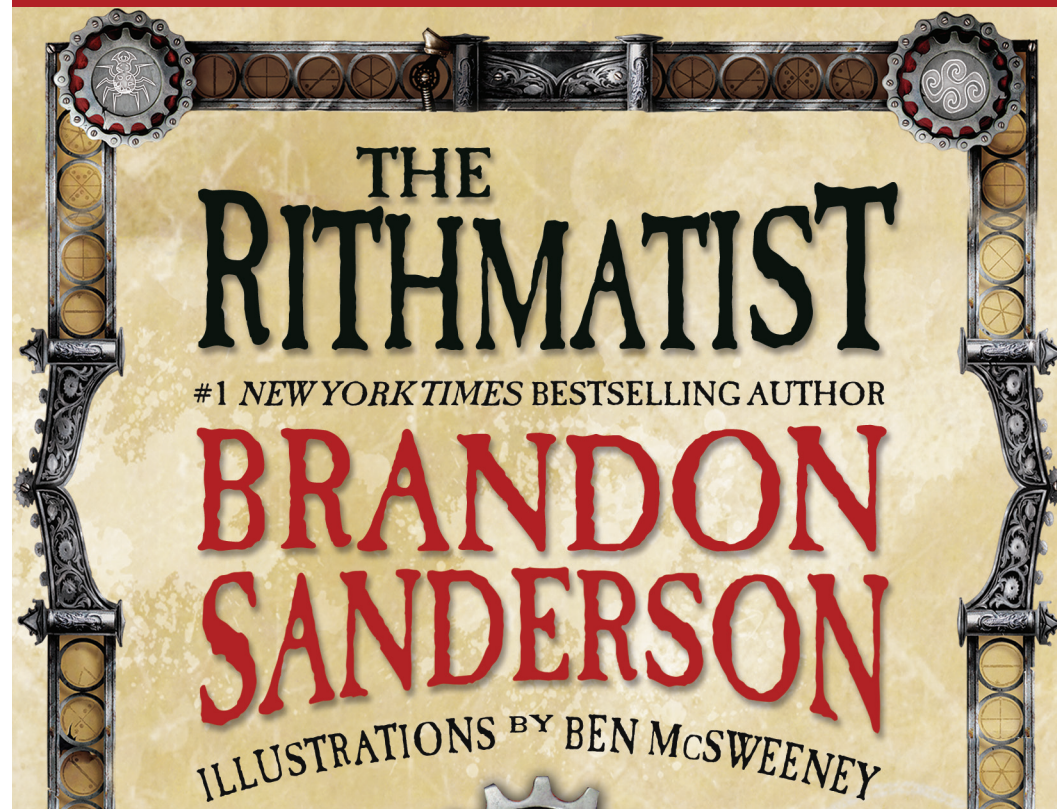


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# TOR TEEN CLASSROOM READER’S GUIDE



## 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.

# WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

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 or Melody, write an internal monologue exploring your thoughts about seeing the town through the other’s eyes, your comfort level and other considerations about giving/receiving money, and whether you feel this trip has changed your relationship in any way.
8. *The Rithmatist* is set in an alternate America with different technology, boundaries, and an ongoing threat posed by the wild chalklings at Nebraska. 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 in his understanding of humanity and Rithmatics. With friends or classmates, role-play a conversation between Joel, Professor Fitch, and Father Stewart in which Joel presents his thoughts on time and the two other characters accept, reject, or elaborate upon his thoughts.
10. Melody is stunned when Joel fails to qualify as a Rithmatist for a second time. Were you? Imagine you are a student at Armedius Academy in whom Joel has confided about his second inception room experience. Write a detailed petition statement demanding a third inception ceremony for Joel. If desired, read your statement aloud to friends or classmates and invite them to vote on whether they would be in favor of a third inception ceremony.

11. Use oil pastels or other visual arts media to create a colorful, illustrated postcard invitation—or design a mock Facebook event page—to encourage people to attend the end-of-year student Melee at Armedius Academy.
12. Assume the character of a Rithmatic student in your final year at Armedius before being sent to complete your education at Nebraska. Create your own chalking, drawn with chalk on a sheet of black construction paper. On a large index card, write a brief description of your chalking, how you came to draw this particular form, the name of the Rithmatic defense with which it is most effective, and your proudest accomplishment as a fledgling Rithmatist. If desired, create a display of “Rithmatic Artworks” by combining your drawing and description with pictures created by friends or classmates.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The prologue of *The Rithmatist* describes something frightening happening to a girl named Lilly. However, it is not until later in the novel that the reader fully realizes what these opening pages have described. How might you interpret the events of the prologue before reading further in *The Rithmatist*? What images and emotions from the prologue resonate through the rest of the novel? After reading the whole novel, how would you reinterpret the prologue? Why, in terms of plot and themes, do you think the author chose to begin his novel with this scene featuring the first Rithmatic student disappearance?
2. From the start of the novel, it is clear that Joel is frustrated by his lack of Rithmatic talent. How does this affect his actions throughout the story? Describe at least two ways in which Joel is an outsider at Armedius Academy. Then, name at least two ways in which Joel is more of a Rithmatist than many of the chosen Rithmatic students.
3. What is Joel’s relationship with Professor Fitch? Why is he so upset when Fitch loses the duel to Nalizar? To what important new responsibility does this lead for Joel? Why has Melody found herself under the tutelage of Fitch?
4. Describe Joel’s relationships with Exton, Florence, and his mother, all non-Rithmatist characters. What secrets do these characters keep about their connection to Rithmatics? What conclusions might you draw about the relationships between Rithmatists and others in the greater world?
5. Between chapters of the novel, diagrams illustrate the art of Rithmatics. As a reader, how do you connect with these instructional elements? How do they help you to build a clearer sense of the world of Rithmatic fighting? Does this complex scheme, thoroughly taught to only a select few, remind you of any realms of scholarship or leadership in your own world? Explain your answer.
6. List all of the characters Joel considers as suspects before the capture of the real kidnapper. What important discovery does Joel make about the mysterious new chalk symbol found at each crime scene that helps him solve the mystery? What might the discovery of this new symbol foretell about the future of Rithmatics?
7. How are the kidnapped children rescued? What is a Forgotten? Do you think the Forgotten has any relationship to the creature Joel sees in the inception room? Why or why not?

