

# THE REAL BOY

BY ANNE URSU

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

The island of Aletheia appears tranquil on the surface but is haunted by its history—wizards that became trees, a plague that destroyed part of the land, and the separation of those in the Barrow village from the shining people who live in Asteri, the city on the hill. Oscar works for the Barrow's most powerful magician, Caleb, and generally follows orders to gather and prepare herbs and bark, but when Caleb's apprentice disappears, Oscar is called on to perform increasingly difficult duties. Along with his new friend Callie, a healer's apprentice, he must call on all his courage and knowledge to save the land from a mysterious, destructive force.



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the settings of Asteri and the Barrow. How are the two different? Base your comparison on specific details in the text. How did the two places become this way? *CCSS.RL.4-7.3*
2. What are the differences between Oscar and Wolf? Why does Wolf think he can get away with mistreating Oscar? Why doesn't Oscar tell Caleb about Wolf's bullying? *CCSS.RL.4-7.1*
3. What does Caleb mean when he says, "Wolf had his talents, but he was reckless" (p. 60)? Describe times when Wolf acted in a reckless way. What talents did Wolf have that Caleb valued? *CCSS.RL.4-7.4*
4. Caleb says he picked Oscar for his "hand" because "the wards told me you were the one who would never get picked" (p. 92). What does he mean? How does that make Oscar feel? Why does he have so few memories of the orphanage? *CCSS.RL.4-7.1*
5. Discuss the statement of Malcolm, the baker: "Magic serves at no one's pleasure but its own" (p. 121). Why did Malcolm give up being a magician? Why does he leave the Barrow? *CCSS.RL.4-7.5*
6. What is the significance of the cat that Oscar carves from the wood he finds in the forest? Why is the wooden cat so important to him? Why are the real cats so important? *CCSS.RL.4-7.2*
7. What does Caleb's library reveal to Oscar? Discuss specific knowledge he gains from the library that helps him in his work and in understanding his world. Why does he take Callie to the library? *CCSS.RL.4-7.1*
8. Discuss the connection of the wizards of Aletheia to the wizard trees. How does Oscar learn about the wizard trees? What does the following statement mean? "The trees were not the wizards' respite. They were their sacrifice" (p.183). *CCSS.RL.4-7.5*
9. Why does Oscar assume that he is made of wood? Discuss his experiences that would make him come to this conclusion. How does Callie help him to see the truth? *CCSS.RL.4-7.5*
10. What is Caleb's reaction to the attack of the monster in his shop? What is Oscar's reaction to what happens to Caleb? Why does he ask Callie how he is supposed to feel? What is the significance of Oscar's comment to Callie, "I am sorry about your brother" (p. 253)? *CCSS.RL.4-7.3*



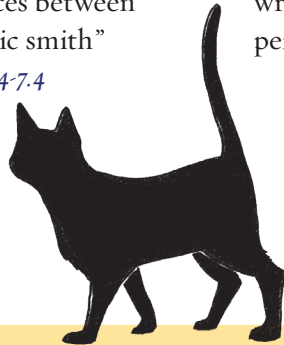
*Discussion questions continued on the next page . . .*

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11. Why do Callie and Oscar want to help the children of the City? Compare the feelings Callie and Oscar have for the sick children to the way they were treated by Madame Mariel and Caleb. How do they figure out what is really wrong with the children? What is the meaning of the title, *The Real Boy*? *CCSS.RL.4-7.3*
12. Why is Oscar able to escape the monster when Caleb could not? What does the earth monster symbolize? Discuss the statement: “It was a beautiful lie that they had all been telling themselves—that you could have magic without monsters” (p. 332). *CCSS.RL.4-7.2*

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Magic in Nature.** In the story, Oscar talks about many plants that he finds in the forest and in Caleb’s greenhouse. Look up the names of these plants in a reference book or on the internet and create a booklet showing pictures of the plants and what you learn about their properties. *CCSS.RL.4-7.1*
2. **Magic with Words.** The land of Aletheia has had a succession of different magic workers throughout its history. Look up the definitions of the words “wizard,” “sorcerer,” and “magician.” What are the subtle differences between these words? How would you describe a “magic smith” based on your reading of the story? *CCSS.RL.4-7.4*
3. **Picture This!** Draw your own map of Aletheia based on your reading of the story. Add as much detail as you can for each part of the island. Use color and texture to make your map interesting. Draw on the map the plants Oscar finds in the forest. Draw a separate map of the City showing how Callie finds the sick children. *CCSS.RL.4-7.7*
4. **People Power.** Choose two characters from the story to compare with each other. Write a character description of each, based on what you learn about them from the text; write about the similarities and differences between their personalities and backgrounds. *CCSS.W.4-7.9*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANNE URSU is the author of *Breadcrumbs*, which *Kirkus Reviews* called “a transforming testament to the power of friendship” in a starred review, and which was acclaimed as one of the best books of 2011 by *The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, *School Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, Amazon.com, and the Chicago Public Library. It was also an IndieBound Next List Pick and an NPR Backseat Book Club featured selection. Anne is a professor at Hamline University’s MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults and a 2013 McKnight Fellow. She lives in Minnesota with her son and three cats—monster fighters all. You can visit her online at [www.anneursu.com](http://www.anneursu.com).



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Discussion guide prepared by Connie Rockman, youth literature consultant and adjunct professor of children’s and young adult literature.