

# THOR'S SERPENTS

## Curriculum connections

- ❖ Mythology
- ❖ Adventure
- ❖ Friendship

Ages 8 – 12

By  
K.L. Armstrong  
& M.A. Marr



## Hello Educators!

The following interdisciplinary activities were written assuming teachers are reading *Thor's Serpents* as a whole-class read, but many of these activities can easily be adapted for class book clubs and/or independent reading. You know your classrooms best!

Be sure to check out the two previous guides for even more content and thematic connections!



## PRE-READING

### Setting

#### What Might It Reveal?

*Thor's Serpents* mostly takes place in “Badlands” which is inspired by South Dakota’s Badlands National Park. What a fitting name for a setting . . . bad . . . lands! Already sounds ominous! Discuss how a story’s setting can affect the plot and why the writers may have chosen this particular setting for this book. Research the characteristics of the types of land formations, animals, etc. the characters might face in Badlands. Based on the research, have students make predictions of the conflicts that may arise and how the land may become friend or foe. Consider having students visit [nps.gov/badl/index.htm](http://nps.gov/badl/index.htm) and become web rangers. As the characters in the novel learn to help save the world, students can learn alongside them how to help save Badlands’ animals!

### Teambuilding

The characters in *Thor's Serpents* have to work together to save the world, even when they don’t like each other. Learning to be a good teammate is essential for children and adults in the real world too. Challenge your students to build their teamwork skills while building the tallest, most elaborate corn castle they can in just twenty-five minutes. Divide the class into teams of 4-5 students. Supply each group with a pile of corn ears and 2-3 other random props (i.e., a ruler, a newspaper, a roll of duct tape, etc.). Show students pictures of the real Corn Palace in South Dakota (yes, a castle made of corn!) from the website [cornpalace.com](http://cornpalace.com) and then start the timer. On your mark, get set, build! After the activity, guide students in reflecting on how well they worked with one another. Discuss whether the success of a team is reflected in the final product. Measure the corn castles and the team with the tallest wins a prize!

### Symbolism

#### Gallery Walk

There are so many references to animals in *Thor's Serpents* that are just asking to be examined! Hang poster paper around the room with one of the following words on each: goat, cat, rooster, wolf, serpent. Divide the class into groups and instruct them to walk around “the gallery” with sticky notes or markers. Each group brainstorms and writes on the posters what they already know about these animals and what comes to mind when they see/hear/think of them. What behavioral traits do these animals possess? After the rotations are finished, come together as a whole class to discuss why the authors may have chosen to use these symbols in their book. As students read the novel, revisit this symbolism discussion. Are they effective symbols? Do they match up with the authors’ purpose? As a follow up writing assignment, consider having students choose another animal not in the novel, research the animal’s behavioral traits and write a short narrative piece around the animal’s characteristics. What trouble might the animals get into? How might they use their skills to overcome conflict?

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

### Creative Writing

#### Descendant of the Gods

The main characters in *Thor's Serpents* find out that they are descendants of Norse gods and fated to live out a mythology they thought was just a story. Ask your students to imagine that they too suddenly find out they are the descendants of mythological gods. You can either assign students a mythological god or have them select one that interests them. What will this mean for their future? How does it impact their understanding of themselves, their family, and their past? Assign students to write a piece of flash fiction that tells the story of when their lineage is revealed. Depending on their prior knowledge and your class curriculum, students may need to research the god before completing this assignment. *The New York Times's* Learning Network has a great resource for teaching flash fiction.

### Psychology/Technology

#### Fiery Feuds

In *Thor's Serpents*, the Brekkes and the Thorsens have always struggled to get along. Identify some of the feuds among other characters in the novel. Why are they so angry at each other? What details in the writing convey this anger? Research/read about other examples of feuds in literature and history (i.e., Romeo and Juliet's families, Hatfields and McCoys, Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr). What do the feuds have in common? How do they begin? Discuss strategies your students use to control their own anger with their peers or family members. Read the articles *Taking Charge of Anger* from KidsHealth.org and *5 Ways to Respectfully Disagree* from TeensHealth.org. Divide the class into groups and explain they will create a stop motion/

animation video that will help others avoid future feuds. Consider sharing their "Anger Buster" videos on schooltube.com or at your school's next assembly.

#### Sample Stop Motion/Animation Apps:

- Animation Creator
- Flipbook
- Stop Motion Studio

### Art/ELA

#### Character Body Map

Create life-size character body maps with your students to explore the difference between static and dynamic characters. Working in partners or small groups, have students choose a major character to analyze. Provide students with guidelines for their character map (i.e., around the head state what the character thinks in a thought bubble, by the heart state what the character feels, on the shoulders state what the character carries/their conflict, by the mouth state what the character says, etc.). Encourage students to decorate the body map with images and objects that reveal more about the character *and* to intersperse direct quotations. Students should create two body maps for the same character during the reading of the novel, once at the beginning and once at the end. After comparing the maps, have students summarize how the character changes and grows. As a class, discuss which characters are the most dynamic and whether this impacts their opinions of them.



## Speaking/Listening

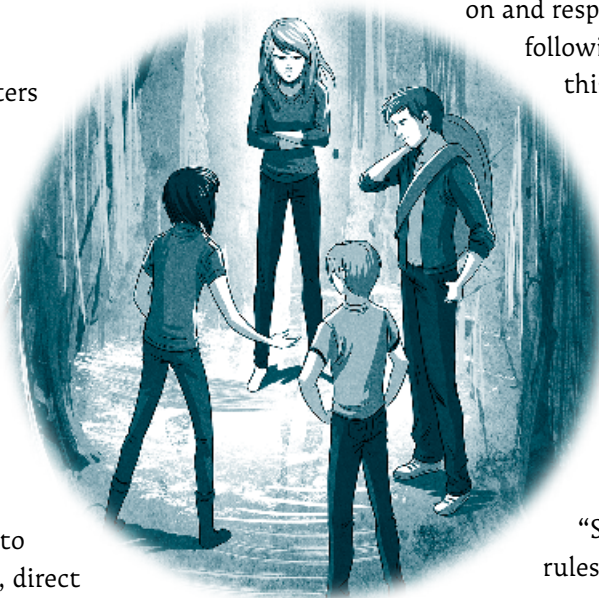
### Stop, Drop, and Brainstorm

Throughout the novel, the main characters often rely on each other for advice on how to handle conflicts big and small. Get your students involved in this problem solving process. Select specific moments throughout the novel to be “stop, drop and brainstorm” moments. Students will stop reading at these key moments and share aloud their advice for the character. Encourage students to build on and refer to each other’s ideas. Some examples of stop, drop and brainstorm moments are: when the Raiders ask Fen what he is going to do with them (pg. 19); when Laurie finds out that Fen was giving orders to the Raiders (pg. 34).

## Characterization

### T-Chart the T-Shirt

There are many strong female characters in the novel that fight alongside (and sometimes in front of) the male characters. They are everyday girls who on any other day would be wearing t-shirts and going to school just like your students. Yet, they are about to go to war. How do the authors characterize these girls? How do we know? Cut out poster paper in the shape of a t-shirt and hang several around the room. Draw a line down the middle of each to make a t-chart. As you read the novel, direct students to pop up and walk to the t-shirts. On one side of the chart, students write text from the novel that focuses on the following: What do other characters say or think about the girl? What does the girl say or think? What actions does the girl take? As students periodically pop up and write on the chart, stop and discuss what is revealed in these lines. How is this female character being portrayed? Is there a difference between how other girls view this character vs. how boys do? Have another student in the class be the scribe and paraphrase the discussion on the other side of the t-shirt t-chart. To extend the discussion, examine how other artists of *other* art forms characterize *their* subjects (i.e., painters, poets, dancers).



## Speaking/Listening

### Stand Up, Speak Out

Matt, Reyna, Fen, and Laurie don’t keep their ideas to themselves. They are strong-willed and outspoken. Use the ideas that these characters feel so strongly about to encourage a lively discussion among your students. Have your students line up in the center of the room with you standing at the head of the line. State a point that a character has made and ask students to step to their left if they agree and to their right if they disagree. You can give them the option to show the range of their feelings by how far right or how far left they go. After discussing what the character meant by his or her statement, give students a chance to “speak their minds” and share their opinions. Encourage students to piggyback on and respond to what other students say. The following are statements you might use for this activity:

“You can’t stop fate.”

—The mayor, Matt’s grandfather

“If we’re going to work together, we need to trust each other and stuff.”—Fen

“I’m not just a kid.”—Matt

“. . . losing Fen was a lot like she figured it would feel if she lost her arm or her lungs.”—Laurie

“Saving the world means breaking some rules . . .”—Matt

## English/Language Arts

### Close-Reading

The protagonists in *Thor’s Serpents* must fight against forceful ruling powers. These powers are convinced they are meant to follow a prophecy set out by their gods that the world must come to an end. How is it that the mayor is so successful at rallying troops to support him in these beliefs? By engaging students in a close reading of *Thor’s Serpents* and an excerpt from the nonfiction young readers edition of *I am Malala*, your class can analyze how the strategies of persuasion used in this novel are not far off from what happens in our real world. After comparing and contrasting, have students discuss how fiction can be as true as nonfiction. Guide students in a close reading of pages 118-120 in *Thor’s Serpents* as well as the following excerpt from *I am Malala*. Discuss how each man in power uses persuasive elements to summon support for his controversial cause.

“At first, it sounded like just another imam giving advice about how to live a virtuous life. Quit smoking, he told men and pray daily . . . Then he began to cry. Stop listening to music, he begged. Stop going to movies. Stop dancing. Stop, he begged, or God will send another earthquake to punish us all. Some of the women began to cry. Terrifying memories of the earthquake the previous year were fresh in their minds; some of them had buried children and husbands and were still grieving. I knew what this radio mullah was saying wasn’t true . . . But these women, many of whom had no education and who were brought up to follow the dictates of their religious leaders, were frightened. As the mullah wept, so did they” (pg. 39).

## Poetry/Science

### Elements of Fire

Fire almost destroys Matt before he can save the world. After reading pages 133-140, read Claude McKay’s poem *The Night Fire*. Create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting what both pieces reveal about fire’s intensity and strength. What differing techniques do the writers use to show how fierce fire can be (i.e., personification, imagery)? Consider visiting your local fire station and learning more about fire’s intensity. Explore the websites [smokeybear.com/elements-of-fire.asp](http://smokeybear.com/elements-of-fire.asp) and [nist.gov/fire/fire\\_behavior.cfm](http://nist.gov/fire/fire_behavior.cfm), interview the school’s science teacher, and research other sources to better understand the elements of fire and fire-safety. After students integrate their findings, have them create fire-safety and informational videos and hold a screening in the neighborhood kindergarten classes. Safety first!

## Audio

### Listen For It

It is an entirely different and wonderful experience to listen to stories rather than read them. It is also an excellent opportunity for students to be exposed to the different rhythms of fluid reading. Use this website [storynory.com/archives/myths-world-stories/](http://storynory.com/archives/myths-world-stories/) to share audio productions of Norse myths with your students. Either set up a listening station in the classroom where students may access these versions independently or create a group exercise where students may listen to and enjoy these readings while also actively listening for reading fluency and emotion. Students can exercise their own reading fluency by recording their favorite myths.

## Music/Literary Analysis

### Become a Music Editor

The action in *Thor’s Serpents* is so vivid and thrilling that one can envision it in a movie. Have your students research the career of music editor. Then as a class, define the literary element *mood* and assist students in identifying certain moods in the novel and the choices the writers make to create these different moods (i.e., use of imagery, setting, characterization, conflict). For this activity, groups will imagine they are teams of music editors that are turning textual scenes into movie scenes with their own added music! Direct each group to choose a scene from the novel. They should discuss what mood is created in this scene, and how the writers create the mood. What details and techniques do the writers use? Groups discuss the type of music that would match the mood of their scene. Have the young music editors bring their songs to class. Groups read an excerpt of the text aloud, play a piece of the matching music, and then present their reasoning and evidence for why this music is the best for the new movie scene.

## Expository Writing

### How Will It All End?

This question fascinates many. With your students, explore how pop culture portrays the apocalypse or end of world battle. Have students brainstorm movies, songs, literature, comic books, etc. that make reference to the apocalypse. View clips, read excerpts, and listen to lyrics from some of their generated brainstorms. What characteristics do they have in common? How do they differ? Identify passages in *Thor’s Serpents* that refer to the potential end of the world Ragnarök. How do the authors describe it? Is there a resolution to their apocalypse? Direct students to integrate and analyze all of these apocalyptic details to help them write an expository piece conveying what they think the “end of the world” battle might look like if they were to create their own form of pop culture art. Encourage students to include topic sentences, descriptive “showing” words, and information gathered in the discussion to support their writing. Create an Art/ELA partnership and have students use their writing to construct or design the actual apocalyptic art for a post-read exhibit!

## Art/Argumentative Writing

### Timeline Challenge

Whether your students read all three novels in The Blackwell Pages series as a whole class, in book club, or as an independent read, this activity will engage and delight your young readers, while tying all three books together. Challenge students to create an illustrated timeline of all major events in the three novels. The tricky part is they may only choose *four* major events from each novel to illustrate and plot on their timeline. Which scenes are the most crucial and essential to the story? The even trickier part? Once students complete the timeline, direct them to *remove* one of the major events from their timeline. Students then write a piece that argues why this event was the *least* essential to the plot, and explain how removing the remaining three would affect or alter the story more. Students should include evidence to support their claims.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions are ideal for whole-class discussion, book clubs, and/or independent reading. Use one as a jumping off point, or use them all. Encourage students to generate their own questions to ask each other!

### Chapter 1–3

1. How do the writers remind us what happened in the previous books in the series? How do they convey this information so it's not just a review of earlier plot lines, but an important piece of the new story?



2. The chapters are told in one of three perspectives, and they alternate among them. Why do you think the authors structure the book this way?
3. Where do we see dramatic irony in this chapter, and what effect does it have on the reader?
4. What is Fen's plan to ensure he doesn't betray either group?
5. Why does Fen use the chess metaphor when explaining his view to Skull?
6. What do we learn about Skull's values in this chapter?
7. What is Fen's view of the pack?
8. How does storytelling help Fen?
9. Owen's primary power is that he can see the future. If you had the chance to see the future, would you want to know what happens? If it were going to happen to someone other than yourself, would you tell the person? Why or why not?
10. How does Laurie react to the news about Fen? What does her reaction reveal about her relationship with Fen? Do you have a relationship in your own life that is similar to Fen's and Laurie's?
11. Is it "absurd" for them to think they can stop the end of the world? What would happen if they didn't try?

### Chapter 4–6

1. The amulet detects trouble for Matt. How does Matt respond to its warnings and his own instincts? What helps you detect trouble in your own life? Do you pay attention to the warnings?
2. Who are the Norns? What role do they play in the group's journey to save the world?
3. Some of the characters seem annoyed with Owen. Are their frustrations with him justified? Why or why not?
4. What clues in the text tell you that Laurie is dreaming a nightmare? Why does this particular nightmare present itself to her? What fears does it reveal?
5. In the passage on pages 76-77, how do the authors show Matt's yearning for home through the details in their writing?

6. What does Jake mean by “man up”, and why is Reyna so surprised to hear him direct this phrase at Matt? Why is Jake angry with Matt?
7. How had Matt misinterpreted his father’s relationship with Uncle Pete?
8. Do you think Jake’s intentions are good or bad in wanting to join Matt? Why? Do you think he should go? Why or why not?

## Chapter 7–9

1. Do you agree with Baldwin that grownups think the worst of teenagers? Explain.
2. Fen thinks, “Leadership is hard.” How do you define leadership? Why is it sometimes difficult?
3. What does Skull reveal to Fen is his motivation for helping the mayor? How does Fen find this information useful? What are the other characters’ motivations for fighting on their chosen sides?
4. Why do the authors italicize the line, “What if it doesn’t have to be that way?” What does this reveal about how Fen is feeling about the future?
5. How does Fen compare himself to the Raiders? Why is it important that he is able to find some common ground between them?

## Chapter 10–16

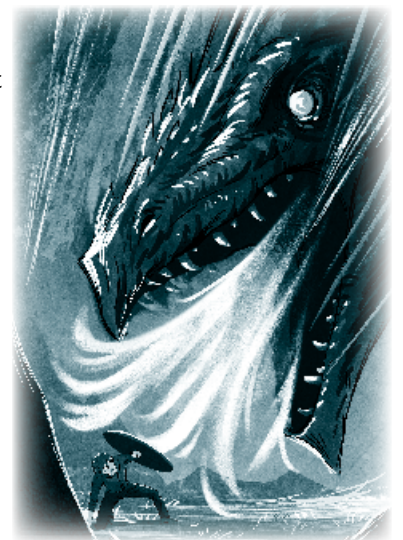
1. If Owen had announced the secret that *both* Laurie and Fen were the champions of Loki, would that have altered the story? How?
2. Why is Astrid’s character pivotal to the story?
3. Could you walk into a situation where you knew you would probably die in the end?
4. What internal conflict does Matt struggle with? Why does he feel it so deeply?
5. What is Matt’s plan for when the war begins?
6. What does the word monster mean to you? Would Matt be a *monster* if he killed Astrid? Discuss.

## Chapter 17–19

1. So far, what have the young characters done to try to alter the myths? What does this reveal about their true selves?
2. Hildar says to Matt, “. . . with rage comes weakness. The best warrior is dedicated . . . it is not about revenge or victory . . . it is about honor.” What message is she trying to pass on to Matt? Do you think this is good advice?
3. How do the writers continue to remind readers that these are just young, innocent kids about to go into battle? Use evidence from the text to support your discussion.
4. As Fen prepares to fight, he doesn’t feel like a hero. He feels afraid. Do heroes ever feel afraid? Can you be afraid and also act heroically? Discuss.
5. Aunt Helen states that, “. . . rules are more suggestions to work around than absolutes to obey . . .” Do you agree with this? Are there instances when this is true? Not true? How is this moment a turning point in the novel? Explain.

## Chapter 20–Epilogue

1. How do we see Matt changing from earlier in the novel?
2. How does Matt deal with the “unfair” situation? Do you think it’s fair? Is anything fair in war? Should it be? Discuss.
3. When Matt breaks down after his granddad’s words, does this show weakness? Explain.
4. How does Matt’s granddad attempt to mend his relationship with Matt? Would you have forgiven him?
5. How does Matt define “real victory”? How does this apply to our real lives?
6. Is the image of the roller coaster effective for what it is trying to convey? Why or why not?
7. Why don’t Laurie and the others reveal the details of what happened in the war to their relatives?



## about the book



**THOR'S SERPENTS**  
 HC 978-0-316-20495-8  
 Also available in  
 downloadable eBook format

For fans of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, the thrilling conclusion to *The Blackwell Pages*, written by New York Times bestselling YA authors, K.L. Armstrong and M.A. Marr.

Thirteen-year-olds Matt, Laurie, and Fen have beaten near-impossible odds to assemble their fellow descendants of the Norse Gods and complete epic quests. Their biggest challenge lies ahead: battling the fierce monsters working to bring about the apocalypse.

But when they learn that Matt must fight the Midgard Serpent alone and Fen and Laurie are pulled in other directions, the friends realize they can't take every step of this journey together. Matt, Laurie, and Fen will each have to fight their own battles to survive, to be true to themselves, and to one another—with nothing less than the fate of the world hanging in the balance.

## also by K.L. Armstrong and M.A. Marr



“This smart, fast-paced, action-packed novel . . . offers readers a solid adventure story that still manages not to skimp on character.”—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

“Loki's Wolves brings Norse mythology to the modern world.”—*School Library Journal*

HC 978-0-316-20496-5  
 PB 978-0-316-20497-2

Also available in downloadable audio and eBook formats



“Delivers plenty of action . . . Keep this series in mind for Percy Jackson fans in search of fresh reading material.”

—*Booklist*

“Intense action, well-crafted scenes and humor-laced dialogue add up to a sure winner. . . . A Hel of a good read.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

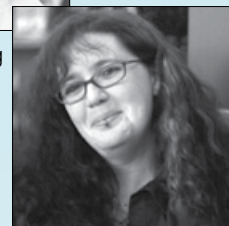
HC 978-0-316-20498-9  
 PB 978-0-316-20499-6

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## about the author



K.L. Armstrong



M.A. Marr



K.L. Armstrong and M.A. Marr had been friends for several years and found themselves spending hours talking about mythology and monsters. One sleepy morning, they realized that M.A.'s second last name is Norwegian. (The similarity between that name and “Midgard Serpent” is totally coincidental.) With that link, in addition to K.L.'s love for tackling creatures in video games when not writing (and sometimes when she's supposed to be writing), their monster and myth fixation, and the books they read with their 11-to 13-year-old sons, they knew they had to write the *Blackwell Pages*. Visit them at [blackwellpages.com](http://blackwellpages.com)



LITTLE BROWN AND COMPANY  
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LittleBrownLibrary.com

This educator's guide was written by Erica Rand Silverman and Sharon Kennedy, former high school English teachers and co-founders of Room 228 Educational Consulting ([rm228.com](http://rm228.com)).