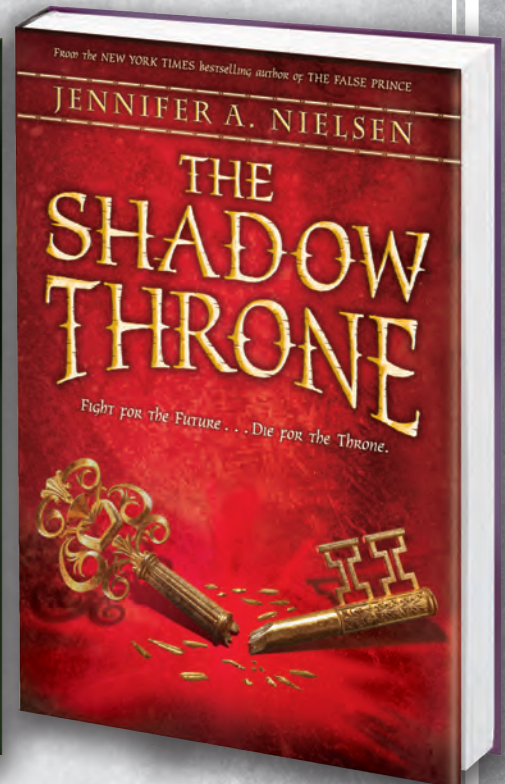
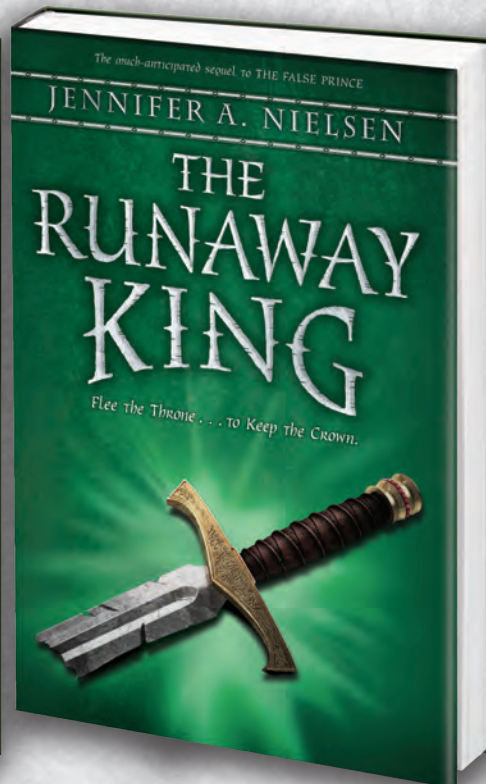


DISCUSSION GUIDE

Grades
5 and up

• THE • ASCENDANCE • TRILOGY •

BY JENNIFER A. NIELSEN



FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE...DIE FOR THE THRONE.

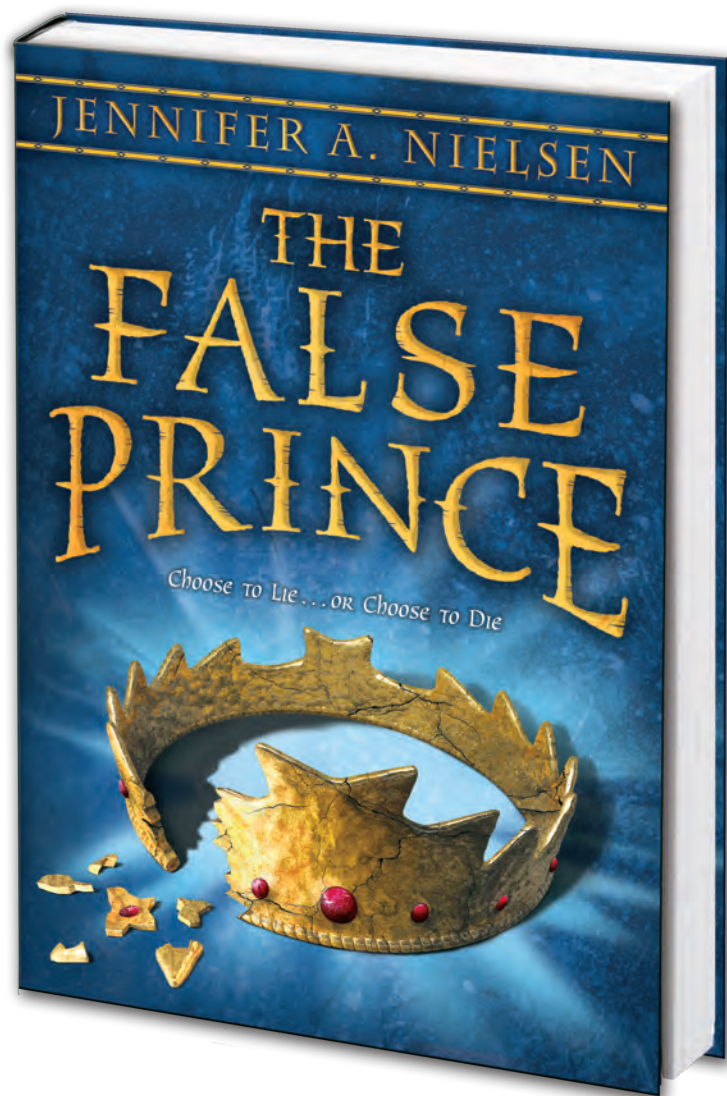
 SCHOLASTIC

Meets Common Core State Standards—SEE INSIDE

BOOK ONE: THE FALSE PRINCE

In a faraway land, civil war is brewing. To unify the kingdom's divided people, a nobleman named Conner devises a cunning plan to find an impersonator of the king's long-lost son and install him on the throne. Four orphans are recruited to compete for the role, including a defiant and clever boy named Sage. Sage knows that Conner's motives are more than questionable, yet his life balances on a sword's point—he must be chosen to play the prince or he will certainly be killed. His rivals will be devising their own plots as well, so Sage must trust no one and keep his thoughts hidden.

As Sage moves from a rundown orphanage to Conner's sumptuous palace, layer upon layer of treachery and deceit unfolds, until finally, a truth is revealed that may very well prove more dangerous than all of the lies together. *The False Prince* is an extraordinary adventure filled with danger and action, deceptions and deadly truths that will have readers clinging to the edge of their seats.



A New York Times Bestseller

A New York Times Notable Children's Book

A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year

A Chicago Public Library "Best of the Best" Children's Book Selection

Winner of the Cybils Award for Middle-Grade Fantasy & Science Fiction

New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing

★ **"An impressive, promising story with some expertly executed twists."**

— *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"A sure-fire mix of adventure, mystery, and suspense." — *The Horn Book*

"[A] page turner..." — *The New York Times Book Review*

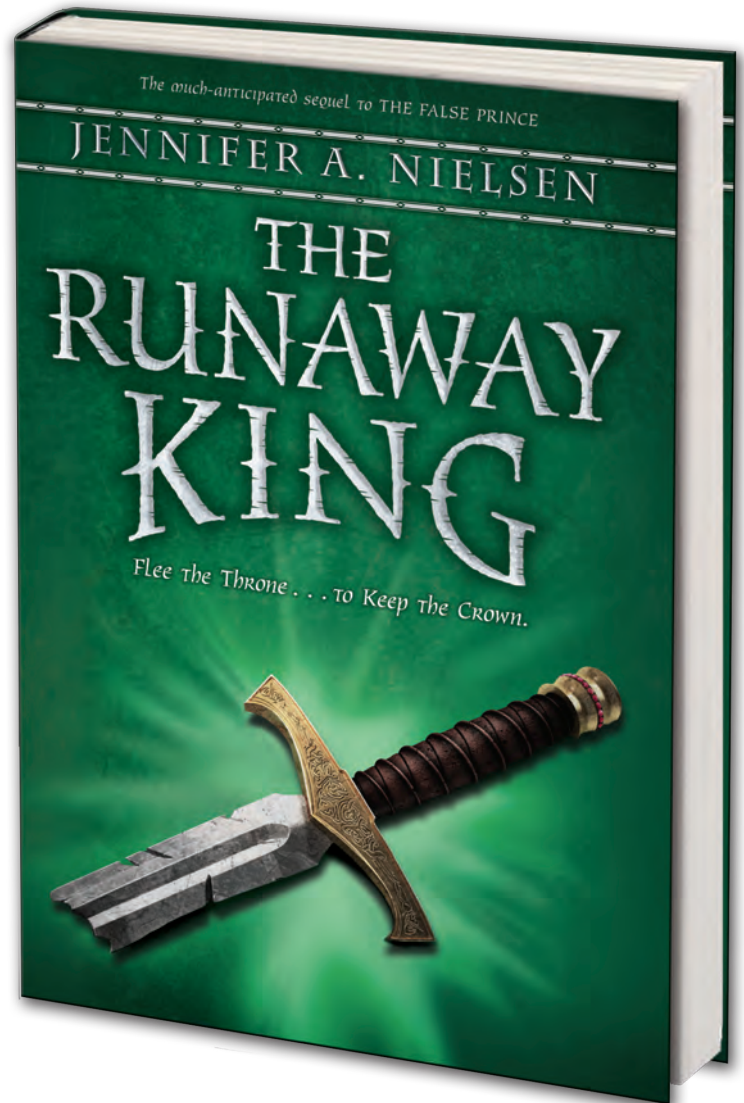
"[A] well-crafted tale...Ruthless ambition, fierce action and plotting, complex characters and lots of sword play and hidden passages keep pages flipping." — *Kirkus Reviews*

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Sage says, "If I had to do it all over again, I would not have chosen this life. Then again, I'm not sure I ever had a choice." Do you agree or disagree with Sage's belief? Has something ever happened to you when you thought you had no choice in the matter?
2. What specific characteristics does Conner see in Sage, Roden, and Tobias that would make each a good candidate to impersonate King Jaron?
3. Conner tells Sage, "Patience is the mark of a ruler." Explain how Sage simultaneously demonstrates and lacks this trait.
4. Sage defies Conner many times and, unlike Latamer, his life is spared. Why do you think Conner chooses to give Sage so many chances?
5. Why does Conner choose orphans to ultimately carry out his plans? How does being an orphan prepare Sage, Tobias, or Roden to become king?
6. Conner claims that he would do anything for his country. Do you find anything noble in his treacherous plans? Is it ever right to kill for something you believe is greater than yourself? If so, when?
7. Why does Conner make the boys compete against each other? Do you think that this competition is a good idea? Have you ever competed against someone? How is competition both a good and a bad thing?
8. Who do you think is Sage's biggest threat in preventing him from becoming Prince Jaron? Why? Who do you think is his greatest ally? Do you think that Sage would have been successful without his ally's help?
9. What qualities do you think a king should possess? Why? Which characters in *The False Prince* possess these qualities? Give examples from the book to support your answers.
10. The themes of class and social identity run throughout *The False Prince*. Give two examples of each theme.
11. Conner wants to fool the whole country with his plan. Do you think his plan will work? Why or why not? Give examples of how each of the following characters is fooled by another character or event in the story: Conner, Mott, Cregan, Sage, Tobias, Roden, King Eckbert, and Veldergrath.
12. Sage has many reservations about claiming the throne. Give three examples of them. Do you believe that it is Sage's duty to his family and the people of Carthya to take his place on the throne?
13. Even though Mott likes Sage and disapproves of many of Conner's actions, Mott stays loyal to Conner. Why? Have you ever done something you know is wrong in order to stay on someone's good side?
14. Explain the dynamics between Sage, Tobias, and Roden. How is it possible for them to be both friends and enemies at the same time? Has there ever been someone in your life that you've considered a "frenemy?" Why did you view them in this way? How do you feel now?
15. Princess Amarinda takes a liking to Sage because he spoke the truth when others around her would not. How is this a form of irony?
16. Before knowing his true identity, Conner lets Sage in on his secret: that he hired the pirates to kill Jaron and to poison the royal family. How does the truth help Sage accept his true identity?
17. How are Imogen and Sage alike? How are they different? Do you think they could ever survive as a real couple? Why or why not?
18. Why does Sage feel that he can never truly be free? Do you think that his fears are justified? In what way? Describe a time when your fears stopped you from doing something.
19. Did you realize that Sage was really Prince Jaron before it became clear in the story? If so, when? Why do you think that the author chose to tell the story with this twist?
20. Do you think Sage made the right decision in letting Roden escape? Why or why not? If you were in Sage's place, would you have done the same thing?
21. Was it difficult for Jaron to let go of his royal past to become Sage? Do you think that it will also be difficult for Sage to be Jaron again?
22. How might Jaron's struggles before he was Sage be different from the ones he will face as King Jaron after being Sage?
23. List three ways in which Sage has already sacrificed for Carthya. Describe a time when you made a sacrifice in your own life.
24. Are any of the characters' motives one hundred percent honest? Which ones? Do you think that it is ever okay to tell a lie? Under what circumstances?
25. Do you think that Sage will be a better king than his father? In what ways? Use examples from the book to support your answers.

BOOK TWO: THE RUNAWAY KING

Just weeks after Jaron has taken the throne, an assassination attempt forces him into a deadly situation. Rumors of a coming war are winding their way between the castle walls, and Jaron feels the pressure quietly mounting within Carthya. Soon, it becomes clear that deserting the kingdom once again may be his only hope of saving it. But the farther Jaron is forced to run from his identity, the more he wonders if it is possible to go too far. Will he ever be able to return home again? Or will he have to sacrifice his own life in order to save his kingdom?



“High adventure abounds with nail-biting drama.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Nielsen tells an exciting, breakneck tale.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“A fast-paced and thrilling read with twists and turns that never let up.”—*School Library Journal*

“As jammed with action and violent swordplay as its predecessor.”—*Booklist*

“A great read.”—*The Horn Book*

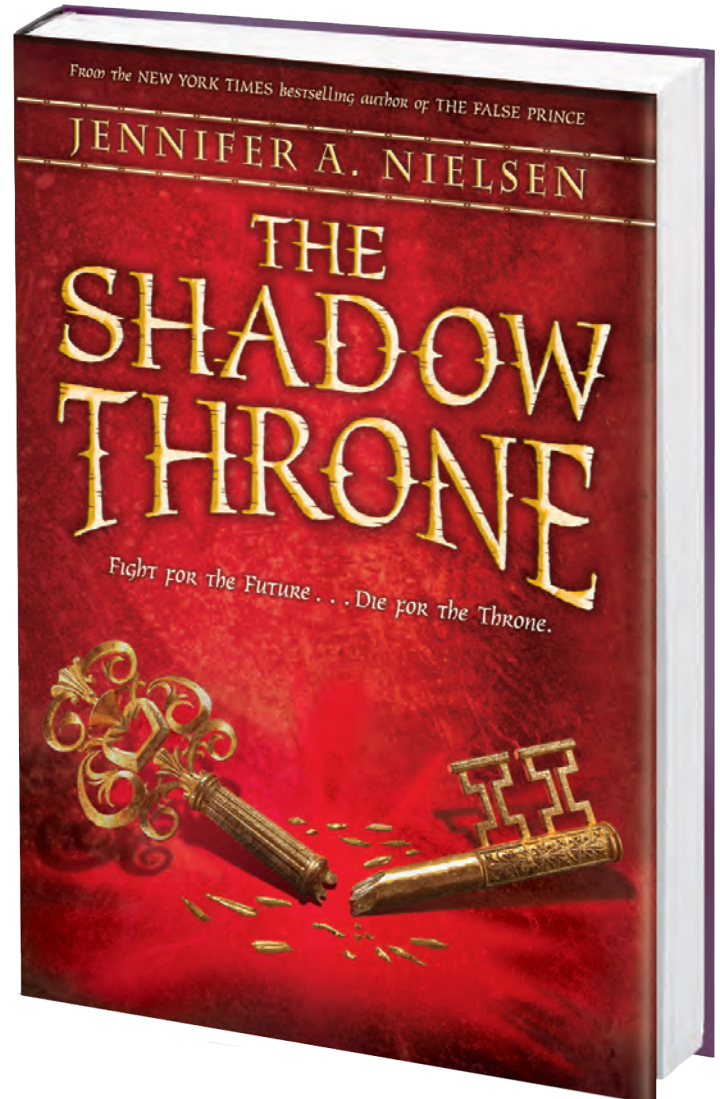
DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Why couldn't Jaron attend his family's funeral? Has there ever been a time when you knew you should have been somewhere or done something, but you couldn't bring yourself to do it? How did you feel afterwards?
2. If Roden had known Sage's true identity before trying to kill him in the garden, do you think he still would have attacked him? Why or why not?
3. Even though Jaron is the rightful heir to Carthya's throne, many people do not want Jaron to be king. Why? Do you think that their concerns are merited? Why or why not? Have you ever been in a position where you believed you could do something that others thought you could not do? How did it make you feel?
4. Many of Jaron's actions have resulted in hurting the people that he cares for the most. He tells Mott, "My crimes may have saved me, but I never meant them to harm you." List two instances in which Jaron's actions hurt others. Have you ever unintentionally caused pain to someone you cared about? How did it make you feel?
5. Jaron risks his identity and life to rescue Nila and to bring her to Libeth. Why is Harlowe so nice to Jaron? How does Jaron repay him?
6. In Libeth Jaron learns that his father had turned a blind eye to Avenians pillaging and murdering farmers in Carthya in order to keep peace. What does this say about King Eckbert and his reign? What did King Eckbert value more—freedom or peace? Which do you think Jaron values more? Why?
7. It seems as though Jaron is always being tested. Name three of Jaron's "tests." Have you ever felt tested by family, friends, or school pressure? Explain how you overcame it, and how you felt afterwards.
8. Once again, Jaron has to become Sage in order to survive. How are Jaron and Sage different? What characteristics of their personalities are the same? If you could have a secret identity, what would it be?
9. Why does Jaron talk Erick and his thieves into breaking into Harlowe's house? When Harlowe and Mott burst in on Jaron and Erick, why don't they stop Jaron? Have you ever had to turn a blind eye to someone who was doing something you knew was wrong? What happened?
10. In what ways does Imogen both help and hinder Jaron's plans?
11. The pirate code is very brutal, yet all of the pirates are loyal to whoever is in charge as long as he is just. Is Devlin a good pirate king? Do you think it would have been easier for Jaron to be the pirate king instead of the King of Carthya? Why or why not?
12. Why does Jaron want the watch that he helped Erick steal from Harlowe? What does the watch symbolize to Jaron?
13. After Devlin brands Jaron a pirate, he says, "You belong to the pirates now." Who or what else has Jaron belonged to? Why can Jaron never be free?
14. Many characters are betrayed in *The Runaway King*. List three examples of betrayal in the book. Have you ever been betrayed? How did it make you feel?
15. List three characteristics that Fink and Jaron share. Do you think Jaron would have survived without Fink's help?
16. Devlin has held a grudge against Jaron since the prince escaped his attempted kidnapping. If that had never happened, do you think that both kings could have ruled in harmony?
17. How did Jaron's time as Sage prepare him for his stay at Tarblade Bay? What skills did he acquire that help him to survive? Have you ever learned something helpful from a bad experience?
18. After Roden leaves Carthya at the end of *The False Prince*, why do you think he wants to become a pirate? Do you think he would make a good pirate king? Explain why.
19. How does Jaron and Imogen's relationship mirror King Eckbert and Queen Erin's relationship? Knowing how King Eckbert ruled and how the royal family and Carthya suffered, do you think that Jaron and Imogen should pursue a relationship?
20. Great leaders often surround themselves with great people. How do Kerwin, Mott, and Tobias each contribute to Jaron's success?
21. Princess Amarinda discovers that Gregor was deceiving Jaron and Carthya. How do her actions help Jaron? How are Amarinda and Jaron alike?
22. Jaron calls Roden "a dangerous enemy but a fierce friend." Do you agree with this? Why does Jaron insist on winning back Roden's friendship as well as trusting him as the captain of the guard? If you were Jaron, would you forgive Roden? Why or why not?
23. List three reasons why Jaron could live a happier life as Sage. List three reasons why Jaron could live a happier life as King Jaron. Which persona do you think Jaron would prefer? Why?
24. In what ways is Harlowe more like a real father to Jaron than King Eckbert ever was? What makes Harlowe a good choice for Jaron's Prime Regent?
25. Is it wise for Jaron to let Imogen stay at Libeth? What are his alternatives? Do you think the Avenians would be able to start a war against Carthya so soon without Imogen?

BOOK THREE: THE SHADOW THRONE

Carthya is at war. But when Jaron's plans and rescue attempts go terribly wrong, the young king must defy the odds in order to save himself, his friends, and his kingdom. His friends and allies are flung far and wide across Carthya and its neighboring lands, the pirates are angry with him, and his army is getting weaker by the day.

In a last-ditch effort to stave off what looks to be a devastating loss for his kingdom, Jaron undertakes what may be his final attempt to save everything and everyone he loves. But even with his lightning-quick wit and sword skills, Jaron cannot forestall the terrible danger that descends on him and his country.



“Gripping...from one cliffhanging episode to the next, wily Jaron’s rebellious, undisciplined spirit carries the day as he battles to save everything he holds dear.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Will thrill fans.”—*Booklist*

DISCUSSION POINTS

Correlated to Common Core State Standards

1. Look at the cover of *The Shadow Throne*, read the summary, and then think of the plots of *The False Prince* and *The Runaway King*. List three things that you think are going to happen in the story. How do you think The Ascendance Trilogy is going to end? Why? (RL.2)
2. *The Shadow Throne* is set in the fictional country of Carthya and its neighboring countries. Look at the map in the beginning of the book, then research places that have the same geography as Carthya. Present a real location that could have been the author's inspiration for the trilogy's setting. Give examples for your suggestion. (RL.3, RI.7)
3. Read the prologue. Why do you think the prologue is set "three weeks before the war?" What purpose does the prologue serve? (RL.1)
4. Since it is set in a fictional place and time, *The Shadow Throne* uses some fictional words as well. Make a list of these words and phrases and their definitions as you encounter them. (RL.4)
5. From what point of view is *The Shadow Throne* told? How does this add to or take away from the story? How would the story have been different if it was told from an omniscient narrator? (RL.5, 6)
6. Choose your favorite scene from *The Shadow Throne*. Rewrite the scene from a different character's point of view. (RL.3, 6)
7. Do you agree with the following statement: "Sacrificing oneself so that others might live was the ultimate act of love" (p. 255)? Why or why not? Give three examples of characters sacrificing themselves for love from *The Shadow Throne*. (RL.1, 2, 3)
8. Which three characters do you think most helped Jaron win the war and bring peace to Carthya? Why? (RL.3)
9. Describe Jaron's feelings for Amarinda. What makes their relationship so complicated? Do you think that he did the right thing by choosing to bless Amarinda and Tobias' relationship? Do you think it was hard for him to do so? Why or why not? (RL.3)
10. Look back through *The Shadow Throne*. List three examples of foreshadowing. Why do you think the author chose to foreshadow these specific events? (RL.5)
11. Discuss Jaron's relationship with Roden and Harlowe. How have these relationships developed over the course of the book? How did Jaron's actions (and/or non-actions) make all of their relationships stronger? (RL.1, 3)
12. Summarize the plot of *The Shadow Throne* in one paragraph. Be sure to include the main ideas of the book without giving away the ending. (RL.2)
13. What do you think fueled Conner's actions towards Jaron at Farthenwood? Why do you think he waited so long to help Jaron? Do you think he redeemed himself? Why or why not? (RL.3, 5)
14. King Jaron had to make many hard decisions throughout *The Shadow Throne*. Examine one of Jaron's decisions by listing the circumstances surrounding it, discussing how Jaron choose to handle it, and analyzing its outcome. (RL.5)
15. Which theme do you think is more important in *The Shadow Throne*—loyalty or love? Why? Use specific examples from the book to back up your claim. (RL.2)
16. Explain how Kippenger's garlin "challenge" to a chained-up Jaron ended up playing a significant role in Jaron's eventual victory. (RL.3)
17. Throughout much of *The Shadow Throne*, Jaron was imprisoned and kept away from most of his friends and allies. Do you think that this makes the story more interesting? Why or why not? (RL.5)
18. Discuss three ways that the following quote applies to King Jaron: "Rulers aren't made just because they sit on a throne. A true king serves his people, protects them, and sees to their happiness if he can." (p. 224) (RL.2, 3)
19. What evidence from *The Shadow Throne* can you find that supports the theory that Carthya will live in peace with its neighbors for a very long time? (RL.1)

COMPARISONS ACROSS THE ASCENDANCE TRILOGY

Correlated to Common Core State Standards

1. In what ways has Jaron grown over the course of the trilogy? List three specific events that demonstrate this growth. (RL.3, 9)
2. Describe the differences and similarities between Jaron and his father, King Eckbert. How do their differences define both of their legacies as king? (RL.3, 6, 9)
3. What is the central idea of *The Ascendance Trilogy*? How is that theme represented in each individual novel? List three ways it has developed over the course of the trilogy. (RL.2)
4. Which three characters do you think most aided Jaron in his ascendance to the throne of Carthya? Why? (RL.3, 9)
5. What traits have Jaron always possessed that make him a good king? Provide examples from each of the three books that show these characteristics in action. (RL.2, 3, 9)
6. If Conner never chose Sage as a possible “false prince,” what do you think would have happened to Carthya? Choose three of the following characters, and write a paragraph about how different his or her life would be if Sage never became Jaron: Roden, Tobias, Fink, Imogen, Amarinda, Erik, Mott, Harlowe, Conner, and Kerwin. (RL.3, 5)

COMPARISONS TO OTHER BOOKS

You can have interesting discussions comparing the plots and themes in *The Ascendance Trilogy* to those found in these books:

Artemis Fowl series by Eoin Colfer

(Hyperion, 2012).

Eight science fantasy novels star a witty teenage criminal mastermind named Artemis Fowl II.

The Arthur Trilogy by Kevin Crossley-Holland

(Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic, 2004).

A teen boy in the Middle Ages faces trials and tribulations on his way to the throne.

The Books of Bayern by Shannon Hale

(Bloomsbury, 2009).

This trilogy of epic proportions is set in a world of fractured fairy tales.

Percy Jackson and the Olympians series

by Rick Riordan

(Disney-Hyperion, 2005).

In this epic adventure, Percy begins a quest across the U.S. in order to reach the gates of the Underworld and prevent a catastrophic war between the gods.

The Last Dragonslayer by Jasper Fforde

(Harcourt Children's Books, 2012).

Fifteen-year-old orphan Jennifer Strange reluctantly assumes the ancient and necessary role of the World's Last Dragonslayer.

The Thief Lord by Cornelia Funke

(Scholastic, 2002).

This book is a fascinating tale of two orphans who join a band of underworld thieves in order to uncover forgotten mysteries and enchanted lands in Venice, Italy.

Peter and the Starcatchers series

by Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson

(Hyperion, 2011).

This rollicking adventure series stars Peter Pan and his friends and enemies in Neverland.

The Thief (Book One of the Queen's Thief)

by Megan Whalen Turner

(Greenwillow/Harper Collins, 1996).

The king's scholar believes he knows the site of an ancient treasure. To attain it for his king, he needs a skillful thief, and he selects Gen from the king's prison. The story continues in *Book Two: The Queen of Attolia* and *Book Three: The King of Attolia*.

Septimus Heap series by Angie Sage

(HarperCollins Children's Books, 2012).

This fantasy-adventure series is about a special young boy with extraordinary magical powers and equally powerful enemies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer A. Nielsen is the acclaimed author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The False Prince* and *The Runaway King*, and *The Shadow Throne*—collectively known as The Ascendancy Trilogy. Jen also wrote the Underworld Chronicles, a humorous middle-grade fantasy series. She collects old books, loves good theatre, and thinks that a quiet afternoon in the mountains is a nearly perfect moment. She lives in northern Utah with her husband, their three children, and a perpetually muddy dog. You can visit her at www.jennielsen.com and follow her on Twitter at [@nielsenwriter](https://twitter.com/nielsenwriter).



Photo Credit: Jeff Nielsen

The False Prince

Hardcover: 978-0-545-28413-4 • \$18.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-28414-1 • \$7.99
Audio: 978-0-545-39166-5 • \$37.99
Ebook: 978-0-545-39249-5

The Runaway King

Hardcover: 978-0-545-28415-8 • \$19.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-28416-5 • \$7.99
Audio: 978-0-545-49769-5 • \$37.99
Ebook: 978-0-545-52951-8

The Shadow Throne

Hardcover: 978-0-545-28417-2 • \$19.99
Audio: 978-0-545-64006-0 • \$37.99
Ebook: 978-0-545-63379-6

This guide supports the following Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature.

Key Ideas and Details

RL.1. Demonstrate understanding of key details in a text; cite textual evidence that supports an analysis of what the text says, as well as inferences drawn from the text. (Grades 5-12)

RL.2. Determine the theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; analyze the development of the themes or central ideas over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text. (Grades 5-12)

RL.3. Describe characters, settings, or events in a story, drawing on specific details in the text; analyze how characters interact, develop, change, and respond to events in the story. (Grades 5-12)

Craft and Structure

RL.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including metaphors and similes; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning or tone. (Grades 5-12)

RL.5. Refer to or explain the parts or structure of a story and how they contribute to the whole; analyze how the author's choices concerning specific parts of a story contribute to its overall structure and meaning. (Grades 5-12)

RL.6. Understand and compare the different points of view in which stories are narrated; analyze how and why the author develops point of view. (Grades 5-12)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RL.7. Explain how illustrations contribute to what is conveyed in a story; compare a written story to its audio, filmed, or staged version; analyze multiple interpretations of a story. (Grade 5 and 7-12)

RL.9. Compare and contrast the treatment of a topic in different stories; compare a fictional portrayal to a historical account; analyze how an author draws from and transforms source material in a particular work. (Grades 5-12)

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This guide was written by Mary Kate Doman, Children's and Young Adult Book Consultant, Author, and Professor.

