

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Grades
3-7

THE UNDERLAND CHRONICLES



By #1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author of *The Hunger Games*

SUZANNE COLLINS

Gregor hadn't planned to fall into another world, or to tumble into an adventure, or to become a hero. But when he follows his little sister through a grate in the laundry room of their New York City apartment building, he hurtles into the dark Underland where humans live uneasily beside giant spiders, bats, cockroaches, and rats.

There, the fragile peace is about to fall apart, and Gregor discovers that a prophecy foretells a role for him in the Underland's future. Little does he know that his quest will change him—and the Underland—forever.



When Gregor falls through a grate in the laundry room of his apartment building into the dark Underland, he finds a world on the brink of war. Gregor's arrival is no accident. A prophecy foretells that Gregor has a role to play in the Underland's future. Gregor wants no part of it until he realizes it's the only way to solve the mystery of his father's disappearance. Reluctantly, Gregor embarks on a dangerous adventure to battle the forces of evil.

Discussion Questions for *Book One: Gregor the Overlander*

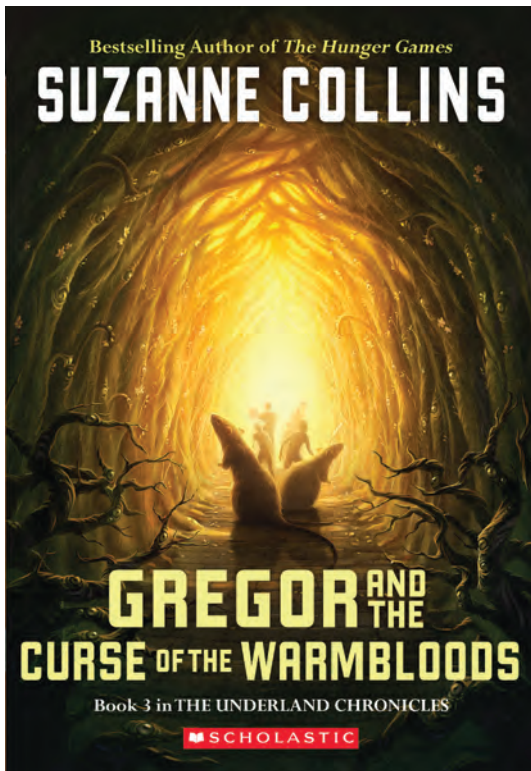
1. Gregor's life isn't as easy or as happy as it used to be since his father disappeared. How has his life changed? Do you think these challenges in any way prepared him for his quest in the Underland?
2. In the beginning of the story, Gregor believes his father will be back, but he has created a rule for himself that prohibits him from thinking about a future that includes his father. Why? How might this aid him in his quest? Does Gregor ever break his own rule?
3. What are some of the descriptions in the book that show how the Underlanders have adapted to their new environment? How do the adaptations help them survive? What might happen to them if they came back to the Overland?
4. The Underlanders see Gregor as the great warrior told of in the Prophecy of Gray, and because of that he is to lead the quest to prevent their annihilation. But Gregor sees himself differently—he says to Vikus, “You’ve got the wrong guy. Really, I promise you, I’m not the warrior.” Explain his feelings. Why is Vikus so convinced that Gregor is the right one?
5. How is Gregor like many soldiers who go off to war? Gregor has many qualities that we associate with the typical American hero. What are they? How are these traits different from those of Luxa and Henry?
6. One of the most interesting characters in the novel is not human, but a rat that Vikus has enlisted to be the guide for the questers. Discuss Ripred's traits that set him apart from the others, both rats and humans.
7. At one point, Ripred says, “Mutual need is a strong bond. Stronger than friendship, stronger than love.” What does he mean by this? In what ways do the various groups have mutual bonds that outweigh friendship and love? Do you think Ripred is wrong?
8. Authors sometimes plant clues in a story to foreshadow future events. Often these clues can be very subtle and hard to pick up on. Look back in the story, and find things that Henry said and did that point to his treachery.
9. At the end of the story, Gregor does not accept Bartholomew of Sandwich's sword, a gift from Vikus. Why? Even after the quest is over and Gregor has helped the Underlanders avoid annihilation, do you think Gregor thinks of himself as a warrior?



Gregor is summoned back to the Underland by the terms of a second prophecy, this time about the Bane, an ominous white rat whose survival may come at the cost of Gregor's dearest treasure – his little sister, Boots. The Bane is destined to bring a World War to the Underland if Gregor doesn't kill it. But when Gregor comes face to face with the Bane, he faces a whole new dilemma. His heart tells him he's making the right decision. Will it be a decision he lives to regret?

Discussion Questions for *Book Two: Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane*

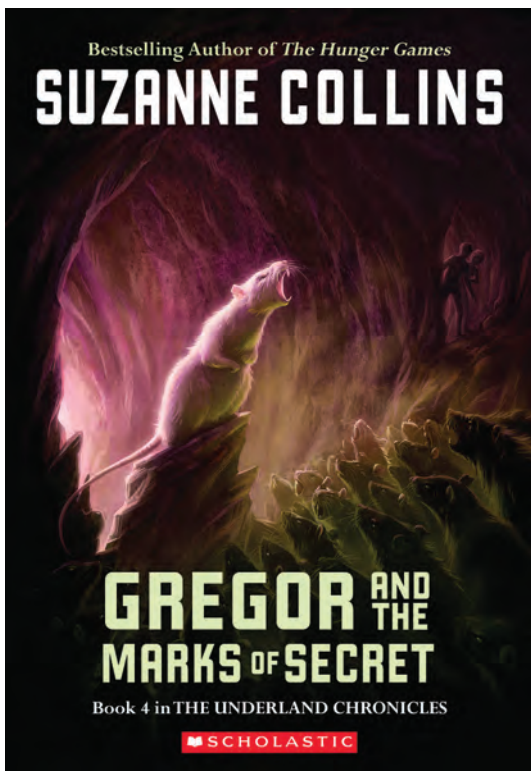
1. In the beginning of the story, we see that Gregor's father is physically and psychologically damaged. In many ways, how is he like a prisoner of war who has been rescued and has returned home? Gregor notes that his father has a hard time separating reality from illusion—why do you think that is?
2. In the Underland, children as young as six years old are training in the arena. How is war a way of life in Regalia? What do you think it would be like to grow up like this? Do you think there is ever hope for reconciliation between warring factions if children are trained at such a young age to fear (and kill) the enemy?
3. Gregor seems to have a bit more “attitude” in the Underland this time around, speaking his mind without much thought or fear of the consequences. He also seems to have a lower tolerance for things that bother him. How do you explain the change in his demeanor from his first journey?
4. Graph out the line to the royal throne of Regalia. Why are Luxa's cousins so awful to her? Is it just because of Henry, or is something more happening here? How do you view Howard? Is he to be trusted?
5. Even Gregor is not immune to feelings of confusion over the relationship between the rats and the humans, but he knows it's wrong to let Twitchtip drown. In what ways does this make Gregor a good leader? Do you think it's possible for a good leader to also be a good warrior?
6. Gregor's secret is that he is a rager. Why does Gregor find this news to be so scary? Do you think Gregor is anything like Ripred? Do you think it's an advantage to be a rager or a disadvantage? Why?
7. According to the Prophecy of Bane, the most essential part of Gregor is his heart. How do you reconcile this with his rager side? Do you think Gregor has come to terms yet with his rager side? Can the two ever coexist?
8. Nature versus nurture is a classic and well-loved debate. Thinking of the Bane in regards to this debate, how do you think the Bane is going to turn out?



With two prophecies fulfilled, Gregor is now focused on the Prophecy of Blood, which calls for Gregor and “the princess,” Boots, to return to the Underland to help ward off a plague. His mom agrees to let them go—on the condition that she travel with them. When they arrive in the subterranean city, the plague is spreading—and one of Gregor’s family is stricken. Only then does he understand his role in the prophecy. He must summon all his power to end the biological warfare, or the warmblood creatures of the Underland will die.

Discussion Questions for *Book Three: Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods*

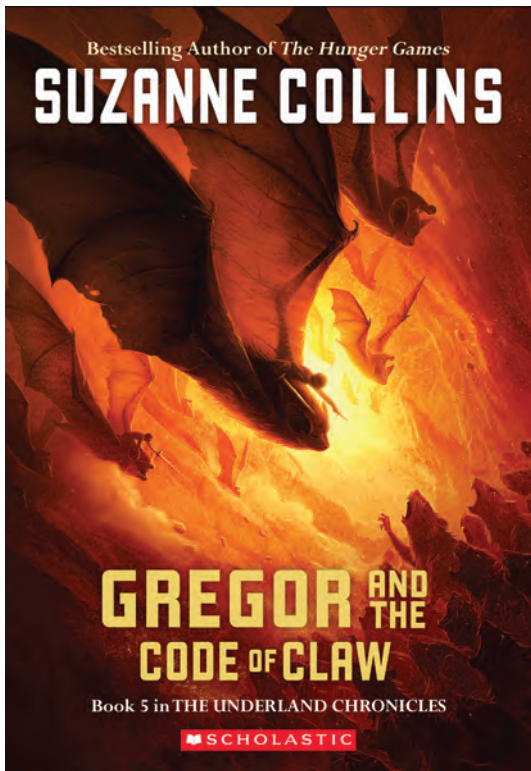
1. Why is the Prophecy of Blood written backwards?
2. Ripred lied to Gregor about how long he would need to stay in the Underland. Do you think it was okay for Ripred to lie? What would have happened if Ripred had told Gregor the truth? Would *you* lie if something important were at stake?
3. In the beginning of the story, Gregor worries about his mom being in the Underland with him—why? How is Gregor different in the Underland when his mom is around? When she is not around? If his mom had not been stricken by the plague and accompanied Gregor on the quest, how do you think this would have affected his quest?
4. Gregor and Ripred often have quite a contentious relationship, yet there are times when they both seem to genuinely care and look out for each other. What evidence is there of Ripred caring for Gregor? And Gregor of Ripred? Why is their relationship so complicated?
5. Why does Luxa almost let Gregor drown in the quicksand? Why has she aligned herself with the nibblers? Why do other groups (such as the rats) seem to hate the nibblers?
6. We learn the story of how Hamnet was forced to flood the garden thereby killing hundreds of rats. Afterward, Hamnet could not stay sane and he fled Regalia. If you were Hamnet, would you decide to live in the jungle or return to Regalia? Which is the bravest choice? Which is the more honorable choice?
7. After telling Gregor and Luxa the story about Hamnet fleeing Regalia, Ripred says, “The more tales told, the less chance of repeating them.” What does Ripred mean by this? What other stories in our own recent history are important stories to hear? Why?
8. We learn a lot about Solovet in this book that paints her in quite an unfavorable light. What bothers Gregor about Solovet? Why do you think Vikus, who in many ways is the opposite of Solovet, seems to tolerate it? In what ways is Solovet like the heads of other military powers in the world? Is it necessary to always rule by force?



Now, with the third prophecy fulfilled, Gregor is drawn into a crisis. For generations, rats have run the mice—or “nibblers”—out of whatever lands they’ve claimed, keeping them on the move. But now the mice are disappearing, and the young queen Luxa is determined to find out why. When Gregor joins her on a fact-finding mission, the true fate of the mice is revealed. It is something far more sinister than Gregor or Luxa had imagined—and it points the way to the final prophecy he has yet to fulfill. Will Gregor’s role as warrior and his abilities as a rager be put to the test?

Discussion Questions for *Book Four: Gregor and the Marks of Secret*

1. Gregor feels like an outsider at home in New York City. He finds comfort in the thought that he can go back to the Underland where he will fit in. How has his idea of “home” changed? Do you think this helps explain why soldiers who come back from war often sign up for more tours of duty even when they aren’t obligated to?
2. Why is Lizzie extremely nervous about going away to camp? In what ways might you compare her and her family to the families that servicemen and servicewomen have left behind to go fight in a war?
3. Why does Ripred tell Gregor that they must kill the Bane and keep their plan a secret from everyone? Would you go along with Ripred’s plan if you were Gregor? Given the past history of Ripred telling lies to get his way, would you doubt or trust him now?
4. Gregor has become more comfortable with being a rager—able to fight without losing awareness of his actions and without fear of his transformation. Why do you think this is? In the battle with the snakes, his friends tell him that he seemed to enjoy killing the snakes. What do you make of this? Why does it bother Gregor so much?
5. The nibblers are like a people without a land, driven by the gnawers from one place to another, never able to put down roots for very long. Historically, what other peoples have had (or currently have) similar plights? Why is this allowed to happen?
6. Should Luxa have declared war on the gnawers? Why or why not? If the humans don’t use force against the rats, how else can they stop them from abusing and killing the nibblers? Is there ever a time when war or force is justified? Why does Gregor feel so torn up over the situation?
7. The author tackles some serious subject matter with the mass killing of the nibblers at the hands of the gnawers. Discuss the ways in which the author might be drawing parallels to genocides in our own history. The Bane blames the nibblers for the troubles of the gnawers. Discuss how one group of people can be hatefully turned against another.
8. Gregor learns that in the Underland, the humans are called the killers. This seems to surprise him. Are you surprised? Do you agree with Luxa that the name will eventually fade away entirely?
9. Besides the marks of secret, what other secrets are there in this story? When is a secret powerful? When is it deadly? Are secrets ever justified?
10. At the end of the story, Gregor says he has no other option but to pick up Sandwich’s sword and fight. Do you agree with Gregor?



Everyone in the Underland has been taking great pains to keep The Prophecy of Time from Gregor. Gregor knows it must say something awful but he never imagined just how awful: It calls for the warrior's death. Now, with an army of rats approaching, and his mom and sister still in Regalia, Gregor the warrior must gather up his courage to help defend Regalia and get his family home safely. The entire existence of the Underland is in Gregor's hands, and time is running out. There is a code to be cracked, a mysterious new princess, Gregor's burgeoning dark side, and a war to end all wars.

Discussion Questions for *Book Five: Gregor and the Code of Claw*

1. Vikus tells Gregor that even in a time of war there is a time for restraint. What does Vikus mean by this? When does this advice end up helping Gregor? Can you think of real-life examples when this advice might come in handy?
2. Were you surprised that Lizzie is actually thought to be the princess? What clues were there from the very beginning of the series that this actually could be the case? Why is she such an unlikely princess? What makes her a good princess?
3. When Gregor learns the truth about how the humans ran the moles out of Regalia, he feels confused about his role in the Underland. Gregor explains, "It was a terrible feeling, to be on the wrong side of what was right." Why does Gregor feel so conflicted? Do you think the humans have the right to claim Regalia as their own?
4. We learn that Ripred's entire family was killed when Hamnet broke the dike. Does this information change your opinion of Ripred? Does this make him a more sympathetic or trustworthy character?
5. Ripred admits that he doesn't believe in the truth of Sandwich's prophecies, and Gregor says that he has been doubting them as well. Why? By the end of the series, it is left a bit open to our interpretation as to whether or not the prophecies have any truth to them. Based on the way the prophecies played out, what do you think?
6. At the end of the story, the humans and the rats form an alliance with one another. How likely do you think this is to last?
7. Gregor says that after the war there will be no place for him, not in the Underland, not in the Overland, and nowhere in between. Thinking about Gregor in the beginning of the first book, how has his idea of being a hero changed? Do you consider Gregor a hero? Do you think he considers himself one? Is the author drawing any parallels to soldiers who return home from fighting in a war?
8. Do you think Gregor has any other choice but to return home to New York City after the war is over?
9. Ripred warns Gregor about going home, because he will still be a rager, and tells him that it's much easier to lose his head than to keep it, meaning that it's much easier to lose his temper than to stay calm in certain situations. How do you think Gregor is going to fare at home in New York City?

Talking About the Books

1. Like many characters in the fantasy genre, and like many of the readers of fantasy, Gregor feels like an outsider in his environment when we meet him in the opening of the first book, *Gregor the Overlander*. Furthermore, he was powerless to control or change things. It is not until he steps out of his world in New York City that he begins to unravel the mystery of who he is and what his place in society is. Why do you think this is? Discuss other fantasy novels with protagonists who also must step outside of what is familiar to them in order to embark on a quest that is larger than anything they've ever known and prevail.
2. How would you react to falling into the Underland? Would you try to escape? Remember that Gregor does try to escape until he knows that his father needs to be rescued. What would cause you to stay and fight in the Underland? How might your quest be different than Gregor's? In what ways might it be the same, and why?
3. The Underland is a fantasy world, but parts of it are based on creatures and settings that are familiar. What are these familiar things? Do you think they make the Underland seem real? Why do you think the author chose to use familiar creatures such as rats but made them six feet tall? How are the other creatures in the books the same and yet different from the ones in our world? If you were to create your own fantasy world, what might you include? How might you alter them to fit into a fantasy world?
4. The prophecies of Bartholomew of Sandwich foretold many things that have occurred in the Underland, including the death of Luxa's parents. When prophecies are fulfilled, is it because of fate or because people shape their behavior to conform to the prophecy? Discuss the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies. Also discuss the belief in free will versus fate.
5. Gregor's journey is that of a hero's quest, a fairly common theme in fantasy literature. How has Gregor changed over the course of the five books? What is his hero's story? Do you have a hero's story? What is it? If you don't feel you have a hero's story, what would your ideal hero's story be?
6. Rats and Underlanders were not always bitter enemies. How is it that now they will fight to the death to eliminate each other? Does this surprise you? Think about recent events in world history, and discuss how the events and attitudes in the fictional society in *The Underland Chronicles* mirror the events and attitudes in real life.
7. The characters in the Underland speak in a very stylized, somewhat old-fashioned way. How does this help define who they are? Why doesn't Ripred talk this way?
8. In many fantasy stories, the main character doesn't plan to go on a quest, but is forced to do so by circumstances, and then rises to the occasion. Discuss the theme of the "reluctant hero" in many fantasies. Why is this an appealing idea? In what ways is Gregor a reluctant hero?
9. Are all the fantasies you have read ultimately about good versus evil? Explore this main theme in the fantasy genre. Discuss what other types of fantasy there may be.
10. Suzanne Collins doesn't shy away from showing the horrible effects of war. Characters die at the hands of others, while others like Gregor's dad suffer horribly and will likely never be the same. Why do you think the author chose to paint this realistic picture of war in a fantasy series where she could have easily gleaned over the violence?
11. Chart how Gregor evolves over the course of the five books. How has he grown? How has he become wiser? How has his rager side evolved?
12. In the Underland, light is synonymous with life. Why do you think this is? How might light be synonymous with life in our own world?

★ “Exceptional . . . well-written, fast-moving, action packed . . . Collins creates a fascinating, vivid, highly original world and a superb story to go along with it.”
—*Booklist*, starred review

★ “Luminous, supremely absorbing . . . wonderful.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Fantastically engaging.”—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

About the Author



Photo: Todd Pitt

Thinking one day about *Alice in Wonderland*, Suzanne Collins was struck by how pastoral the setting must seem to kids who, like her own kids, lived in urban surroundings. In New York City, you’re much more likely to fall down a manhole than a rabbit hole, and if you do, you’re not going to find a tea party. What might you find? The answer to this question can be found in Collins’s first novel, *Gregor the Overlander*.

Suzanne Collins has had a prolific career writing for children’s television. She first made her mark in children’s literature with the *New York Times* bestselling series *The Underland Chronicles*. Collins, who was named among *Time* magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in 2010, continued to explore the effects of war and violence on those coming of age in her award-winning series for young adults, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. Collins lives with her family in Connecticut.

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