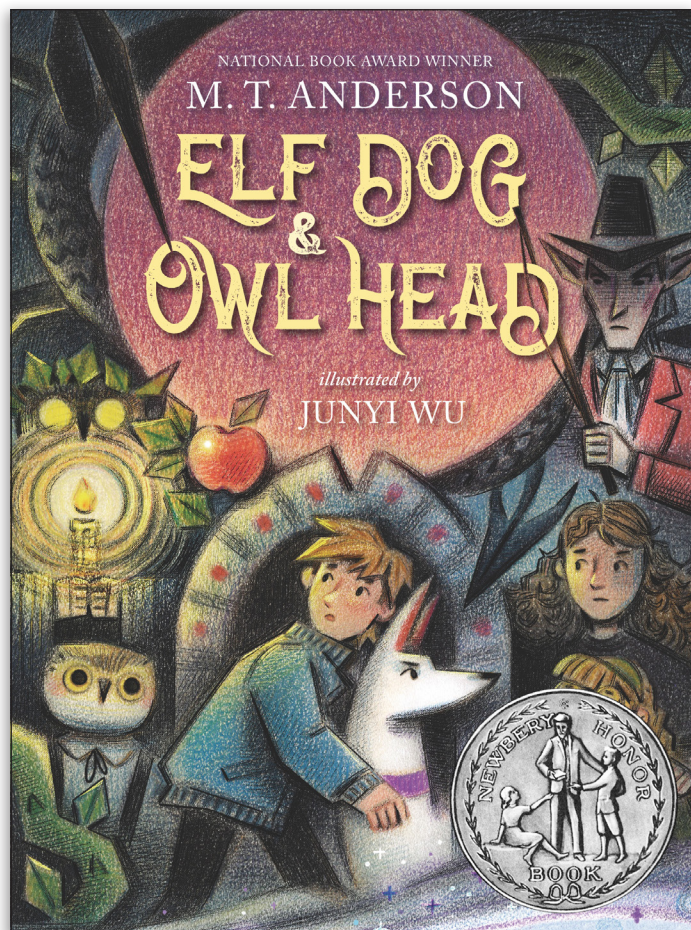


ELF DOG & OWL HEAD

M. T. ANDERSON

illustrated by JUNYI WU

A
Newbery
Honor
Book



HC: 978-1-5362-2281-4

Also available as an e-book and in audio

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

About the Book

Clay has had his fill of home life. A global plague has brought the world to a screeching halt, and with little to look forward to but a summer of video-calling friends, vying with annoying sisters for the family computer, and tuning out his parents' financial worries, he's only too happy to retreat to the woods. From the moment the elegant little dog with the ornate collar appears like an apparition among the trees, Clay sees something uncanny in her. With this mysterious Elphinore as guide, he'll glimpse ancient secrets folded all but invisibly into the forest. Each day the dog leads Clay down paths he never knew existed, deeper into the unknown. But they aren't alone in their surreal adventures. There are traps and terrors in the woods, too, and if Clay isn't careful, he might stray off the path and lose his way forever.

Set in a time like our recent pandemic, this is a magical adventure about a boy and his dog—or a dog and her boy—and a forest of wonders and other worlds hidden in plain sight.



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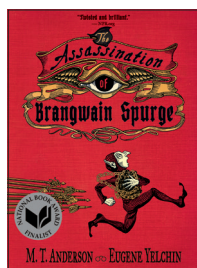


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

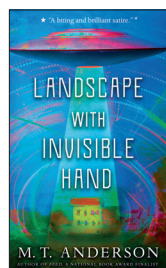
1. We meet the People Under the Mountain on the first page of the book. What did you think of them and their way of life?
2. Have you ever wondered if there are other worlds besides our own? Parallel worlds? Places that we cannot see or hear? Maybe we are not paying attention; maybe there are clues everywhere. What do you think?
3. When Clay's sister Juniper questions calling Fish and Wildlife about Clay being attacked by a bear, because "the wildlife obviously know already," Clay says, "Juniper was the only person who could be a know-it-all and still at the same time know nothing" (page 21). What does he mean? Do you know anyone like this?
4. Clay tries to figure out an appropriate name for his dog. Have you ever named a pet? How did you decide on a name?
5. Think of some things you could do with a magic shaker. What would you sprinkle it on?
6. This book never calls it by name, but it seems likely the author has based the family's situation on the COVID-19 pandemic. How did your family handle the changes necessitated by the pandemic? Did you become closer and do more things together, or did you all drive each other crazy? If you can't remember, what do you think would be your family's response now?
7. Clay can't stand the fact that Elphinore wants to go back to the People Under the Mountain, because he loves her and wants to keep her. What do you think is right for Elphinore? Where does she really belong? And what does it mean to belong somewhere?
8. Why do you think that the author chose owls as the animal whose head would be on the other people?
9. Amos, the owl-head boy, says, "The human-head people never simply walk somewhere. They always burn and flatten" (page 90). What does he mean by this? Do you agree?
10. If it were really possible to have slept for thousands or even millions of years, like the giants in this book, what would you want to show them when they woke up?
11. Clay and Amos explore the forest with Elphinore and find many wondrous things. If you were inventing a magic forest, what would you put in it?
12. Clay does not tell his best friend, Levi, about Elphinore and his magic discoveries but wonders if "he is being kind or being sneaky" (page 105). What do you think? What do you think you would do?
13. Amos the Owl Boy invites Clay to a magical party on Midsummer's Eve. Clay knows there will be scary creatures there and that if he is discovered, it might be the end for him. What would you have done—gone to the party and risked death, or stayed home safely?
14. What do you think the theme or themes of this book are?



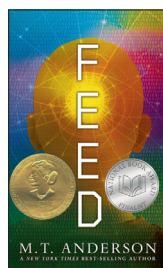
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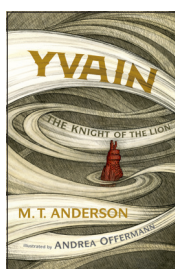
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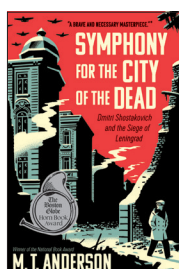
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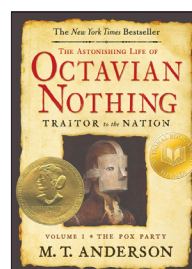
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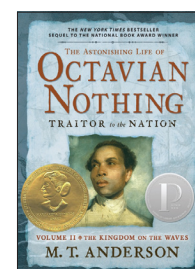
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About M. T. Anderson

M. T. Anderson is the author of *Feed*, a National Book Award Finalist; the National Book Award Winner *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Volume I: The Pox Party* and *Volume II: The Kingdom on the Waves*, both Michael L. Printz Honor titles; *Symphony for the City of the Dead*; *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion*; *Landscape with Invisible Hand*; and many other books for children and young adults, including *The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge*, cowritten and illustrated by Eugene Yelchin, which was a National Book Award Finalist. M. T. Anderson divides his time between Massachusetts and Vermont.

Photo by Sonya Sones



About Junyi Wu

Junyi Wu is the illustrator of several books, including *Two Bicycles in Beijing* by Teresa Robeson; *Beatrix Potter, Scientist* by Lindsay H. Metcalf; and *Scary Stories for Young Foxes* by Christian McKay Heidicker, which was a Newbery Honor Book. Junyi Wu is a graduate of ArtCenter College of Design and is based in Orange County, California.

These questions were prepared by Grace K. Worcester, a former youth services consultant for the Vermont Department of Libraries. Having spent her entire professional life working with books and children, she has served on the Newbery Medal, Caldecott Medal, *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award*, and National Book Award for Young People's Literature committees.

