

Teacher's Guide

MARKED BY MAGIC

Leif Versus the Soul Stealer

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Upper Elementary Edition • Grades 3–5

Includes discussion questions, vocabulary, cross-curricular activities, and Common Core State Standards connections.

About the Book

Twelve-year-old Leif Andreist is brilliant at building mechanicals and reading ancient runes, but in the kingdom of Vederfiel, where everyone expects him to be a warrior like his famous father, those are not the skills that count. Then his life takes a turn for the worse when a mysterious symbol appears on his wrist, a stranger who can fly, without a wingsuit, tries to kill him, and Leif discovers that the "Old Magic" his kingdom abandoned long ago is not gone at all. When his father is captured by an enemy kingdom, Leif sets out on a rescue mission with his best friends, Antony and Adara, and an unexpected (and unwelcome) companion—Terach, his school nemesis. To save his father, and hundreds of innocent strangers, Leif will have to master forbidden magic, outwit a witch, battle an invisible dragon, and learn that the bravest thing he owns is his own mind. Along the way he learns that sometimes we misjudge people.

Genre: Middle grade fantasy adventure (with gears, gadgets, and magic)

Structure: 40 chapters plus an epilogue; approximately 60,000 words

Suggested use in grades 3–7: The novel works well as a class read-aloud in grade 3 and as an independent or small-group novel study in grades 4–7. Chapters are short and action-driven, making natural stopping points for discussion.

Themes at a Glance

- Brains and bravery: there is more than one way to be strong
- Friendship, loyalty, and teamwork
- Fairness: how we treat people who are different from us
- Believing in yourself, even when others underestimate you
- Family, grief, and learning the truth about the people we love
- Doing the right thing even when it is hard, scary, or against the rules

How to Use This Guide

The discussion questions are grouped into eight sections of five chapters each, matching natural breaks in the story. Each section also lists vocabulary words drawn from those chapters. Activities near the end of the guide can be used at any point during the novel study; suggested timing is noted for each. A note for teachers: this guide discusses the whole plot, including the ending, so this is for your eyes.

Contents:

Discussion questions	Pg. 2
Vocabulary	Pg. 6
Activities and Projects	Pg. 7
<i>English/Language Arts</i>	<i>Pg. 7</i>
<i>STEM</i>	<i>Pg. 8</i>
<i>Art</i>	<i>Pg. 9</i>
Common Core Standards	Pg. 9

Before Reading

Build Background and Curiosity

1. Look at the title and cover together. The story is called "Marked by Magic." Predict: what kind of mark might it be, and how could a mark change someone's life?
2. Leif's world has no electricity as we know it. Instead, people build amazing machines from gears, steam, and springs, called "mechanicals." Brainstorm a list of machines the class would invent if they lived in a world of gears.
3. Discuss: Leif's father is the most famous hero in the kingdom. What might be wonderful about having a famous parent? What might be hard about it?

Set a Purpose for Reading

Tell students that as they read, they should watch how Leif changes from the boy in Chapter One who dreads the battle rankings into the boy he becomes at the end of the book. Have them think about what kind of person they want to be by the end of their own story.

Discussion Questions by Section

Section 1: Chapters 1–5 (The Mark Appears)

1. In Chapter One, Leif is great at mechanicals and runes, but those skills do not matter in battle class. Have you ever been good at something that other people did not value? How did that feel?
2. Terach teases Leif about his mother in front of everyone. Why do you think Terach picks on Leif in particular? What clues does the author give about Terach's own life?
3. No one is allowed to talk about Leif's mother. Make a prediction about why that happens? How do you think that makes Leif feel?

4. When the strange symbol appears on Leif's wrist, he hides it instead of telling an adult. Why? What would you have done?
5. Sir Drandurling tells Leif to wear the pendant, then refuses to explain what the symbol means. What do his words "earlier than expected" make you predict?
6. During the sparring match, something takes over Leif's body and he wins, but he feels like a fraud afterward. Why doesn't winning feel good to him? Is a win still a win if you did not earn it yourself?

Section 2: Chapters 6–10 (Wingsuits and a Faceless Man)

1. In chapter 6, Terach says, "I'm Khilafa, so *obviously* I practice sorcery." Why do you think Terach said that? Do we sometimes assume things about people because of how they look, what race they are, or whether they are rich or poor? How do you think it makes people feel when we do that?
2. A faceless stranger saves Leif's life and has the same symbol on his wrist. List the mysteries the author has set up so far. Which one do you most want answered? Do you have any predictions?
3. When Leif tells his father about the man attacking him at the flying fields, his father doesn't believe him. Have you ever had someone not believe you even though you told the truth? Did you feel like Leif or a different way?
4. When Elise, a chorikos (commoner) girl, joins the noble students' math class, some students object loudly. Adara defends her, but Elise refuses Adara's handshake. Why might Elise push away someone who is trying to help her?

Section 3: Chapters 11–15 (Secrets and a Talking Anteater)

1. Adara is rude to Elise after being snubbed, and Leif tells her she is being petty. Leif says, "Just because someone can handle something on their own, doesn't mean they should have to." What does he mean? Do you agree?
2. Leif questions the history he is taught: why would a whole kingdom give up magic because a few people misused it? Why is it sometimes important to ask questions about what we are told?
3. Leif sneaks into Sir Drandurling's secret drawer. Was that wrong, smart, both, or neither? Explain why you think so.
4. When Leif sees Adara fly for the first time, he realizes she's way better at it than he is, but he's still happy for her. What does that tell you about Leif? Have you ever had someone be much better than you at something you love?
5. Krowder the shape-shifter chooses an anteater disguise because of its "marvelous olfactories," even though there are no anteaters in Vederfiel. Leif patiently helps Krowder pick a better disguise instead of getting angry. What does this small moment show about the kind of person Leif is?

Section 4: Chapters 16–20 (Threats, Lessons, and Terrible News)

1. Frayderr threatens Leif in his own bedroom: stop learning about Old Magic, or his father will pay the price. Leif does not tell his father. Do you think that was the right choice? What might have happened if he had told?

2. When Krowder helps save Leif, we see him in his natural form for the first time. What is his nose like? What does that tell you about why he was excited about an anteater's "marvelous olfactories"? Do you ever wish you had a skill or appearance you didn't? Why do you think we sometimes envy other people?
3. Note to teacher: When Leif finds out his mother is from CeTi-al, we get a hint of why his father won't talk about her. One of the reasons I wrote this book was to help kids who are straddling parents who have different belief systems or don't get along. I want them to understand that you don't have to pick a parent. You can love both of them and value both sides of your heritage. This is tricky for kids. Consider whether this would be a good discussion topic for your class.
4. Elise explains that chorikos are not allowed to use the library where she works. Leif is shocked and says she must have misunderstood the rules. Why does that make Elise even angrier? What does Leif learn from this conversation?
5. Sir Drandurling says the secret to Old Magic is concentration, confidence, and belief, not muscles. How is learning magic in this book like learning a hard skill in real life, such as multiplication, swimming, or an instrument?
6. Leif secretly uses a spell to help Matteo win his sparring match against Terach. Was that kind, unfair, or both at once? Should Leif have done it?
7. At the end of Chapter Twenty, Leif learns his father has been captured. Reread the last two sentences of the chapter. How does that change everything? Is it *really* Leif's fault his father was captured? Why or why not? This is a good chance to discuss how other people can try to blame other people for their own behavior.

Section 5: Chapters 21–25 (The Runaway Rescue)

1. Leif grabs the High Minister's scepter with magic to prove Old Magic is real and ends up under house arrest. What was he hoping would happen? Why did his plan backfire?
2. Antony insists on coming with Leif even though it is dangerous. Terach turns out to be hiding in the same wagon, trying to protect his own father. What do all three boys have in common, even though they are so different?
3. Terach says no one cares that his father is in danger because everyone only worries about Leif's famous father. Is Terach right, wrong, or both?
4. At the bridge, Terach throws a rock to mock the sea monster legend, and it nearly costs him his life. What lesson does Terach learn? What does Sir Drandurling mean when he says that believing only in what you can see is "arrogance"?
5. Adara and Elise, who don't get along, team up to bring vital news. Elise insists on carrying the dangerous fuel herself because of an unjust law that would punish her whole family if a noble got hurt. What do the girls' actions show about real courage?

Section 6: Chapters 26–30 (A Frightened City)

1. Sir Drandurling tells Leif that nobody is all good or all bad, and that Terach bullies Leif out of jealousy. What could Terach possibly envy about Leif? Did this surprise you?
2. In Averier, people whisper, look down, and are afraid to answer questions. The class watches a little girl get taken into a building called Diatasso for "re-training." How does the author show that something is wrong in this city without ever saying "this city is bad"?

3. When Leif finds out that they don't have time to wait on the rescue party, he had to do something much harder than he expected. Have you ever had a time you were depending on something or someone for help and it fell through? What did you do?
4. Lord Treben humiliates Leif's father in front of a cheering crowd. Why do you think the author lets Leif (and the reader) see this painful scene?
5. Terach secretly plans to abandon the mission to save his own father, and he and Leif battle. When Leif learns Terach's father is captured, he makes Terach a promise: "We won't abandon your father." Both boys have someone to rescue. How would you feel if you were Leif? What about if you were Terach?
6. Leif's father does not recognize him and calls him an intruder. What do you think the "Dominitious spell" has done to him? Why is this scarier than bruises?
7. When we learn the rescue party was killed, do you think Leif feels guilty about Terach's father? What does Terach volunteering the help Leif tell you about his character?

Section 7: Chapters 31–35 (Globes, Witches, and Dragons)

1. When the airship fails, Leif gives up his seat on the last escape ship to rescue a little girl. He says, "I just did what anyone would," and the mother answers, "Anyone didn't. You did." What is the difference between those two sentences?
2. Leif figures out where the hidden globe must be using geometry: three globes form a triangle, so finding two points reveals the third. How does this scene prove that "school stuff" can save the day?
3. After Antony is cursed, Leif wants to charge back and fight the witch. Terach stops him with Sir Drandurling's saying: "If you can't do what you want, do what you can until you can." What does this advice mean? When could you use it in your own life?
4. Leif must fight a dragon he cannot see, while Terach can see it but cannot hurt it. How do the boys solve this problem? What does it show about teamwork?
5. Drandurling tells Leif that the witch could only hurt him "because you let her," and that he must believe in himself for his magic to work. Why is believing in yourself the hardest magic in the book?

Section 8: Chapters 36–40 and Epilogue (The Truth Comes Out)

1. The real traitor turns out to be Lord Bukari, Terach's own father. Look back: what clues did the author plant earlier in the book? Which clues fooled you?
2. Lord Bukari says he betrayed Vederfiel because his family was always treated as outsiders. Does understanding his reasons excuse what he did? Why or why not?
3. Lord Bukari offers Leif a deal: take your father and go home a hero but leave the last globe alone. Leif is exhausted and tempted. Why does he still say no? Which would you choose? Why?
4. Terach stops his own father to save Leif. What did that choice cost Terach? Why does Leif call him "a true son of Vederfiel"?
5. At the beginning of the book, Leif and Terach are enemies. How did getting to know each other turn them into friends? Are there times we assume things about people? How could getting to know someone change how we see them?

6. Bunter disobeyed a direct order and secretly saved the letters from Leif's mother. Leif's father says, "I have never been more relieved to have my orders disobeyed." When is it right to disobey an order? When is it wrong?
7. At the start of the book, the High Minister called Old Magic treachery and put Leif under arrest. At the end, he admits he was wrong, in front of the whole school. Why is it important for leaders to admit mistakes? We all make mistakes. Why is it important to admit our own mistakes?
8. The book ends with Leif racing upstairs to read his mother's letters and unlock the cryptex. What do you predict he will find? What questions do you want the next book to answer?

Vocabulary

These words are drawn from the novel and grouped by the section where they first appear. For each word, students can find the sentence in the book, predict the meaning from context, then check a dictionary. The right-hand column offers a student-friendly definition.

Sections 1–2 (Chapters 1–10)

Word	Chapter	Student-Friendly Meaning
anticipation	1	the excited or nervous feeling of waiting for something to happen
compatriots	1	people from the same group or country as you
rotund	1	round and plump
vied	1	competed for something
hallucinate	3	to see something that is not really there
persistence	3	refusing to give up
deciphered	4	figured out the meaning of a code or puzzle
parry	5	to block an attack, especially with a sword
rebuke	10	to scold or criticize someone

Sections 3–4 (Chapters 11–20)

Word	Chapter	Student-Friendly Meaning
petty	11	caring too much about small, unimportant things; small-minded
incognito	15	in disguise, hiding who you really are
olfactories	15	Nose - the part of the body used for smelling
sympathetic	17	showing that you understand and care about someone's feelings

syllabary	17	a book or chart of the symbols in a writing system
reluctantly	18	doing something even though you do not want to
concentration	19	focusing all of your attention on one thing

Sections 5–6 (Chapters 21–30)

Word	Chapter	Student-Friendly Meaning
treachery	21	betraying someone who trusts you
clandestinely	22	secretly
subterfuge	23	a trick used to hide what you are really doing
legitimacy	23	the quality of being accepted as proper or official
arrogance	23	believing you are better or smarter than everyone else
spectacle	28	a big public show meant to impress a crowd

Sections 7–8 (Chapters 31–40)

Word	Chapter	Student-Friendly Meaning
vertex	32	a corner point of a shape, such as a triangle
symmetry	32	when two halves of something match or mirror each other
makeshift	34	made quickly from whatever is on hand
hypocrite	39	a person who tells others to follow rules they break themselves
condescension	38	talking down to someone as if they are less important than you
comradery (camaraderie)	40	the warm friendship of a team or group

Activities and Projects

English Language Arts

Vocabulary Extension: Invented Words

The author invents words for her world: mechanicals, chorikos, wingsuit, mech-sword, Endurryll, lumierton, pharmakon dart, Haverim. Have students choose two invented words, write what each one means using only evidence from the book, and then invent one new word that would fit in Vederfiel, complete with a definition and a sentence.

Leif Then and Now (character study; use throughout, finish after Chapter 40)

At the beginning of this guide, it was suggested to pay attention to how Leif changes throughout the book and think about what type of person they'd like to be like at the end of their story. Have the students write a paragraph about one of those "think abouts."

Secret Message Station (after Chapter 3)

Leif and Antony pass coded notes by mechanical bird. Teach students a simple letter-substitution cipher (such as a Caesar cipher, where each letter shifts down the alphabet). Pairs write, swap, and decode short messages about the story. Extension: students design their own cipher key and challenge a classmate to crack it.

The Mad Madame's Theater (after Chapter 11, or anytime)

Madame Madlenka performs history instead of teaching it. In small groups, students choose a favorite scene (Krowder's anteater disguise, the sea monster on the bridge, and the runaway wingsuit work well) and perform it as reader's theater. Afterward, discuss what a performance can show that words alone cannot, and what gets lost.

A Letter from Mother (after finishing the book)

Leif finally receives the letters his mother wrote him. Have students write the first letter. It should include one detail about her life in the hidden kingdom, one piece of advice that fits what Leif went through in this book, and one clue that might open the cryptex.

STEM Connections

Build It, Don't Buy It: Design a Mechanical (anytime)

Inspired by Leif's message-carrying birds and Antony's note-smuggling spider, students design a mechanical that would solve a real problem at school. Each design needs a labeled diagram, a name, a list of materials (gears, springs, levers), and three sentences explaining how it works. Display in a class "Mechanical's Lab."

Wingsuit Flight Lab (after Chapter 13)

Adara wins the obstacle course by changing her wing shape at just the right moment. Students fold three paper airplane designs (wide wings, narrow wings, folded-back wings) and test which flies farthest and which is easiest to aim through a hoop "obstacle." Record results in a simple data table and connect findings to how Leif and Adara fly: wide wings to slow and steady, tucked wings for speed.

Triangle Treasure Hunt (after Chapter 32)

Leif finds the hidden globe by realizing three globes form a triangle. Give pairs a simple map of the school or classroom with two "globes" marked. Using a ruler, students find a third point that makes the triangle balanced (an isosceles or equilateral triangle), then check the spot for a hidden "globe" (a paper circle the teacher placed in advance). Discuss how did math turned a citywide search into a single X on the map?

Social-Emotional Learning and Social Studies

The Fairness Files (during Sections 2–5)

The book shows several unfair rules and attitudes: chorikos may shelve library books but not read them; girls were not allowed in flying class until this year; Khilafa families are looked down on; a chorikos family can be punished for a noble's accident. As a class, keep a running list titled "Unfair Rules of Vederfiel." For each, discuss: who does the rule hurt, who does it protect, and which character pushes back against it? Close by connecting to classroom and community rules: what makes a rule fair?

More Than One Kind of Strong (after Chapter 35)

Terach is strong in battle; Leif is strong in thinking; Adara is strong in flying and standing up for others; Antony is strong in loyalty; Elise is strong in responsibility. Students identify their own "strength type," draw themselves as a member of the rescue team, and write how their strength would have helped on the journey to Fronceit.

The Apology of a Leader (after finishing)

The High Minister publicly admits he was wrong about Leif. Discuss what makes a good leader. Does admitting they made a mistake make you respect them more or less? Why?

Art

Design Your Rune (after Chapter 4)

Leif carves his mysterious symbol into a metal pendant. Students design a personal rune that represents them, draw it large with a written explanation of each part, then create a wearable "pendant" version from cardboard, foil, or clay.

Design an Airship (after Chapter 26)

Have students design an airship. How does it fly? What are the important sections and why?

Common Core State Standards Connections

The questions and activities in this guide support the following Common Core State Standards for grades 3–5. Grade-level numbers are shown with grade 4 as the anchor; the parallel standards apply at grades 3 and 5.

Reading: Literature

- **RL.4.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences. (All discussion sections; "Leif Then and Now")
- **RL.4.2** Determine a theme of a story from details in the text; summarize the text. (Theme questions in Sections 4, 7, and 8)
- **RL.4.3** Describe in depth a character, setting, or event, drawing on specific details. (Character questions on Leif, Terach, Adara, Elise, and Krowder)
- **RL.4.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text. (Vocabulary program, including invented words)
- **RL.4.6** Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated. (Discussion of what Leif knows versus what other characters know, Sections 6 and 8)

Writing

- **W.4.1** Write opinion pieces supporting a point of view with reasons and information. (Book review; "When is it right to disobey an order?")
- **W.4.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences. ("A Letter from Mother")

Speaking and Listening

- **SL.4.1** Engage effectively in collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas. (All discussion sections; "The Fairness Files")
- **SL.4.5** Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations. (Reader's theater; mechanical design presentations)

Language

- **L.4.4** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown words using context clues and reference materials. (Vocabulary program)

Mathematics and Science Connections

- **4.G.A.2** Classify two-dimensional figures; recognize and identify triangles. ("Triangle Treasure Hunt")
- **NGSS 3-5-ETS1** Engineering design: define problems, develop solutions, test and improve. ("Design a Mechanical"; "Wingsuit Flight Lab")

A Note on Sensitive Topics

The novel handles several tender subjects gently but honestly: Leif's mother died when he was a baby; Elise's father died after losing his job unjustly; Terach is betrayed by his own father; and Antony's father is harsh with him, including one moment where Lord Greystone strikes Antony and is stopped by Leif's father. Teachers should preview Chapters 18, 28, and 40 and decide how to frame class conversations, especially for students who have experienced loss or difficult family situations. These threads also offer some of the richest opportunities in the book to discuss empathy, and the story consistently surrounds hurting characters with adults and friends who care for them.