

Teacher's Guide

MARKED BY MAGIC

Leif Versus the Soul Stealer

by Annmarie SanSevero

Middle School Edition • Grades 6–8

***Note: This guide contains spoilers and is intended for teacher/parent eyes only.**

Includes analytical discussion questions, literary analysis, vocabulary and word study, writing prompts, Socratic seminar and debate frameworks, and Common Core State Standards connections.

About the Book

Twelve-year-old Leif Andreist lives in the shadow of his father, the celebrated Hero of Vederfiel, but Leif excels in reading ancient runes and building mechanicals. When a rune appears on Leif's wrist and a stranger who flies without a wingsuit tries to kill him, Leif learns that the official story of his kingdom is a lie: Old Magic was not surrendered but stolen, his late mother came from a hidden kingdom, and his own coming of age threatens a faction that wants Vederfiel kept powerless. When his father is captured and condemned to public execution in the rival nation of Fronceit, Leif mounts an unauthorized rescue with his best friends, his school bully, and a cantankerous teacher who is far more than he appears. The mission forces Leif to confront propaganda, a surveillance state that "re-trains" disobedient citizens, a traitor hiding in plain sight, and the discovery that his sharpest weapon was never a sword. 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 blending gaslamp/steampunk invention with a magic system built on language, concentration, and belief

Structure: 40 chapters plus an epilogue; approximately 60,000 words; third-person limited narration from Leif's point of view

Suggested use in grades 6–8: The accessible reading level makes this an excellent whole-class novel for grade 6, a literature-circle or independent-reading title in grades 7–8, and a strong choice for striving or reluctant readers across the band. Its thematic content (prejudice, propaganda, state control, moral complicity, friendship, and complicated family relationships) supports analysis well above its decoding demands.

Major Themes

- **Prejudice and systemic injustice.** Class barriers against the chorikos, ethnic hostility toward the Khilafa refugees, and gender barriers in flying class are woven into the world's laws, not just its insults.
- **Power, propaganda, and control.** Fronceit's Diatasso, its "re-training" of citizens, and Lord Treben's execution-as-festival dramatize how regimes manufacture fear and consent.
- **Identity and heritage.** Leif's hidden mixed heritage, the slur "half breed," and his father's erasure of his mother's memory raise questions about who controls a family's, and a nation's, story. It's also a great way to help students understand that even when family members have disparate beliefs, you can still love them and accept all parts of your heritage.
- **Moral complexity.** "No one is all good or all bad": the bully becomes a hero, the trusted lord becomes a traitor, the loyal servant disobeys a direct order and is thanked for it.
- **Self-concept and competence.** The magic system literalizes a psychological truth: Leif's spells fail when he doubts himself and succeed when he believes, making confidence a learnable skill rather than a trait.
- **Grief and silence.** Lord Andreist's refusal to speak of his wife, and his destruction (he believes) of her letters, explores how adults' grief can become a child's deprivation.

How to Use This Guide

Discussion questions are organized into chapter sections and progress from comprehension toward analysis and evaluation. The literary analysis section, writing prompts, seminar and debate frameworks, and word-study activities can be deployed at the points suggested or adapted freely. This guide discusses the entire plot, including the identity of the traitor and the ending, and is intended for teacher use only, because of these spoilers.

Discussion Questions by Section

***Note: You know your students/child best. I recommend looking at the younger guide as well and deciding which is best for your situation. They can be combined as well.**

Section 1: Chapters 1–5

1. The novel opens with a public ranking system: students' names descend a geared track in front of the whole school, beneath portraits of the kingdom's great men. What values does this ritual teach Vederfiel's children? What does it cost students like Leif, and what might it cost students like Terach, who is always first? Are skills that society doesn't currently value still important?
2. Terach's cruelest taunt is about Leif's mother: "mommy's not around to confirm anything, is she?" The narrator notes that "not even adults dared mention Lady Andreist." What does this single forbidden subject tell us about Leif's household before we ever see it? How does having forbidden topics help or hurt a family or a society?
3. In the sparring circle, an outside force seems to control Leif's body, even making him taunt Terach with a little dance. Leif wins but feels "dread" and like "a fraud." Analyze the conflict between Leif's desire for his father's pride and his sense of fairness. Which wins in Chapter 6, and what tips the balance?

4. Oliver tells Terach to "go back to the south seas where you belong," and Terach later assumes Leif suspects him of sorcery "because I'm Khilafa." How does the author complicate the bully archetype in these early chapters, before Terach's redemption arc begins? How do we sometimes judge people based on labels instead of getting to know them

Section 2: Chapters 6–10

1. Lord Bukari tells his son, "When you lose a match, you work harder. Find a way to beat them," and Terach goes silent and timid. Compare the three fathers we have met so far: Lord Andreist, Lord Greystone, and Lord Bukari. What does each man demand of his son, and how does each son respond?
2. This is the first year girls may take flying class, and most have already been pulled out by their mothers. Adara stays. Later, Sir Proust escalates the obstacle course only when Adara flies it. What is Proust testing, and what does Adara's response (and his bow) suggest about how barriers actually fall?
3. Leif reasons that flying alone is safe because he read the manual cover to cover; his father retorts, "Not everything you need to know is found in a book." Given how the rest of the novel unfolds, is the father right, the son right, or both?
4. Elise rejects Adara's friendly handshake: "I didn't need your help. I can take care of myself." Consider her position as the only chorikos in a room of nobles who just argued about whether she belongs. Is her coldness a flaw, a defense, or a rational reading of her situation?
5. By Chapter 10, Leif has been attacked, rescued by a faceless man, disbelieved by his father, and abandoned (he feels) by Drandurling. Are there hints that create dramatic irony? What is its emotional effect on the reader who suspects more than Leif knows?

Section 3: Chapters 11–15

1. Leif critiques the official history: "Why deprive everyone for the actions of a few? There had to be more to the story." Later he learns the history is a lie. What is the novel suggesting about official narratives and the readers', or citizens', duty to question them?
2. When Adara punishes Elise with pettiness, Leif says, "Just because someone can handle something on their own, doesn't mean they should have to," and adds that nobles are "supposed to be the ones setting the example." Evaluate this as a statement about privilege and obligation. Does Leif live up to it for the rest of the novel?
3. Leif overhears Drandurling tell his father, "It's not any more evil than Talia was," the first time Leif's mother is named. Analyze how the author uses eavesdropping scenes (here and at the Greystones') to deliver exposition. What are the risks and rewards of letting the protagonist learn by overhearing?
4. Krowder is comic relief, but he is also the book's purest character: earnest, loyal, easily hurt, and incapable of deceit. What narrative work does Krowder do in a story otherwise full of secrets and double lives?
5. Leif breaks into Drandurling's desk; later we learn Drandurling knew instantly and even assigned a cryptex reading to protect Leif from his own snooping. What does this reveal about Drandurling's approach to mentorship, protecting students from consequences or engineering safe ones?

Section 4: Chapters 16–20

1. Frayderr offers Leif a devil's bargain: live a normal life, "forget about Old Magic," and his father stays safe. Leif keeps the threat secret. Map the chain of consequences that follows. To what degree is Leif responsible for what happens to his father, and to what degree is that guilt misplaced?
2. Elise's history lesson: her father was blacklisted by Lord Greystone after "he saw something he wasn't supposed to," then found dead under a bridge; chorikos may shelve the library's books but not read them; a chorikos family is collectively punished if a noble dies through their actions. The author plants these injustices without resolving most of them in this volume. Why might she leave them open? What are positive ways we can confront injustice?
3. Drandurling's magic pedagogy: pronunciation first, then meaning, then intent, then belief, with confidence as the gating factor ("You've spent too many years thinking you don't measure up"). Compare this to a growth-mindset model of learning. Where does the analogy hold, and where does the fantasy exaggerate? Discuss how sometimes believing in yourself is the most challenging magic.
4. Leif secretly trips Terach so Matteo, who showed courage but was outmatched, wins the spar. Defend or prosecute Leif's choice. Consider: the match's fairness, Terach's illegal hits that Sir Rhodri ignored, Matteo's dignity, and the precedent of using secret power to engineer outcomes you believe are just.
5. The note pinned to Leif's sofa by a dagger reads, "Whatever happens to your father now is on your head." Frayderr did not take Leif's father, yet the note claims credit for the consequences. What does this teach Leif (and the reader) about how intimidation works? How could Leif carry false guilt as a result of this?

Section 5: Chapters 21–25

1. Leif seizes the High Minister's scepter with magic to prove his claims and is arrested for "treachery." Analyze the failure: Leif had true information and a real demonstration, yet persuaded no one. What does the scene suggest about evidence, authority, and the messenger's standing?
2. Drandurling reprimands the runaways for selfishness, then announces he will accompany rather than return them, reasoning they would only run again. Evaluate his decision as an adult responsible for children. Is it wisdom, surrender, or strategy?
3. At the Amité Bridge, Terach mocks the sea-monster legend and nearly dies. Drandurling: "Limiting the possibilities of the universe to just what you can see is the height of arrogance and stupidity simultaneously." How does this line operate as a thesis for the whole novel, including Vederfiel's denial of magic and Lord Andreist's denial of his son's testimony?
4. Elise insists on carrying the volatile fuel herself because the law would destroy her family if a noble died through her actions; Adara, who once tormented her, defends her fiercely to Terach. Trace how the Adara–Elise relationship grows. What changed each girl?
5. Drandurling says "will drain your energy and your ability to accomplish what you are capable of. Do what you can. That's all that is required of anyone." Where does the novel test this advice most severely, and does it hold up?

Section 6: Chapters 26–30

1. The author builds Averier's atmosphere through behavior: lowered eyes, whispered conversations, a man who warns, "finish your business and get out, without asking any more questions." Identify the techniques used to convey life under surveillance before anyone explains the Dominitious spell. Why is showing more chilling than telling here?
2. The Diatasso scene: a seven-year-old is taken for "re-training" because she could not "keep control of her emotions," and her parents are told they are "fortunate" not to be charged for it. The crowd watches in silence. Discuss the bystanders. What keeps an entire crowd silent, and is the novel sympathetic to them, critical of them, or both?
3. Treben turns Lord Andreist's humiliation into public entertainment, a jester costume, forced dancing, a festival culminating in execution. Connect this to real-world uses of spectacle by authoritarian regimes. Why is humiliating the hero more politically useful to Treben than simply killing him?
4. Drandurling argues no one is "all good or all bad" and that Terach's bullying grows from jealousy. Cite the steps in his arc.
5. When Leif finally reaches his father's cell, his father does not know him and calls for the guards. Compare this scene to Leif's lifelong fear of disappointing his father. How does the Dominitious spell literalize the novel's anxieties about recognition, approval, and identity?

Section 7: Chapters 31–35

1. On the failing airship, Leif leaves the last escape craft to save a stranger's child, fully aware of his own arithmetic that there will not be enough seats. The grateful mother says, "Anyone didn't. You did." Contrast this private, unwitnessed heroism with the public heroism Vederfiel celebrates on its ranking track. Which kind does the novel value more, and how do you know?
2. Leif locates the hidden globe by reasoning that three globes maximizing coverage would form a triangle, fixing one vertex at Diatasso and reflecting across a line of symmetry. The scene explicitly rewards academic knowledge. How does the author keep this from feeling like a math lesson? What does Antony's statement ("when he starts talking all smart stuff, he's usually right") contribute?
3. After Antony is cursed, Terach, of all people, talks Leif out of a revenge charge and quotes Drandurling: "If you can't do what you want, do what you can until you can." How does this signal a turning point in their relationship? Ask students to discuss how that advice is applicable in their own lives.
4. The invisible-dragon battle forces a perfect division of labor: Terach can see but not harm; Leif can harm but not see; each must literally place his life in the other's called-out instructions. Are there times our success depends on others? What could we do if they fail us?

Section 8: Chapters 36–40 and Epilogue

1. Lord Bukari's confession: "My family would never be anything more than Vederfiel's sniffer dogs... I quietly endured it, biding my time." The novel has shown us the prejudice he describes; Oliver's "locust eater," the whispers, the suspicion. Does this context create sympathy for Bukari, explain him without excusing him, both or neither? Where exactly does explanation end and excuse begin?

2. Bukari's temptation of Leif is precise: take your father, go home a hero, no one will ever know. Leif refuses because of three remembered images, the clinging girl, the frightened citizens, the gray-eyed prisoner. Analyze the craft here: why images rather than arguments? What does the choice reveal about how moral courage and sacrifice?
3. Terach shoots his own father to save Leif, answering Bukari's taunt with, "Like father, like son. Apparently, treachery isn't an issue for me either." Unpack the bitter irony of this line. Is Terach's act treachery or courage, and what does it cost him that the medal ceremony cannot repay?
4. Leif calls his father a hypocrite: weapons kill people, yet no one bans mechswords; but because some people misused magic, he justifies banning it. Evaluate Leif's analogy. Is it sound reasoning? How does the father's lived trauma (he was just mind-controlled by sorcery) complicate the debate? How can a victim's fear cloud a debate?
5. Bunter disobeyed a direct order years ago and preserved the letters; Lord Andreist says, "I have never been more relieved to have my orders disobeyed." Compare Bunter's disobedience with Leif's (running away, breaking laws against magic) and with the Diatasso guard's small mutiny in helping the children. What ethic of disobedience does the novel construct?
6. The final image is Leif racing upstairs with his mother's letters, "ready to learn everything his mother had to say, including how to get into the cryptex." Why is this a stronger ending than the medal ceremony? What does it tell us the series is ultimately about?

Literary Analysis Focus

Foreshadowing and the Mystery Plot

The traitor plot is a fair-play mystery: the author plants Lord Bukari's guilt early while misdirecting suspicion toward Lord Greystone. Evidence students can assemble in a re-read or "clue audit": Bukari is in charge of security when Lord Andreist reports the breach (Ch. 3); Bukari deflects Leif's mention of Old Magic before the High Minister (Ch. 21); the stranger at the inn recognizes Terach as "the Bukari boy" and resembles men who meet Lord Bukari "behind closed doors" (Ch. 26–27); Terach returns from his night excursion changed and grieving before any death is announced (Ch. 28); Drandurling pointedly calls Terach "a true son of Vederfiel" (Ch. 31); and the Rod of Aarif serpent imagery on Bukari's signet ring (Ch. 6) reappears as the bronze serpent staff in his hidden laboratory (Ch. 37). Meanwhile the Greystone red herring is built from the airship drawings on Lord Greystone's desk, his quarrel with Bukari, and Elise's family history. A clue-audit chart (Clue / Chapter / Points toward / Verdict in hindsight) makes an excellent culminating analysis task.

Character Foils

The novel is organized around paired opposites that illuminate each other: Leif and Terach (mind and muscle each envying the other); Antony and Adara (charm without discipline, discipline with heart); Lord Andreist and Lord Bukari (the insider hero and the outsider who curdles into treason); Lord Andreist and Lord Greystone (the father who shows up and the father who demands glory); Old Magic and sorcery (power drawn from one's own heritage and concentration versus power borrowed from a source that "enslaves its users"). Students can select one pair and trace how each member exposes what the other lacks.

Worldbuilding as Argument

Vederfiel is not a neutral backdrop; its institutions make arguments. The ranking track teaches public comparison; the noble/chorikos library rules teach that knowledge is a class privilege; the collective-punishment law teaches that the powerless absorb the risks of the powerful; Diatasso, across the border, shows where such logics can end. Ask students: which of Vederfiel's "normal" institutions look different after the journey to Fronceit, and does Leif return home seeing his own kingdom more clearly?

The Magic System as Metaphor

Dunamaic magic requires correct pronunciation (knowledge), clear intent (purpose), unbroken concentration (discipline), and genuine belief (self-concept), and it fails precisely when Leif panics or doubts. The locked box exercise (Ch. 19) is a miniature of the whole novel: skill is necessary but insufficient until fear is mastered. Students can map each requirement of the magic system onto a real domain (athletics, performance, test-taking) and evaluate the metaphor.

Point of View and Dramatic Irony

Third-person limited narration confines us to Leif's knowledge, so the reader experiences his father's disbelief, Drandurling's withheld secrets, and Terach's hidden grief exactly as Leif does: as frustration. Key scenes to analyze: the overheard argument outside Drandurling's office (Ch. 12), where Leif and the reader receive the same fragment; and Chapter 28, where Drandurling and Terach share knowledge the narration deliberately keeps from Leif, and from us.

Vocabulary and Word Study

Core Vocabulary

Words below appear in the novel. Students should locate each in context, infer meaning, verify, and then use the word in an original sentence about the story.

Word	Chapter	Definition
compatriots	1	fellow members of one's country or group
countenance	5	a person's face or facial expression
nefariously	10	in a wicked or villainous way
melee	10	a confused fight involving many people
deference	13	respectful submission to another's judgment or status
treachery	21	betrayal of trust
clandestinely	22	in a secret, concealed manner
arrogance	23	an exaggerated sense of one's own importance
subterfuge	23	deceit used to achieve a goal
legitimacy	23	conformity to law or accepted standards; rightful standing

petulant	27	childishly sulky or bad-tempered
spectacle	28	a visually striking public display
annihilated	30	destroyed completely
vertex / symmetry	32	a corner point of a figure / balanced correspondence of parts
condescension	38	an attitude of patronizing superiority
hypocrite	39	one who professes standards their own behavior contradicts

Greek and Hebrew Roots: Decoding the Spell Language

The author builds her invented language, Dunamaic, on real classical roots, which makes the novel an unusually rich platform for morphology study. Begin with the language's own name: Dunamaic echoes the Greek *dunamis*, "power" (the root of *dynamic*, *dynamo*, and *dynamite*). Then set students loose on the spells and proper nouns:

- **Tayle Kinois** (the moving spell) echoes Greek *kinesis*, "movement," the root of *kinetic* and *telekinesis*, which is precisely what the spell does.
- **Selas** (the light spell) is the ancient Greek word for light or brightness.
- **Telos** (ends the light spell) is Greek for "end" or "completion."
- **Terminidzo** (stops the witch's spell) suggests Latin *terminus* / English *terminate*.
- **Diatasso** (the re-training prison) is Greek for "to command" or "to put in order", a chilling name for a place that orders minds.
- **chorikos** (the commoner class) evokes the Greek chorus, the collective common voice of drama.
- **pharmakon** (the poison dart) is Greek for drug or poison, the root of *pharmacy*.
- **Deror** (the unbinding spell) parallels a Hebrew word meaning liberty or release, fitting for a spell that frees Antony from a binding curse.

Activity: students compile a "Dunamaic Lexicon" of at least six entries, each with the invented word, its effect in the story, the real root they can identify or hypothesize, two modern English relatives, and a one-sentence justification of why the author chose that root. This converts the novel into a vehicle for CCSS L.6-8.4b (Greek and Latin affixes and roots).

Writing Prompts

Argumentative

1. Was Leif justified in secretly using magic to make Matteo win the spar? Take a position and defend it with evidence from the text, addressing at least one counterclaim (consider Sir Rhodri's tolerance of Terach's illegal hits and the meaning of a victory Matteo did not earn alone).
2. The High Minister arrests Leif for demonstrating magic; at the end, he publicly honors him. Was the original arrest defensible given what the High Minister knew at the time?

Argue your case, distinguishing between a decision that was wrong and a decision that was unreasonable.

3. "Understanding is not excusing." Using Lord Bukari, argue whether the novel asks readers to sympathize with the traitor, and whether it should.

Literary Analysis

1. Analyze how the author develops Terach from antagonist to hero, identifying at least four turning points and explaining how each changes either Terach's behavior or Leif's perception of him.
2. Examine the novel's two competing power systems, mechanicals and magic, and argue what each represents thematically. Why does the resolution require Leif to master both?
3. Trace the motif of locked and hidden things (the secret drawer, the cryptex, the invisible shop, the hidden stairwell, the suppressed letters, the hidden kingdom of CeTi-al). What does the novel suggest about secrets kept "for someone's own good"?

Narrative

1. Rewrite Chapter 28 (or the night Terach disappears in Chapter 27) from Terach's point of view, maintaining consistency with everything the novel later reveals about what he learned and how he felt.
2. Write the first of Lady Andreist's letters to her son. The letter should be consistent with what the novel establishes about her (her CeTi-al origin, her gift for Old Magic, her open-gate philosophy, Drandurling's devotion to her) and should embed a plausible clue to the cryptex's code.
3. Write the scene, which the novel skips, in which Lord Andreist learns that his twelve-year-old son broke into an enemy fortress and freed him. Decide what the father says, what he cannot bring himself to say, and why.

Informative / Explanatory

1. Explain how Lord Treben maintains control over Fronceit's population, synthesizing evidence from the city scenes, the Diatasso scenes, the festival, and Drandurling's explanation of the rondure globes.
2. Drandurling claims, "Old Magic is science. Science the people of Vederfiel have forgotten." Using his fire demonstration (drawing oxygen and a hydrocarbon together, balancing "elemental equations") and the novel's portal, light, and element spells, explain how the author blends scientific language into her magic system and what effect this has on believability.

Socratic Seminar and Debate

Socratic Seminar: The Ethics of Disobedience

Anchor text passages: Bunter's confession and Lord Andreist's response (Epilogue); Leif's escape from house arrest (Ch. 22); the Diatasso guard's decision to help (Ch. 37); Elise's eavesdropping for the kingdom's sake (Ch. 25). Opening question: "In this novel, every hero breaks a rule, a law, or a direct order. Does the book argue that disobedience is sometimes a duty, or only that it is sometimes lucky?" Follow-up questions: Who in the novel disobeys and is

wrong to do so? What distinguishes Bunter's disobedience from Lord Bukari's treason, both, after all, are betrayals of an authority the man served? What tests would the class propose for justified disobedience, and do Leif's choices pass them?

Structured Debate: Security Versus Freedom

Resolution: "A government is never justified in controlling what its citizens may learn, even to prevent catastrophic harm." Vederfiel banned magic and rewrote history after magic was abused; Fronceit "re-trains" citizens for disobedience; both claim safety as justification, and the novel shows the ban left Vederfiel defenseless against enemies who never stopped learning. Teams should marshal evidence from both kingdoms, and from the High Minister's closing admission, before connecting to real-world analogues such as censorship, classified research, and banned books.

Four-Corners Discussion: Who Bears the Most Responsibility?

Post four positions for the suffering in this novel, Frayderr and the CeTi-al rebels; Lord Bukari; Lord Treben; the silence and denial of ordinary people (Vederfiel's erasure of history, Averier's silent crowds). Students choose a corner, defend it with textual evidence, and may migrate as arguments persuade them.

Cross-Curricular Activities

1. The Clue Audit (after finishing; literary analysis)

In teams, students re-examine the text and build the traitor-mystery evidence chart described in the Literary Analysis section, then present a "prosecution brief" against Lord Bukari using only clues available before Chapter 37, and a separate brief showing how the author framed Lord Greystone. Closing discussion: what is the difference between a fair-play mystery and a cheat?

2. Propaganda Workshop (after Section 6; media literacy / social studies)

Lord Treben's regime communicates through spectacle: the festival, the jester costume, the execution posters numbered with a countdown. Students analyze the poster campaign as propaganda (audience, message, emotional levers), then design a counter-poster the resistance might secretly distribute in Averier, accompanied by a paragraph defending its persuasive choices. Connect to historical examples of state propaganda appropriate to your curriculum.

3. Triangulation Lab (after Chapter 32; geometry)

Recreate Leif's reasoning. Give students a city map with one globe located and Diatasso fixed as the apex of an isosceles triangle. Using compass, straightedge, and reflection across a line of symmetry, students locate the third globe, then write a justification in Leif's voice. Extension: discuss why three points maximize area coverage and connect to real triangulation (GPS, cell towers, earthquake epicenters).

4. Engineering Under Constraint (any time; STEM)

Vederfiel's wingsuits are limited by lumiertion fuel that "burns rather quickly," and the plot turns twice on fuel limits (Elise's dangerous cargo flight; the suit Terach smuggles aboard the airship). Teams design a delivery glider (paper or balsa) that must carry a payload (paper clips) a fixed distance with no power at all, iterating through at least two tested prototypes and documenting trade-offs between payload, wingspan, and stability.

5. The Unfair Laws Codex (during reading; civics)

Students compile Vederfiel's and Fronceit's unjust laws and customs as a formal "codex," then, acting as the new advisory council the High Minister might convene after the events of the novel, draft and defend three reforms, anticipating who would resist each reform and why.

6. Soundtrack and Storyboard (after finishing; arts integration)

Students storyboard one high-tension sequence (the airship evacuation, the invisible dragon, the Diatasso infiltration) in six to eight frames with camera notes, then select or compose music for the sequence and justify the pairing in a brief artist's statement tied to the scene's pacing and mood.

Common Core State Standards Connections

Grade 7 is shown as the anchor; parallel standards apply at grades 6 and 8.

Reading: Literature

- **RL.7.1** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis and inferences. (All discussion sections; the Clue Audit)
- **RL.7.2** Determine a theme and analyze its development over the course of the text. (Theme questions; literary analysis essays)
- **RL.7.3** Analyze how particular elements of a story interact (how setting shapes character and plot). ("Worldbuilding as Argument"; Averier atmosphere questions)
- **RL.7.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases, including figurative and connotative meanings. (Vocabulary; Dunamaic Lexicon)
- **RL.7.6** Analyze how an author develops and contrasts points of view of different characters. (POV and dramatic irony focus; Terach POV rewrite)

Writing

- **W.7.1** Write arguments with clear reasons, relevant evidence, and acknowledgment of opposing claims. (Argumentative prompts; debate briefs)
- **W.7.2** Write informative/explanatory texts that examine a topic through selection and analysis of relevant content. (Explanatory prompts)
- **W.7.3** Write narratives using effective technique and well-structured event sequences. (Narrative prompts)
- **W.7.9** Draw evidence from literary texts to support analysis and reflection. (All essay prompts)

Speaking and Listening

- **SL.7.1** Engage effectively in collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own clearly. (Socratic seminar; four-corners discussion)
- **SL.7.3** Delineate a speaker's argument and evaluate the soundness of reasoning. (Structured debate)

Language

- **L.7.4b** Use common Greek and Latin affixes and roots as clues to word meaning. (Dunamaic Lexicon root study)

Mathematics and Science Connections

- **7.G** Draw, construct, and describe geometrical figures and the relationships between them. (Triangulation Lab)
- **NGSS MS-ETS1** Engineering design: define criteria and constraints, evaluate competing solutions, iterate. (Engineering Under Constraint)

A Note on Sensitive Topics

Teachers should preview the following before whole-class work: the death of Leif's mother and his father's suppression of her memory (throughout; resolved in Ch. 39–40); the death of Elise's father after blacklisting (Ch. 18); ethnic hostility toward the Khilafa, including the slur "locust eater" (Ch. 4) and the term "half breed" directed at Leif (Ch. 16), both clearly framed as wrongs; Lord Greystone striking Antony (Ch. 40), interrupted by Lord Andreist; the public humiliation of a prisoner and an execution countdown (Ch. 28–32); the removal of a young child to a "re-training" facility (Ch. 27); and Terach shooting (non-fatally) his own father to save a friend (Ch. 38). All are handled at a middle grade level without graphic content, and each offers a structured entry point into the guide's discussions of prejudice, propaganda, family, and moral courage. The novel's violence is adventure-typical (sword sparring, monster battles) with minimal injury detail.