

# Educator Discussion Guide

## *Illuminae*

By Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff

Louisiana Teen Readers' Choice Nominee 2018

Grade 9-12

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### ABOUT THE BOOK

Most girls are only concerned about running into their ex after they break up, but not Kady Grant. Instead of merely dodging glances from her ex-boyfriend, Ezra Mason, on the day they break up, Kady has to decide if she is going to save his life while fleeing from an invading corporation that is trying to destroy their planet. Though the two make it off of the planet Kerenza alive, they are put into separate spaceships in a fleet consisting of military personnel and refugees from their home planet. Meanwhile, the enemy is tracking their location. Ezra joins the fighter pilots on the *Alexander* while Kady keeps a low profile as she tries to hack into the *Hypatia's* computer system. Ezra tries to contact Kady to salvage their relationship, but Kady wants nothing to do with him. Suddenly, the refugees contract a mysterious plague which is followed by a surprise attack that takes out one of the ships in the fleet. Kady discovers that something is wrong with the *Alexander's* Artificial Intelligence, AIDEN, which is supposed to be keeping them all safe. In order to find out what is really going on, and to save the rest of the refugees, Kady is going to need some help from Ezra as well as a whole lot of time, something they may not have. Told in alternating perspectives through interviews, emails, chat room conversations, ship blueprints, and military and medical files, Kady and Ezra find themselves in a situation far worse than a broken heart.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Amie Kaufman was raised in both Australia and Ireland, and currently lives in Melbourne, Australia. She earned degrees in law, Irish history, and English literature as well as a master's degree in conflict resolution. She worked as a mediator for seven years before beginning her writing career. Aside from her collaboration with Jay Kristoff for *The Illuminae Files* trilogy, Kaufman has also worked with Meagan Spooner on the *Starbound* trilogy. Her book *These Broken Stars*, co-written with Spooner, won the 2013 Aurealis Award for Best Young Adult Novel. Her book *Gemina*, co-written with Jay Kristoff, won the 2016 Aurealis Award for Best Science Fiction Novel.

Biographical information taken from the author's website:

<http://amiekaufman.com/bio/>

Accessed 7 June 2017

Jay Kristoff was born in Perth, Australia where he spent most of his time reading and playing tabletop games. He earned an Arts degree and worked for eleven years in creative advertising in television before pursuing his writing career. In addition to his work with Amie Kaufman, Kristoff has written other book series on his own including *The Nevernight Chronicles* and *The Lotus War* series. His novella *The Last Stormdancer*, a prequel to his book *Stormdancer*, won the 2013 Aurealis Award for Best Fantasy Short Fiction. His book *Gemina*, co-authored with Kaufman, won the 2016 Aurealis Award for Best Science Fiction Novel. Kristoff currently lives in Melbourne, Australia with his wife and their Jack Russel.

Biographical information taken from the author's website:

<https://jaykristoff.com/about/>

Accessed June 7, 2017

## **BOOK AWARDS**

2015 Aurealis Award for Best Science Fiction Novel

2015 Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Young Adult Fantasy & Science Fiction

2016 Audie Award for Multi-Voiced Performance

2016 Australian Book Industry Award for Book of the Year for Older Children (age range 8 to 14 years)

2016 Gold Inky Award for Best Teen Fiction

## **OTHER TITLES IN SERIES**

*Gemina* (2016)

## **PREREADING ACTIVITIES**

### **Artificial Intelligence**

Ask students what they know about artificial intelligence. If they need a concrete definition, you can use this one from Encyclopedia Britannica: "*the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings ... such as the ability to reason, discover meaning, generalize, or learn from past experience*"

(<https://www.britannica.com/technology/artificial-intelligence> . Site accessed 6/20/2017). Have students list all the ways in which artificial intelligence could be used for good purposes. Then have students list all the negative issues artificial intelligence may create. Ask students if they think that artificial intelligence will be possible in their lifetimes – or if it already is – and how they would feel about its existence.

### **Biological Weapons**

Ask students if they know about biological weapons and how they can be used in warfare. Break the students into groups to research different biological weapons and find real-world evidence of their usage and the results that followed. Here are a few websites to start off the research:

1. Avoiding Armageddon from PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/avoidingarmageddon/>
2. Fact Sheets on Specific Bioterrorism Agents from the CDC: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/bioterrorism/factsheets.asp>
3. What are Biological and Toxin Weapons from the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/geneva/bwc/what-are-biological-and-toxin-weapons/>

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. It is evident from dialogue between the characters that this story takes place in a possible future. How do you think this future came to be?
2. Do you think having a large number of supporting characters and showing their individual lives is necessary to the story? What does this add to the book? How might it have been different if they were left out?
3. How does the nontraditional writing style of the book enhance the story? How might it hinder the story?
4. How is censorship used within the book? Why do you think this was done? Does it distract from the story?
5. Kady and Ezra had broken up before the attack on Kerenza. How might their relationship have played out if the attack had never happened?
6. Ezra wanted to stay on Kerenza before the attack while Kady wanted to leave for college. Do you think their relationship could have worked out if it was long-distance? Why?
7. How has the situation, fleeing the attackers through space, affected Kady and Ezra's emotions towards each other? Give examples from the book.
8. A lot of the teens who are refugees are recruited to join the military aboard the ships. Do you feel like these teens had a choice in whether or not they joined – besides sabotaging their chances like Kady did? Did these teens seem to want to be in the military? How would you feel in this situation if it happened in your lifetime?
9. Kady has to go to group therapy and it does not go well, why is this so? Is there a way it could have worked? How could it have been better? Is there anything Kady could have done to make it better?
10. Kady's journals show us another side to her personality that she does not show in therapy. How do these journals help Kady with her grief? If Ezra had kept a journal like hers what might his entries be about? How does Ezra deal with his grief?
11. A chat between Kady and Byron reveals that Kady does not know what a book is. Why do you think books do not exist in this future? What else do you think may no longer exist?
12. "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny" is a quote from Wole Soyinka that Byron uses in the book (p. 200). What do you think this quote means? Why do you think it was included in the book? How do you think the characters interpret it?
13. Why do you think Kady's mother asked for her transfer requests to be denied? How do you think Kady felt when she learned her mother did not want her to be transferred? How do you think Kady felt when she lost her mother? Why do you think she tried to hide it from Ezra?
14. In a chat between Captain Boll and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Carlin, they discuss the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" What significance does this poem have to the story? Why do you think this poem is still being remembered in this future? What other works or quotes do you think will survive into the future and why?
15. Do you agree with Captain Boll's decision to purge Hangar Bay 2? Why do you think she made that choice? What would you have done in the same situation?

16. AIDEN says that human emotions get in the way of tough decisions, do you agree with this statement and why? Find instances of decisions being influenced by emotions in the book and discuss their outcomes. Can you think of instances in your life when emotions have influence decision-making?
17. How does Kady's relationship with AIDEN change over the course of her rescue mission? Why does this happen?
18. Why do you think Kady allows a part of AIDEN to "live" after what it has done? Do you agree with her choice? Why or why not?
19. Kady and Ezra are both protagonists, but only Kady goes on to save the day. Do you feel like they had equal focus in the book? Why or why not? How might the story play out differently if Ezra was on the rescue mission? Who do you identify with more and why?
20. At the end of the book we find out who has been compiling all of the documents presented in the book and who they are sent to. Was it obvious throughout the book that this was going on? Support your answer with examples from the book.

## **CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

### **Language Arts:**

- This book is written by two authors and utilizes a variety of storytelling methods. Have students work in pairs or in groups to write a short story using different methods like those used in the book – text messaging, documents, reports, emails, or other forms. Instead of creating an original short story students could use these methods to retell a well-known fairy tale.
- Ezra sends Kady images made up of words in some of his emails. Have students try their hand at making these types of images by writing concrete poems. Completed poems could be put on display or compiled into a class book.
  - For examples of concrete poems see this virtual gallery:  
[http://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions\\_events/exhibitions/concrete\\_poetry/](http://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/concrete_poetry/)

### **Science:**

- Kady is a skilled hacker whose expertise helps her solve several problems throughout the book. It is mentioned that she needs to perform some basic coding for Byron at one point, a skill anyone can learn today. Have students participate in an Hour of Code session on Code.org. For an activity with similar theming to the book have the students try *Flatverse*. If your current technology poses issues with this particular activity, the webpage allows you to search for other activities based on grade level, experience, subject, length, and type of technology available. The website also contains lesson plans on coding.
  - <https://code.org/learn>
- Ezra and Kady live in a future where space travel between planets is possible with large groups of people. Have students look into how far our technology has come in terms of space travel. A good place to start would be Discovery's Virtual Field Trip to NASA for Space Day. The webpage includes the 30 minute Virtual Field Trip video as well as lesson plans for various grade levels.
  - <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/Live/of-the-people-space-day-2015.cfm>

### **Art:**

- Though the book makes use of diagrams and blueprints for the layouts of the spaceships, a map of Kerenza – the planet Kady and Ezra are from – is never shown. Using descriptions from Kady and Ezra’s initial interviews, try to create a map of their hometown. It could include a diagram of their escape route and the locations of where the spaceships picked up survivors.
- One of the lesser-used methods of writing in the book is the use of flyers promoting activities and good hygiene. Have students make their own flyers that would fit in with the setting of the book. These could promote activities mentioned in the story or anything that students think would fit within the setting.

### **Social Studies:**

- Ezra, Kady, and the other survivors from their planet become refugees after fleeing their home from attackers. Though the book is set in space in the distant future, there have been and continue to be instances where evacuees need to leave their homes behind. Have students research past and current refugee/evacuee crises. Compare and contrast these with Ezra and Kady’s experiences in the text. Discuss the needs of the refugees and how they could be helped by others.
- HotChalk provides a lesson plan on grief counseling, which is something Kady goes through over the course of the story. This lesson plan has students discuss the feelings they associate with grief, explains the 5 Kubler-Ross Stages of Grief, and has them write out journal entries about the topic. This is a good way to tie into the story by having students learn what Kady may be feeling and what other methods would have helped her in her grief. An additional activity to this could be to have students regularly keep a journal to explore their feelings like Kady does in the book.
  - <http://lessonplanspage.com/ogriefcounselingkublerrossstages912-htm/>

### **Vocabulary:**

Acquit	Demoralizing	Resentment
Aforementioned	Forthcoming	Spatial Awareness
Anomalies	Intermittent	Typographical
Astute	Lateral	Unprecedented
Compilation	Litigation	Wind-chill
Conceptualize	Pathogen	
Conscription	Refinery	

### **RELATED WEBSITES**

#### **The Big Idea: Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff**

<http://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/10/22/the-big-idea-amie-kaufman-and-jay-kristoff/>

A discussion with the authors about the idea for the story, their writing process, and how they designed the book.

#### **Could Some Alien Worlds Be More Habitable Than Earth?**

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/01/140117-exoplanets-superhabitable-planets-space-astronomy-science/>

National Geographic article about planets that various lifeforms could potentially live on.

**The Illuminae Files**

<http://www.randomhouse.com/teens/illuminae/index.php>

The book series' website which contains character profiles, videos, and diagrams of the space ships as well as information on the second book in the series.

**Selective Service System**

<https://www.sss.gov/About>

The official website of the Selective Service System which provides information about who needs to register and how to register for the United States draft.