

Educator Discussion Guide

NYXIA

by Scott Reintgen

Louisiana Teen's Readers' Choice Nominee 2019-2020

Grade 9-12

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Emmett Atwater, a Detroit teenager, has been offered the opportunity of a lifetime. Babel Communications has offered to pay Emmett and nine other teenagers from around the world \$50,000 a month for life in return for traveling to the planet Eden and mining nyxia, a sought-after substance nicknamed “the new black gold” which can transform into just about anything with your mind. The catch? Only eight of the chosen ten will be allowed onto the mining team. While traveling through space, the teens enter into a brutal competition in which they must fight, run through virtual reality racecourses, and manipulate nyxia. Emmett is determined to win, but it becomes hard to fight against friends. Who will emerge victorious?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Reintgen (pronounced rankin) has a Bachelor of Arts in English from UNC-Chapel Hill and a master's degree in teaching from North Carolina State. After receiving his degrees, he spent time teaching English and Creative Writing in his home state. He believes strongly that every child has the right to see themselves in the works they read and hopes to encourage future writers. He currently lives with his wife and family in North Carolina, where he continues to work on stories that he hopes his family and fans will continue to love.

Biographical information taken from the author's website and an interview done for Technician, the school newspaper for North Carolina State University, found at

<https://itspronouncedrankin.com> and

http://www.technicianonline.com/arts_entertainment/article_9f1ba558-8e1a-11e8-a983-5b1fc8ece5df.html

Accessed 3 October 2018.

BOOK AWARDS

2018 Blue Spruce Award Nominee

OTHER TITLES IN THE SERIES

Nyxia Unleashed (2018)

Nyxia Uprising (2019)

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Research Space Missions and Famous Astronauts

Break students into small groups. Ask them to research space programs and/or famous astronauts from around the globe. Students should prepare a presentation in whatever format they want (PowerPoint, poster board, video clip, etc.). After each group has presented, have the students discuss ways that these programs were similar and different from each other. Ask them to brainstorm what would occur if these astronauts were mixed together into the same program. Do the students think that the astronauts would be able to put aside their cultural differences to work together?

What would you do with great wealth?

Emmett and his fellow competitors are offered substantial rewards for winning the competition and successfully mining nyxia. Ask the students to imagine what they would do if they were suddenly offered a large sum of money in return for three years of unknown service, far from home and everyone they know and love. How would they react? Would the student be willing to sign the contract? Students should reflect on potential obstacles, concerns, and challenges that would occur from signing such a contract.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In some ways Emmett's world is more advanced than our current society. But some things are still the same. Give examples of these similarities and differences. What do you think led to these differences and similarities?
2. Early in the novel, Emmett very easily manipulates Babel Communications employees and his fellow competitors. What in Emmett's past has allowed him to develop this skill set? Why do you think he chooses to manipulate some individuals and not others? Give examples from the text.
3. Constantly being observed, judged, and in competition can affect the way that individuals feel about themselves and their behavior patterns. What are some of the ways that the Babel competition has changed Emmett and the other members of *Genesis II*?
4. How do each of the competitors express their native cultures while still assimilating to their new environment?
5. Teamwork and competition are major themes of this novel. How do these two opposing forces influence the ways that characters develop their own personalities? How do they affect relationships between the competitors?
6. Why do you think that Babel Communications chose to have the competitors come from so many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds?
7. At the beginning of the novel, Emmett believes that the competitors are the ones that "hold the power" because Babel needs them to get more nyxia. Defoe, however, insists that Babel has all the power. Who is right? Give examples from the text to support your position.
8. Emmett says that the men and women in his family "weren't free, not really." What do you think that he means by this?
9. Do you think that forming alliances is a smart move for the competitors? What would you do in this situation?
10. When Emmett crushes Roathy's throat in the fighting pit, he insists that he was only defending himself. Do you believe his argument? Why or why not? Support your position with evidence from the novel.
11. Kaya believes that she can see "colors" surrounding the competitors that represent their inner nature. What color do you think you would be? Why?

12. Emmett mentions that there are different types of friends. There are friends that you have when you are young because they are closest to where you live. Then there are friends that you make as you get older and come to know who you are as an individual. Do you think any of the competitors are truly friends? Or are they just friendly with each other because they are forced close together? Explain.
13. What hints does Reintgen give the reader about how Babel chose the teens participating in the competition?
14. How do you feel about what happened to Kaya? Were you expecting her story to end that way? Who do you feel the blame of her fate rests with? Explain.
15. Do you believe that Vandemeer came to truly care about Emmett and Kaya as individuals and not just the source of his next paycheck? Support your position with evidence from the text.
16. Babel employees were worried that the competitors would become numb because of the virtual reality programs used in the competition. Do you think that prolonged exposure to virtual reality could affect your thought processes and ability to discern reality from fantasy?
17. Day 189, page 252 of the book, the competitors arrive at Tower Space Station and see the other team for the first time. How would you have reacted if you suddenly discovered you had ten more people to compete against? Explain.
18. When the members of *Genesis 11* need to choose a ship captain for the Waterway challenges, the competitive nature between the crew members interferes. Emmett becomes captain by starting to issue orders even those he doesn't have the highest score. How would you have handled this situation? How would this have affected the team?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Social Studies:

- Emmett's ancestor escaped slavery using the Underground Railroad. The "bronze key" that was created to remove this ancestor's shackles has been passed down through the generations as a symbol of their family history. Students will research the Underground Railroad and first-hand accounts of escaped slaves. Students should compare their research to the depiction of Emmett's ancestor's flight, looking for authenticity of experience. Possible resources include:
 - <https://cropper.watch.aetnd.com/cdn.watch.aetnd.com/sites/2/2017/03/Underground-Railroad-Education-Guide.pdf>
 - <http://underground-railroad.lunchbox.pbs.org/black-culture/shows/list/underground-railroad/home/>
 - http://www.eiu.edu/eiutps/underground_railroad.php
- Privilege is a major theme throughout the novel. Students will discuss this topic, with the goal of being capable of defining the concept of privilege and identifying examples of privilege in their lives or in the world in which they live. Follow this by breaking students into groups and having them look for examples of privilege in the novel. A possible lesson plan resource on these topics can be found at: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/diversity/social-justice/social-justice-lesson-plans/talking-about-race-and-privilege-lesson-plan-for-middle-and-high-school-students>.
- Names and their meanings hold a special importance for Emmett and Azima. Students will research the meanings behind their names. Students should prepare a brief presentation on the history of their name, what it means, and what relation (if any) that meaning has to their

personality. Follow with a whole class discussion on how Emmett and Azima’s names reflect their personalities, cultures, and family histories. Possible resources include:

- <https://www.behindthename.com/>
- <https://www.ancestry.com/learn/facts>
- <https://www.names.org/>
- Psychology: Through the course of the novel, Emmett experiences different motivations for wanting to win the competition. Students will participate in a short lesson about the different theories of motivation, the differences between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Have students view the videos at <https://study.com/academy/topic/ap-psychology-motivation-in-psychology-lesson-plans.html>. Follow this lesson with a discussion about Emmett’s motivations at the beginning, middle, and end of the model. Using evidence from the text, students should label these motivates as either extrinsic or intrinsic.

Fine Arts:

- Throughout the novel, Emmett turns to music as an extension of his emotional state. For example, he listens to soothing beats for comfort and more intense rhythms before combat in “the pit.” Have students create a soundtrack or playlist of ten songs that they believe Emmett would listen to throughout the events of the novel. Each song should reflect a specific competition event, character interaction, or plot point. Students should submit “linear notes” explaining their song selections using evidence from the text.
- “Pictionary with Clay”: Nyxia is a substance capable of morphing into anything based upon the will and imagination of the individual controlling it. Students will:
 - Break the class into two teams.
 - Have a representative from each team sculpt an object or creature while their teams try to guess what it is. The objects should reflect tools competitors would need during the competition and/or while on Eden’s surface. Creatures should reflect flora or fauna the competitors would be likely to encounter on Eden’s surface.
 - Afterwards have a whole class discussion about possible tools needed for mining, surviving in a hostile environment, and other objects or creatures they created.

More information about this game can be found at: <https://artsandactivities.com/creativity-exercises-and-games-with-clay/>.

Science:

- Students will research natural resources that are obtained through mining. Students should consider the uses of the extracted resources, the processes used to obtain them, risks for the environment and the miners, and the history and future of the industry. Possible resources include:
 - <http://www.digintomining.com/high-school-resources>
 - <http://www.nma.org/>
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/mining/statistics/allmining.html>
 - <http://naturalresources.house.gov/>

Health and Physical Education:

- Emmett and the rest of the teens spend almost an entire year in intense physical and mental competition with each other. Students will research the effects of prolonged physical and mental competition on the human body. Students should write a short essay synthesizing their research. Possible student resources include:

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/socially-relevant/201506/the-psychology-competition>
- <http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/mind-body-and-sport-how-being-injured-affects-mental-health>
- <https://www.gssiweb.org/sports-science-exchange/article/sse-43-exercise-effects-on-children's-health>

Language Arts:

- Students will demonstrate their knowledge of characters by writing a short fanfiction piece of their own. *Nyxia* ends on a cliffhanger with Emmett launching his pod towards the surface of Eden. Students will write a fanfiction of what they imagine Emmett’s landing and first few moments on Eden will be like. Allow a few volunteers to share their stories aloud with the class. The class should then read the excerpt from chapter one of *Nyxia Unleashed*, the sequel to *Nyxia*. The excerpt can be found at: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/541338/nyxia-unleashed-by-scott-reintgen/9780399556838/>. Follow up with a discussion comparing the fanfiction writings with the excerpt. Resources on using fanfiction in the classroom can include:
 - <http://inclusiveclassrooms.org/inquiries/fan-fiction-examples-lessons-and-scaffolding>
 - <http://www.ssauro.info/2017/02/06/bringing-fanfiction-to-the-english-classroom/>
 - <http://blogs.slj.com/connect-the-pop/2013/07/english/ways-to-welcome-fanfiction-in-schools/>
 - <http://blogs.slj.com/connect-the-pop/2013/07/english/fanfiction-what-educators-really-need-to-know/>

Vocabulary:

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| Perpetuity | Interlopers | Extrajudicial |
| Privatization | Pinwheels | Southpaw |
| Galaxies | Riposte | Higashi |
| Fathom | Insurmountable | Wasanbon |

RELATED WEBSITES

International Space Station

https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/main/index.html

Explore various aspects of the international space station, experiments conducted onboard, and what it’s like living in space.

***Nyxia* by Scott Reintgen, TeachingBooks.net**

<https://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=57700>

Lists several interviews with author Scott Reintgen.

SpaceX

<https://www.spacex.com/about>

Explore one company’s vision for the future of space travel.