

ODIN'S RAVENS

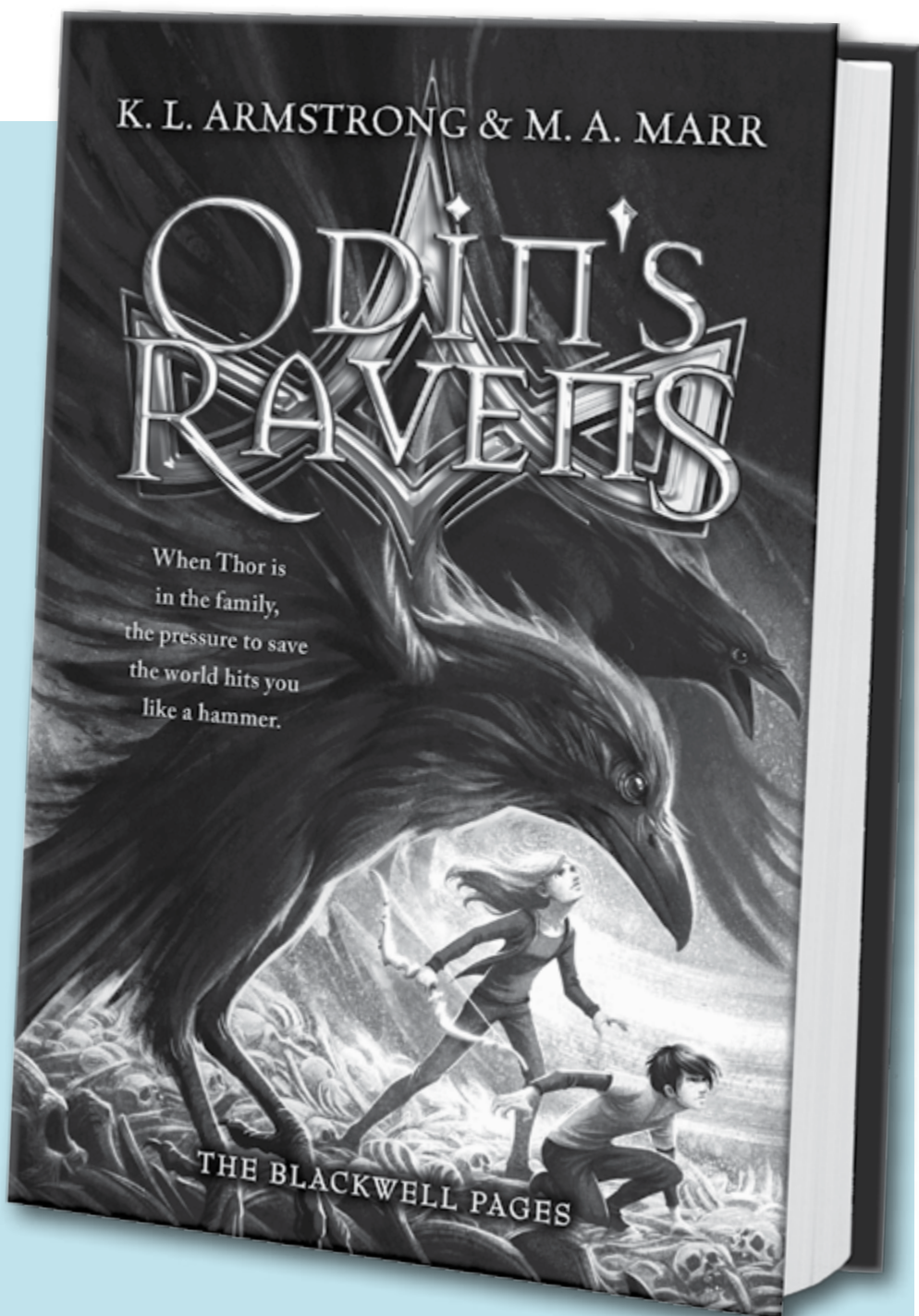
THE BLACKWELL PAGES

Curriculum connections

- ❖ Mythology
- ❖ Adventure
- ❖ Friendship

Ages 8 - 12

By
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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES:

Make Your Own Amulet!

The amulet plays an important role in *Odin's Ravens* and connects Matt to his family roots. Have students interview several family members and ask them about objects that are important to the family or that represent something about their families. Based on this information, students will create their own amulets. The amulets may be in any shape or form and should depict the important family item(s) on them. Students may also write a descriptive piece explaining their amulets and what they represent. Celebrate students' writing and creativity by inviting family members into the class to share the amulets and their significance!



Who's the Messenger?

Ravens serve as messengers in the novel. Students should pick or create their own personal messenger animals and illustrate them through drawing, painting, collage, etc. Ask students to write an accompanying report that describes the types of important messages their messenger will share and the animals' physical characteristics and magical powers that enable them to do so. Students can present their messengers to the class, explaining why they chose or created these animals to be their messengers.

SOCIAL STUDIES/MYTHOLOGY:

Matt faces the Midgard Serpent in *Odin's Ravens*. This is just one variation of the serpent story that exists in many different cultures. The serpent takes on many roles in each cultural telling. The myths listed below are a sampling of various serpent myths.

Have students engage in a group research activity where they research one of the myths below. Students will create either posters or power point presentations for the class where they identify and teach the following to their classmates: 1. What does the serpent represent in this particular myth? 2. What does the myth explain? 3. What types of inferences can you make about the culture based on these myths?

Or, as an alternate activity, students could find the myths below and have groups pick two and compare and contrast them.

- Rainbow Serpent in Aboriginal Australia
- Snakes in Ancient Egypt (Apopis, the demon of chaos)
- Snakes in Medieval Europe (the basilisk)
- The Umai-hulhlya-wit serpent of the Diegueño Indians of California
- Hindu serpent myths

Teacher Resources:

mythencyclopedia.com/Sa-Sp/Serpents-and-Snakes.html

bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/worldhistory/double_headed_serpent/teachers_resources.shtml

education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/rainbow-serpent

VOCABULARY:

Clue Me In!

Odin's Ravens is an incredible resource for learning vocabulary in context! As the students read, direct them to find words that are unfamiliar to them and to list the words and page numbers in their notebooks. Encourage students to try to define them as they go, using context clues. If students have difficulty, they may also refer to a dictionary. For example: *crevasse*: a giant hole. "The giant stood in a *crevasse* up to its thighs...." (page 2).

Follow-Up Vocabulary Project

With a partner, students choose 3-4 words from their vocabulary lists. For each word, partners use an 8.5 X 11" sheet of paper. On the paper, they will write the word and its part of speech, write a definition, write an original sentence using the word, and create a picture illustrating the word's definition. Create a Vocabulary Village by hanging their posters all around the classroom and offering prizes when students use the words correctly during class discussions.

CREATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE NOVEL:

What's the Message?

Odin's Ravens is filled with rich themes that are waiting to be explored. After students have finished reading the book, have them write an essay in which they explore one of the following themes. Encourage students to use specific details from the text to support their points:

- crisis and family betrayal
- good guys vs. bad guys (and who's who)
- the more powerful vs. the less powerful
- the girls vs. the boys

DEBATE: WHO'S IN CHARGE OF THE AFTERLIFE?

Towards the end of the book, the readers learn that the afterlife is led by two groups of women: Helen of Hel and Hildar and her Valkyries. Using evidence from the novel, have students debate which of the women is more powerful.

As a starter, students can think→pair→share. Students can then create the rules for the debate (one student speaks at a time, a second student from the same side can add a point, then a student from the other side rebuts with her/his own point, only the student with the talking stick can speak, etc...).

After the rules are set, the students choose their sides and sit on opposite ends of the room and commence the debate. Students may change sides if they are persuaded by the other side's argument. Encourage students to use specific references from the text to support their points.

Teacher Resource:

Look up Philosophical Chairs for further information and handouts.

The teacher may want to follow up with a post-debate exit question: what characteristics make a person powerful?

HOW ART ILLUSTRATES WRITING:

Illustrations in novels often tell their own stories. Have students analyze the illustrations throughout the *Odin's Ravens*. How do the illustrations add to the story? How would the novel be different if there were no illustrations?

After reading the novel, students can create a comic strip (3-5 boxes) and draw and write how they think the last book in the series will begin. Students may use any medium to create their strips.

The teacher can post the completed work in the classroom and students can do a "gallery walk" and vote on which beginning is most likely to happen in the final novel of the trilogy.

ACT IT OUT!

Even A Little Can Make a Difference

In *Odin's Ravens*, the action just explodes off the page. Scenes in the novel lend themselves to dramatization.

Working in groups, the students can take several key moments in the book (i.e.: meeting Helen in Hel, Matt's grandfather's betrayal, the Midgard serpent, Matt gets and loses Mjöltnir, the final battle) and write them out as scenes to perform before the class. After students have had time to work on and practice the scenes, they can act them out.

After each scene is performed, the class discusses the importance of that scene in the novel: plot, themes, conflict, etc.

WORK THE CRAFT!

A Close Read: Going Behind the Curtain!

A close reading of the text can reveal much about *Odin's Ravens* such as the writers' choices, writing techniques, and/or strategies. Understanding this helps students better understand the novel as a whole.

Have the students work in small groups to do a "close read." Give them excerpts from the book with questions to analyze the writing craft.

Some examples:

- Reread the very first paragraph of the book. How do the authors create tension through their writing? How does this tension affect the mood?
- Fen is the only one who can communicate with Garm, the guard dog of Hel (pages 22-27). What does Fen have in common with the guard dog? How are they different? How do you think the authors' choice of using Fen to communicate with the guard dog and not Matt or Laurie affects the action of the novel?
- When the descendants of the North finally escape Hel, they are attacked by a herd of bison and then saved by the Valkyries, led by Hildar. Hildar tells the descendants: "Each time we rescue you is considered an interference, and it will upset the balance of things" (page 103). How and why do the writers use foreshadowing here?
- In chapter 7, Hildar reveals that Matt is Vingthor (pages 122-125). Reread the pages and list the reasons that Hildar gives him for why this is true. How does Hildar persuade Matt? How do the authors use punctuation and brief sentences in this excerpt to build the tension throughout the scene?
- Matt's grandfather tries to justify his choice of leading the monsters to Matt (pages 189-190). What persuasive techniques do the authors use to show Matt's grandfather's position on Matt's future at Ragnarök? Why does his grandfather try to convince Matt that Matt will lose at Ragnarök? How does his grandfather's betrayal affect Matt?
- Owen tells Fen: "I think you should know I won't hurt Laurie... not like you will" (page 215). How is this an example of foreshadowing? Infer what it hints at and how it affects the action of the story.
- Matt retrieves Mjölfnir and then gives it to the draugr (pages 263-265). What are Matt's reasons for doing this? What are the consequences of this choice? How does it affect the other descendants of the North? Why? How do the authors use details to reveal Matt's character and leadership qualities?
- Laurie undergoes a crisis of her own when she realizes that she, and not Fen, is the true descendant of Loki (pages 293-297). Why is this so hard for her? What internal and external conflicts does she now face?
- Matt tells the draugr that they have been misled by Glaemir, and they now have to decide whether to go with Helen or the Valkyries (pages 327, 331). How do the draugr decide? How do Helen and Hildar "assist?" How do the authors build the tension between Hildar and Helen?

WHO'S THE REAL HERO?

Have the students choose one of the Descendants of the North and list evidence from the book proving why he/she is the real hero.

Students should also choose a hero from another novel they read in class or on their own, a cartoon/tv show, a movie, a comic, a historical figure, someone from their family, etc... and create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two heroes' qualities and what makes them heroes.

After researching the two heroes, students may participate in a "hero hullabaloo," a gathering where the students attend as their characters and chat and with other heroes about their deeds and adventures.

RESEARCH THE AFTERLIFE...

Hel, the afterlife in *Odin's Ravens*, is presented in specific detail. Different cultures have their own explanations for the afterlife and descriptions of what it looks like.

As a class, students research several different depictions of the afterlife as explained in various cultures. Working in pairs or in groups, students create dioramas and then present them to the class. In their presentations, students should explain how their chosen depictions differ from the one in *Odin's Ravens*.

BULLYING: FEN VS. SKULL

Have the students reread the altercation between Fen and his cousin Skull (pages 333-342). How does Skull bully Fen? What does he do to try to make Fen lash out at him? How can this be considered bullying?

If possible, the teacher can invite the social worker or a guidance counselor to discuss bullying, its effects as well as prevention.

Students can research the topic of bullying online and then create anti-bullying posters to hang around the school.

Teacher Resources: stopbullying.gov

SCIENCE

What's In The Water?

In *Odin's Ravens*, the descendants of the North must cross a river full of decaying bodies to cross back to the land of the living. In the process, Matt is grabbed and pulled under water. The Descendants realize how dangerous the water is.

Guide your students in researching the water they drink and what "lives" in it. Students can also research different types of bottled water to discover what makes each type different and what may be added to the different waters.

Students present their findings in small groups. Each student should take notes on what he/she has learned from each presentation.



QUESTION GUIDE:

Chapters 1-3

1. In chapter 1, Matt believes “If they failed? Then the world would be plunged into endless winter” (page 15). Describe some characteristics of winter. What do you think the authors mean by “endless winter?”
2. How might we characterize Fen in these first three chapters? Define hero and anti-hero with your class. Debate whether Fen is a hero or an anti-hero and support your opinion with evidence from the text.
3. Helen is Laurie and Fen’s aunt. Based on what you’ve read so far, can the descendants of the North trust her? Why or why not?
4. Chapter 3 is told from Owen’s point of view and is very short. What do we learn about the conflict the descendants of the North face in the rising action in this chapter?

Chapters 4-6

1. How do the descendants of the North plan to change the myth cycle? Based on what you’ve read so far, predict whether they will be successful.
2. The descendants of the North find a boat and use it to exit Hel. Matt pushes the boat off the shore and then is grabbed. Matt decides to let go. Why? What would you do in that situation? Why? What might this action reveal about Matt’s character?
3. When Matt lets go of the oar, Fen has a crisis of conscience. What do the kids decide to do? Why?
4. Fen seems to take on a leadership role as the chapters continue. Has he become Matt’s second-in-command? Why or why not?
5. How would you describe the relationship among Matt, Laurie, and Fen?
6. We first see the ravens in chapter 5. What characteristics do ravens have? What might the ravens in the story symbolize?

Chapter 7-9

1. Chapter 7 is the first chapter from Laurie’s point of view. Why do you think the authors chose to write the first six chapters from the boys’ point of view?

2. Owen and Laurie seem to have a special connection. Why might he seek her out more than the others?
3. Laurie has been given a gift of a bow, but no arrows. What does the bow symbolize? Why doesn’t it have any arrows? Matt gets Thor’s magical goats. What might this gift symbolize? Why?
4. Matt and Fen work as a team when there’s a potential threat (page 149). What does this tell you about them as characters? As leaders?

Chapters 10-12

1. Based on what you’ve read so far, how is Matt growing up? How is he maturing, and how do you know?
2. When Fen is accused of killing Baldwin, Laurie stands up for him. What does this reveal about Laurie as a character? Does she have heroic qualities? Why or why not?
3. Matt learns about his grandfather’s betrayal at the end of chapter 12. How does this change him as a person? How would it change you to learn that a family member you trusted had betrayed you?

Chapters 13-15

1. Matt is trying to deal with his grandfather’s betrayal and then he has to face the Midgard Serpent. How are the two incidents linked?
2. Fen and Owen are at odds throughout these chapters. What do they disagree about and why? How is their distrustful relationship significant?



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Chapters 16-18

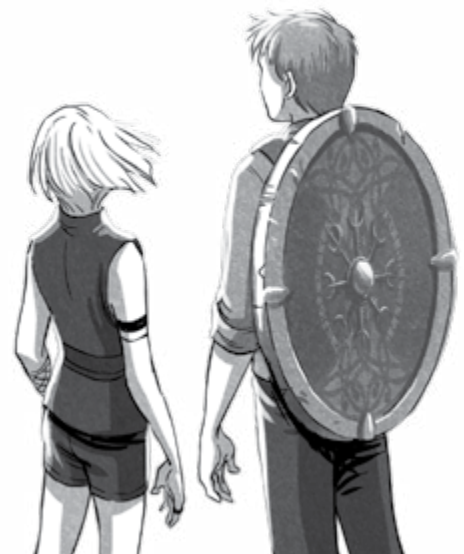
1. Matt is still dealing with his grandfather's betrayal and feels that he cannot talk about it to the other descendants of the North. Why does he feel like this? What does this tell you about Matt's role in the group?
2. Matt used to invite all different types of kids to the campouts on St. Agnes Eve, but he never invited the Brekkes. Based on what you've read so far, why didn't he invite them? Now, Matt feels badly about not inviting Laurie and Fen. Why have his feelings changed? How have all three characters changed?
3. Owen goes to rescue the twins from the nykurs. Why does he choose to do that instead of helping Matt with Mjöltnir? How does this affect the plot at this point in the story? Why do you think the authors chose to have Owen do this?

Chapters 19-21

1. Fen learns something about himself from Owen in Chapter 19. What does this revelation mean for Fen?
2. Who is Loki's representative? What does this mean for Fen? For Laurie? Were you surprised at Laurie's reaction to the news? At Fen's response?
3. Fen begins to doubt himself in these chapters. How is his role among the descendants of the North changing?
4. How does Reyna help Matt with his doubts about his leadership skills? What does she say to him? Is she right? Why or why not? Can a leader be a kind person or does a leader have to be cold-hearted? Why?

Chapters 22-23

1. Matt seems to be immune to the fighting while he looks for Glaemir and Mjöltnir. Why isn't he fighting alongside Fen, Baldwin, and Laurie?
2. How does Matt finally get Mjöltnir back? What does he have to do?
3. Skull tells Fen that his future has been decided already. How is he right? How is he wrong? Fen is suffering from an internal conflict. What choices does Fen still have to make?
4. Were you surprised by the ending of the book? Why or why not? Where do you think the authors plan to go next with the story?



about the book



Odin's Ravens
by **K.L. Armstrong**
& **M.A. Marr**

HC 978-0-316-20498-9

Also available as an eBook and
in a downloadable audio format

Seven kids, Thor's hammer, and a whole lot of Valkyries are the only things standing against the end of the world.

When 13-year-old Matt Thorsen, a modern-day descendant of the Norse god Thor, was chosen to represent Thor in an epic battle to prevent the apocalypse, he thought he knew how things would play out. Gather the descendants standing in for gods like Loki and Odin, defeat a giant serpent, and save the world. No problem, right?

But the descendants' journey grinds to a halt when their friend and descendant, Baldwin, is poisoned and killed and Matt, Fen, and Laurie must travel to the Underworld in the hopes of saving him. But that's only their first stop on their journey to reunite the challengers, find Thor's hammer, and stop the apocalypse—a journey filled with enough tooth-and-nail battles and larger-than-life monsters to make Matt a legend in his own right.

also by **K.L. Armstrong & M.A. Marr**



Loki's Wolves

HC 978-0-316-20496-5

PB 978-0-316-20497-2

Also available as an e-book
and in a downloadable
audio format

“Norse mythology brought to life with engaging contemporary characters and future volumes that promise explosive action; ideal for Percy Jackson fans who want to branch out.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

“*Loki's Wolves* brings Norse mythology to the modern world.... The background and explanation of the legends are clear and a natural fit to the story and dialogue, bringing life to lesser-known Norse mythology.”

— *School Library Journal*

“This smart, fast-paced, action-packed novel... offers readers a solid adventure story that still manages not to skimp on character.”

— *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

about the authors



K.L. Armstrong



M.A. Marr



K.L. Armstrong and M.A. Marr had been friends for several years and found themselves spending hours talking about mythology and monsters. One sleepy morning, they realized that M.A.'s second last name is Norwegian. (The similarity between that name and “Midgard Serpent” is totally coincidental.) With that link, in addition to K.L.'s love for tackling creatures in video games when not writing (and sometimes when she's supposed to be writing), their monster and myth fixation, and the books they read with their 11- to 13-year-old sons, they knew they had to write the Blackwell Pages.

K.L. Armstrong and M.A. Marr invite you to visit them at blackwellpages.com.



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

LittleBrownLibrary.com
This educator's guide was written by Erica Rand Silverman and Sharon Kennedy, former high school English teachers and co-founders of Room 228 Educational Consulting (www.rm228.com), along with high school English teacher Magda Adamczyk.