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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Gregor the Overlander by Suzanne Collins

Summary

This irresistible first novel tells the story of a quiet boy who embarks on a dangerous quest in order to fulfill his destiny -- and find his father -- in a strange world beneath New York City.

When Gregor falls through a grate in the laundry room of his apartment building, he hurtles into the dark Underland, where spiders, rats, cockroaches coexist uneasily with humans. This world is on the brink of war, and Gregor's arrival is no accident. A prophecy foretells that Gregor has a role to play in the Underland's uncertain future. Gregor wants no part of it -- until he realizes it's the only way to solve the mystery of his father's disappearance. Reluctantly, Gregor embarks on a dangerous adventure that will change both him and the Underland forever.

Discussion Questions

1. How have the inhabitants of the Underland adapted to their environment? What do you think would happen if any of them came to the surface?
2. Do you think that, at the beginning of the story, Gregory has given up hope of ever finding his father? Once his adventures in the Underland get under way, do you think he believes he'll find his father?
3. The Underlanders see Gregor as the great warrior told of in the Prophecy of Gray, and because of that he is to lead the quest to prevent their annihilation. But Gregor sees himself differently -- he says to Vikus, "You've got the wrong guy. Really, I promise you, I'm not the warrior." Why do you think he feels this way? Why is Vikus so convinced that Gregor is the right one?
4. Talk about Gregor's personality. Of all his character traits, which do you find most admirable? Could he be your friend? Why?
5. How does Gregor's relationship with Luxa change over the course of the novel?
6. One of the most interesting characters in the novel is not a human, but a rat that Vikus has enlisted to be the guide for the questers. What traits does Ripred possess that set him apart from the others, both rats and humans?

7. Giant cockroaches, rats, and bats inhabit the Underland. Gregor is scared but keeps his cool. How and why do you think he does it, and why is it important to him that he appear brave? How would you react if you were staring down into the face of a four-foot cockroach?
8. Although he doesn't show it, it seems that Vikus knows who Gregor is from the time Gregor arrives. Why doesn't he tell Gregor from the very start? What does Vikus say that suggests he was testing Gregor to see if he was worthy of leading the quest?
9. Vikus tells Gregor: "The journey will be difficult. The prophecy warns that four of the twelve will lose life. It may be wisest to leave Boots here." While it seems that Gregor's desire to bring his baby sister on the quest is foolish, she does play a crucial role as a quester. What is it?
10. Authors sometimes plant clues in a story to foreshadow future events. Often these clues can be very subtle and it's not easy to pick up on them. Looking back in the story, what things did Henry say and do that pointed to his treachery?
11. Before leaving for the quest, Gregor is brought to the Underland museum to choose things that might aid him on his journey. He selects a flashlight and batteries, a construction worker's hardhat with a light, and a can of root beer. What did you think he would do with these items? How in fact do these things come in handy? He could have taken a baseball. Why didn't he?
12. Despite the great perils, Gregor insists on taking Boots with him on the quest. He recalls what his mother once said to him, "Stay together." Do you think his mother would have wanted him to put Boots in that kind of danger? Was there ever a time when you followed something your parents said and it got you into trouble in school or at home? Was there a time when you did what your parents told you and it paid off?
13. Gregor, Luxa, Vikus, Solovet, Temp and Tick, Aurora and Ares, Gox, King Gorger, and Ripred - from what each of these characters say and do, imagine their voices. Then cast the actors who might play them or do their voices in a feature film of *Gregor the Overlander*.
14. "Good late day," said Vikus, nodding to the Underlanders. "Meet you Gregor and Boots the Overlanders, brother and sister, who have most recently fallen among us." The characters in the Underland speak in a very stylized, somewhat old-fashioned way. How does this help define who they are? Why doesn't Ripred talk this way?
15. In many fantasy stories, the main character doesn't plan to go on a quest, but is forced to do so by circumstances, and then rises to the occasion. You could call them "reluctant heroes." Why is this an appealing idea?
16. Gregor, like Alice (in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll); Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy (in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis); and Dorothy (in *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum), travels through a passageway from "the real world" to a fantastic one. Discuss the variety of ways characters find their way into fantasy worlds in these and other novels you have read.