



A Giant's Trek

NICK STELLA

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 10+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Credit: Ethan Stella

Nick Stella lives in Sydney, where he works as a public servant. *A Giant's Trek*, which started out as a bedtime story for his children, is his first novel.

SYNOPSIS

Ash is used to being the weakling. All the other giants are strong, including his brother, Oak, who teases him relentlessly for his inability to wield an axe or a shield. Ash is especially ashamed because he's the chieftain's son. He should be a strong and worthy heir. But as the Trek approaches—the journey all young giants must take to prove their worth and bring back a weapon to defend their tribe—Ash worries that he'll let his family down.

The giants of Haven-Home assemble to find out who will act as the guardian for the young adventurers. The names are drawn from a bag. Oak's guardian is Trondor, revered for his strength. Ash's friend, Mithra, draws Emling, who takes her new charge with pride. But when Ash reaches into the bag and draws out Thorsten, there is silence. No-one steps forward to claim him, and the giants in the audience fall silent.

Later, at home, Ash discovers that Thorston, better known as Avalanche, lives apart from Haven-Home in disgrace for bringing back 'a broken giant'. But Avalanche and Ash are bound together, and Ash is eager to meet his mysterious guardian. Avalanche is nothing like the other giants Ash has met, and with Avalanche as his guardian, Ash feels emboldened to carve a different path for himself, to seek the power of incantation over a physical weapon. Despite chiding from his brother, Ash knows he's doing the right thing.

But the path to learn incantation is precarious, and Ash must travel through some of the most dangerous areas in Wild-Reach. Ash chooses his path with great courage, knowing that he is risking the respect of his entire community to travel an uncertain path. But the Ash that sets out on the Trek is not the Ash who returns, and the lessons he learns along the way are a powerful reminder of the value of staying true to yourself, and letting others surprise you.

A Giant's Trek is an action-packed quest narrative for middle-grade readers that explores themes of identity, courage, acceptance and, most significantly, the power of being yourself.



BEFORE READING

1. Read the blurb of the book aloud. Discuss some of the themes you think the book will explore based on the information given in the blurb.
2. What is a trek? How is it different from other journeys? Why might this Trek be so significant?
3. In the book, Ash is often laughed at because he's so different from the other giants. Share a time you've felt ashamed or embarrassed by something that makes you different. How might you see or use that difference as a strength?

WHILE READING

1. What is the Giant's Trek?
2. Why is Avalanche unwelcome in the village?
3. Would you describe Ash as brave? How does he show his bravery (or not) in the book?
4. Before he sets out on his Trek, Ash 'needed to know that the old giant would be there for him when the time came'. (p. 32) Is Avalanche there when Ash needs him? Provide three examples of the way he supports and shows up for Ash.
5. Avalanche describes the Great Gulf as a 'great big grave'. (p. 121) Why? Who is responsible for the deaths that occurred there?
6. Ash encounters a fork in the road at the beginning of his journey. (p. 88) What does this represent? What choice does he make and why?
7. Ash and Syp have a lot in common, particularly the way that their differences make them the target of teasing and bullying. Have you ever been excluded or laughed at (or have you ever laughed at someone else) because of a difference?
8. How does Ash describe incantation to Syp? What are Syp's feelings about magic?
9. How does Ash's attitude towards his journey change as they progress?
10. How would you describe the change that takes place in Ash between the beginning and the end of the book?
11. Why is Half-Beard so angry at the giants of Haven-Home? Do you think he's justified in wanting revenge?
12. What are the four points along Ash's journey of incantation? What does each represent?
13. At the end of the book, Ash looks at Avalanche and says, 'I was waiting to see how it was going to end. But now I know'. (p. 285) How does the story end? Are you happy with the ending?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. Ash is 'crestfallen as he remembered thinking that Avalanche had done nothing in preparation for the Trek'. (p. 66) What other incorrect assumptions has Ash made about Avalanche, and the other giants? How do some of the characters they meet later in the book surprise them or challenge their assumptions?
2. Tuffy taunts Ash for his lack of physical strength, suggesting that Oak fights for him and saying, 'living in his shadow must be colder than a Haven-Home winter'. (p. 100) How does Ash's reaction to this show Tuffy that his taunts have hit home? How would you describe Ash's relationship with his brother? How do you think he feels about their differences?
3. Avalanche reminds Ash that he is a child, saying 'the Trek aims to change that'. (p. 115) Do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing? How is Ash different at the end of the Trek from the start of it?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

The Hero's Journey or home, away, home

The hero's journey is a classic narrative structure popularised by famous films and books such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, in which a hero's everyday life is interrupted by a call to adventure. At first our hero refuses the call, reluctant to leave the safety of home, but they are persuaded to set out, and cross the threshold into the special world (the world away from home, where adventure happens). Challenges are met and overcome, and the hero returns home, slightly changed.

Watch this video on the Hero's Journey:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hhk4N9A0oCA>

Draw your own diagram that captures the steps the hero has to undertake. Map Ash's journey out against this. Does it fit?

THEMES

Strength

1. Why are the giants so dismissive of incantation? Do you agree that strength is the most useful skill a giant can have? Why/why not?
2. Ash knows he is 'useless with an axe or a bow, but with incantation he knew he could bring his own strength to the village'. (p. 133) What is Ash's strength? Does he achieve his goal of bringing it home to his village?



3. What does Ash do that proves his strength to his father? Do you think his father is surprised? Write this scene from his perspective, trying to imagine how he feels.

Being yourself

1. Avalanche tells Ash to 'Be yourself, as you can't be anyone else'. (p. 105) Do you agree with this statement? Who has Ash been trying to be like up until this point?
2. What does his encounter with Lord Stone teach Ash about being himself? How does this lesson help him brave the Plug Hole?
3. Towards the end of the book, Mithra tells Ash: 'you're no longer the Ash I knew'. (p. 282) What does she mean by this? Does being yourself mean letting go of the way that other people see you? What else does it mean to be yourself?

Nature

1. Many of the giants seem to view the land as something to be conquered or survived, but Avalanche is more observant, pointing out 'treacle trees that boasted sweet sap, the green-tail lizards that were good for roasting, and the devil-stem mushrooms that would have you over the bog-hole all day if they weren't cooked properly'. (p. 70-71) How else do Ash and Avalanche utilise the natural world in order to survive?
2. How do trees feel about stone? How does Ash use this to his advantage to choose the staff he wants from the Grandfather Tree?
3. How does the natural world sometimes act as a physical barrier in the story? Find an instance in the book where nature is an obstacle to be overcome and compare it to an example where it helps the characters.

RESPONDING

1. Avalanche tells Ash: 'the Trek is your journey to adulthood and you still have a long way to go. It's my role to walk beside you, to give you what courage and wisdom I may'. (p. 112) Imagine your own life as a Trek. Where on the journey are you? Who walks beside you? What are some of the challenges you have already encountered or expect to encounter? Draw a timeline that shows how far you've already come.
2. Draw a comic strip that depicts Ash's meeting with one of the guides or mentors in the story, and illustrating the lesson he learns from them.

3. Draw a map of the world of the book as you imagine it, and mark in all of the key points in Ash's journey.
4. Use the structure of the hero's journey to plan your own story – who would your hero be? What challenges will they overcome? Who will help them?
5. Write the first chapter of your story, where your hero is called to adventure.