



Dig

A.S. KING

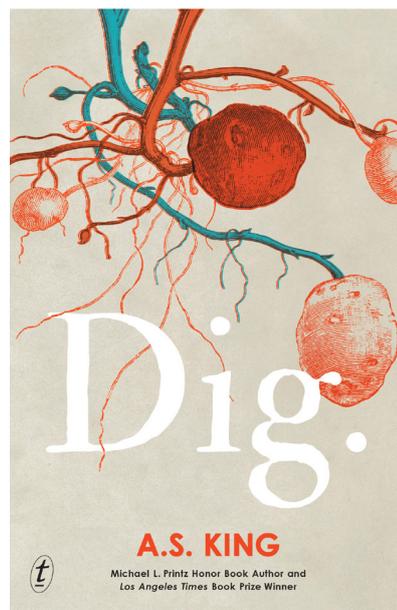
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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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.

SYNOPSIS

The Shoveler doesn't know who he is. The Freak flickers from place to place trying to help people, even though she feels helpless. Loretta can't tell the difference between her life and a circus act.

CanIHelpYou is a drug dealer, but she isn't like other drug dealers. And Malcolm's father is dying. These five teenagers have something in common, but they have no idea what it is—although it seems to have something to do with potatoes.

Meanwhile, Jake Marks finds himself questioning his older brother, Bill, a violent and hateful young man, who taught his younger brother everything he knows. But Jake only seems to know racism, sexism, abuse and torment, and now that Bill is getting married and moving out, Jake has a chance to be something else... even if that means that Bill has to go down.

Toxic family dynamics and white supremacy come under the microscope in A.S. King's new novel *Dig*. And it'll take the next generation to clear the way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.S. King is the critically acclaimed author of many novels for young adults and middle readers, including *Still Life with Tornado*. Her fiction has won numerous awards, including a Los Angeles Times Book Prize, a Printz Honor and over fifty starred reviews. She is a faculty member at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She lives in Pennsylvania with her family.

BEFORE READING

1. *Dig* has three epigraphs. Read each epigraph and write down what message you think is communicated in each. Then consider whether there is a connection between the epigraphs. What predictions do you make about the content of the novel as a result of these epigraphs?
2. Have you ever witnessed, or been a victim of, any acts of racism? Place yourself on a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree based on your response to the following questions:

- My race has advantaged me during my lifetime.
- I don't think about my race often.
- The emerging fundamentalist nationalism in the developed world worries me.

3. Write down your personal definition of family. Compare your definition with a dictionary definition.

Do you think that the meaning of family has changed over time, or do we tend to use it metaphorically now? Discuss these questions with the class and, as a group, write a definition that encompasses everyone's ideas about what family is.



WHILE READING

Part One

1. In the first chapter, Gottfried recalls an incident from his past, about the robins he unintentionally killed when driving as a seventeen-year-old. Gottfried's continual reference to this incident throughout the novel suggests something about his character. What do you think it suggests?
2. In part 1.1, we are introduced to 'The Shoveler', who remains unnamed until the end of the novel. The Shoveler meets Mike, who tells him, 'Control the mind and the rest is easy.' This statement is referred to several times throughout the text. What do you think it means and why does it have such an impact on The Shoveler?
3. In the chapter 'Make the Freak Vanish' (p 20) we are introduced to 'The Freak'. The Freak describes an incident from which she ran away. She then describes how she is still running and that she 'flickers' from one place to another. What do you think she means by this?

Part Two

1. What age do you imagine Loretta is? Explain your answer with reference to the text.
2. On page 180, Jake remembers Bill telling him to 'look for other guys like us'. What does Bill mean by this? Jake then mentions the time Bill told him that he isn't responsible for what he does when he's pissed off. What does the text imply that Jake has done?
3. In the chapter 'Marla Still Believes Blood is Sacred' (p 186), Marla refers to a secret she's kept from her husband. When she believes she is dying, she thinks to herself, 'I never told Gottfried about the blood.' What do you think her secret might be? Explain your prediction.

Part Three

1. Malcolm and The Shoveler have very different perceptions of Gottfried and Martha. Why is this? How do Malcolm's and The Shoveler's experiences of family differ?
2. CanIHelpYou has lost her best friend and her job. She is struggling with her life. What are the expectations placed on her by her mother that she finds unreasonable? Compose a venn diagram to represent the values they have in common and the values they do not share.
3. Make a list of the different ways the author foreshadows the outcome of the novel. Include textual references and page numbers for each example.

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. Loretta imagines she is part of an act and that all those around her are actors. Why do you think she does this?
2. We are not told the names of several of the narrators until the very end of the novel. Instead we are given titles: The Shoveler, CanIHelpYou and The Freak. Explain the significance of these titles beyond their literal interpretation.
3. Write each character's name in a box and bullet-point five characteristics that person has under their name. Draw connection lines between characters, noting their relationships, thereby constructing a character map of all of the major characters in the novel.

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. During the novel, characters often talk about their 'tunnels'. Then the formatting of the prose changes. Describe the physical setting of these moments and discuss the effect this structure has on the reader.
2. Use the table on page 3 overleaf to tally up the number of times each character drives the narrative and from what point of view it is written. Does the information in the table support the impression you had regarding who the main characters were? Discuss your answer with a partner. Then, as a pair, share your thoughts with another pair.
3. The novel is divided into three parts: Part One: Introductions, Part Two: Our Cast in a Blender and Part Three: Our Case in a Strainer.

Describe the significance of each section title. Within the sections, some chapters begin with a list of the 'cast' in order of their appearance. What genre does this suggest and how is that relevant to the novel?

THEMES

Control

1. On page 23, The Freak describes her controlling father. What are the repercussions of his controlling behaviour on The Freak?
2. Jake Marks is controlled by people and their behaviour. Write a paragraph that describes and analyses the control that he is under and the controlling behaviour he exhibits to cope with his emotions.
3. CanIHelpYou also feels she has a very controlling mother. On page 101, she states, 'She's [her mother] just trying to control me.' In the novel, what evidence is there that the mother is controlling rather than simply concerned for her daughter's safety and welfare?



Morality

1. How did Gottfried make his money? Do he and Marla appear to have different moral positions on the tactics he used to make his money? Discuss.
2. Marla threw her daughter out of the house when she fell pregnant at 17. Research the moral theory of consequentialism and determine an argument for whether you believe Marla's actions can be morally defended.
3. Bill Marks seems to believe that doing the right thing is doing what is right for him. Devise a table listing the good things and the bad things that happen in the novel as a result of this attitude. Draw a conclusion regarding whether 'right' behaviour can ever be determined by desire.

Race relations

1. On page 82, Malcolm describes white privilege. What does he say? In your own words, define white privilege. Which characters best represent the concept of white privilege and why?
2. CanIHelpYou's mother has a problem with the friend she refers to as 'that boy'. How does the novel use characterisation to position you to disagree with her perspective?
3. If Marla revealed her secret, she would find that it has no impact on her life. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Facilitate a classroom debate on the topic.

SYMBOLISM

1. The novel makes numerous references to potatoes. Create a table that lists at least 10 references to potatoes, and offer a suggestion of the symbolic meaning of each reference. Write an analytical paragraph that presents a perspective on the meaning of potatoes in the novel and justify your position with evidence from the text.
2. CanIHelpYou's mother has a bell. List all that ways this bell is a symbol of control.
3. The tunnels each character experiences are represented graphically. Choose any two tunnels and describe the mental process that character is going through in that moment.

Think, Pair and Share activity

	Marla	Gottfried	The Shoveler	CanIHelpYou	Malcolm	Loretta	Bill Marks	Jake Marks	The Freak
1st person									
3rd person									

RESPONDING

1. Write a book review for *Dig*, to be published in *Progressive YA Fiction* literary magazine. Consider the audience of the novel when developing your tone. Mention the multiple narrative perspectives, authenticity of voice, style and structure. Research the author and draw connections between this novel and her body of work.
2. Write a narrative textual intervention from the perspective of a character that we hear about but never directly from e.g. The Shoveler's mother, Mike, The Freak's father. Identify which part of the novel your intervention would be placed in. Title the narrative in a similar way to the chapter titles in the novel.
3. On her twitter account, A.S. King has tweeted, '...teenagers are brilliant, creative, honest humans who have a lot to say and a lot of guts. I can't wait until they run the world.' Use this quote to develop a thesis argument and an essay exploring the ways King demonstrates this belief in the novel *Dig*.
4. Prepare and record a vlog entry as one of the characters in *Dig*. Consider the events that have led up to the day of the entry and reflect on the thoughts and feelings your character would have about these events and the situation he/she finds themselves in presently. Avoid retelling events, instead focusing on demonstrating an understanding of the character's motivations, interests and emotions.
5. Mike's tattoo reads '100% WHITE POWER'. Race relations are a theme of the novel, although they are most often dealt with subtly. Research the history of race relations in America.

Focus your attention on the Civil Rights Movement, the presence of the Ku Klux Klan and the recent rise in white supremacist action. Create an informative multimodal presentation, using programs such as Prezi, Adobe Spark, Haiku Deck, Google Slides or Visme, that focuses on one key event in the history of race relations in America and discuss the influence this event had on shaping the nation.