

# Study Guide: *The Taker and the Keeper*

by Wim Coleman and Pat Perrin



## THE BASICS

### About the Authors:

Wim Coleman and Pat Perrin are a married couple who love writing books together. Their stories for young readers include science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, retold myths, and plays. They've also collaborated on many nonfiction books about history, literature, and mythology for use in school libraries and classrooms. Pat and Wim have lived in various parts of the United States, and now they live in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico. Their family includes their adopted Mexican daughter, Monserrat. Pat and Wim also manage a scholarship program for Mexican students, sponsored by the San Miguel chapter of International PEN. For more about Pat and Wim, and to learn about their publications, visit <http://www.chironbooks.com>.

### About the Inspiration:

We've long been fascinated with stories—reading them, telling them, and thinking about how they influence our lives. We've written a lot about legends and myths, and we've read what various scholars believe such stories mean to a culture. When we started talking about putting all of that into an adventure series for young readers, we came up with the idea of showing how it might affect our everyday lives if an important story had never been told. Then we wondered: would the characters get into a traditional tale by way of some natural phenomenon or by magic? We might never fully answer that question, but Gregory and Yolanda will certainly use their remarkable lenses to find more lands of myth and legend in future books. For more of what we've written about King Arthur and about stories in general, see our “Notes on the Story of King Arthur” and “Words About Stories.”

### About the Story:

Gregory discovers a dark tunnel that's visible only through one of the lenses his science teacher left behind when she quit. When he explores the tunnel, Gregory is met with hostility at the other end and returns home. Meanwhile, people in Gregory's family, school, and town are behaving badly. Only his friend Yola—who complains that all the best stories are missing from her favorite book—seems normal. Gregory and Yola go through the tunnel and find themselves in King Arthur's legend, which is not happening the way it should. The sword Excalibur is missing, the befuddled magician Merlin has lost his power, and Arthur seems an unlikely candidate for king. The kids join Merlin, his apprentice Palamon, and the science teacher (who came through the tunnel before them) in setting things right. Gregory and Yola each reveal unexpected talents as they contend with Morgan Le Fay's terrifying magic and rescue Excalibur. Gregory learns that he's a taker of risks; Yola discovers just how important her knowledge of legends really is. Palamon returns with Gregory and Yola to their own world, where they find things much improved now that those tales of heroism and chivalry are back in Yola's book.



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## THE CHARACTERS

### **Gregory Guest**

The main character, a bookish 12 year old whose favorite class is science.

### **Yolanda Torres**

Gregory's friend who knows a lot about legends and myths, age 13.

### **Mildred McDougal**

Gregory's eccentric former science teacher, who believes that everything has a scientific explanation.

### **Merlin**

A wizard who has lost most of his powers, but who believes that everything can be accomplished through magic.

### **Palamon**

The wizard's apprentice.

### **Arthur**

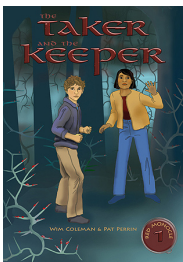
A squire who is having little success learning to swordfight.

### **The Lady of the Lake**

A magical creature who lives in a lake.

### **Morgan le Fay**

Arthur's half-sister, a sorceress.



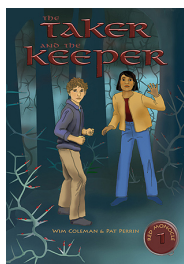
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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is your favorite story? What does that story tell you about how people should or should not behave?
2. In *The Taker and the Keeper*, how does Gregory feel the first time he looks through the monocle and sees the tunnel? Why does he feel that way?
3. Why does Gregory go into the tunnel? Would you go into a strange dark tunnel if it appeared one day in a familiar place? Why or why not?
4. Why does the boy at the other end of the tunnel think that Gregory is a demon?
5. After his first trip through the tunnel, Gregory thinks about throwing away the monocle. Why do you think he doesn't throw it away?
6. What kind of science teacher do you think Ms. McDougall would be? Explain your answer.
7. How have things changed recently in Gregory's world? Have you ever had a day when it seemed to you that everybody else was behaving strangely? What did you do about it?
8. Why does Gregory decide to show Yolanda the tunnel? Would you share such a discovery with a friend? Why or why not?
9. On the other side of the tunnel, what clues make Gregory and Yolanda realize that they are in a very different world? Where do they think they are, and why?
10. What things has Merlin forgotten? What helps Merlin regain some of his strength and memory?
11. Why does Gregory suspect that the snake isn't a natural creature? Describe a time when you felt that something was wrong, but couldn't explain why to anyone else.
12. What doesn't Mildred remember that Gregory remembers clearly? By the end of the book, how is that explained?
13. Why did Mildred search for a wormhole? How does she explain the wormhole and the lenses?
14. Why did Merlin open his door?
15. Why do Mildred and Merlin have such different opinions on what the door is?
16. What is chivalry? Do you think that chivalry is important? Why or why not?
17. What sort of heroes does the Lady of the Lake predict will come? Why isn't her vision clearer? At that point of the story, who did you think the promised heroes would be, and why?
18. How does the group figure out where the lost sword must be—with logic or with magic?
19. When the story begins, how does Gregory feel about adventure? Why does he feel that way? How does he change?
20. How does Yola feel about adventure? Why does she feel that way? Would you welcome an unexpected and risky adventure? Why or why not?
21. When does Gregory accept that he must personally do something to help solve the problem? What brings him to that decision? Have you ever been faced with a problem that you had to take on whether you wanted to or not? What did you do?
22. What memories help Gregory make it up the castle wall? Why do those particular memories help? What helps you overcome your own fears?
23. Why doesn't Gregory leave the castle when Morgan Le Fay gives him the chance to go? What does he do instead?
24. When does Gregory feel the most fear of Morgan Le Fay? What does he say is the greatest evil? What do you think is the greatest evil in our own world, and why?



25. What does Merlin ask Yola to watch for? What do you think will happen in her books in the future?
26. What strange discovery do Gregory and Yolanda make about time when they return to their own world?
27. What kind of world had Gregory, Yolanda, and Mildred visited? Would you like to discover a different world? Would you like to stay there permanently? Why or why not?
28. What does *The Taker and the Keeper* tell you about how people should or should not behave?

## TOPICS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

### Topic #1: The King Arthur Legend

A legend is a story that gets started about a real person or actual event, but becomes more elaborate and fantastic as it is handed down over the years. Arthur was probably an actual warrior or king in the sixth century AD. The version of Arthur's story that is most familiar today was told nearly 1000 years later.

1. Read a detailed version of the King Arthur legend. Which events do you think are most likely to have actually happened?
2. Research one of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table—Lancelot, Gawaine, Galahad, Percival, Tristan, or another. What part do heroism and chivalry play in that knight's story?

### Topic #2: The Effect of Stories

In *The Taker and the Keeper*, Yolanda says that stories about chivalry encourage "bravery, honor, kindness, and courtesy."

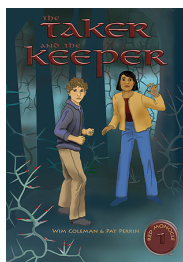
1. What kinds of stories do you think can influence people to behave in a particular way—for example, to share what they have with others? To quit school? To fight for their country? To steal money? To go to the aid of someone in trouble?
2. In a few paragraphs, outline a short story and explain how you think it might encourage people to behave.

### Topic #3: The Call

The well-known authority on mythology Joseph Campbell wrote that a hero's story begins with a call to adventure. That call can be clear, or it can be very subtle:

A blunder—apparently the merest chance—reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood. (Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 51.)

1. How is Gregory called to adventure?
2. Often, the hero tries at first refuses the call to adventure. How does Gregory feel about the call? Why does he finally accept the call?



### Topic #4: The Monomyth

Joseph Campbell discusses what he calls the monomyth—a story line that turns up in tales from cultures around the world. Campbell describes the hero's journey as separation or departure, initiation or trial, and return:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 30.)

1. How does the monomyth apply to Gregory's story?
  - a. What is Gregory's separation, or departure?
  - b. What is Gregory's trial?
  - c. What is Gregory's return?
2. Describe how the monomyth applies to a different hero story from a book, comic book, movie, or television.

### Topic #5: Traits of Traditional Heroes

List three or more of your favorite heroes from books, movies, or television.

1. Describe some things that make these heroes different from ordinary people. If they have special weapons, where did they get them? If they have special abilities, where did those come from? Does the hero have a companion or helper? Is anything unusual about the hero's birth or childhood?
2. What do these heroes have in common and how are they different? Discuss the traits that you find common to all the heroes on your list.
3. Heroes often accomplish a seemingly-impossible task that proves they are different from ordinary people. For example, young Arthur pulls the sword from the stone. What tasks do heroes in more recent stories do to prove who they are? (Consider, for example, Neo, Buffy, and Luke Skywalker. Think of others.)

4. What makes Gregory and Yolanda different from ordinary people?
5. A villain is the bad guy in a story, but villains can resemble heroes in some ways. For example, Morgan Le Fay and Merlin are both sorcerers with great powers. How are they different from each other? Compare and contrast three heroes and three villains to show how they are alike and different.

### Topic #6: Heroes in the Real World

On the internet or in a library, research real-life heroes who lived during the past 50 years. Also consider people you know personally.

1. List three or more people that you think are heroic. Your list might include artists, writers, teachers, and family members as well as explorers, lifesavers, peacemakers, sports stars, and so on ...
2. Explain why you think each of your choices is heroic.
3. What do these real-life heroes have in common and how they are different? Discuss the traits that you find common to all the heroes on your list.

More about *The Taker and the Keeper* and the Red Monocle series: <http://www.chironbooks.com>

