

# LAST GATE OF THE EMPEROR



**EDUCATORS'  
GUIDE**

## ABOUT THE BOOK



Yared Heywat lives an isolated life in Addis Prime — a hardscrabble city with rundown tech, lots of rules, and not much to do. His worrywart Uncle Moti and bionic lioness Besa are his only family... and his only friends.

Often in trouble for his thrill-seeking antics and smart mouth, those same qualities make Yared a star player of the underground augmented reality game, The Hunt for Kaleb's Obelisk. But when a change in the game rules prompts Yared to log in with his real name, it triggers an attack that rocks the city. In the chaos, Uncle Moti disappears.

Suddenly, all the stories Yared's uncle told him as a young boy are coming to life, of kingdoms in the sky and city-raiding monsters. And somehow Yared is at the center of them.

Together with Besa and the Ibis — a game rival turned reluctant ally — Yared must search for his uncle... and answers to his place in a forgotten, galaxy-spanning war.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Kwame Mbali** is a husband, father, writer, a *New York Times* bestselling author, and a former pharmaceutical metrologist in that order. He is the author of *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*, a Coretta Scott King Honor book. He lives with his family in North Carolina. Visit him online at [kwamembalia.com](http://kwamembalia.com).

**Prince Joel Makonnen** is the great-grandson of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I, the last emperor of Ethiopia. He is an attorney and the co-founder of Old World/New World, a media and entertainment company focused on telling powerful African stories that inspire global audiences through film, TV, and books. He lives with his wife, Ariana, in Los Angeles.

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Common Core Standards push readers to look closer when reading a text including examining author’s craft and analyzing word choice and narrative elements. Kwame Mbalia’s and Prince Joel Makonnen’s novel *Last Gate of the Emperor*, includes allusions to Ethiopian history, precise language, opportunities for debate, well-crafted characters, and a chance for imagination that allows the reader to deeply delve into the text. This teaching guide includes discussion questions and language arts activities to be used in grades 4-8 as this text is read as a whole group, small group, or a combination. This guide could also be modified to be used with a student who is reading the novel independently.

The Common Core Anchor Standards in English Language Arts and Themes in the National Council for Social Studies Curriculum Standards that can be addressed using the discussion questions and activities in this guide are:

## English Language Arts Common Core Anchor Standards

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10

Read and comprehend complex literary texts independently and proficiently.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

## National Council for Social Studies National Curriculum Standards

### Theme 1: Culture

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

### Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

### Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

### Theme 9: Global Connections

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions as reading check-ins, writing prompts, or classroom discussions throughout *Last Gate of the Emperor*.

1. What does the preface audio file transcript foreshadow about the plot? About Yared's personality?
2. Who decides that mythology isn't real?
3. How were Axum's goals as an empire different than the Werari? Which group was empowering and which was colonizing?
  - **Extension question:** What does the Bulgu represent when it comes to colonization?
4. What are some items in your life, like the net in Yared's, that are there to keep you safe but actually make you feel trapped or scared?
5. The net causes pollution that keeps citizens from seeing the sky very often. What are some psychological effects of not having sunny days?
6. Yared mentions how he did not get a screen for school because his uncle had not been able to pay the fee. Do you think a good education or the supplies for a good education should cost money?
  - **Extension:** Have students debate this topic.
7. Uncle Moti was a rule follower while Yared liked to push boundaries. When is it okay to push the boundaries of rules or laws?
8. Besa had a snack cubby. What would you add to your Guardian for convenience?
9. Yared is not very humble. Would you consider him cocky or confident? What do you believe is the difference?
10. How is The Authority in Addis Prime like police?
11. Rival has a negative connotation, but Yared sees his rivalry with the Ibis as a positive and even says, "everybody needs a good rival." Who is your rival that pushes you to be better?
12. When Yared gets to the Ibis's farm, he looks forward to seeing a normal family; however, is there such a thing as a normal family?
13. The Ibis had photos rotating in her shed of her favorite memories. If you had a rotating photo frame, what photos would you include?
14. So many people in Yared's life were lying to him. Usually lying is not something that is easily forgiven, but do you think that you can forgive someone for lying if it is for the right reason?

15. The day we live through with Yared changed his entire life. What is a day that changed everything for you?
16. Yared makes up the word shambush which is a sham ambush. These types of words are called portmanteaus. Make up a new word by combining two words to make your own portmanteau.
17. Why do you think we never learn the Ibis's real name?
18. In Chapter 15, Yared asks, "Was that strange blend of emotions a common expression for mothers to make? For all parents?" How would you answer him? Why?
19. What about the Ibis made her the perfect companion/partner for Yared during the book?
20. In Chapter 17, Yared shares what he believes the theme of the book is, "How we love family, find family, and maybe even choose family". Do you think this is the main theme of the book? If so, why? If not, what do you think is?

## CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

Use these activities to extend your students' thinking and experience with *Last Gate of the Emperor*.

### Intriguing Words

- Research shows that finding, defining, and discussing vocabulary within the context of reading is one of the most effective ways to learn vocabulary, and readers will find very specific word choice in this work.
- While reading, have students mark words that intrigue them. Intriguing words can be words they like, words they didn't know, words that they can tell were specifically chosen by the author, etc.
- Using these words that are identified by your students, have your students create a word wall of the vocabulary from *Last Gate of the Emperor* by picking five words that they liked learning the most and putting them with their student-worded definition and a drawing/symbol to post on the word wall. They should also put what page the word can be found on in the book. You can have them add anything else on the word wall index card as well such as synonyms, antonyms, etc.
- Before posting the word wall words on the wall, have students get in small groups and share their words with peers making sure to share why they chose the word and where it can be found in the book.
- Example of word wall index card:

## SENTIENT

**Able to feel or perceive things**



Synonyms: aware, responsive, reactive, living

Antonyms: insentient, comatose

Chapter 1: "All sentient races and species were invited, and though some did refuse, many accepted."

- Some examples of words that may be chosen are:

**Preface**

Redacted  
Stellar

**Chapter 1**

Sentient  
Coveted  
Barren  
Prevail  
Attrition  
Onslaught  
Exploits  
Intrepid  
Sticklers  
Bristling  
Turrets  
Disobedience  
Prosperous

**Chapter 2**

Sludge  
Terrain  
Haunches  
Emitted  
Talismans  
Indomitable  
Sticklers  
Dissipate  
Retort  
Alcove  
Evade

**Chapter 3**

Scurvy  
Pungent  
Billowing  
Gouging  
Obliterating  
Distress  
Jarring

**Chapter 4**

Exacerbate

**Chapter 5**

Disdainful

**Chapter 6**

Garble  
Melodic  
Infamy  
Circuitry

**Chapter 7**

Nuzzled  
Quivering  
Braziers

**Chapter 8**

Sparse  
Levered

**Chapter 9**

Switchback  
Incredulity  
Quirked

**Chapter 10**

Astrogators  
Repel  
Monotone  
Pivoted  
Taut  
Nocked

**Chapter 11**

Physiology  
Bionic

**Chapter 12**

Stasis  
Perchance  
Fallible  
Concocted

**Chapter 13**

Decimated  
Miscreant

**Chapter 14**

Fulcrum

**Chapter 15**

Traversal

**Chapter 16**

Wraith  
Insolent

**Chapter 17**

Hostile  
Polyhedral

- Extension Activities**

- Using the student-chosen words, create a list of “intriguing words” that your students found and challenge students to use some of the words in their own writing.
- Ask students to answer the following standards-based question about their intriguing word(s): Why would the author choose to include this word over a synonym? How did the author’s choice of this word change the tone or mood of the section the word is found in?

## Ethiopian References

- Throughout the book, there are many items inspired by real places, people, and cultures. Using think-pair-share, have students reflect on, discuss, and share their thoughts on:
- What does the inclusion of languages other than English bring to the story? Make sure they include examples from the story to support their answer.
- Have the students write a literary analysis of the author's choice of including Ethiopian references in the novel. How does the inclusion impact the reader's experience, add to character development, and engross the reader in the story?
- If your students do not know what some of the references are, do not worry! Context allows the reader to determine the meaning, and if not, a quick search on the internet will.
  - Scholastic has created a reference sheet, as well: [The Ethiopian Lore Behind the Book](#)
- Optional: Have students, as they read the book, keep a list of the references they find most important to define to determine the meaning of the story. When finished, have your students create a glossary for the book.
  - Examples:

### Chapter 1

Sambusas  
Tej  
Yasa tibs  
Woredas  
Kebele  
Jebenas  
Nefasi

### Chapter 2

Habesha kemis  
Teff  
Niter kibbeh  
Mitmita  
Aweasa  
Wat  
Shiro

### Chapter 6

Shekla tibs  
Selam

### Chapter 8

Tuk-tuks

### Chapter 11

Injera



## Ethiopian History Comparisons

- Using the Scholastic *The Ethiopian Lore Behind the Book* reference sheet, have students begin to compare Yared's story and setting to Ethiopian History.
- Example of a graphic organizer that could be completed and answers:

<i>Last Gate of the Emperor</i>	Ethiopian History
The Hunt for Kaleb's Obelisk game	Based on King Kaleb's mysterious end of life and how no one knows where he is buried, but obelisks should mark his burial site.
Intergalactic Menelik drives	Named after a famous Emperor of Ethiopia.
IAM Ezana	Named after a famous King of Axum
Shotels & Meshenitai	The Meshenitai were elite Ethiopian warriors who fought both unmounted and on horse-back and carried beautiful curved swords.

Then have students expand their research by searching online about the history of Ethiopia and add to their findings.

<i>Last Gate of the Emperor</i>	Ethiopian History
Werari invasion of Axum	May be based off of the Ethiopian Civil War when a group of high-ranking politicians and military officers attempted to overthrow the monarchy.
Axum	Named after a city in Ethiopia but based on the country of Ethiopia which had the longest monarchy in the world and much success. It was also never colonized and was always independent.

## Author Craft

- *Last Gate of the Emperor* is filled with figurative language and descriptive language to lend to imagery for the reader, specifically similes and adverbs.
- **Figurative Language**
  - First, use this time if needed to introduce different types of Figurative Language. Have students complete a graphic organizer defining each type and giving an example.
  - Then, specifically focus on similes.
  - Discuss with students how similes add to the imagery of a story.
  - Then, send students on a Simile Hunt! Have them find similes throughout *Last Gate of the Emperor*.
  - After each student, or group of students, have found similes in the work, compile them all.
  - Some examples:
    - Silent as a crypt (chapter 1)
    - Gleaming gray powered armor, like flying silverbacks (chapter 6)
    - I felt like I would burst with frustration (chapter 7)
    - Sliced through me like a razor-thin edge of a shotel blade (chapter 7)
    - Like an elephant trembling in front of a mouse (chapter 11)
    - Rippled like stalks of grass in the wind (chapter 12)
  - Once the class list is completed, have students choose a simile then do a quick write for 5 minutes using the simile as their guide for what to write about. The simile must be included.
  - **Extension:** Other forms of figurative language are included in the book, as well. The scavenger hunt can be expanded to include other types. Similes are just the most common in the book.
- **Adverbs**
  - First, use this time if needed to introduce parts of speech. Have students complete a graphic organizer defining each type and giving an example.
  - Then, focus on adverbs.
  - To show students how adverbs add to writing, take a sentence from *Last Gate of the Emperor* and remove the adverb and share it with the students.
    - Example: remove happily. “All good here,” I said.’ (Chapter 2)
  - Now, ask students to say “All good here” just like Yared did. Students should all say it in different tones because there is no indication of how Yared says it.
  - Then, add back in the adverb: “All good here,” I said happily.’ And ask again. Students should now see how adverbs make all the difference.
  - Now, send students on an adverb hunt! Students should find 5 different times in the book where the authors used adverbs in purposeful ways and then write a written response sharing what they found and how the adverbs changed the meaning of the text.
  - **Extension:** Have students go back to what they wrote using their simile and add adverbs to their writing.

## Yared's Medallion

- Yared always has on his “all-black hexagon medallion, silver wire braided around the edges, a lion roaring in the middle.” He shared that he felt it represented him and Uncle Mori: “Defiant to the end.”
- Have students create their own medallion that represents them. They should consider size, shape, color, edges, images, etc.
- Accompanying their medallion, they should explain how the medallion embodies them.

## Traits of a Leader

- In Chapter 16, it is questioned if Yared has what it takes to be a leader.
- As a class, use a piece of chart paper to make a list of traits that leaders should possess.
- Once the list is completed, with the help of students, mark which traits they think are the most important?
- Then ask students to answer: Does Yared have what it takes to be a leader? What traits does he excel in? What traits should he work on?
  - This could be answered through a written response, think-pair-share, Socratic seminar, or debate.

## Illustrate

- There are many robots, vehicles, architecture, and creatures described in *Last Gate of the Emperor*. Have students illustrate the book by using the imagery to guide their illustrations.
- For an example, the Bulgu is described in Chapter 3 and would be a great one for the teacher to complete or the class to do together.
- Have each student choose a robot, vehicle, piece of architecture, or creature to illustrate.
- First, ensure that they find the description in the book, write down all of the traits and information about their item, and the page numbers where they found the information.
- Then, they should use their creativity to create illustrations!

## The Power of Story

- Kwame Mbalia says “The power of story is transformative.” In what ways do you agree or disagree? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4tl8pNm2-k>
- After students watch his Power of Story video, feel free to share others: <https://www.youtube.com/hashtag/powerofstory>
- Have students create their own 30 second to 1 minute video sharing what the power of story means to them.
- Flipgrid would be a great program to use to allow students to watch each others' videos.
- Reflection: Have students answer how *Last Gate of the Emperor* fits their definition of the power of story.

This guide was created by Kellee Moyer, a middle school teacher-librarian in Orlando, FL. Kellee is the author of various teaching guides for all levels; the co-author of the blog [Unleashing Readers](#); a past committee member & chair of the Schneider Family Book Award and Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award; on the 2016-2018 ALAN Board of Directors; and a member of NCTE, ALAN, and ALA. Kellee can be reached at [Kellee.Moye@gmail.com](mailto:Kellee.Moye@gmail.com).