

MASTERMINDS

BY GORDON
KORMAN

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

In the perfect town of Serenity, New Mexico, children are sheltered from the evils of the world around them and taught to trust and be truthful at all times. But when Eli Frieden discovers by chance that the town is more prison than haven, his safe and happy world begins to unravel. Rather than the children of loving parents, Eli and a few friends learn that they are actually the subjects of a once-forbidden experiment. Together, they plan a daring breakout. But will they survive? And if they do—where do they go from there?

PRE-READING ACTIVITY: A PERFECT WORLD

Look up the meaning of the word *Utopia*. What would a perfect society mean to you? How would you describe such a world—physically, emotionally, and intellectually? *RL.3-7.W.2*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

1. What is Eli's first clue that something is not right about his life in Serenity? When do Malik, Hector, Tori, and Amber each realize that there is something wrong with their society? Cite the specific moment when each of them decides to leave. *RL.4-7.1*
2. How does Randy change before he leaves Serenity? Why won't he talk to Eli or visit him in the clinic? How does Randy's departure trigger other events? Why does Eli decide to go to Randy when he and the others make their break from Serenity? *RL.3-7.1*
3. What is the hardest thing for the kids to accept when they realize their "parents" are not truly their parents? Discuss the meaning of love as it affects each of them—Eli, Malik, Hector, Tori, and Amber—in thinking about their families. *RL.3-7.2*
4. Discuss the concept of lying as it relates to life in Serenity. Why do the adults stress honesty so

strongly? How do Eli and his friends feel when they learn the entire society is based on lies and no one has been truly honest with them? *RL.3-7.2*

5. Why does Eli feel he can trust Mrs. Delaney? Why does she come to find him when the kids first try to leave town? Why doesn't she report their attempted escape to her husband or the other adults? *RL.3-7.3*
6. What skill does each of the kids contribute to the attempt to find out what is really happening in Serenity? What ideas and skills do they each bring to the plan to leave the town? *RL.3-7.3*

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

7. Discuss how the names of the town, the streets, the newspaper, and the classes in the school all contribute to the project that is at the heart of this community. What part does language play in the experiment? *RL.3-7.4*

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

8. What are the figurative and connotative meanings of the project name, Osiris? Why do the kids call the Surety guards “Purple People Eaters”? What is the meaning of the title of the book, *Masterminds*? Does that word have more than one meaning in the context of the story?
RL.3-7.4
9. What does Eli mean when he says, “Osiris is already over. Once you know you’re in an experiment, it’s not an experiment anymore” (p. 207)? Discuss how this moment is a turning point in the plot.
RL.3-7.5
10. Discuss your experience of reading the book from five different points of view. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story through a variety of voices? How does it affect your understanding of the setting and the plot?
RL.3-7.6
12. Compare this book to others you have read in which young people are used as subjects in an experiment or have little control over their own lives, such as the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth or *The Giver* series by Lois Lowry. What other books have you read that echo these themes?
RL.3-7.9

INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **CLONING—MIRACLE OR MONSTER?** Look up information about cloning to understand its scientific basis. (One possible resource: www.pitara.com/science-for-kids/5ws-and-h/what-is-cloning/). What are the philosophical concerns about the science of cloning? Write a paragraph about the controversy over human cloning.
RI.3-7.8; W.3-7.1
2. **DRAW YOUR WORLD.** Pretend you are doing a project for Serenity Day and draw a map of the town. Locate all the streets and landmarks mentioned in the book. How could you use your map to devise an escape plan from the town?
RL.3-7.1
3. **NATURE VS. NURTURE.** Make a list of ways in which you might be influenced by your family background or by the environment in which you live. What do you think is most important to the development of your personality—nature or nurture? (One suggested resource: www.explorable.com/nature-vs-nurture-debate).
RL.3-7.10
4. **ACTING OUT.** Choose one of the characters in the book and write a character sketch of that person. What are his or her likes and dislikes? How would he or she react to a specific situation? Create improvisational scenes in which your chosen character interacts with another character.
SL.3-7.2

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo by Owen Kassimir

Gordon Korman has written more than eighty-five middle grade and teen novels, including the *New York Times* bestseller *The 39 Clues: Cahills vs. Vespers*, Book one: *The Medusa Plot*; the Swindle series; *Ungifted*; the Island trilogy; *Pop*; *Schooled*; *No More Dead Dogs*; *Son of the Mob*; and many other favorites. Gordon lives with his family on Long Island, New York.

Discussion questions prepared by Connie Rockman, youth literature consultant and adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature.