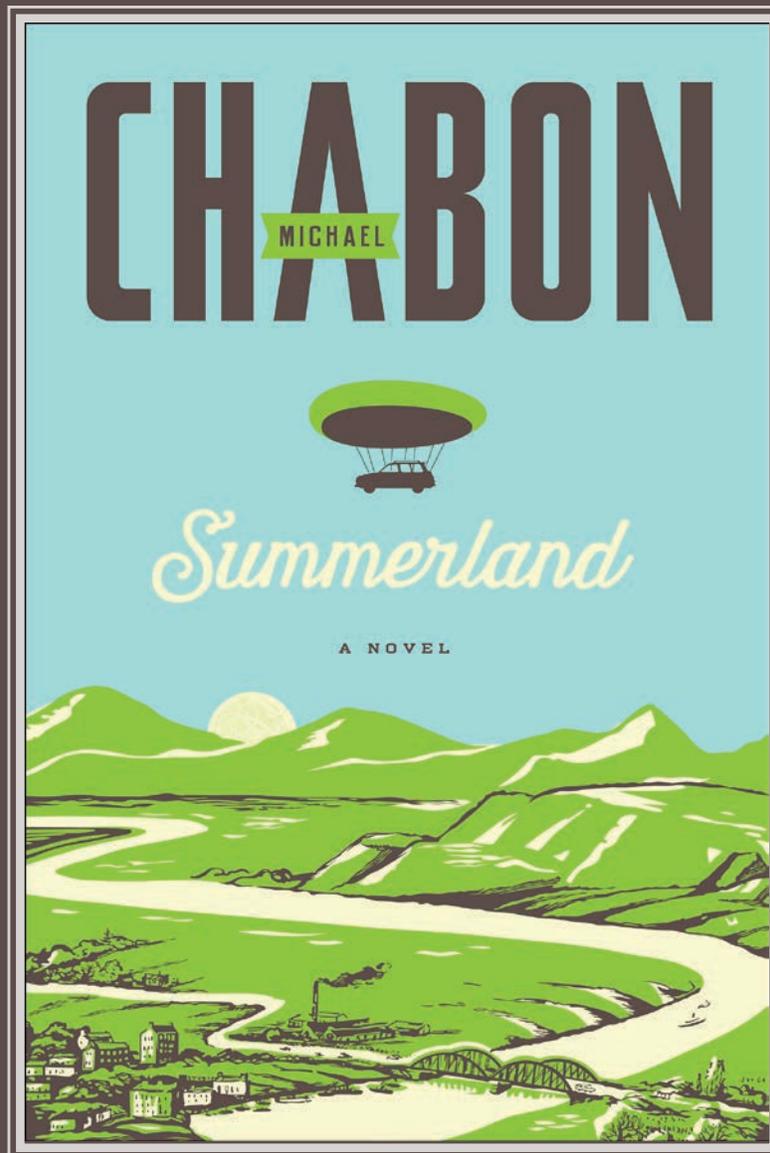


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



“Teach[es] the enduring lessons about finding strength within yourself.” —*Time*

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## A Note for Teachers

In this cherished modern classic, Pulitzer Prize-winning Michael Chabon, brings his masterful storytelling, dexterous plotting, and singularly envisioned characters to a coming-of-age novel.

Ethan Feld is having a terrible summer: his father has moved them to Clam Island, Washington, where Ethan has quickly established himself as the least gifted baseball player the island has ever seen. Ethan's luck begins to change, however, when a mysterious baseball scout named Ringfinger Brown and a 765-year-old werefox enter his life, dragging Ethan into another world called the Summerlands. But this beautiful, winter-less place is facing destruction at the hands of the villainous Coyote, and it has been prophesized that only Ethan can save it.

## Praise for Michael Chabon and *Summerland*

"*Summerland* adapts Norse mythology, Native American folklore, Homeric myth, Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis, to teach the enduring lessons about finding strength within yourself." —*Time*

"Readers will identify with Ethan and his motley crew with their insecurities, longings, family problems, and their sometimes clumsy ingenuity. Packed with magic, adventure, myth, and America's favorite pastime, this book will enchant its audience." —*School Library Journal*

"His work is page-turning and poignant; he is one of the best writers of English prose alive." —*Washington Post Book World*

"A literary swashbuckler." —*Boston Chronicle*

"An immensely gifted writer and a magical prose stylist." —*New York Times*

"An unstoppable master of the ripping yarn, beautifully told." —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

## First Base

### CHAPTER 1: THE WORST BALLPLAYER IN THE HISTORY OF CLAM ISLAND, WASHINGTON

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- Do you think it is right that Mr. Feld makes Ethan keep playing when he really isn't interested in it?
- On pages 5 and 6, Ethan thinks about the difference between *errors* and *accidents*. Would *accidents* be a fairer way to describe errors in baseball?
- Based on what we learn about the Roosters baseball team, from their players to their coach, Mr. Olafssen, how would you describe their team dynamics?
- What kinds of unexpected occurrences happen in this chapter that foreshadow elements of fantasy and fairytale?
- This chapter also introduces the idea that time, and our perception of time, are going to be constantly challenged throughout this novel. Does the manipulation of time displace you as a reader?

### CHAPTER 2: A HOT PROSPECT

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- Since werefoxes have a teacherly nature, what kind of teacher does Cutbelly seem?
- In what ways are the two Summerlands similar? In what ways are they different?
- To what does the title's chapter, "A Hot Prospect," refer?
- Like Cutbelly, Ringfinger Brown also appears in both Summerlands. What are your initial impressions of his character?
- Ethan learns that he must help the ferishers. How well-suited is he to this role, both in his own mind and in the minds of Cinqufoil, Johnny Speakwater, and Ringfinger Brown?

### CHAPTER 3: A WHISTLED-UP WIND

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- How does time work moving between the worlds, and how does that affect how the story is told?
- On page 61, our narrator says that he wants to construct a believable fairy world, and asserts that the story you're reading isn't fiction but fact. So far, do you think the narrative fits the genre of fairy stories in a believable way?
- Is Ethan suited to be a catcher? Or do you think this choice of position will only further set him up for dissatisfaction as a baseball player?
- What is the Victoria Jean and why is it significant?
- Jennifer T. also likes Hotel Beach. What are her reasons for liking it so much, and how does that contrast with what we know about her as a character so far?

### CHAPTER 4: THE MIDLING

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- In what ways does the pitcher-catcher dynamic express the kind of partnership that will be necessary between Ethan and Jennifer T.?
- Are you surprised when Ethan joins Cinqufoil in the physical fight against the ferishers?
- How does Cutbelly's assertion that two-thirds of shadows aren't real make them more threatening?
- Are you surprised that some of Jennifer T.'s family are aware of ferishers and the four worlds?
- Jennifer T. quickly points out that Thor Wignutt will help them travel among the worlds. What do we know so far about his character that makes him a logical, and desirable, part of the team?

## CHAPTER 5: ESCAPE

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- What value does Mr. Feld have to Padfoot and Coyote?
- Why would Padfoot's sunglasses be a useful tool for Ethan to have?
- Is Ethan disappointed or relieved when everyone figures out that Ringfinger should have scouted Mr. Feld and not Ethan to help the ferishers?
- Why is Thor able to fit so easily into the ferisher world? And in spite of Jennifer T.'s family experience, history, and knowledge of the ferishers, why isn't she able to pick up on their world as easily as Thor seems to be able to?

### Second Base

## CHAPTER 6: THOR'S CROSSING

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- Thor seems simultaneously certain and uncertain that he can cross between worlds. Why do you think he feels this way?
- How do think the group of Cinquefoil, Ethan, Thor, and Jennifer T. will function?
- Thor does seem to have a skill at leaping between worlds, and manages, in his first attempt at crossing, to do the impossible by taking them to the Far Territories. Will Thor be more useful to the group than you first imagined?
- What kinds of similarities and differences can you outline among the different creatures the novel has anthropomorphized so far?

## CHAPTER 7: THE EIGHTEENTH GIANT BROTHER

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- Mooseknuckle John is yet another kind of obstacle the kids encounter on their adventure. What kind of obstacle does he represent?
- From the four descriptions John gives of our group on page 163, which fits each character? Why do you think so?
- Ethan references a lot of knowledge he gained from reading in books. Thor is also a character who remembers a lot of what he has read and stores information away in his head for future use. Do you think Ethan and Thor use that kind of knowledge in similar or different ways?
- This chapter presents us with the universal rules that provide a kind of order and level the playing field for contests. Are the universal rules a good idea? Why is fairness so important to competition in this novel?

## CHAPTER 8: TAFFY

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- Thematically, what are the ways in which seeing, sight, and glasses are significant in the novel so far?
- On page 172, we learn that even the calendar changes as we move between worlds. Compare how we understand time in this sense with how the passing and recording of time happens earlier in the novel.
- Ethan seems to rely a lot on Peavine's book, *How to Catch Lightning and Smoke*. How useful a text is it for him?
- Do you think Ethan and his friends will try and help get Taffy released?

## CHAPTER 9: A GAME OF CATCH

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- Do you think universal rules help Ethan succeed in catching Mooseknuckle John? Why or why not?
- Is it fair that Ethan chose to change Mooseknuckle John's final pitch from a fastball to a change up?
- Thematically, why are books like Peavine's *Lightning and Smoke* or the Wa-He-Ta Brave guidebook so important?
- Why was it important to Jennifer T. to free Taffy?
- In this chapter, time is presented in a different way, via the innings of a baseball game. How does this change how you understand and think about time in the novel?

## CHAPTER 10: MR. FELD IN THE WINTERLANDS

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- How easy or difficult is it for Mr. Feld to believe what is happening to him?
- Does Coyote's or Padfoot's ability to change themselves (from creature to person and back again) make assessing them more difficult?
- Why would Mr. Feld's "uncluttered mind" make him most useful to a person like Coyote?
- With Coyote's insistence that Mr. Feld develop a substance capable of dissolving the entire underlying structure of the universe, are Mr. Feld's natural scientific curiosity and work ethic positive or negative character traits?
- In this chapter, Mr. Feld makes a team of himself and Cutbelly. Based on what you know of both characters, do you think they'll make a good team?

## CHAPTER 11: THE HERALD

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- How does Jennifer T.'s heritage inform both her character and her response to the events she's encountered so far?
- Do you think it's possible for Jennifer T. to reconcile what her ancestors lost with the new experiences she's gaining on this adventure?
- In what ways is expanding the size and range of Jennifer T.'s voice significant?
- Rain is significant in this chapter, just as it was in the opening of the text. Thematically, what does rain signify in the novel so far?

## CHAPTER 12: THE ROYAL TRAITOR

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- Why was Spider-Rose also imprisoned with Ethan, Jennifer T., Thor, and Taffy?
- Thor seems to be quietly figuring out his role and abilities within the group. Do his shadowtail traits seem helpful to the group as a whole?
- Jennifer T. doesn't seem too impressed with Spider-Rose. Why would she not warm to her?
- Spider-Rose claims that she came up with the designated hitter rule in an effort to make baseball more exciting. In exchange, Coyote ruined her local ball field and changed her brother into a doll. Why would Coyote be so cruel to her, when she was trying to improve his game?
- How do you see Taffy's character? Is she a kind of voice of reason for the kids? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 13: THE HOUSEBREAKERS OF DANDELION HILL

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- Given the uncomplicated physical layout of Queen Filaree's knoll, do you think it will be easy for Ethan and Thor to find his stick?
- On pages 252-255, we get a description of the kind of items found in the ferishers' treasury. Why do you think they took the items they did? Is the treasury really full of treasure?
- Why do you think the map of the worlds resembles a Rubik's cube?
- How does Ethan express his concern that Thor actually isn't human?
- Do you think Thor, as a changeling, is comfortable knowing that he's actually quite different from the likes of Ethan and Jennifer T.?

## CHAPTER 14: A MOTHER'S TEARS

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- How does the name of the Clam Island baseball team, of which Ethan, Jennifer T., and Thor are part, become more significant in this chapter?
- What makes Jennifer T. so homesick?
- Is Taffy to blame for leaving behind her children and going on an adventure?
- Do you think Taffy's adventure with Ethan, Jennifer T., and Thor makes up for missing the bridge?
- In terms of group dynamics, does Taffy become a kind of surrogate mother to the kids? Use specific examples from the text to justify your answer.

## CHAPTER 15: GRIM

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- Knowing what we do of Thor's background and the feeling of familiarity discussed on page 272, do you think there's a chance that he and Grim could be related somehow?
- Does Grim elicit a kind of sympathy, given his relation to the ferishers?
- What is the significance of the knot Ethan must cut out of the bat?
- Though Ethan felt an electricity when he helped Grim make the bat, were you disappointed when he ultimately shied away from finishing the bat himself?

## CHAPTER 16: A RAT IN THE WALLS

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- What are some positive and negative ways books, or knowledge gained from books, help or hinder the kids?
- Do you think Pettipaw is going to become a trusted ally?
- Jennifer T. displays loyalty when she insists they not leave Taffy behind. In what other ways do characters display loyalty within the novel?
- Secret passages become a key idea within this chapter. What are the ways to think of travel between worlds as a series of extended secret passages?

## CHAPTER 17: THE RESEARCH OF MR. FELD

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- Based on your initial impressions from Chapter 10, how does the team of Cutbelly and Mr. Feld function?
- When in the Middling, Mr. Feld is often described as being immersed in his work. Does his work ethic for Coyote follow the same trend?
- Like Cutbelly, are you upset when Mr. Feld kills the striker? Or do you feel his action was justified?
- Why do you think the back of Mr. Feld's head is getting flatter? What could this represent?
- Coyote refers to a female, close to Ethan, who is willing to help him get the vitriol. Who do you think it is?

## CHAPTER 18: ON THREE REUBENS FIELD

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- Do you think Queen Filaree was right to name the field after Ethan, Jennifer T., and Thor? Did their contribution merit such a reward?
- The bat Grim made works to help heal Cinquefoil, but so far hasn't had much luck in baseball games. Given these circumstances, do you think the bat is effective as a tool?
- Is it surprising that the magical place Ethan's gall created was a baseball field? Why or why not?
- Queen Filaree says the map Thor would like to have is priceless. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- The chapter ends with the repeated image of the crying woman. Who do you think she is and why do you think she's crying?

## Third Base

## CHAPTER 19: THE LOST CAMPS

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- From the shadowtail team's player-by-player description, are you surprised at their record?
- The passing of time in this chapter is discussed via the pace of a baseball game: seemingly long stretches that suddenly become quicker, more action packed. Do you think this adds a sense of urgency to the plot?
- Annie Christmas suggests bringing in a ringer so the shadowtails have a chance. From her suggestion, have we lost all hope that Ethan will be that kind of champion and hero?
- The Big Liars style of baseball is described as "old time." What kind of style is that?
- Ringfinger Brown reappears in this chapter. Do you think his presence is designed to help the kids or present them with another obstacle they must overcome?

## CHAPTER 20: RANCHO ENCANTADO

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- Rodrigo Buendía's house is obviously quite secure. But is that much security actually necessary? Why or why not?
- Do you think Thor will ever be able to understand fully just how different he is? Will he ever get a sense of himself given that he is a changeling?
- We learn that Buendía has stories surrounding him that make him more of a hero figure than he actually is. Is being a baseball hero not enough? Why or why not?
- This chapter foreshadows that Buendía, as their ringer, will save Ethan, Jennifer T., and Thor. Do you think he will be successful?

## CHAPTER 21: JENNIFER T. AND THE WORMHOLE

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- Jennifer T. says she wouldn't be as great a pitcher if they were back at home, but that Ethan would still be a good catcher. Do you agree with her assessment of how their skills would translate? Why or why not?
- In this chapter, the knot in Ethan's bat, Splinter, is stronger than the Tall Man's knife. How do you think the knot will be resolved?
- Given what we know of her family history and her skills, do you think it's possible that Jennifer T. really could be a shadowtail?
- If Jennifer T. is a shadowtail and if Thor is a changeling, then how much does Ethan, as the only completely human kid, stand out among this group of friends?
- Ethan's idea about Jennifer T.'s pitch, to throw the ball into the wormhole, saves the game for Cinquefoil's Shadowtails. Do you think he's hitting his stride as a catcher?

## CHAPTER 22: THE BOTTOM-CAT

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- Is Ethan getting better at decoding advice given to him elliptically, as in the case of the Tall Man with the Rattlesnake Necktie?
- This chapter marks the last time we see Ringfinger Brown. Now that we have the full arc of his character, do you think he was helpful or a hindrance to Ethan and his friends?
- Discuss the ways in which Taffy is both an insider and an outsider within the group.
- Do you think the Bottom-Cat was too easily manipulated into helping them, or was Jennifer T.'s plan a very good one?

## CHAPTER 23: THE CONQUEST OF OUTLANDISHTON

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- Does Angry Betty's character surprise you in any way?
- How similar is the creation story told at the beginning of the chapter similar to other notable creation myths?
- Why does Cutbelly kill Betty? Does doing so help him and Feld more than it helps Coyote?
- This chapter is dominated by the physical structure of the citadel. What does that structure represent in this chapter?

## CHAPTER 24: APPLELAWN

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- How significant does Jennifer T.'s family history and heritage become to her personal adventure and to that of the team as a whole?
- Coyote ends up agreeing to play the kids in baseball. Do you trust him to keep it a fair game?
- The Diamond Green baseball field serves as a crossroads to the four worlds. In what ways does a baseball field make a good metaphor for a crossroads?
- Coyote is quite cruel when he makes La Llorona appear to Ethan as his mom. Do you think this trick will bolster Ethan's resolve to defeat Coyote?
- We know now that Taffy was the one to get the vitriol for Coyote. Has she betrayed her friends or do you understand her motivations for agreeing to help Coyote?
- Mr. Feld becomes a Flat Man. Is this physical transformation a result of being so dedicated to his work or to specifically working for Coyote?

## CHAPTER 25: A GAME OF WORLDS

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- Ethan learns that Jennifer T. has bargained Splinter if the Shadowtails lose their game against Coyote's Hobbledehoy. Has she wagered too much?
- Given what we learn in this chapter of the players on both teams and the choice of umpire, do you think the game is played fairly?
- Is Taffy entirely broken as a character or is she a hero for her actions?
- In spite of his appearance as the Flat Man, how important is Mr. Feld's support of Ethan during this game?
- Ethan and Splinter finally connect on not just any hit, but a monster home run. Has this at-bat made his character fulfill Ring-finger Brown's initial scouting report, that Ethan will save the ferishers and the four worlds?

## Home

### LIFE, THE WORLD, AND BASEBALL IN THE DAYS AFTER THE FLOOD

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- Across all the worlds, what are some of the impacts of Ethan's home run?
- Back in the Middling and what we understand as present time, we learn that only two days have passed since the kids' adventure began. Does that timeframe seem reasonable?
- Following Ethan's home run, Jennifer T. doesn't experience any kind of transformation or magical healing like Thor and Ethan do. Why disallow her that experience? How does Jennifer T.'s apparent constancy affect how we understand and respond to her character?
- Thor spends more and more time testing the skills he has as a changeling, and often leaps between worlds with Taffy. Does this represent a broken friendship between Thor, Ethan, and Jennifer T.?
- The novel ends with Ethan being taken out at the plate, but holding onto the ball and recording an out in the seventh inning of a game. Why is it more important narratively to end with Ethan's success and not the outcome of the game?

## Writing & Research Prompts

- Throughout the novel, baseball is both a literal game that teams play, but also a metaphor. What are the ways in which *Summerland* uses baseball as a metaphor?
- *Summerland* references various kinds of story telling practices, especially mythology and folklore. How does the novel connect to such genres as Norse and Native American mythology and American folklore and why are these connections so vital to the way in which *Summerland* is told?
- As discussed, *Summerland* manipulates time and its passing in a variety of ways, and there are moments in which the narrative seems to have time pass both slowly and quickly simultaneously. Why is the manipulation of time significant to the genre of fantasy and faerie stories?
- From the Introduction, we learn that *Summerland* was written partly out of the author's love of baseball, but also as a way of coping with loss and grief. How do the themes of loss and grief inform of *Summerland's* plot?
- *Summerland*, in a variety of ways, blends the scientific and rational with fantasy and the fantastical. In what ways does the novel combine science and scientific rationalism and certainty with fantasy's uncertainties and magical realism?

## About the Author



Michael Chabon is the bestselling and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, *A Model World*, *Wonder Boys*, *Werewolves in their Youth*, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, *The Final Solution*, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, *Maps & Legends*, *Gentlemen of the Road*, *Telegraph Avenue*, *Manhood for Amateurs*, *Moonglow* and the picture book *The Astonishing Secret of Awesome Man*.

[www.michaelchabon.com](http://www.michaelchabon.com)

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## Books by Michael Chabon

### FOR TEEN READERS

*[The Astonishing Secret of Awesome Man](#)*

*[Summerland](#)*

### FOR ADULT READERS

*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*

*[The Final Solution: A Story of Detection](#)*

*[Manhood For Amateurs: The Pleasures and Regrets of a Husband, Father, and Son](#)*

*[Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borders](#)*

*[A Model World and Other Stories](#)*

*[Moonglow: A Novel](#)*

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## About This Guide's Author

Kim Racon holds a BA in English and Gender Studies from Cedar Crest College and an MA and is ABD in English from Lehigh University. A contributor to the websites [Notches](#): (re)marks on the history of sexuality and [The Buzz About](#), she is currently an adjunct lecturer in first-year writing programs.

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