

READERS GUIDE

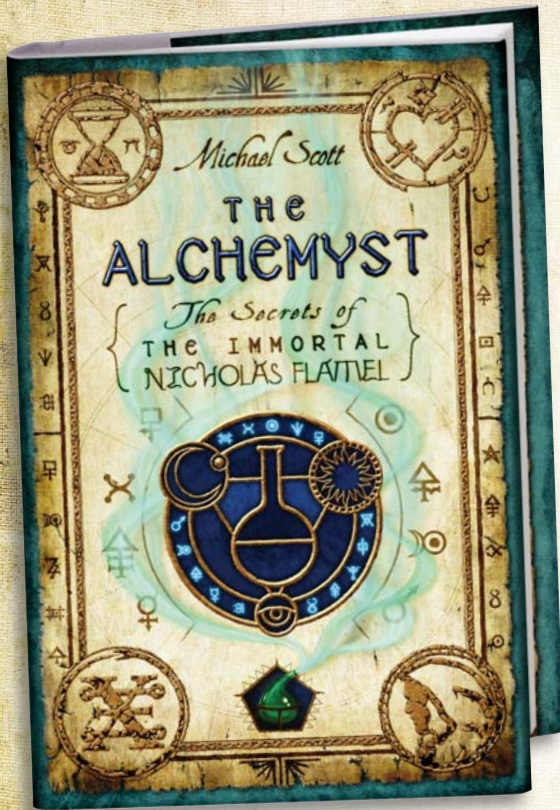
THE ALCHEMYST

The Secrets of
THE IMMORTAL
NICHOLAS FLAMMEL



www.thealchemy.com
www.randomhouse.com/teachers

ABOUT THE BOOK



When Josh takes a job in a secondhand bookstore in San Francisco, he has no idea that Nick Fleming, the owner, is actually Nicholas Flamel, a 14th-century alchemist who discovered the secret to immortality.

Flamel and his powerful wife, Perenelle, are attacked by Dr. John Dee, a magician and astrologer from the court of Queen Elizabeth I. Dee has been chasing Flamel and Perenelle through the centuries and around the globe to retrieve the Book of Abraham the Mage, the codex that holds the secrets of life and death.

Josh and his twin sister, Sophie, find themselves caught in the center of the battle. Could it be that these twins actually possess the powers that can save the world?

Grades 7 up

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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

♀ Familiar to many from the Harry Potter novels, Nicholas Flamel was a real historical figure. Have students search online and in encyclopedias for information about Nicholas Flamel, Perenelle Flamel, and Dr. John Dee. Have them make a chart of facts they find out about these individuals as well as the legends that have evolved around their names.

♁ Ask students to research the term *Elder Race*. What does this term mean? Have them write a paragraph exploring some of the concepts and conjectures about an Elder Race. Organize a debate between groups of students about whether such a race could exist today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ♀ How do Josh and Sophie know they can trust Flamel? How do they know that Dee's motives are evil ones? Do their feelings toward these two characters change through the course of the story?
- ♀ Discuss the power of the codex, the Book of Abraham the Mage. Do you think that one book could contain the secrets to immortal life?
- ♀ Compare the personalities of Josh and Sophie, and Flamel and Dee. In what ways are the pairs alike and different? How does Perenelle compare to them?
- ♀ Flamel and Dee both call on beings of the Elder Race. Discuss the idea that entities from many different mythologies could still exist in our world, and that they could interact with one another and with humans.
- ♂ Why does Perenelle use a ghost to help her communicate with Flamel? Why can't she call on beings of the Elder Race?
- ♀ Discuss the character of Scathach. What part does she play in the story? What is her relationship to Flamel? To the twins? To Hekate and the Witch of Endor?
- ♀ Flamel says, "We are all prisoners of a sort here—prisoners of circumstance and events." (p. 197) What does he mean? Are Josh and Sophie involved in the battle between Flamel and Dee because of their destiny, or because they choose to become involved? What does the codex mean when it says, "The two that are one will come either to save or to destroy the world"? (p. 199)
- ♂ Why do Josh and Sophie agree to go through the Awakening? Why does Hekate only "awaken" Sophie's powers? How does this affect the twins' connection to each other?
- ♀ What does Hekate mean when she says, "Great change always comes down to the actions of a single person"? (p. 210) Can you identify times in the history of the world when great change happened because of the actions of a single person?
- ♀ Why does Josh believe what Dee is telling him at the fountain in Ojai? What does Dee mean when he says, "It seems we are all victims of Nicholas Flamel"? (p. 338) Who do you believe is telling the truth?
- ♀ The ending of the book seems to lead to another beginning, at the other side of the leygate. What do you think will happen to the twins in a future story? Is Dee destroyed, or will he return? The first chapter of Book 2 is printed in the back of *The Alchemyst*. Challenge students to write an additional chapter of this story as they would like to see it unfold.

USE OF LANGUAGE

Have students work in groups to research the use of language in *The Alchemyst* from the list of activities below.

- ♀ Look up the word *codex* as it applies to the history of printing. How is a codex different from a modern book?
- ♁ Look up these words and determine the specific differences between them: *magic*, *alchemy*, *necromancy*, *scrying*, *astrology*, *divination*, *sorcery*, and *aura*.
- ♂ Look up these words and define the unique characteristics of each of these creatures: *golem*, *simulacra*, *homunculus*, and *pterosaur*.
- ♁ There are many ancient and legendary beings mentioned in this book. Find out the origin of beliefs for each of these and what cultures they represent: *Scathach*, *the Morrigan*, *Bastet*, *Hekate*, and *Witch of Endor*.
- ♁ Place names are important in this story—both real places and those from mythical legends. See what you can learn about each of these places: *Yggdrasill*, *San Francisco*, *Atlantis*, and *Ojai*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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MICHAEL SCOTT is one of Ireland's most successful authors. He writes for both adults and young adults. A master of fantasy, science fiction, horror, mythology, and folklore, he was hailed by the *Irish Times* as "the King of Fantasy in these isles." He lives and writes in Dublin, Ireland. Learn more about Michael Scott at www.dillonscott.com

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Alchemy Lab
www.alchemylab.com/flamel.htm

Encyclopedia Mythica
www.pantheon.org

The John Dee Society
www.johndee.org

Prepared by Connie Rockman, children's literature consultant, adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature, and editor of the H. W. Wilson Junior Book of Authors and Illustrators series

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