

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ANIMORPHS™

by K. A. APPLGATE



DISCUSSING THE SERIES

Everyone should be scared—really scared—and that means you! Five kids—the Animorphs—are Earth’s only hope against a secret invasion by a race of terrifying parasitic aliens called Yeerks. Can the Animorphs defeat the Yeerks—and still have time to be normal kids?

Stories of alien invasion have been common in science fiction novels and movies for over a century. *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells set the standard, and has been revived over the years through a famous radio play and two movie versions. The theme has been explored by many other famous authors such as Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, John Christopher, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert Heinlein, and in movies such as *Invaders from Mars*, *The Thing from Another World*, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and in TV shows like *Battlestar Galactica*, *Dr. Who*, *Star Trek, V*, and *The X-Files*. In the video game, *Destroy All Humans!*, gamers play war-like extraterrestrials seeking to add Earth to its Galactic Empire.

Now, in the Animorphs series, five young people—Jake, Marco, Cassie, Rachel, and Tobias—and one alien, Aximili-Esarrouth-Isthill (nicknamed Ax)—obtain the ability to morph into any animal they touch. They name themselves “Animorphs” and use their ability to battle a secret infiltration of Earth by the Yeerks. The Animorphs take turns narrating the books, telling their story of the secret war through each of their perspectives.

As you read these books you can discuss many themes that run through them—such as dehumanization, growing up, innocence, leadership, morality, responsibility, and war. Other themes you can explore include:

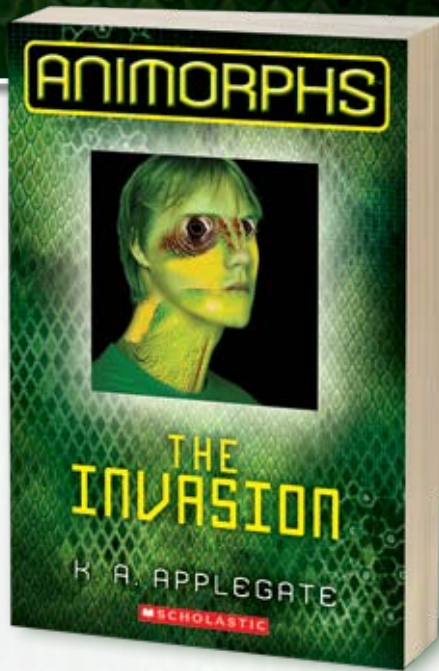
Alien infiltration. This popular variation of the alien invasion theme is at the core of the Animorphs stories. The Yeerks are parasites that take over and control human hosts. Because the human hosts are normal in appearance and demeanor, it is difficult for the Animorphs to detect and identify who are the invaders among them.

Underdog stories. Everyone identifies with the underdog—and who are better examples than five kids trying to thwart an entire race of alien invaders with advanced technologies and superhuman powers?

Parasites. The Yeerks are terrifying parasites from space—but Earth has also spawned its own species of parasites. Considering humans’ unsustainable exploitation of the Earth’s resources and indifference to its care, can the human race itself be considered a parasitic species? In the long run, are we superior to the Yeerks—or terrifyingly similar to them?

Human superiority to animals. Are humans superior to other animals? Only by becoming animals can the Animorphs acquire the amazing abilities to fly, live underwater, or navigate by scent or radar. Who’s smarter?—and better suited to its environment?—us or them?

ABOUT THE BOOKS



BOOK 1: *THE INVASION*

The Earth is being invaded, but no one knows about it. When Jake, Rachel, Tobias, Cassie, and Marco stumble upon a downed alien spaceship and its dying pilot, they're given an incredible power—they can transform into any animal they touch. With it, they become Animorphs, the unlikely champions in a secret war for the planet. And the enemies they're fighting could be anyone, even the people closest to them.

BOOK 2: *THE VISITOR*

If someone told you Earth was under a secret invasion, what would you think? Rachel had a hard time believing it, even after she and her friends saw what they saw—and received an incredible power to become any animal they touch. Rachel knew they were in danger from the start, so when it's suggested that they use their new powers to spy on one of their enemies, she rises to the challenge. But when she discovers what they'll have to do to win, will it be more than Rachel can handle?



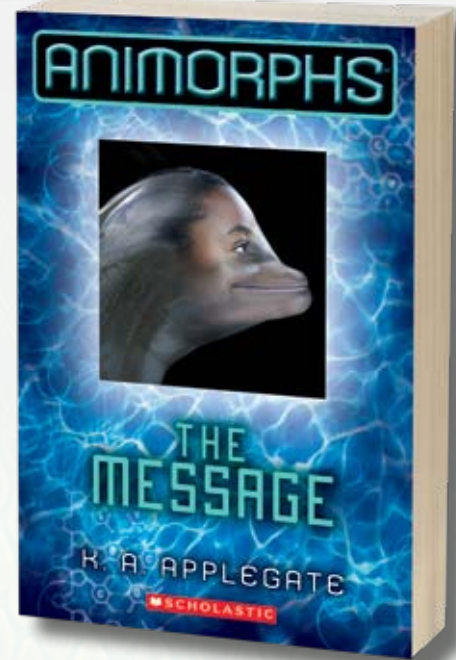
BOOK 3: *THE ENCOUNTER*

When Tobias and his friends were given the power to morph, they were also given an important warning: Never stay in a morph for more than two hours. But Tobias broke the time limit, and now he's trapped in the body of a hawk—forever. Tobias won't give up, though. They all made a promise to fight. So when he discovers an important Yeerk secret, he knows he has to do everything in his power to destroy it. But to do so, Tobias will have to contend with a part of himself that's wrestling for control. A part that isn't human.



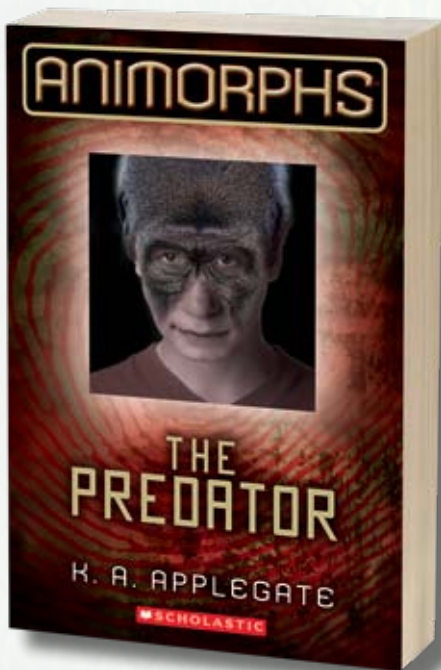
BOOK 4: *THE MESSAGE*

It all started with the dreams, but Cassie didn't pay much attention to them. She and her friends have been having nightmares ever since they acquired their power to morph. But when Cassie discovers that Tobias has been having dreams too—the exact same dreams—about the ocean, and a voice that's calling to them for help, she decides it's time to start listening. Now she and the others have to figure out if the dreams are a message, or a trap.



BOOK 5: *THE PREDATOR*

Marco never wanted to be an Animorph. He didn't want the ability to change into any animal he touches. And he certainly did not want to be one of a handful of kids who are the planet's only defense against a secret alien army. His friends understand why he feels how he does. He's worried about his dad—the only family Marco has left. If anything happens to him, his father will be alone. But something is about to change for Marco, something that could finally give him a reason to fight.



BOOK 6: *THE CAPTURE*

It was bad when Jake found out his brother was one of them—a Human-Controller, a slave. But that was nothing compared to what he's dealing with now. When the Animorphs decide to visit the Yeerks' new base, it seems simple. But then they get caught and Jake falls—just for a moment—into the Yeerk pool. Now they're out, and his friends can't see it. To them he's just like normal. But Jake is screaming for help. His worst fear has finally come true. He's become the enemy.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ALIEN ENCOUNTERS

Book 1: *The Invasion*

- Marco's reaction to the spaceship is that they should call "the cops or the army or the president or something" (p.11). What would you do if you saw a spaceship land?
- Jake describes the alien as a fusion of animal and human parts. What do you think is the strangest feature of this creature?
- How does the alien communicate?
- Who does the alien say has come to destroy the people of Earth?
- What does Jake find surprising about the interior of the Andalite's ship?
- What does Jake realize when he sees the three-dimensional picture in the Andalite's ship? How does it make him feel?
- What power does the Andalite share with Jake and his friends? How does the power work?

Book 4: *The Message*

- What do the Animorphs find on the ocean floor?
- How is the Andalite the Animorphs find in the ocean dome related to Prince Elfangor?
- What surprising thing does Jake say to the Andalite?
- Why is Ax living on the ocean floor?
- Why does Ax refer to Jake as Prince Jake? What does Ax promise to do?
- Why does it anger the Yeerks that the Andalites take their home with them into space?
- What does Ax reveal about the Yeerk plan for the Earth?
- What is it that Ax says he is forbidden to reveal?
- How does what Ax tells the Animorphs about the Yeerks affect them?

- What does Ax morph into that troubles the Animorphs?
- What will be the challenge of Ax living among the Animorphs?

ENEMIES AMONG US

Book 1: *The Invasion*

- What is the shocking news that Tom shares with Jake? What does Jake realize about his relationship with Tom?
- What makes Marco believe that Tom is a Controller? What is Jake's response?
- What convinces Jake that his brother is a Controller? Who else is a Human-Controller?
- How are the Yeerks able to persuade some humans and Hork-Bajir to become voluntary hosts?

Book 2: *The Visitor*

- What is the purpose of The Sharing, and what is Assistant Principal Chapman's role in it?
- Why is Rachel concerned about her friend Melissa?
- Why is it so difficult to identify Human-Controllers?
- Why does Rachel not tell the other Animorphs about Mr. Chapman driving her home? How does it make her feel?
- When Rachel listens to how the Chapmans speak to Melissa, she describes it as "the kind of horrible that made you want to cry instead of scream" (p. 106). What do you think she means?
- What weapon does Chapman use against Rachel?
- What causes Chapman to start twitching and contorting?
- Why did Mr. Chapman volunteer to be a host?

Book 5: *The Predator*

- What does it mean for Marco to live in a “paranoid world”?
- What do the Animorphs discover are the perils of bringing Ax to the mall?
- Marco says he used to hate Chapman but has changed his mind. What changed it?

Book 6: *The Capture*

- What does Jake learn when he checks on the phone calls his brother Tom is making from home?
- How does the Yeerk slug live inside a host’s head?
- How does The Sharing convince people to become voluntary hosts?
- What is the significance of Tom leaving the meeting with Visser Three?
- What happens when Jake falls into the Yeerk pool?
- How does Jake know he has become a Controller?
- What does Marco propose to do with Jake?
- What does the Yeerk make Jake’s body morph into in order to escape?
- What does Jake realize is the basic difference between Yeerks and humans?
- What does the Yeerk reveal to Jake about its home world and evolution? What does Jake learn about the Yeerk while it lives in his brain?

CLOSE CALLS AND NARROW ESCAPES

Book 1: *The Invasion*

- Why are the Yeerk ships called “bug fighters”?
- Why does the Andalite say that the Hork-Bajir should be pitied?
- Which creatures do you think are more frightening, the Hork-Bajir or the Taxxons? Which do you think would be more difficult to fight?

- Jake says: “If you’ve never been really afraid, let me tell you—it does things to you. It takes over your mind and your body. You want to scream. You want to run. You want to wet your pants” (p. 33). What is a time in your life when you have been as afraid as Jake, or close to it?
- What does Visser Three tell Prince Elfangor of his plans for the Earth?

Book 2: *The Visitor*

- How does Rachel infiltrate the Chapmans’ house?
- What is Iniss Two-Two-Six?
- What is the warning that Visser Three gives to Iniss Two-Two-Six?
- What does Iniss Two-Two-Six wish would happen to Visser Three?
- How does Rachel feel when she sits with Melissa? What makes it such a painful experience for her?

Book 3: *The Encounter*

- How does Tobias break up the impending wolf fight?
- Do you agree with Marco when he says to Rachel, “You get off on the danger”?
- Tobias observes that people “never think something bad will happen to them.” Do you agree? Can you think of examples of that from your own life?
- Why is Cassie’s morphing plan so risky?
- What do the trapped Animorphs want Tobias to do?
- What do you think it was that Tobias never told Rachel?
- How do the Animorphs escape and survive?

Book 4: *The Message*

- Why do the Taxxons fare so poorly in the ocean?
- What is a mardrut?
- What comes to rescue of the Animorphs just as the mardrut is upon them?

Book 5: *The Predator*

- What close call do they have as lobsters?
- How do ants compare to humans in warfare?
- How are the Animorphs affected by their terrifying encounter with the ants?
- How do the Animorphs escape from the Yeerk mother ship?

LEARNING ABOUT ANIMALS

Book 1: *The Invasion*

- What does Tobias find so amazing about morphing into a cat? What do you think would be the advantages and disadvantages of being a cat?
- What does Jake find so amazing about morphing into a dog? What do you think would be the advantages and disadvantages of being a dog?

Book 2: *The Visitor*

- What does Rachel love most about being an eagle?

Book 3: *The Encounter*

- Rachel tells Tobias that he is a human being because “what counts is what is in your head and in your heart. A person isn’t his body. A person isn’t what’s on the outside.” Do you agree with Rachel? What are the things that make humans unique from other animals?
- Tobias says there are “millions of things he can do as a bird that I couldn’t do as a human.” How many things can you think of that you could do as a bird that you can’t do now?
- How does Tobias feel about the experience of catching and eating a rat? What does the experience lead him to conclude?
- What does the death of the female hawk make Tobias realize?
- What is the difference between how Tobias thought of himself before he morphed into a hawk and how he thinks of himself now?

Book 4: *The Message*

- What unique connection does Cassie have with animals?
- Why does Cassie have reservations about morphing into a dolphin?
- What does Cassie discover about the clicking noises made by dolphins?
- What do Cassie and the other Animorphs discover in their battles with the sharks?
- What thoughts does Cassie learn from the whale they rescue?
- Why does Cassie say it “isn’t necessary to believe whales are as smart as humans”?
- Why does Cassie believe the whales battled Visser Three, other than her call for help?

Book 5: *The Predator*

- As ants, what do the Animorphs find irresistible?

Book 6: *The Capture*

- What does Jake discover is most alarming to cockroaches?
- What does Jake find is fun about being a fly?

THE BEST AND WORST THINGS ABOUT MORPHING

Book 1: *The Invasion*

- What is the greatest danger of morphing?
- How is Marco able to fly when the hawk he morphed into has an injury?
- When Jake morphs into a green anole lizard at school, what is the worst part of the experience? What important discovery does he make?
- Why is Tobias unable to morph back into human form? As what animal will he have to remain?

Book 2: *The Visitor*

- What does Rachel say is the greatest challenge of having the animal's brain in with one's own?
- Why do you think it is so much easier for Cassie to morph?
- Why does Tobias always have to be a hawk?
- If not for the Yeerks, how would Marco use his morphing power? If you had it, how would you use your morphing power?
- What does Rachel think of Jake morphing into a flea?
- Rachel says they all shudder at the thought of morphing into a cockroach (p. 42). What do you think would be the worst thing to morph into?
- From the way Rachel describes morphing into a shrew (pp. 56-58), would you say morphing is a good or bad experience?
- What is Rachel doing in her nightmare? What do the others say about dreams and nightmares in relation to morphing?
- Why does Visser Three believe that the Animorphs are Andalites?

Book 3: *The Encounter*

- Why does Tobias hate the way the others feel sorry for him?
- How does he feel about having to remain a hawk?
- What does Tobias realize when he eats the cold hamburger?
- Why is Tobias frightened when he sees the hawk he rescued?
- Rachel tells Tobias that she is certain that when the Andalites return, they will be able to return him to his human body. If that is possible, do you think Tobias will want to return to his human body?
- Tobias observes: "It's strange the things you miss when you lose your human body. Like showers. Like really sleeping, all the way, totally passed out. Or like knowing what time it is." If you were in Tobias's situation, what are the things you would miss the most?

Book 4: *The Message*

- How is Marco able to survive the injuries he receives from the shark attack?
- Why does Cassie feel the need to talk to Marco about what happened to him in the shark fight?
- What dream does Cassie repeatedly have?

Book 5: *The Predator*

- How is Marco's morphing into a gorilla to stop the robbery a kind of wish fulfillment?
- What is so weird about Ax morphing into a human?

Book 6: *The Capture*

- What is the dream Jake has almost every night?
- What opinion do Jake and Rachel share on morphing into cockroaches?
- Why is Ax "dangerous" when he gets around food?
- What vision does Jake have as he morphs out of his cockroach body?

FIGHTING THE YEERKS

Book 1: *The Invasion*

- What makes Visser Three the most dangerous of the Yeerks?
- Why is the Kandrona important to the Yeerks?
- What do the Animorphs find at the Yeerk pool?

Book 2: *The Visitor*

- Why does Rachel suggest destroying the Kandrona?
- What is it about Visser Three that makes Rachel's skin crawl?

Book 3: *The Encounter*

- What does Tobias discover about the Yeerk ship?
- How does Tobias describe the Yeerk ship? What kind of ship is it?
- What is Cassie's argument for going after the Yeerk ship? What is Marco's argument against going after the Yeerk ship? Who do you think makes more sense?
- Why does Marco want to disable the Yeerk ship's cloaking device instead of destroying the ship? Do you think it's a sensible alternative?

Book 5: *The Predator*

- How does Marco feel about Cassie's plan to get into Chapman's basement and steal a transponder?
- What does the Yeerk mother ship look like?
- Whom does Marco realize is Visser One?
- What does Marco wonder about his mother?

Book 6: *The Capture*

- What is the two-part mission Visser Three reveals at the The Sharing meeting? If the Yeerks succeeded, what would it mean for Earth?
- How do the Animorphs sabotage the Yeerk pool?

LIFE OUTSIDE OF MORPHING

Book 1: *The Invasion*

- Why is Jake bothered about not making the school basketball team?
- How did Jake meet Tobias?

Book 2: *The Visitor*

- What is the fantasy that Rachel tells Marco he must get over?
- What is the reason behind Marco's reluctance to be an Animorph?

Book 5: *The Predator*

- How did Marco's mother die?
- How has Marco's dad been since his mother died?
- What is it that Marco cannot bring himself to tell his dad?

Book 6: *The Capture*

- Why do you think Jake is the only one with whom Marco has shared the truth about his mother?

WHAT THE ANIMORPHS KNOW AND THINK ABOUT EACH OTHER

Book 1: *The Invasion*

- What do you think Jake means when he says about his cousin Rachel: "[she] may look like Little Teen Miss Model or whatever, but she thinks she's Storm from the X-Men"? (p.4)
- Jake says that Tobias is "never scared of weird stuff. It's the normal stuff he can't stand" (p.10). What are some things that scare you?
- What does Jake think of Tobias's family situation?
- How does Jake respond to Tobias telling him that he is their leader?

Book 4: *The Message*

- How does Cassie feel about Jake?

Book 5: *The Predator*

- What is Marco's opinion of Rachel?
- With which of the Animorphs characters do you most identify?

The Animorphs books may be ordered from your local bookstore or usual supplier. Teachers and librarians may order from Scholastic, 2931 East McCarty Street, P.O. Box 7502, Jefferson City, MO 65102. Call toll-free 1-800-SCHOLASTIC. Fax orders toll-free to 1-800-560-6815. Email orders to: EGOPorders@scholastic.com.

This discussion guide was prepared by Ed Sullivan, an author, book reviewer, educator, and librarian.



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