

# READING GROUP GUIDE

## TUNNELS, DEEPER, FREEFALL, AND CLOSER

by Roderick Gordon and Brian Williams

Enter the terrifying world of *Tunnels*—a subterranean society under the streets of modern London, whose citizens are enslaved by a strange, cruel sect, the Styx, who plan to exterminate all Topsoilers. Can fourteen-year-old Will defeat the Styx, and rescue his missing father?

Roderick Gordon and Brian Williams first met at college in London and have remained friends ever since. Gordon, a former investment banker, now lives with his wife and children in Norfolk, England; Williams, an installation artist, inhabits the city's Hackney neighborhood, accompanied everywhere by his invisible dog.

About their writing process, Gordon says:  
“When I lived in London, my house was only a ten-minute bike ride from where Brian lived, so he’d cycle round and we would work on *Tunnels* at my kitchen table. When I moved with my family to the country, we discussed *Deeper* over many late-night phone calls, and swapped sections by email. When I visit London we go to a couple of favorite cafés. They’ve gotten used to us and know that we can make a cup of coffee last several hours!”



# TUNNELS

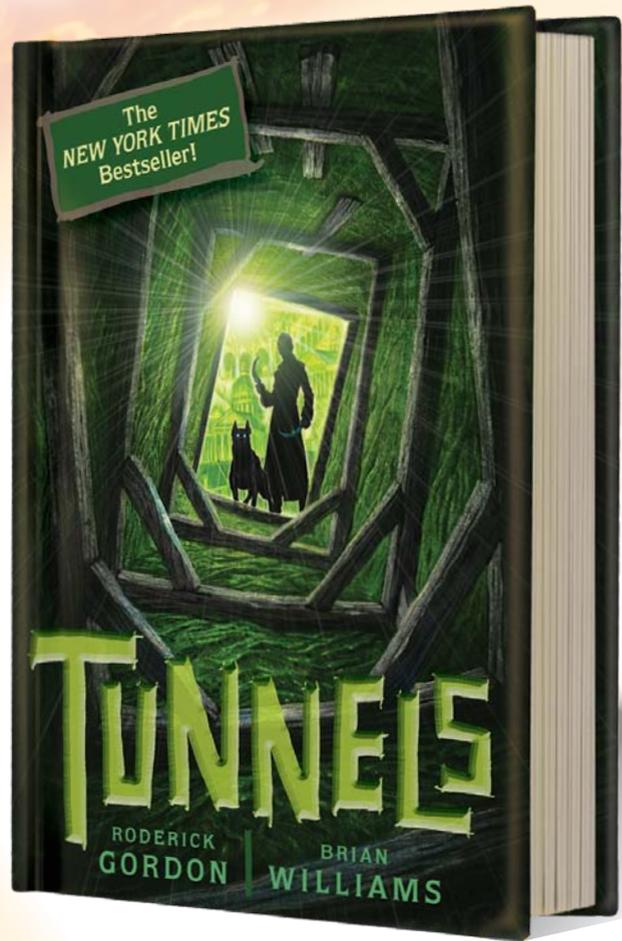
A *New York Times* Bestseller

## ABOUT THE BOOK

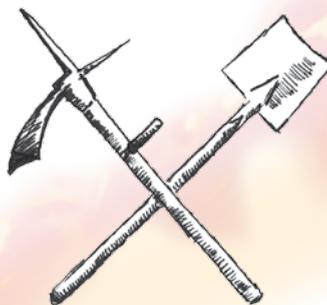
He's a loner at school, his sister's beyond bossy, and his mother watches TV all day long, but at least Will Burrows shares one hobby with his otherwise weird father: They're both obsessed with archeological sites. When the two discover an abandoned tunnel buried below modern London, they think they're on the brink of a major find. Then Dad disappears. And strange men start following Will home. Helped by his only friend, Chester, Will decides to investigate. Soon the boys are lost in a dark underworld, desperate to escape the clutches of a cruel and brutal cult. The deeper they descend, the deadlier it gets!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do Will and his father share a passion for? Does it sound interesting to you or not? Why? What types of things do they uncover?
2. Why is Will such a loner at school? How does it change for him? How do the two boys prove their friendship to each other throughout the story?
3. Describe Will's home life. Who are the members of his family? How do they function together and apart? Would you want to live with them? How does his family life become a "total cave-in"?
4. List and examine the series of mysterious discoveries that Dr. Burrows uncovers in the town of Highfield. Would these small but tantalizing objects and people keep you searching or not? Which clue would pique your interest most?
5. What do Will and Chester find in the forty pits tunnel? Would you be disappointed or astonished after all that work? What happens to the tunnel? Why are they certain it isn't a natural occurrence? What do you think they should do next?
6. Dr. Burrows wants, most of all, to be remembered for his work. Is this a worthy goal? Is he willing to sacrifice his family on the altar of his career for it? What consequences does this cause for his family?
7. How do Will and Chester follow the clues of Dr. Burrows' disappearance? Where do they look? What do they discover?



8. Describe the odd men skulking around Highfield. What happens when they follow Will and Chester? Where do they take refuge? What would you do if you were followed?
9. What are the qualities of the luminous sphere? How was it tested? What would you do with it if you found it? What is the most important thing you learn about it? Theorize its importance.
10. Analyze the reasons that Will and Chester should (and should not) open the door that is set in the rock. Would you go? What would you take if you did?
11. Describe their first encounter with the Colony. What can they conclude about its inhabitants based on what they find? Would your curiosity lead you deeper, like Will, or would you be more cautious like Chester? Summarize what happens once they are discovered.
12. Who are the Styx? What are their methods? What conclusions can you make about their power in the Colony?
13. How is the attack on Mrs. Burrows a surprising revelation of her character and personality? Who else is a surprise in the story? How did the authors lull you into believing this character was benign at first?
14. What truth does Will find out about his heritage? Who are the members of this new family, the Macaulays? Who would you trust? Why? How does this separate Will from Chester? Who becomes important to Will?
15. Compare and contrast life in the Colony with life Topsoil. How are they alike? How are they very different? Which do you think has stricter laws?
16. Explain the work that Will is pressed into performing. What do you think he's recording about this part of his adventure in his journal? What would Chester and Rebecca be writing about?
17. Who helps Will plan an escape for both him and Chester? Evaluate the various parts of the journey. Who ends up in London? Why will they never truly be safe?
18. How does Cal react to being Topsoil? What is better than he expected? What is worse? Who helps them in London?
19. In the end, why do they decide to return to the Colony? What is the most perilous part of the journey? Who aids them? Who do they find?
20. Predict what you think will happen in the sequel, *Deeper*. Give evidence from the book to support your answer.



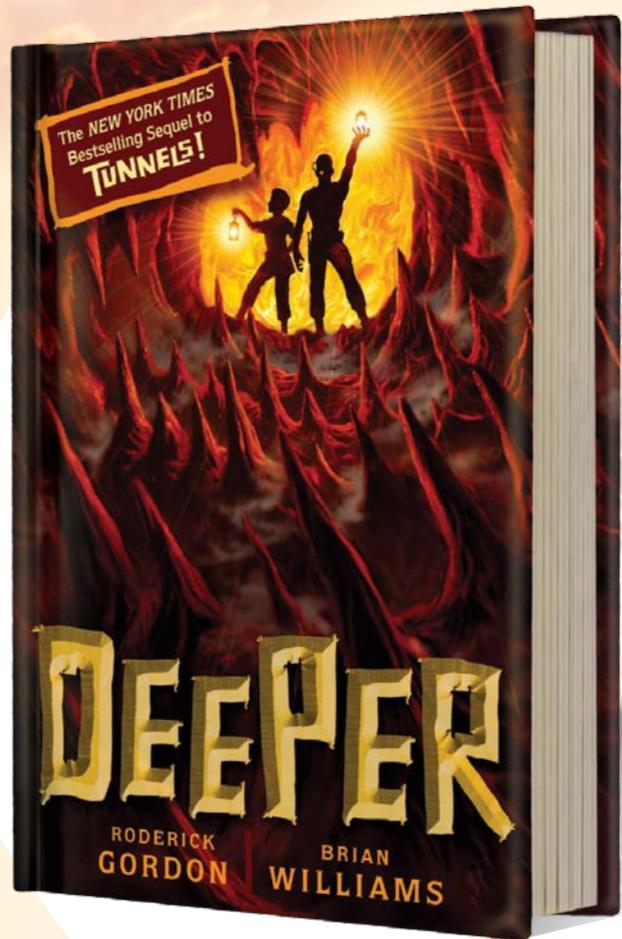
# DEEPER

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Darker. Deadlier. Deeper! Boy archaeologist Will Burrows went in search of his missing father—and discovered a sinister subterranean world. Now, wandering the dark, hot bowels beneath the Colony, Will stumbles across the Styx's dastardly plan to exterminate all Topsoilers. Slowly he begins to piece together the plot. But how can Will save the Topsoilers from annihilation when his own life is at risk—and his killer sister is still at large?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you summarize where *Tunnels* left off? Who are the main characters? What is the major conflict?
2. Who is Sarah Jerome? What do we, as readers, learn in the early chapters about her? What do you think is most important? Why? What is her life like Topsoil? Do you think it is worth it? Who else do they get to cooperate with them?
3. Where are our heroes: Dr. Burrows, Will, Call, and Chester as the book opens? What are the first challenges that they face? What does each of them want?
4. What does Sarah believe has happened to both of her sons? Why does she believe it? Is it easier to believe things about people that you do not know that well? How do they use her for their own purposes?
5. Who are the Styx? What is their objective in the Deeps and Topsoil? How do Will and Chester learn about them?
6. What is Mrs. Burrows' life like in Humphrey House? Has she changed much from book one? How do you think she became so incapable of participating in life? What does she witness over the course of the novel?
7. Along the journey Will finds clues that his father is still alive. Would these little tantalizing tidbits be enough for you to press forward into the great unknown to find him or not? Why? Is Will more like his biological father or the one who raised him? Which is more important: nature or nurture?
8. What are Coprolites? What do they look like? What have they been used for in the Deeps? How do they treat Dr. Burrows? Does Cal's prejudice against them remind you of anything in our own world?



9. What happened to Cal when he rushed ahead once too often? How was his body attacked? Can you imagine leaving him behind? What emotions do you think Will must have? Does he ever recover completely, both physically and mentally?
10. Describe both Drake and Elliot. How do they become indispensable in the lives of the boys? What tools and weapons do they use?
11. How is Sarah treated once she returns to the Colony? How did she become a heroine to the people? What does this tell you about life under Styx rule?
12. "...Even in this roughest and most hostile of environments, where you had to do whatever was necessary, however rank and disgusting it might be, consideration for your friends was still paramount. This consideration, this code of behavior, was the glue that held the team together." Discuss why this is so important in the Deeps. Is it true in your life as well? How does Will and Chester's friendship change?
13. Why does Sarah join the Styx to find Will and Cal? Who else helps in the search? What do you think her brother Tam would say about her decision? Why?
14. Describe Dr. Burrows' continued adventures down in the Deeps. What types of things does he discover? How does he imagine his life Topsoil after his explorations? Do you think he is brave or foolish? Why? Defend your answer.
15. How does Will become separated from the patrol? How does he try to survive? What would be the most frightening aspect of this for you? Do you think the physical or emotional aspect would be the most difficult? Why? How does his ordeal end?
16. Explain what happens in the deadly battle of Drake, Elliot, and the boys against the Styx. How do Drake's actions mirror Uncle Tam's? Why do they cause Will to make a decision that makes him feel "as if...he was now marked, as if things would never again be the same"? How many times do you think these kinds of moments happen in a person's life?
17. Why is Elliot so frustrated with Cal? Is she being realistic or cruel about his inclusion on the team? How has Cal changed from the beginning of the story?
18. Which character do you admire the most? Why? What qualities make a person brave? Which character do you feel like you know the best? How do we, as readers, get to know the characters?
19. How does the setting vary throughout the novel despite the fact that it takes place completely underground? Which is your favorite part? Why? What have you learned from reading these novels that you can apply to your own writing?
20. In the end, what happens to each of the characters? Who would you say has won at this point? Predict how you think the story will continue in book three and explain your choices.



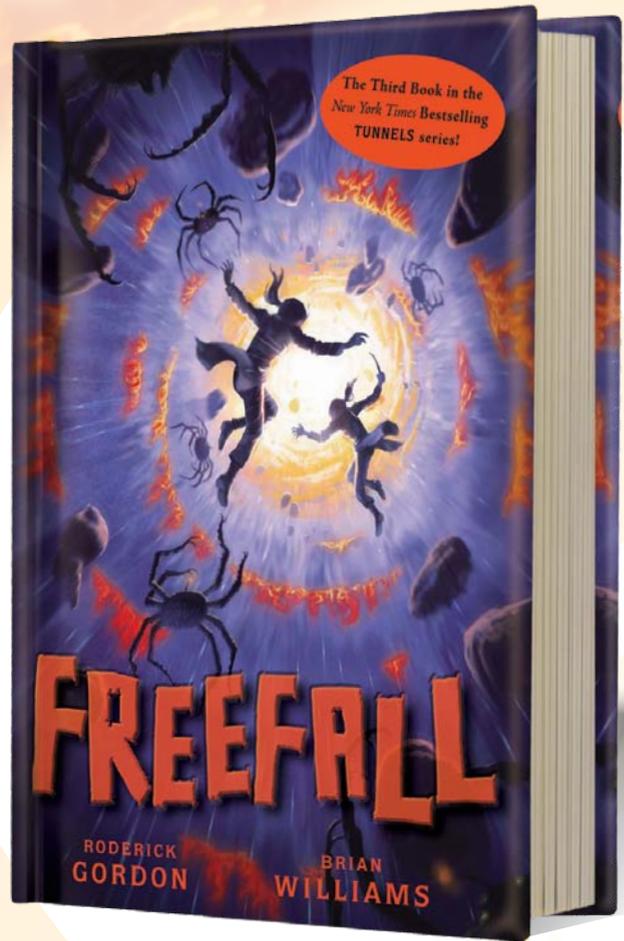
# FREEFALL

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Pulled into the Pore by the weight of his brother, Will Burrows and his best friend, Chester, must find a way to survive in the most disturbing environment yet... one made up of prehistoric creatures that like human snacks, and the continued threat of the evil Styx led by Will's evil sister, Rebecca. Is there hope that Will can still find his dad and rid the world of the Dominion virus that threatens all Topsoilers?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do the Styx believe happened to the Rebecca twins, Will, and his companions? How do they hope to continue with their plan Topsoil?
2. Summarize what has happened at the end of the last novel and who has survived into this story. What happened to Sarah, Jerome, and Cal? Describe the new setting in which they have landed.
3. Why does Mrs. Burrows decide to leave Humphrey House? What is her plan? Does she get much help from the authorities? Why or why not? How does she pursue her family?
4. How are we certain of the loss of Cal in this book compared to the previous novel? What does Will do?
5. How does Drake foil the plans of the Styx to extract the virus from their victims? Who does he get surprising help from in his act? Do you think the Styx are acting more desperate?
6. Did the twins survive the freefall into the Pore? What do they have on their side for their survival? How does this complicate things for Will and his friends?
7. Describe Elliot's condition. How do they try to care for her? Do you think they would have been able to help her at all if gravity were at full force?
8. What insects, arachnids, and monsters do they encounter along their adventures in the Pore? Which is the most gruesome or fearsome? Why?
9. How is Dr. Burrows fairing on his scientific expedition? Who discovers him? What do you think they are using him for? Will he be duped by their story?



10. Who is Martha? How does she come to the boys' aid? What is her story? Can you imagine living by yourself in that environment? What do you think would be the worst part? Why does Chester suspect her motives?
11. Do you think Dr. and Mrs. Burrows are partly responsible for the way Rebecca turned out, or not? Is she evil by birth or by nurture? How much can parents be blamed?
12. Why doesn't Will take revenge on his sister? Is she telling the truth? What clues do you have that she is or isn't? How does she gain Will's faith?
13. How does Will figure out that there is more to Martha's story than she originally revealed? What does it lead them to? What is the most perilous part of their journey to the metal ship? Why are they willing to make this journey?
14. What do you make of Will's repeated urge to hurl himself down the Pore? Where do you think this came from? How does he eventually overcome it? Do you think this type of mind control is possible in our world too?
15. Describe the metal ship. How do they think it came to be in the Pore? What is the most important thing they discover on the ship?
16. How does Rebecca put doubts in Will's mind about Martha? Do you question Martha's loyalty as you read? Can a liar like Rebecca ever truly be trusted? How do you learn about her duplicity? How does it reveal more about Elliot's story too?
17. Reconstruct the meeting between Will and his father, Dr. Burrows. How is it not quite the reunion he imagined? How would you feel if he were your father?
18. How do Will and Dr. Burrows become separated from the rest of the team? What do they discover? How are they able to accomplish the impossible, going Topsoil? What miraculous things do they discover along the way?
19. How is Dr. Burrows finally convinced that things are actually quite dangerous Topsoil? How does he make foolish moves that almost get them killed? Who helps them navigate the world safely Topsoil?
20. Describe the reunion between Mrs. Burrows and her son and husband. What has happened to their relationships? How has Mrs. Burrows changed? How does she prove her loyalty to her family by cooperating with Drake? What happens to her because of this? How had she been duped too?
21. What organization does Drake reveal he is a part of? How do they operate? What does he outfit Will and Dr. Burrows with for their journey? Of all the tools and weapons he provides, which ones are most useful?
22. Why does Dr. Burrows and Will's relationship suffer during this journey? Do you think Will is right to be angry with his dad? Is his dad unbelievably selfish or on the path to enlightenment?
23. While Dr. Burrows and Will have been Topsoil, what has happened with Chester, Elliot, and Martha below? What have they been hoping for? How have they survived?
24. Summarize the undercover operation that Mrs. Burrows enters in with Drake to get the Styx leader. How does it go? What are the causes and effects of this operation?
25. After Will reunites with Chester and the gang, what impulsive choice does he make? Who follows his lead? Describe their journey into the Garden of the Second Sun. Were the myths true? Generate a list of important events that happened along the way and in this Eden. In the end, where does everyone stand? What will happen next?

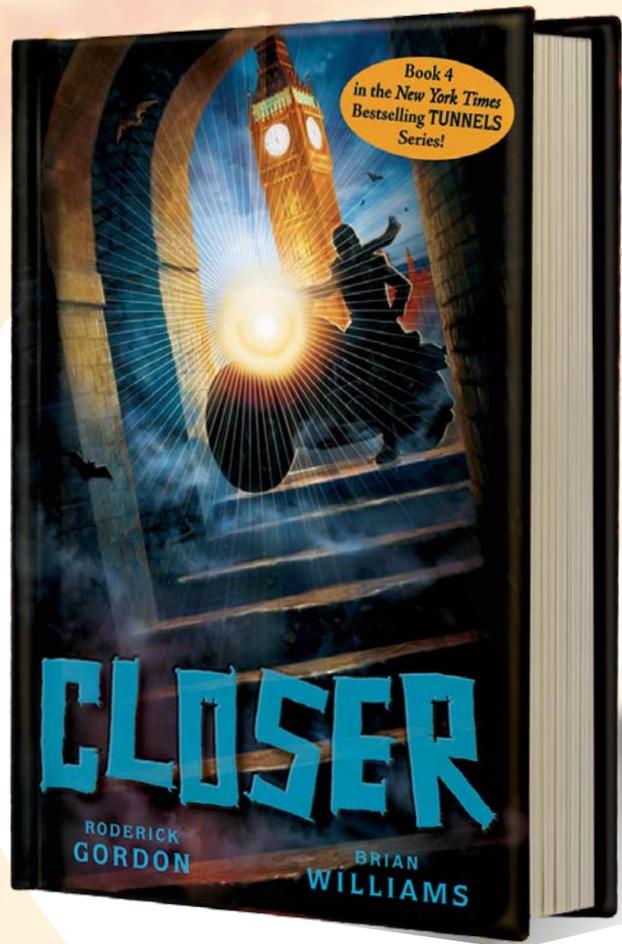
# CLOSER

## ABOUT THE BOOK

At long last reunited with his dad, Will now spends his days exploring “the Garden of the Second Sun,” decoding the cryptic glyphs on its three mysterious temples—or eyeing the wild animals with renegade girl Elliot. But an army of darkness is on the march and the ruthless Rebecca twins have once more cheated death. With a corps of cold-blooded Limiters at their command, they’re determined to hunt Will to the bitter innards of the earth. This time, who won’t escape with their life?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Brainstorm a list of the ten most important things a reader of this series should know or remember before reading chapter one.
2. How does the novel open? Where are all the most important characters? What conflicts do they each face? What is their ultimate goal?
3. Compare and contrast Chester and Martha’s journey to the Rebeccas. What do they have in common? Who would you rather join and why? Who has the best resources?
4. How does Martha’s behavior change toward Chester once they are Topsoil? Would you consider her evil or not? Why? What does Chester want more than anything?
5. Why does Drake feel as if “he didn’t deserve to be alive”? (p 57) What does he hope to accomplish? How does he become associated with Eddie the Styx? What relationship does Eddie have with Elliot? What are the five most important things to know about these two characters?
6. Describe the landscape and inhabitants of the Garden of the Second Sun. What odd things appear here? Do you think they should stay there or go Topsoil?
7. Describe what happened to Mrs. Burrows. What are the long-term results of her exposure to the Dark Lights? How does her brain re-wire?
8. What happened to Drake’s friend Fiona while at the university? Why? What do you think happened to her? How does this story eventually give Drake the proof he needs against Eddie?



9. Discuss Dr. Burrows' relationship with his son, Will. What is most important to the doctor? What theories does he develop about man's evolution in the new world?
10. Explain the existence of New Germania. Why is it important to the Rebecca twins? What do they demand of its leaders? How have the people of New Germania changed from their original ideas and leaders? Are they now admirable or not? Why?
11. How is Chester finally rescued from the cabinet? What gruesome discovery is made about Martha? What is her fate?
12. How is Mrs. Burrows treated within the home of the Second Officer? What do his relations try to do to her? Why is she once again transferred to the care of the Limiters? What do they hope to discover about Mrs. Burrows? How do they plan to find out?
13. Explain what happens when Chester goes to see his parents. What techniques does Drake use to help them overcome the Dark Lights?
14. Do you think Dr. Burrows' insistence on personal discovery and his career eventually leads to his fate or not? Is he somewhat responsible for what happened? Why did he miscalculate their cruelty? How does Elliot gain control over the negotiations?
15. Why does Will accuse Elliot of being a traitor? Do you agree? How does she execute her plan of saving Will with few resources? Who stands between the two parties? Is the commander an honorable figure in your opinion or not? Why?
16. Why must Will and Elliot make it to the surface as soon as possible? What obstacles do they face on their journey Topsoil? Which part is most difficult? What hindrances and help do they find along the way?
17. Why can't Drake make a plan to simply annihilate the Citadel and the Styx inside it? Do you agree with the theory of collateral damages or not? Why?
18. What do the Rebeccas' plan to do with the resources of the New Germania? Do they accomplish this task or not? How?
19. What is the Styx plan for Topsoil? Why do they feel justified in their plans to create a feudal system and take over the planet? (p 355) Do they have a point or not?
20. Do you consider Drake and Chester's mission into the Eternal City a successful one or not? Why? How does Drake rid himself of the complication of Eddie the Styx? Why? What clues are given that Eddie is still part of the equation?
21. In the end, summarize the fates and missions of each of the main characters. Predict what you think will happen next and why. What will the Styx do next? Who will eventually have success? At what price to humanity and the Colony?

## DISCUSSING THE SERIES

1. The series explores many compelling settings: the Colony, the Deeps, the Garden of the Second Sun, and now the New Germania. If you could take a one-day pass and explore only one of them which would you choose? Why? What would you take with you for protection?
2. Which characters in the series are your favorites? Why? What do you admire about them? How have they changed over the course of the series?
3. Now that Will is finally reunited with his father what do they do together? Does his father seem interested in Will's life and friendships or not? Do you think modern parents are more concerned with their careers and accomplishments than previous generations or not? Why?
4. The Rebecca twins are formidable enemies. Why is dealing with these two so challenging? Do you prefer them as antagonists or the Styx? Why? What qualities make a compelling antagonist in a novel?
5. Which characters have your sympathy? How do novelists develop these feelings in their readers? What make a character likeable to a reader? What predictions do you have for each character in the story? What makes you think this?
6. Elliot makes a difficult decision to risk the future of the entire Topsoil world for the survival of her true friend, Will. Would you have made the same decision? When should the sacrifices of a few lives be made for the success of many? Who should decide?
7. Heroism is a theme throughout the series. Which characters do you think act in the most heroic ways? What constitutes a hero? Which character would you most like to make your best friend? Why? Even if the characters survive how will they be different after their experiences in the Deeps?
8. Are the Styx at least a little justified in their plans for the Topsoil? Is it self-defense to protect their lands from people who abuse the earth?
9. Do you think the environmental movement has a hope of reversing the damages caused by years of abuse? Why or why not?
10. Why do you think the authors included New Germania in this novel? What do you think they are trying to say about that war and the people who lived through it?
11. Which book in the series is your favorite so far? What would you tell your best friend about this series? What makes a good series?

## READING

1. Create a character chart as you read the novels. List each major character and the following information: description, history, relationship to Will, and where they are at the end of the fourth novel.
2. Good readers can summarize the most important parts of a chapter (in a sentence or two) and make predictions based on evidence from the story. After each chapter, do both. It doesn't matter if your predictions end up wrong (after all, what fun would it be if we always knew what would happen?) but only that you stay involved in the story and that it is plausible!

## WRITING

1. Keep a journal as Will, Chester, or Dr. Burrows and make at least five entries in the most important parts of your story.
2. Describe your own monster. Use descriptions like that of the Brights, or a dust puppy, as inspiration. Be sure to write it with enough words that someone could illustrate it.

## ART

1. Draw a set design for one scene of the novel. What colors would you use in your palette? How would you research the historical components, if necessary?
2. Create a journal or guidebook about things the boys discover on their journey. Use sketches and short notes to help you remember what you've found on this adventure.



**THE FOLLOWING BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE:**

**TUNNELS**

Hardcover: 978-0-439-87177-8, \$17.99

Paperback: 978-0-545-07881-8, \$7.99

**DEEPER**

Hardcover: 978-0-439-87178-5, \$18.99

Paperback: 978-0-545-09636-2, \$7.99

**FREEFALL**

Hardcover: 978-0-545-13877-2, \$18.99

Paperback: 978-0-545-13878-9, \$8.99

**CLOSER**

Hardcover: 978-0-545-20115-5, \$18.99

The books are available from your local bookstore  
or usual supplier, or from:

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P.O. Box 7502, Jefferson City, MO 65102.

Call toll-free 1-800-SCHOLASTIC.

This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer,  
a reading specialist and children's author.

Visit her website

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

to find hundreds of guides to children's literature.



## PRAISE FOR TUNNELS

★“Compelling...A very promising series kickoff.”—*Booklist*, starred review

“Sure to captivate readers...fresh, adventure-filled.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“This incredible debut fantasy...will have quest fans eagerly waiting for the next installment.”—*Voice of Youth Advocates*

## PRAISE FOR DEEPER

“This page-turner has lots of action and deeds of derring-do for fans of dark, dystopian fantasies.”—*Voice of Youth Advocates*

“Nonstop action...for readers who aren’t afraid of the dark.”  
—*School Library Journal*

## PRAISE FOR FREEFALL

“At long last, the third installment in the subterranean ‘Tunnels’ epic reunites Will, his errant father, and his resilient mother...[Freefall] gains momentum as it goes, propelled...by chases, attacks, explosions, cunning deceptions, and acts of heroism.”—*School Library Journal*

## PRAISE FOR CLOSER

“Gordon and Williams move characters and plotlines around like two generals directing a simulated battle...[the] authors have created quite a world.”—*Booklist*





# Chicken House

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