EXPLORER ACADEMY

Readers Guide

The Coolest School on the Planet!

"A fun, exciting, and action-packed ride that kids will love." — LM ABRAMS
"Inspires the next generation of curious kids to go out into our world and discover something unexpected." — JAMES CAMERON

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THE NEBULA SECRET

A NOVEL

TRUDI TRUETA
Cruz loves to surf. It gives him a sense of calmness and comfort. It makes him feel powerful, free, and invincible.

- What favorite activity makes you feel this way?
- What do your family members and friends do that makes them feel this way?

Cruz is going to leave his father, friends, and everything familiar to fly far away to attend Explorer Academy. He is scared that he won’t make any friends, won’t be able to handle the training, and might disappoint everyone who has helped him reach this point.

- Have you ever traveled away from everything familiar to you?
- What fears did you have?
- How did things turn out?
- How did the experience change you?

Cruz uses Mell and the voice-command remote to take aerial photos, unlock a door from the outside, and more.

- If you had your own Mell, what would you use it for?

Emmett's glasses show the world how he is feeling.

- How could this be a good thing, or not-so-good-thing?
- Would you want everyone to know exactly how you are feeling all of the time?
- When could this be helpful?
- When might it cause trouble?

Sailor and Emmett vow to help Cruz find out what happened to his mother and who is trying to kill him. They stick by him regardless of the risk.

- When have you experienced loyalty—to others, or from others—and what did it inspire you to do?
- When being loyal might also put you at risk, what factors might help you decide between loyalty and keeping yourself safe?

Cruz went back to find Dugan in the classroom on their first morning of class even though it made him late to the session with Dr. Hightower.

- Would you have done the same? Why or why not?
- Have you ever tried to help someone who has bullied you?
- Did it have any effect on their behavior toward you?
Academy students learn that anthropology has four subfields: biological, cultural, linguistic, and archaeological. Cruz chooses archaeology and uses King Tut’s tomb as the setting for his holo-video.

- If you were in Cruz’s class, which subfield would you choose?
- What place or people would you want to explore for your holo-video?

On their first CAVE training expedition, Cruz and his team visit the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in El Santuario del Rosario, Michoacán, Mexico. Some of the butterflies journey 3,000 miles to spend the winter there. The students have to catch some of the already tagged insects and look up the tag numbers in a database to learn the original tagging location.

- Why might it be important to understand where the butterflies were tagged?

Jericho takes a blood sample from his own arm instead of Cruz’s.

- Why does he do this?
- If you were in his position, would you do the same? Why or why not?

Cruz and his classmates use technologies that potentially cure illness and save lives: Emmett makes his OS band send electrical pulses to his brain to try to cure his seasickness; Cruz’s MAV, Mell, responds to Cruz’s call via radio frequency to free him from a smoke-filled room.

- If you could invent something that would cure sickness or save lives, what would it be? Describe how it would work and what you’d use it for.

Team Cousteau takes a simulated expedition on the Academy’s research boat Orion, setting sail from Nome, Alaska, 140 miles from the Arctic Circle and 160 miles east of Russia. Cruz sees a “stark white landscape” and a swimming polar bear. Following instructions to act as freelance journalists for a conservation magazine, they each choose a topic: the submersible, the ship’s captain, the research labs, the observation deck, climate change.

- If you were on Team Cousteau, which topic would you choose to explore?

Academy explorers learn from experts: Dr. Gabriel teaches them about monarch butterfly migration patterns, Dr. Osment, on Orion, studies climate change. Their professors are experts in geography, astronomy, biology, oceanography, conservation, scientific innovations, art, journalism, fitness and survival, anthropology, paleontology, and cryptology.

- What does it mean to be an expert?
  If you don’t know what these fields are, look them up on www.nationalgeographic.org.
- Which of these fields sound interesting to you?
Mr. Rook appears to be a kind and helpful librarian. Renshaw appears to be a loyal friend.

- How do their later actions change how you think of them?
- Why did each of them choose to do a bad thing?

All of the students at the Academy are “on paper ... extraordinary” according to Dr. Hightower. In other words, they’ve scored top grades and have won lots of awards.

- Why is that not enough, and what else does she say they need to prove?
- Do you think it’s enough to be extraordinary “on paper”? Why or why not?
- In what ways is Cruz extraordinary?
- In what ways are his mother and Aunt Marisol extraordinary?
- In what ways are they ordinary?
- In what ways are members of your family extraordinary and ordinary?

Aunt Marisol observes that in the past, “‘explorer’ tended to be just another word for ‘conqueror.’” For example, she says, when Christopher Columbus encountered the Taíno people in the Caribbean, he was “quite taken with them—said they were a generous and giving people and would make good servants.” In other words, he valued them because of what he could take from them.

- How does this differ from the Academy motto: “With all, cooperation. For all, respect. Above all, honor”?
- What’s the difference between doing your best and being a perfectionist?
- Why is it good to do your best but not always good to be a perfectionist?
- If you could enter the Computer Animated Virtual Experience (CAVE), which location would you most like to visit and why?
- If you could join Team Cousteau in one of the CAVE simulations or the Augmented Reality Challenge (ARC), which would you choose and why?

Dr. Hightower tells the students, “the world needs you as much as you need it … The future of this planet is in your hands.”

- What does she mean?
- In what ways do you think the world needs you?
- In what ways do you need the world?

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