



EXPLORER ACADEMY READER'S GUIDE

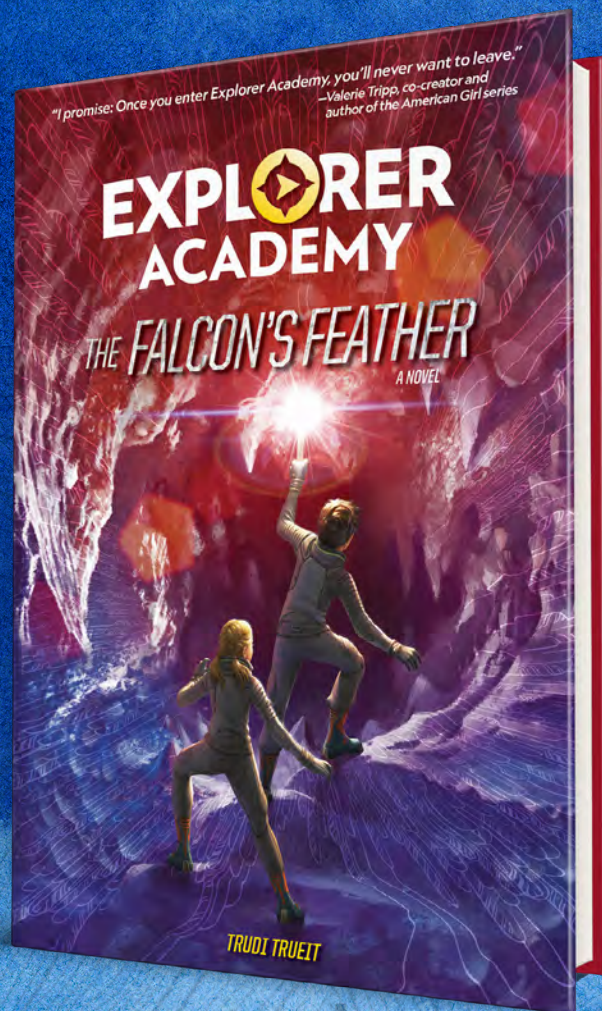
In the captivating and thrilling follow-up to *The Nebula Secret*, Cruz and his classmates embark on their first globe-trotting mission aboard the Academy's ship, *Orion*.

... A DEADLY SECRET

... A DANGEROUS MISSION

... A DISCOVERY THAT COULD
CHANGE EVERYTHING

UNDER THE *Stars*



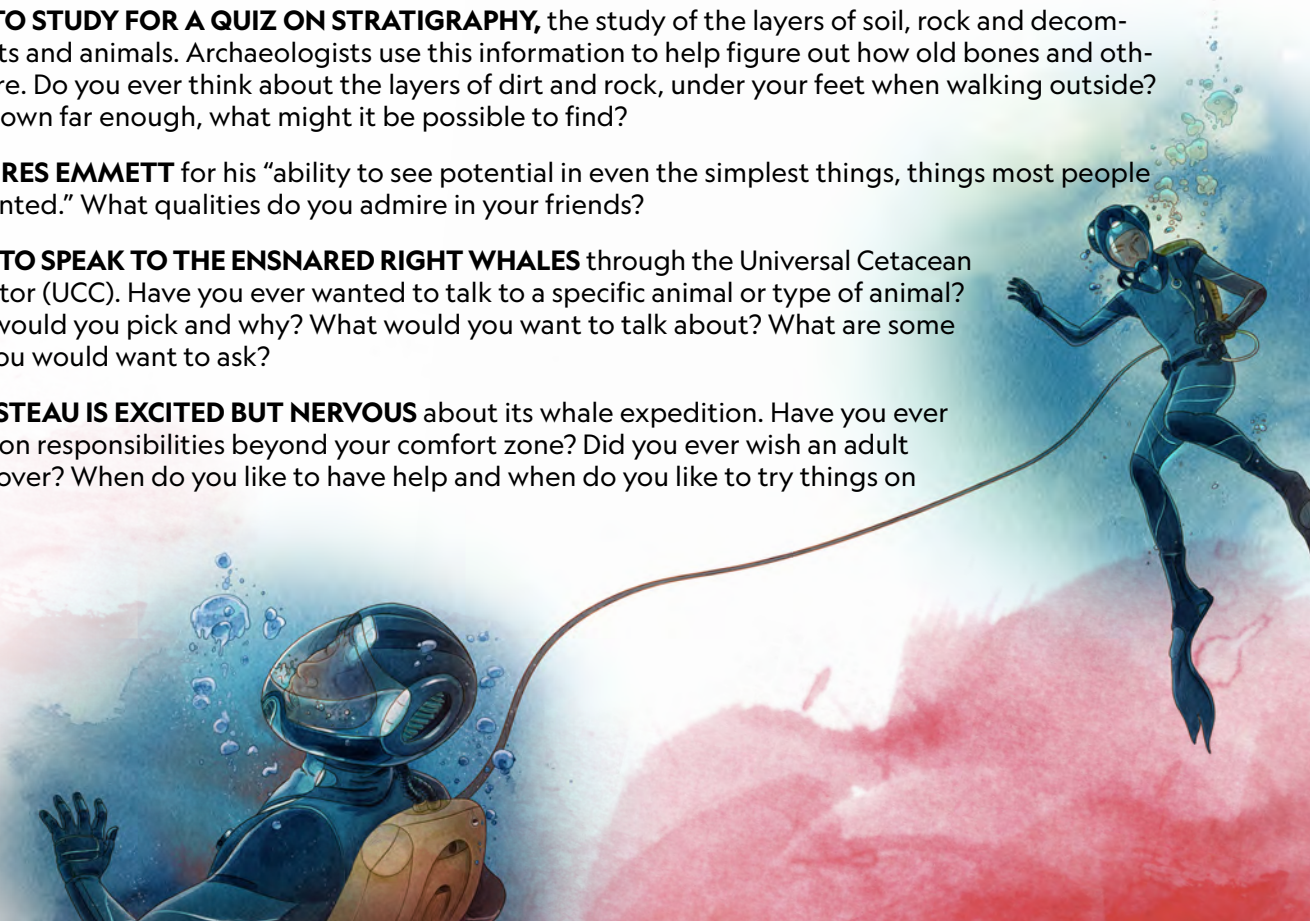


THE FALCON'S FEATHER READER'S GUIDE

- ▶ **CRUZ FACES A DAUNTING CHALLENGE:** to find the scattered pieces of the cipher circle while Nebula, the group who killed his mother, tries to stop him. Dr. Hightower, Emmett, and Sailor are the only ones who know of his quest. How might things be different if Cruz were alone in his mission, uncertain of anyone he could trust?
- ▶ **CHEF KRISTOS GROWS MOST OF THE VEGGIES EATEN ONBOARD ORION** in a hydroponic garden on the observation deck. Lemons, limes, and oranges grow on potted trees near the outdoor bow deck. What do you think are the advantages of growing food onboard a ship instead of buying it and bringing it aboard at port?
- ▶ **THE WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY IN THE EXPLORERS' UNIFORMS INCLUDES** a charging port that runs on body heat, a translator for 6,000 languages, and a personal GPS that displays hologram maps. If you could have one of these built into your clothing, which one would you choose and why?
- ▶ **CRUZ LIES TO HIS AUNT MARISOL** when she asks him to consider using the ship's safe to store his mom's journal and cipher piece. When have you lied to someone you loved? How did it make you feel? Did you ever confess the truth? What happened as a result?
- ▶ **LATER, AUNT MARISOL REMINDS CRUZ** that if he isn't candid with her, finding the cipher to his mother's formula isn't going to work. After he tells her the whole truth about his encounter with Jericho, he falls asleep on her shoulder. Why do you think he decides to give up his secret and how does that affect him?
- ▶ **WHENEVER CRUZ LOOKS AT THE BIRTHMARK ON HIS WRIST** shaped like a deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) molecule, he feels weird. Cruz's dad says it makes him special. In this case, what's the difference between "weird" (how Cruz feels about the double helix) versus "special" (how his dad feels about it)? What is something about yourself that makes you feel weird? In what ways do you feel special? Is it possible that anyone would say the things you feel weird about actually make you special?



- ▶ **EMMETT RIGS THE SECURITY SENSOR** for his and Cruz's room at 80,000 hertz—a level he says is only audible to bats and Mell. Yet Cruz hears it clearly, to the point it makes his ears ring. Why might Cruz be able to hear a sound at that level?
- ▶ **RIDLEY, THE DEEP SUBMERGENCE VEHICLE** with an impenetrable hull and four robotic arms, can dive to the deepest known place in the ocean, seven miles down. It's named after one of the most endangered turtles on Earth. In what ways does this name suit the DSV?
- ▶ **TRIPP SCARLATOS NOTICES CRUZ'S INTEREST IN RIDLEY** and offers to give him private lessons so that Cruz can become his co-pilot. When has a teacher or other adult given you individual attention to help you develop a talent or special interest of yours? Is there an adult (parents, teacher, relative, friend, neighbor) who does something really cool that you'd like to learn? How could you ask them to show you some basics or how to get started?
- ▶ **THE FOUR TEAMS ONBOARD ORION—MAGELLAN, COUSTEAU, EARHART, AND GALILEO—ARE ALL NAMED AFTER FAMOUS EXPLORERS:** Ferdinand Magellan sailed around the globe; Jacques Cousteau explored life underwater; Amelia Earhart tested the human limits of air travel; and Galileo Galilei was a scientist, astronomer, and more. How does Cruz's team name suit it? If you could go back in time and work with one of these explorers, which one would you choose?
- ▶ **THE PRIZE FOR THE SCAVENGER HUNT IS A SPHEROCYLINDRICAL TIME CAPSULE** that can capture a moment in time to be relived again and again. Which moment in your life would you like to have stored in a time capsule?
- ▶ **BRYNDIS TELLS CRUZ AND EMMETT ABOUT THE SVALBARD GLOBAL SEED VAULT** (aka Doomsday Vault) where countries store a backup supply of seeds in case of disasters. Some Middle Eastern countries have made withdrawals after droughts decimated crops. What seeds would you want to store in order to protect your favorite foods?
- ▶ **THE PROBLEM KNOWN AS BYCATCH**, large marine animals tangled in fishing nets meant for smaller fish, kills more than three hundred thousand whales, dolphins, and porpoises a year. The explorer students are called to help rescue some North Atlantic right whales with nets tangled around their fins. How would this rescue mission have gone without all of the technology onboard *Ridley*? Would it have been possible to pull the nets off the whales without the translator?
- ▶ **CRUZ HAS TO STUDY FOR A QUIZ ON STRATIGRAPHY**, the study of the layers of soil, rock and decomposing plants and animals. Archaeologists use this information to help figure out how old bones and other objects are. Do you ever think about the layers of dirt and rock, under your feet when walking outside? If you dug down far enough, what might it be possible to find?
- ▶ **CRUZ ADMIRES EMMETT** for his "ability to see potential in even the simplest things, things most people took for granted." What qualities do you admire in your friends?
- ▶ **CRUZ GETS TO SPEAK TO THE ENSNARED RIGHT WHALES** through the Universal Cetacean Communicator (UCC). Have you ever wanted to talk to a specific animal or type of animal? Which one would you pick and why? What would you want to talk about? What are some questions you would want to ask?
- ▶ **TEAM COUSTEAU IS EXCITED BUT NERVOUS** about its whale expedition. Have you ever had to take on responsibilities beyond your comfort zone? Did you ever wish an adult would take over? When do you like to have help and when do you like to try things on your own?



▶ **WHEN TEAM COUSTEAU SUCCESSFULLY FREES THE RIGHT WHALES FROM THE NETS**, Cruz hears the whales saying, “Joy, Joy, Joy” through his UCC as he watches them breach and frolic. It’s such a powerful moment that tears come to his eyes. When was the last time you had to gain a person’s or an animal’s trust in order to help them? What words did you use and what was the outcome?

▶ **CRUZ COMPARES THEIR BIOLUMINESCENT COATS TO THE MILKY SEAS**, bioluminescent bacteria floating on the ocean that is so bright that satellites can see it from space. Cruz, Sailor, and Bryndis take turns wearing their coats (to charge them) and laying them out to illuminate their icy prison. Sailor compares the milky seas to explorers, like themselves. In what ways does that comparison fit? In what ways does it not?

▶ **DR. FANCHON QUILLS GIVES CRUZ AN OCTOPOD** that releases a paralytic similar to the Australian blue-ringed octopus, whose bite can barely be felt and whose venom, a tetrodotoxin released into the bloodstream, paralyzes the diaphragm for about 15 hours. What are the advantages of carrying this kind of weapon? What are the potential disadvantages?



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