

## KS3 Bookclub

Animal Farm, George Orwell  
Magnus Chase, Rick Riordan

### Animal Farm

#### The basics...

- What genre (type of story) was the book?
- Fairy story (evil villains and noble characters, a castle (the farm), royalty (Mr Jones), we expect a happy ending (but never get one)), but mainly because Orwell felt that way about the Russian Revolution and Stalin - promise of a happy ending, but in reality, unachievable. Original title, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*.
- Animal (or beast) fable - fables are short simple stories, usually have animals as characters and they are designed to teach a moral truth.
- Political satire (exaggeration to ridicule a situation). According to Orwell it was written to reflect the events of the 1917 Russian revolution, Stalin and the Soviet Union.
- The best bits?
- The worst bits?
- Your favourite characters?
- Who was the protagonist/hero?
- Who was the antagonist/bad guy?
- Which person was it written in? 3rd
- Which is your favourite front cover? (Assuming you are comparing multiple different editions of the books)
- Who is this book aimed at?
- Would you recommend it?
- Did it feel like a new story to you?
- Would you read it again/other books by same author?

### Magnus Chase

#### The basics...

- What genre (type of story) was the book? Fantasy, adventure.
- The best bits?
- The worst bits?
- Your favourite characters?
- Who was the protagonist/hero?
- Who was the antagonist/bad guy?
- Which person was it written in? 1st
- Which is your favourite front cover? (Assuming you are comparing multiple different editions of the books)
- Who is this book aimed at?
- Would you recommend it?
- Did it feel like a new story to you?
- Would you read it again/other books by same author?

## Comparing the texts...

### Similarities

- **Sacrifice** - who sacrificed what for whom? Was one sacrifice more meaningful than another? Can you imagine making any similar sacrifices for others in your everyday life?
- **The all-powerful's flexible views on morality** - How do you feel about the people at 'the top' of each story? Are they good or bad? Does it even matter? Would it be better if another character was in charge? Do they make the stories better or worse for having these morally questionable powerful characters? Are there any similarities to those who are all-powerful in our world? How do they compare to your parents?
- **The importance of words and word play** - What do you think to how words were used in these texts? What power did the words hold?
- **Family: we're all in it together** - were they? What does it mean to be a family? How does this relate to your everyday world? Is family a power for good or for bad?
- **Violence: death of lead characters, both loyal to 'the cause'** - How do you feel about the violence in the books? Did they die for a cause or were they just in the way of someone else's cause? What does it mean to be a martyr? Would most people die for a cause? Would you?
- **'The cause': Valhalla, holding back Ragnarok; Animal Farm, self-sufficiency. 'Heaven' is not quite what either think it should be** - How do you feel about that? What do you feel for the characters when they realise? Do they realise? Just because the outcome wasn't what they thought it would be, does that mean that they should lose faith in the cause?
- **Confusion about who is really in charge** - Phrases like 'the power behind the throne' imply that there is often a question about who is really in charge. Who's in charge in these books and at which stage of the stories? Compare this to the words of the Ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power. What do you think?
- **Not clear who the baddie is** - Would it be better with a clearer cut baddie? How does this relate to the world you live in?
- **Both complete and incomplete endings: AF, to leave you thinking, MC to get you to read the next book** - Does this bother you? Is it better or worse for this being the case? How would you finish the books if you were writing them?
- **Both reflect society, but in different ways** - How? Does this make you think about society differently? Do you like the society you live in? What would you change if you could? How would you go about changing it? Which people in your society are changing it? Do you think they are changing it for the better or worse?

## Differences

- AF: those at the bottom stayed at the bottom / MC: those at the bottom rose to the top
  - Which made for a better story and why?
- Narrative - MC: first person narrative, AF: third person narrative
  - What difference did this make on how you related to the characters?
  - What difference did it make to how you felt about the story?
  - Which made for better reading?
- Genre - MC: adventure story, AF: Fable/Satire
  - How do you think it would work if all the characters in AF were people and all the people in MC were animals?
- Purpose - AF: to criticise a government, MC: to encourage inclusion of groups that are often spurned in current American society
  - Why did Rick Riordan choose for a character to be disabled and why choose deafness for the disability?
  - Why did George Orwell go for a children's story to criticise another government?
- Style - AF: Simple, straightforward, nothing flouncy. Minimal similes (comparing one thing to something that has similar characteristic, e.g. as brave as a lion). MC: Many descriptions, dialogue heavy, written conversationally, informal. Loads of similes to aid description.
  - Which made for better reading?
  - How did the style influence how the book 'stays with you' after you have finished reading it?
  - If you were to write a book, which style would you find it easier to write in?
- Beginnings - AF: from the beginning, due to style, you think you are going to get a happy ending: MC: opening paragraph end with *'My name is Magnus Chase. I'm sixteen years old. This is the story of how my life went downhill after I got myself killed.'*
  - Do these beginnings influence your motivation and enthusiasm for reading the book?
  - Do they give you a taste of what is to come?
- Endings - AF: leaves you feeling sad. MC: leaves you feeling optimistic.
  - The endings are a long way from the beginnings. How does this make you feel?
  - Do you feel cheated that it wasn't what it said on the tin, or pleased because it felt like a more interesting twist?

## General questions:

- Two of the all-time greatest rhetoricians (an expert in speaking and communicating), the Ancient Greek, Aristotle and the Ancient Roman, Cicero, said the purpose of rhetoric was to entertain, educate, and/or call a person to action (motivate them to do something).
  - Do the books do any of these things?
  - If so which ones and to what extent?
  - Re-read the first paragraph of MC - is it motivating you to do as it literally says, or motivating you to read on?
- Which characters really developed?
  - Which ones didn't?
  - Static Characters - don't undergo any significant change in character, personality or perspective through the story
  - Dynamic/Round Characters - undergo a major transition in character, personality or perspective
  - What is the purpose of the people who don't develop?
- What part did freedom of choice play in the stories?
  - What part did fate play in the stories?
  - What part did control of others play in the stories?
  - Who had freewill (the ability to act in a way of your own choosing) and who didn't?

## Thought experiment:

### Causal Determinism vs Moral Responsibility

- Child soldiers - 'if you don't kill that man, we will kill you'.

Are child soldiers responsible for what they do?

- Three people on a train line. Train is coming. Turning a lever will reroute the train. But you already know that the lever is stuck and will not move....

Are you morally responsible for the death of the people if you do not try the lever?

- You tell three people to stand on the railway line, knowing a train is coming. If you did not tell them to stand there, they would have stood there anyway, of their own accord.

Are you morally responsible? They were destined to die anyway....?

And if you told them to stand on the line at exactly the same moment they were already stepping on the line?

Compare to a child.

- Brought up in a house where they are severely beaten. The child beats up another child in the playground.

Are they morally responsible?

What about mental impairments? Does this diminish responsibility

## Harry Frankfurt - 1967

Frankfurt cases - a counter example to the argument that a person can only be held morally responsible for something if and only if there are alternative actions available to them...

### Chip in the Head

Someone puts a chip in the head of Mrs Y, who is planning to murder Mr X. The chip allows the controller to determine the actions of Mrs Y. The chip is activated if Mrs Y decide not to kill Mr X, forcing them to kill Mr X anyway.

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Donald is a Democrat and his is more than likely to vote for the Democrats, but there is one particular circumstance, if it occurs, that he will he not. That circumstance is if he thinks about the prospects of an American defeat in Iraq just before voting.

Damien is a representative of the Democratic Party, and he wants to ensure that Donald votes Democrat, so he secretly plants a device in Donald's head that, if activated, will force him to vote Democrat. Not wishing to reveal his presence unnecessarily, Damien plans to activate the device **only if** Donald thinks about the Iraq War before he votes. As things happen, Donald does not think about Iraq, so Damien sees no reason to activate the device and Donald votes Democrat of his own accord. Apparently, Donald is responsible for voting Democrat, although, Damien's device means Donald lacks the freedom to do otherwise.

Frankfurt concluded that "[A] person is not morally responsible for what he has done if he did it *only because* he could not have done otherwise."

**AF: Did the animals have a duty to rise up against the tyrants even though they might not win?**

**MC: Was Magnus a hero, even though he couldn't have done anything other than he did?**