

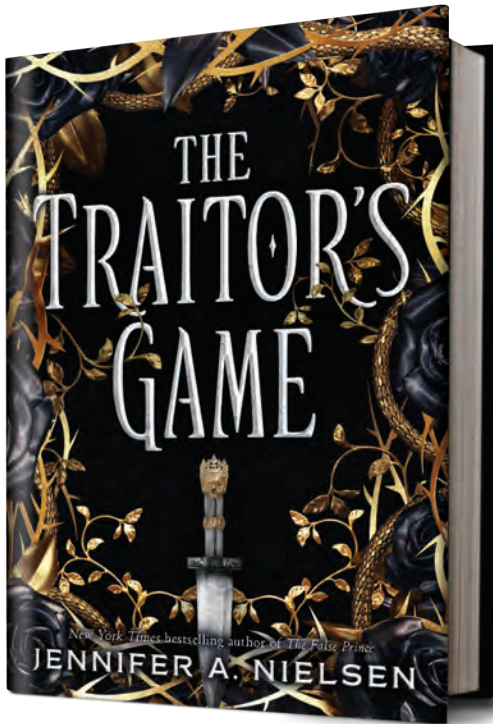
Young
Adult

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE TRAITOR'S GAME

Jennifer A. Nielsen introduces an unforgettable new heroine in this epic tale of treachery and intrigue, love and deceit.

Hearts and loyalties collide in this electrifying new young adult series from *New York Times* bestselling author Jennifer A. Nielsen



THE TRAITOR'S GAME

Nothing is as it seems in the kingdom of Antora. Kestra Dallisor has spent three years in exile in the Lava Fields, but that won't stop her from being drawn back into her father's palace politics. He's the right hand man of the cruel king, Lord Endrick, which makes Kestra a valuable bargaining chip. A group of rebels knows this all too well—and they snatch Kestra from her carriage as she reluctantly travels home.

The kidnapers want her to retrieve the lost Olden Blade, the only object that can destroy the immortal king, but Kestra is not the obedient captive they expected. Simon, one of her kidnapers, will have his hands full as Kestra tries to foil their plot, by force, cunning, or any means necessary. As motives shift and secrets emerge, both will have to decide what—and who—it is they're fighting for.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE TRAITOR'S GAME

1. Describe Kestra at the beginning of the novel, including who is important to her and why she's in hiding. What are her strengths and weaknesses? How does she change over the course of the novel and what changes her?
2. Who does Kestra believe her parents are when the book opens? What does she know about them by the end? What is her emotional reaction to finding out her real parentage? Explain the relationship and interactions among Lily Dallisor, Risha Halderian, and Anaya. Describe Darrow, his role in Kestra's life, and her feelings about him. What happens to Darrow in the end?
3. After they escape from the dungeons, Simon believes he knows what Kestra did with the Olden Blade, an action he describes as "equal parts dangerous and cautious, reckless and logical. Kestra wouldn't do things any other way." (p. 303) How accurately does his description fit Kestra's actions overall? Give examples of when she is prone to danger, caution, recklessness, and logic.
4. How did Kestra know Simon in her childhood and why does he resent her when they meet again? Describe his personality and why he joined the Coracks' cause. Discuss his relationship with Kestra and how it evolves. Why does he grow close to Kestra despite their past? Why does Gerald warn Simon not to get involved with her?
5. When Kestra points out the violence of the Coracks, Simon answers, "I'm never comfortable with what I have to do for the Coracks, and I don't want to be." (p. 144) Analyze this exchange. How are the Coracks violent? How do they justify it? Why does Simon participate in the violence if he's uncomfortable with it? Why does he say he doesn't want to be comfortable?
6. Kestra and Trina both feel like they don't belong. As Kestra observes, "We were both looking in from the outside." (p. 230) What is Trina's history? What do she and Kestra have in common? How are they different? Would Trina have made a good ruler? Why or why not?

7. Analyze Kestra's relationship with her father. Why do they dislike each other? In what ways does her father try to use Kestra as a political tool? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being the daughter of a wealthy, powerful man? What are her father's goals and what's his relationship to Lord Endrick?
8. Where did Lord Endrick come from and how did he end up on the throne? What makes him effective as a villain? What role has magic played in his success? Find specific scenes that illustrate his character. Do you believe that he can be defeated? Why or why not?
9. Trust is a key issue in Kestra's life. When she goes with Simon and Trina to find the Olden Blade, she's not sure she trusts them. In fact, she thinks, "I no longer even trusted myself." (p. 196) What makes it so hard for Kestra to trust others? Why does she have doubts about Simon? Is she right to distrust him? Give examples of actions or words that make Kestra distrust those around her and herself.
10. "In a traitor's game, there are no winners," begins the book's epigraph. Analyze the whole epigraph and how it applies to the novel. Why did the author choose the title, *The Traitor's Game*? In what ways do the actions in the book resemble a game? Explain why Gerald tells Kestra that she's "the only one who can play the traitor's game, and win." (p. 160)
11. Kestra and Simon both serve as first person narrators of the story, using the past tense. Discuss why the author chose to have two narrators, and what it adds to the story. How would the book have been different if it gave only Kestra's point of view or only Simon's? What are the effects on the reader of using past tense rather than present tense?
12. Find examples of figurative language in the novel and analyze what each one adds to the narrative. Identify some recurring images throughout, such as Kestra having emotional "walls" around her.

The discussion questions meet the following Common Core anchor standards: CCSS.Reading Literature.1-6. CCSS.Speaking & Listening.1.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR THE TRAITOR'S GAME

1. What qualities does it take to be a good king or queen? Have students each research a different monarch in history who had real political power as opposed to one who functioned solely as a figurehead. Using print and digital sources, the student should gather facts about the monarch and the country they ruled but also discern if historians think the monarch was effective and why. Have each student give a multimedia presentation to the class that introduces the king or queen and includes an evaluation of their effectiveness.
2. One of the recurring questions in *The Traitor's Game* is whether violence is justified to depose a ruler and replace him with a better government. Assign students to one of the two sides of this debate topic or let them choose a side. They should work in pairs to marshal their arguments, backing them up with evidence and expert opinions. Hold formal presentations in which one pair of students debates another pair on the topic. After the debates, discuss the issue as a whole class.
3. "You know as well as I do how much one's blood matters in Antora," (p. 199) Trina says to Kestra because each of them is judged by who her father is. Have students write an essay about the importance of bloodlines in the novel, using examples and quotations. The essay should compare the role of bloodlines in Antora with their role in the modern world. Based on what the student knows of the world, how important is it who your parents are or your ancestors were?
4. Kestra believes that Simon should be the ruler once Lord Endrick is removed from the throne. Create a list of at least five of Simon's character traits, with evidence from his actions or words that illustrate each trait. Meet in small groups to discuss Simon's traits and which ones indicate he'd be a good leader. Draw from your research for Activity #1 to talk about what makes an effective or ineffective monarch, and how Simon might compare on the throne to the monarch you researched.

CCSS.Writing.7. CCSS.Speaking & Listening.4, 5.

CCSS.Reading Literature.1. CCSS.Writing.2.

CCSS.Reading Literature.1. CCSS.Speaking & Listening.1.

CCSS.Writing.7. CCSS.Speaking & Listening.4.



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JENNIFER A. NIELSEN is the acclaimed author of the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling Ascendance Trilogy: *The False Prince*, *The Runaway King*, and *The Shadow Throne*. She also wrote the *New York Times* bestselling Mark of the Thief trilogy: *Mark of the Thief*, *Rise of the Wolf*, and *Wrath of the Storm*; the standalone fantasy *The Scourge*; the historical thriller *A Night Divided*; the second book in the Horizon series, *Deadzone*; and book six of the Infinity Ring series, *Behind Enemy Lines*; and *The Traitor's Game*, the first book in a series of the same name. Jennifer lives in northern Utah with her husband, their three children, and a perpetually muddy dog.

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