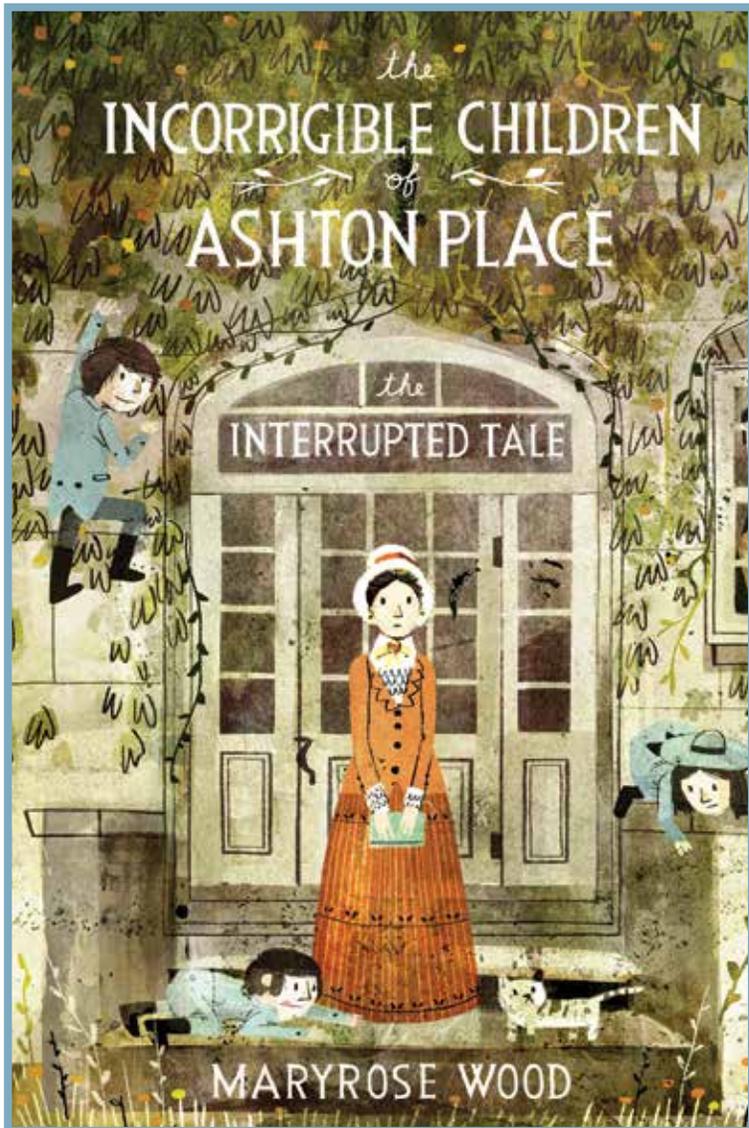


DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK



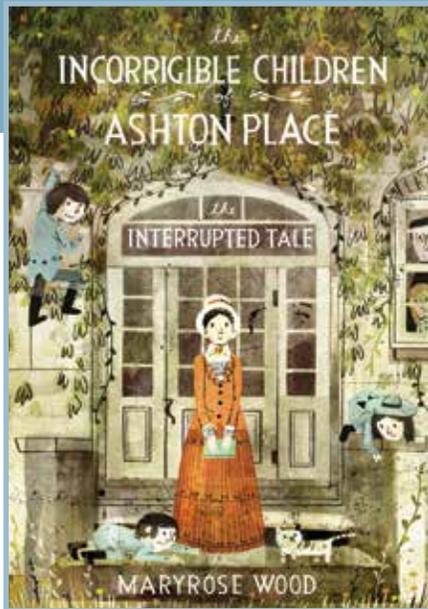
Turning sixteen is a bittersweet occasion for Miss Penelope Lumley: Her parents remain disappointingly absent, and her perfectly nice young playwright friend, Simon Harley-Dickinson, has not been heard from since he went to visit his ailing great-uncle Pudge in the old sailor's home in Brighton. Luckily, an invitation to speak at the annual Celebrate Alumnae Knowledge Exposition (or CAKE) at the Swanburne Academy for Poor Bright Females provides just the diversion Penelope needs.

Optoomuchstic as ever, Penelope hopes to give her CAKE talk, see some old friends, and show off the Incurrable children to Miss Mortimer, but instead she finds her beloved school in an uproar. And when Penelope is asked by the Swanburne Academy board of trustees to demonstrate the academic progress of her three wolfish students so the board can judge the true worth of a Swanburne education, the future of her alma mater—and of her job as governess to the Incurrables—hangs in the balance.

★ “Happily, the mysteries deepen at Ashton Place in this fourth volume in the Incurrable Children series. Once again delightful wordplay and a plot that snakes itself around a suspicious family tree add to the deliciousness.”

—*Booklist* (starred review)



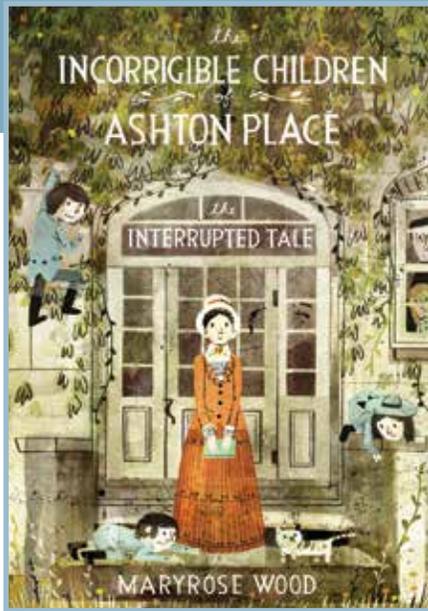


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Penelope feel “glum” at the opening of the story? Identify phrases that speak to her mood. How do the Incurrable children and others brighten her mood?
2. Why is Penelope invited back to Swanburne Academy? What role is she asked to play upon her return? How does she feel about the opportunity given her? What puzzles her about her former teacher’s letter? How do the children feel about the trip? Support your answers with evidence from the story.
3. What secret does Lord Fredrick reveal about himself prior to Penelope leaving for Swanburne Academy? What assistance does he request from Penelope? How does this information come into play later in the story? How does it “explain” his behavior?
4. Who is Dr. Westminster, and what role does he play in the story? What surprise awaits the reader about his relationship with Old Timothy? How does Penelope’s relationship with Dr. Westminster aid her at the academy?
5. Why is Penelope suspicious of Judge Quinzy? Why does she not want him to have the cannibal book? Why is he after it? Is he a menacing character? Explain.
6. When Penelope and the children are first greeted by Miss Mortimer, Miss Mortimer remarks, “No hopeless case is truly without hope” (p. 128). What does Miss Mortimer mean? Support your response with textual evidence and inferences you can make.
7. Compare and contrast Baroness Hoover with Lady Constance. Is one character more likable than the other? If so, explain. Choose either character and explain how she grows throughout the story (if indeed she does).
8. Who is Simon Harley-Dickinson, and why is Penelope glad to see him? How does Simon Harley-Dickson advance the plot—that is, what information does he bring to the story that sets up events that follow?
9. Penelope has a difficult time writing her speech for the CAKE. Why does she have difficulty? Define *filibuster*. Why does Penelope use this technique at the meeting? What impact does her filibuster have on the audience?



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

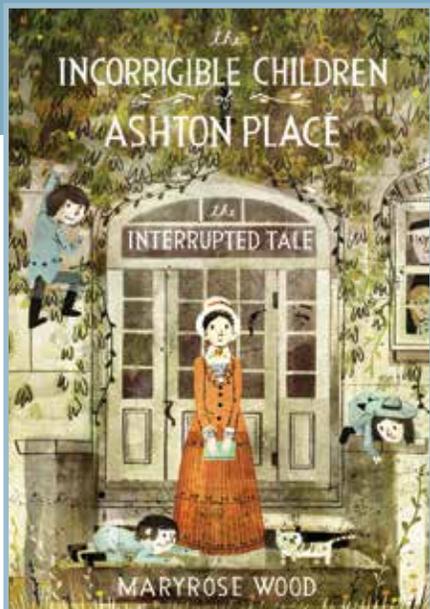
10. Describe the plan Penelope and Simon devise to get the cannibal book back and “visibilize” the book’s contents. Are they able to pull off their plan? Explain.
11. Why is Penelope concerned about Lord Fredrick? How does she show her concern? Is Lord Fredrick a sympathetic character? What about Judge Quinzy? Why or why not? How does the reader’s attitude toward Lord Fredrick and Judge Quinzy change by the end of the story?
12. By the end of the story, what does the reader know about the “howling curse”? What predictions can readers make about what might happen in a next installment of the series? Why are these predictions likely to happen? Support your ideas with both explicit and implicit information drawn from the story.



13. Choose a favorite scene and think about how it might be written if told from another character’s point of view. For example, how might the scene at the school in which Lord Fredrick howls be different if it were written from Lady Constance’s point of view?
14. Identify a favorite chapter. Discuss why you like this chapter. How does this chapter contribute to the overall story? Why is this chapter important?
15. Identify a favorite theme in the story and explain how the author develops this theme using details from the story.

Aligns with the English Language Arts Common Core Standards: RL.5.1, RL.6.1, RL.7.1; RL.5.2, RL.6.2, RL.7.2; RL.5.3, RL.6.3, RL.7.3; RL.5.4, RL.6.4, RL.7.4; SL.5.1, SL.6.1, SL.7.1

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



- 1. Become a Bard.** Penelope and the children enjoy poetry. Explore your creative side by writing quatrains. A quatrain is a four-line poem or stanza. It can follow a rhyming pattern, but it doesn't have to. First, write a quatrain made of couplets where the first two lines rhyme with each other and the last two rhyme with each other (AABB). Then try a different pattern, such as ABBA, ABAB, or ABCB. Share your poems with a classmate and/or small group.
- 2. Practice Oratory/Persuasive Skills.** Penelope is well acquainted with the literature of ancient Rome. She draws on the thinking of Cicero and others as she prepares her speech for the CAKE. Identify an organization for which you are thankful for the contributions it makes to young people (for example, Girl Scouts, organized sports, or a school, church, or community club). Write a speech in which you explain the contributions the organization has made. Deliver your speech to the class and/or record a video of the speech to share with others.
- 3. Explore Roman History.** Roman culture has a rich literary past. It also has a history of conflict. Work in pairs or small teams to research the Roman Colosseum and prepare a short class presentation on your findings. Use visuals in your presentation. Consider the following in your research: a) when and how the Colosseum was built; b) its original purpose; c) how it was used—and by whom—throughout history; d) what it represents today.

- 4. Analyze Character.** Choose any character in the story and write down three to five words that describe her/him. Then find passages in the story to support your word choices. Write a paragraph describing the character and support it with information from your reading. Share your description with others who chose the same character. Discuss what your answers have in common and how they differ.
- 5. Examine Humor.** The narrator of the series has a wonderful sense of humor. Find three favorite passages that you find funny and discuss in a small group what makes them funny. Brainstorm in your group topics that you can write about and ways that you can make these topics funny. On your own or working in pairs, try your hand at writing a humorous passage.

Aligns with the English Language Arts Common Core Standards: RL.5.1, RL.6.1, RL.7.1; SL.5.1, SL.6.1, SL.7.1; W.5.2, W.6.2, W.7.2; W.5.3, W.6.3, W.7.3; W.5.7, W.6.7, W.7.7.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tess Steinkolk

Maryrose Wood has written three other books in the Incurable Children of Ashton Place series: *The Mysterious Howling*, *The Hidden Gallery*, and *The Unseen Guest*. She teaches fiction writing at NYU's Gallatin School and the Stony Brook Children's Lit Fellows Program and is a frequent visitor to schools and writing conferences.

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GUIDED
READING
LEVEL
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