The SCHOOL for GOOD AND EVIL
by Soman Chainani
SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide contains discussion questions and activities for:

WELCOME to the School for Good and Evil, a mysterious boarding school in magical Woods where students fall into two groups: Good or Evil. In this captivating fantasy series, three young teens come into their power and pursue their dreams. Smart, grumpy Agatha, labeled as Good, just wants one close friend to love her. Beautiful Sophie, labeled as Evil but convinced she's good, schemes to win a handsome prince. And King Arthur's son, Tedros, seeks the wisdom and courage to rule Camelot. Is Sophie the right friend for Agatha? Is Tedros the prince for Sophie? On the path to "happily ever after," they face fierce enemies, perilous battles, and a menacing School Master whose dark dream may destroy their own. The three friends and their schoolmates must learn who to trust and, more important, how to trust themselves in this fairy-tale world that's scary, romantic, sometimes fun, and always exciting.
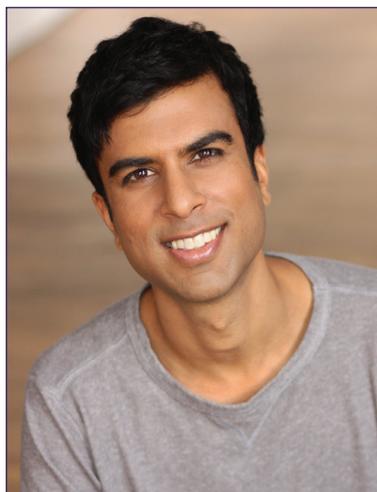
Photo by David J. Martin

SOMAN CHAINANI's first novel, *The School for Good and Evil*, debuted on the *New York Times* bestseller list, as did each of its two sequels, *A World Without Princes* and *The Last Ever After*. The series has been translated into over twenty languages across six continents and will soon be a major motion picture from Universal Pictures.

As a graduate of Harvard University and Columbia University's MFA Film Program, Soman has made films that have played at over 150 festivals around the world, and his writing awards include the Sun Valley Writers' Fellowship. When he's not telling stories or teaching in New York City, Soman is a die-hard tennis player who never lost a first-round match for ten years . . . until he started writing *The School for Good and Evil*. Now he loses all the time.

You can visit Soman at www.somanchainani.net.

ALIGNS WITH COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR GRADES 3–8

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD AND EVIL*

1. How does the very first sentence shape your predictions of what might unfold in *The School for Good and Evil*?

2. Describe the legend of the School Master and how the different inhabitants of Gavaldon react to his imminent arrival to take selected children to the School for Good and Evil.

3. Sophie feels like a "red rose amongst thorns" (p. 39) at her school while Agatha perceives herself to be "the cat in a nightingale's nest" (p. 40) at her school. How do these descriptions help the reader understand how the characters view themselves and their respective settings?

4. Castor and Pollux say that "All children are born with souls that are either Good or Evil. Some souls are purer than others" (p. 80). Discuss the idea that a soul can be either fundamentally good or evil and how this theory is supported—and in some cases refuted—by events in the story.

5. How does Tedros influence the highs and lows of the friendship between Agatha and Sophie throughout the story?

6. Agatha and Sophie both wrestle with their unlikely placement in their individual schools. What story events help Agatha and Sophie recognize the accuracy of their school placements?

7. What is the Storian? How does it influence what happens to Agatha and Sophie at the School for Good and Evil?

8. When the School Master's motivation for bringing Sophie to the School for Good and Evil is revealed, all that has held true for Nevers and Evers melts away. Discuss how the School Master's revelation shapes the ending of the story.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR *THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD AND EVIL*

1. **Never vs Ever.** Use a Venn diagram to compare the characteristics of one Never and one Ever, such as Tedros and Hort or Agatha and Sophie. Cite what makes each unique as well as characteristics, hopes, and dreams that the characters share.

2. **Friendship Map.** Design a timeline of Sophie and Agatha's friendship over the course of the story through the twists and turns of loyalty and betrayal at the School for Good and Evil. Which story events were most important in defining their friendship?

3. **Happily Ever After?** The author of *The School for Good and Evil* leaves a trail of clues in the story that hint that more of the story is yet to be told. Create a T-chart listing some of these moments of foreshadowing on one side of the chart and listing what you predict will happen on the other side of the chart. For example, the School Master remarks, "What other villages?" when asked why he didn't kidnap children from places other than Galvadon (p. 177). What could happen next in the story based on the School Master's comment? Using the T-chart of story clues and predictions, write the first chapter of a sequel to *The School for Good and Evil*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR A *WORLD WITHOUT PRINCES*

1. "There is an uneasiness that remains after your best friend tries to kill you," opens this rich novel (p. 1). What does this sentence tell you about Sophie and Agatha's past? What does it suggest about their current friendship? Discuss, too, what the sentence foreshadows about the future of their friendship and how that is played out in the plot.

2. Describe the School for Girls, including classrooms and living spaces, using details from the text. What aspects of the school reflect the new teaching that glorifies females? Describe the boys' school and discuss the similarities and differences between the two schools.

3. Dean Evelyn Sader is a key figure in the story. What is her family background? Describe how she looks and acts. How do her actions drive the plot? Analyze whether or not you consider her a villain, and give your reasons.

4. Reread the passage on page 334 where Sophie notes that she thought of the fairy tale as her story, with Tedros as the villain. But she realizes that Tedros thinks of it as his story and that he, too, deserves a happy ending. Is there one main character in this novel or more than one? What is the novel's narrative point of view? Explain your answers with examples from the text.

5. Betrayal is a theme throughout this book. In what ways do characters betray, or seem to betray, each other? How does each person react to the perceived betrayal? In what cases are actions misinterpreted as betrayal when they aren't?

6. Find places that butterflies appear in the book, and discuss their functions and symbolism. What do butterflies have to do with Dean Sader, and why do her butterflies change from blue to red (p. 356)? What is the significance of the fact that Sophie's mother's name means "butterfly" (p. 347)?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR A *WORLD WITHOUT PRINCES*

1. **A Simile Safari.** This fantasy is filled with similes that refer to animals. Have students note page numbers for such similes as they read or go back and find them. Have each student choose a simile and write a paragraph explaining what is compared and how the comparison enriches the text. Then have them draw a picture of the image the simile creates in their mind. Post the images with the paragraphs on a "Simile Safari" bulletin board.

2. **Who's Guilty?** Characters in this book make major mistakes, break important rules, betray their friends, and more. Have the class discuss the different wrongdoings and choose characters to put on trial. Small groups for each accused character will marshal evidence on both sides, drawn from the text. Students can play defendant, plaintiffs, lawyers, witnesses, and judge, with the remaining class as jury.

3. **Twice Upon a Time.** Most of the students at the School come from families in fairy tales or legends but are not mentioned in those tales. Have students choose a fairy tale or legend and rewrite it with a new main character who's the relative of a more well-known character. For example, the student could give Hansel and Gretel another sibling. In the rewritten tale, the new character should change the feel and ending of the story.
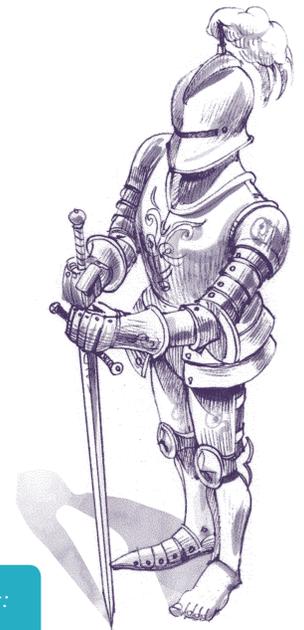
ALIGNS WITH COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR GRADES 3–8

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *THE LAST EVER AFTER*

1. When the book opens, Agatha cannot picture herself as a queen. Describe her vision of a proper queen. Why can't she see herself as one? Why does her viewpoint change by the end of the book?

2. Keeping a balance between Good and Evil is key to the survival of the school. Why is that true? Discuss that balance in the school's history and how the School Master affected it. How will the school maintain the balance in the future?

3. Describe Guinevere and Lancelot, their relationship, and their history. What effect did their love story have on Tedros? Why did the couple end up at the safe house, and what is their life like there? Describe Sophie's dealings with Lancelot and Agatha's with Guinevere.

4. What does the School Master really want? Discuss his history and describe what he's like as a young man. Talk about his relationship to Sophie and whether he really loves her. What happens to him in the end?

5. Sophie changes significantly in this book. Describe her at the beginning, the choices she's made previously, and the major choices she makes in this story. How is she different at the end? What brings about her transformation?

6. In the end, Sophie becomes the Dean of Evil. What does a dean do, and why is Sophie chosen for the role? Discuss whether you think she'll be good at it and why.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR *THE LAST EVER AFTER*

1. **The Magic of Camelot.** The legends around King Arthur provide the background for Tedros's personal history and supply the characters of Guinevere and Lancelot. Students should work in groups of four, with each one taking Arthur, Guinevere, Camelot, Excalibur, or another part of the legend to research. They should consult print and online sources and write a short paper about their topic. Have them reconvene as a group to share their findings and relate them to the book.

2. **Merlin's Gender Spell.** Have students choose any character except for Agatha, Sophie, or Tedros and focus on a scene with that character. The student should rewrite the scene from the character's viewpoint but switch the character's gender. For example, have Dot recount an experience as if she were a boy, expanding on her part in the scene. Share the writing in small groups and discuss if the character's gender makes a difference, and how.

Common Core State Standards addressed by the above discussion questions and activities: RL.4-7.2, RL.4-7.3; SL.4-7.2; W.4-7.3, W.4-7.7

SERIES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When the series opens, Sophie's dream is to become a princess, with a handsome prince and a life of luxury. Agatha's dream is to have one close friend who loves her. Discuss how these dreams change for each of them throughout the books, using specific examples. Talk about the book's conclusion and whether Sophie's and Agatha's dreams come true.

2. At the School for Good and Evil, good is equated with beauty and evil is equated with ugliness. Successful Good students will end up with a "happily ever after" romance, while successful Evil students will end up alone. Do Agatha and Sophie fit these stereotypes in terms of their characters and actions? Explain your answer. Discuss the stereotypes in terms of other characters as well.

Common Core State Standards addressed by the above discussion questions and activities: RL.4-7.2, RL.4-7.3