

# INTERACTIVE GUIDE FOR READERS, DISCUSSIONS, & ACTIVITIES

## Overview

Individual readers or groups can use this guide to improve their understanding of *Star Life Keepers*, storymaking, and creative writing. Brady Williams came up with the idea to develop *Dragon & Dinosaur Chronicles* for elementary and middle school readers when he was eight years old. He helped his grandfather, Rick Williams, Sr., to embark on a five-year journey to study fantasy worldbuilding, learn how to develop characters and creatures, and build the Belacamber parallel universe—finally deciding to publish books as a family via Legacy KidLit Press.

Living in the diverse Research Triangle Park area and having three adopted Chinese grandkids, Rick continues to make sure each book reflects his family's multicultural heritage. For the *Dragon & Dinosaur Chronicles*, he's built a medieval world where different groups of humans, elves, and dragons work together to defeat a common enemy. Additionally, the characters of Maester Shan and Bo Shan from *Tiantan* are based on navigators that Gavin Menzies wrote about in his book, *1421: The Year China Discovered America*.

## **Background: *Dragon & Dinosaur Chronicles***

Jason, Amanda, and Elisa are middle school kids who want to use time travel to resolve their family's challenges in the modern world. The father of Jason and Amanda was a former astronaut who became a Mars researcher to improve breathing in space. Sadly, he died five months ago on a secret Space Force mission. Elisa's father passed away previously in a motorcycle accident. The cousins' mothers have struggled since the loss of their husbands.

The kids discover their astrophysicist grandfather has created a way to star travel, which could enable them to go back in time and prevent their fathers' accidental deaths. Instead of time traveling in the modern world to a year ago, however, they enter the parallel universe of Belacamber and arrive in the medieval country of Bukania, six hundred years in the past.

As second-generation Star Life Keepers, Jason, Amanda, and Elisa pursue dangerous missions—personally and for their new country—to save family members, defeat dinosaurs and creatures, and neutralize traitors. They become more confident as they draw upon their respective strengths and gifts, team up with Star Life Keepers from other cultures and ethnic groups, and learn how to use the magic system available to them through the Power Beyond the Universe.

Along the way, Jason must overcome the hazards of living in a medieval land while also dealing with his hidden hearing aids.

## **Participants**

Children in 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades can benefit from this guide along with engaged parents, grandparents, and educators who understand that high-quality books are a gateway to enhancing childhood literacy, critical thinking, and creativity.

## Goals

The guide contains key topics associated with *Star Life Keepers* as the first book in the *Dragon & Dinosaur Chronicles* series: History of Classic and Modern Fantasy Books; Story Drivers; Positivity, Hope, & Optimism; Collaboration & Team Building; A Higher Power; Hero's & Heroine's Journeys; and How to Make Stories. After each section, there is a set of questions for personal reflection or group discussion followed by fun activities.

Here are some goals to consider:

- ✦ Learn how *Star Life Keepers* fits into the history of classic and modern fantasy books
- ✦ Understand the book's key story drivers such as astronomy, time travel, medieval life/warfare, and dinosaur hybrids
- ✦ Describe how the cousins overcome life's challenges, such as fear and anxiety, while better understanding the importance of positivity, hope, and optimism; explain how Jason has to deal with hearing impairment and anger management in the medieval world
- ✦ Assess how Jason, Amanda, and Elisa collaborate with a group of humans, elves, and dragons to accomplish an important mission such as saving the Bukanian queen and defeating the dinosaur invaders
- ✦ Explore how the Power Beyond the Universe provides Jason, Amanda, and Elisa with special powers—through a portal in Orion's belt—as they also take advantage of their natural gifts
- ✦ Learn more about Hero's and Heroine's Journeys
- ✦ Review the basics of making a fantasy story from scratch

## KEY TOPICS

### History of Classic and Modern Fantasy Books

Folklore, fairy tales, and fantasy books continue to be part of cultures throughout the world. Those magical stories, from as early as Homer's

*The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, have inspired generations of new authors whose work today generates ideas for movies, TV shows, and videogames.

Adventure books about King Arthur and his knights began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and ignited the imagination of both kids and adults. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-1596) became a fantasy classic and strongly influenced C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien along with the works of George Macdonald. Tales from the Arabian Nights, Brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen propelled children-oriented literature forward.

Interest in fantasy books significantly grew during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, picking up additional momentum with the emergence of more Arthurian novels, C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*—culminating in the explosive success of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. Other fantasy and adventure books have also made bestseller lists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, e.g., those written by Flanagan, Messenger, Mull, and Sanderson. (See Fantasy & Adventure Books.)

Many scholars think Tolkien set new boundaries for modern fantasy books. In his review of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Lewis said it appeared “like lightning from a clear sky” as compared to the books that preceded it. He also felt it was “sharply different” and “unpredictable.”

Tolkien believed that God was the primary creator with men and women being secondary creators. In developing epic fantasies, he combined his World War I experiences, academic studies, life lessons, etc. to characterize Middle Earth.

With his vivid imagination, Tolkien created new geography, histories, languages, magic systems, etc., which were, as Lewis said, “full of strange creatures beyond count.” He also wove ethical and moral principles into his story tapestries.

Because of their complexity and ingenuity, Tolkien's fantasy books have provided opportunities for children to exercise critical thinking and enhance their own creativity.

## RELECTION & DISCUSSION

1. What are some of your favorite fantasy books? Do you notice any common themes in them?
2. Why do time travel stories appeal to so many people? If you could time travel, where would you go?
3. What makes monsters and creatures so interesting to read about?

## ACTIVITIES

Write a paragraph about a fantasy protagonist (or antagonist) based on your worldbuilding ideas. Here are some things to consider:

- o What would he or she look like?
  - o Are there any specific personality traits and special interests for your protagonist (or antagonist)?
  - o What power would he/she have and what heroic action (or evil action) would occur in your story?
  - o Identify key aspects of your new world, e.g., geography and history.
4. Create a play-by-play action scene for a *Star Life Keepers* graphic novel that features scenery, characters (either your own or existing), and dialogue.
  5. Knowing that fantasy books can spark ideas for new videogames, can you come up with your own concept based on *Star Life Keepers*?
    - o Create a “Hollywood pitch,” marketing poster, or one-page summary
    - o Outline the purpose of the game and how the player character can score points.
    - o What obstacles will he/she encounter?
    - o What tools can the player character use to overcome those obstacles?
    - o How does he/she win the game?

## BUILDING KIDLIT FANTASY WORLDS

In the parallel or “sideways” Belacamber universe, the cousins enter the Alnilam portal on Orion’s belt and land in Bukania. They assume the role of royal counterparts who take their place in the modern world. Instead of becoming actual characters, participants in most time travel stories are “bystanders” who merely observe what goes on in the special worlds instead of being integrally involved.

In *Star Life Keepers*, Elisa discovers that she is the crown princess and will become queen—at the age of 15—if her dying mother doesn’t receive a healing plant from the westernmost region of Bukania. Jason is a prince, and Amanda is a princess in the strange land.

As second-generation Star Life Keepers, Jason, Amanda, and Elisa have access to the Orion magic system through the Hall of Endless Light. They must learn how to use medieval-like “starfire weapons” as they face invading Jurassican dinosaurs and hybrid creatures—and become resourceful in exposing Bukanian traitors.

### RELECTION & DISCUSSION

1. Name some of the humans, elves, and dragons that help the cousins. What roles do they play?
2. Who does Jason think is a friend but later turns out to be a traitor?
3. How would you describe the magic system that empowers Jason, Amanda, and Elisa to bravely confront dinosaurs and creepy hybrids?

### ACTIVITIES

Conduct online research on various types of time travel. What are some of the most common forms of transportation used?

1. Create your own way to star travel. Use a short PowerPoint presentation to show your method of transport, including pictures of time traveling from books, movies, and TV shows.

2. Write a paragraph about a past era that you would like to visit.

## POSITIVITY, HOPE, & OPTIMISM

Since his father's death, Jason has had to deal with a serious hearing disorder and increased problems with anger management. In Bukania, he wears hidden hearing aids and must survive in a world of dragons and dinosaurs as he learns how to channel his anger against enemy attacks.

After star traveling, Jason, Amanda, and Elisa find that they must continue to address their fears and anxieties. Despite seemingly impossible odds, they draw upon their next-generation powers as Star Life Keepers to retrieve a rare plant (Carmanixia) to save Queen Dhyanna. With the encouragement of adults such as the Mapmaker, Summit Dragon, and knight commander Bo Shan, the cousins also become more confident in their natural abilities.

In Bukania, the cousins pull together the five races/cultures into the Star Points of Unity, which give them access to greater powers to overcome their enemies.

## RELECTION & DISCUSSION

1. How did Jason, Amanda, and Elisa deal with the deaths of their fathers in the modern world—and then again in the parallel universe?
2. How did the cousins deal with fear and anxiety in the medieval world? How was Jason able to channel his anger into fighting dinosaurs and creatures?
3. What are some of the difficulties you've had to face in life? Are their role models who inspire you to rise above your challenges?

## ACTIVITIES

1. What are the respective weapons of choice for Jason, Amanda, Elisa? Draw a picture of them.
2. In *Star Life Keepers*, a meteorite from each of the three stars in Orion's belt lands in the countries of humans, elves, and

dragons. Look up the names of the three stars in Orion's belt and identify which star gives power to Bukania vs Evergreen Nation vs Dragonora. Also, find the star Rigel in Orion's left leg that enabled Maester Shan and his son to become Star Life Keepers while living in Tiantan.

3. Take a walk in the woods, along a waterway, or in the hills/mountains and reflect on how you can become more positive, hopeful, and optimistic.

## COLLABORATION & TEAM BUILDING

In the *Dragon & Dinosaur Chronicles*, there is a diverse set of collaborators among human cultures as well as races of elves and dragons.

### Humans

- ✦ East Bukanians represent the original Abbington country led by the royal family's House Blakeslee. They have more advanced weapons, medicine, and science than other nations.
- ✦ Approximately two hundred explorers from Tiantan (China in the modern world) settled in Bukania and introduced innovative technologies—like making books, suspension bridges, and explosives—that they brought from East of the Most East.
- ✦ Oronoccons live in a semi-independent country in West Bukania whose human citizens are predominantly mountaineers and miners. Its leaders, headed by the Crimson Queen, follow the overall laws of Bukania but make local decisions on their own.

### Elves

- ✦ The Evergreen Nation, semi-independent like Oronocco, is located in the mountains of West Bukania. The Evergreen King is its leader. His triplets join the mission and help Jason, Amanda, and Elisa to save Queen Dhyanna.

- A group of elves, led by the Evergreen King's younger brother, started their own country called the Red Cliff Nation, which is in a desert region outside of West Bukania.

## Dragons

Dinosaurs in the far west came up from subterranean depths and stole the dragons' homeland, renaming it Jurassica. The new emperor, Zimri, sent the dragons into exile. A five-headed dragon, known as the Summit Dragon, has aligned herself with the humans and elves. Her deceased husband wrote the Dragonora Prophecies, which predict that young Star Life Keepers will rally diverse groups to fight against the Jurassicans who need a steady supply of above-ground water and food to survive.

## RELECTION & DISCUSSION

1. Bullseye, one of the Elf King's triplets, becomes Jason's new friend. Why is his sister Bryn unfriendly to Jason? How does she later help him to resist the Jurassican invaders?
2. One of Jason's other friends is a shapeshifting dragon from Capital City who helps his sister Amanda to retrieve Carmanixia to save Queen Dhyanna. What is her name? How was shapeshifting used in *Star Life Keepers* compared to other fantasy stories you've come across?
3. In *Star Life Keepers*, China is known as Tiantan, or East of the Most East, and features theories from Gavin Menzies who wrote a controversial book called *1421: The Year China Discovered America*. Name two Tiantan characters and how they could get more involved as the series unfolds.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Identify a different culture or race you'd like to know more about. Conduct online research and write down information or make several PowerPoint slides about dress, food, holidays, etc.
2. Ask your parents to take you to an ethnic restaurant that you've never visited.

3. Make up your own fantasy story where a diverse set of characters work together to overcome a major challenge.

## A HIGHER POWER

In the Belacamber parallel universe, the magic system comes from the Power Beyond the Universe through star portals. It empowers the first- and second-generation Star Life Keepers as well as Guardians who support them.

A meteorite from the center star of Orion's belt, Alnilam, struck Capital City. Leaders from House Blakeslee led the construction of the Hall of Endless Light, which they built around the massive Orionite rock. Using powder from ground-up chunks of the meteorite, Bukanians are able to create light for their homes and cities while converting starfire into energy and weapons.

Another star in Orion's belt—Mintaka—released a meteorite that landed in the Evergreen Nation. Its power transformed underground roots that became the magical Harp Tree and the Murewood Forest.

The dragons derive their special powers from the Alnitak meteorite, which fell in Dragonora. The Great White Dragon serves as a Belacamber Guardian.

## RELECTION & DISCUSSION

1. What problem will Jason, Amanda, and Elisa face if Jurassicans capture Capital City and destroy the Star Globe in the Hall of the Endless Light?
2. As a young elf, Bullseye leads Jason on a supernatural journey through the Harp Tree portal. Where do they go and what do they learn?
3. The cousins' grandfather is Bukania's Guardian and its chief astronomer and mapmaker. What is the name of his counterpart who protects the Harp Tree? What role do the Guardians play in helping the second-generation Star Life Keepers?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Set personal goals about reading more fantasy books and developing a creative-writing project you'd like to explore over the next twelve months.
2. If you were a Bukanian, how would you use the power of light and starfire to help someone who is in danger?
3. What other constellations, such as the Big Dipper, Cassiopeia, Draco, etc., could provide magical powers like Orion does in this book?

## HERO'S & HEROINE'S JOURNEYS

A distinguished professor from the University of Southern California (Joseph Campbell) and a writing expert for movie scripts (Christopher Vogler) determined that many myths, fairy tales, and fantasies from around the world contain similar patterns—and are often the foundation for modern stories. The following clock model is a good way to think about Hero's and Heroine's Journeys.

### *TURN ON THE HEAT*

- + 1:00 Living in Your Ordinary World
- + 2:00 Discover Your Call to Adventure
- + 3:00 Refuse the Call & Meet with a Mentor

### *TURN UP THE HEAT*

- + 4:00 Cross the Threshold & Enter the Special World
- + 5:00 Face Enemies & Develop Allies
- + 6:00 Pause & Plan (Point of No Return)

### *BRING TO A BOIL*

- + 7:00 Decide to Fight
- + 8:00 Confront Your "All Is Lost Moment"
- + 9:00 Win the Epic Battle

## COOL DOWN

- 10:00 Celebrate
- 11:00 Say Goodbye
- 12:00 Return Home (with new wisdom, gifts, etc.)

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. Where is the Ordinary World from which Jason, Amanda, and Elisa start?
2. What are some of the first problems the cousins encounter in the medieval world?
3. How do they handle their “All Is Lost Moments”?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Pick a favorite book, TV show, movie, or videogame and look for a Hero’s or Heroine’s Journey. Describe what you would consider as an “All Is Lost Moment” in your own life. Do you have a mentor that you privately talk to when dealing with challenges? What makes this person a good advisor?
2. The Internet has a lot of ideas about how a Hero’s/Heroine’s Journey can tie directly to movies and books. Find examples or graphics to show a Hero’s Journey or Heroine’s Journey and share them with family members and/or friends.
3. Draw a timeline to demonstrate your own Hero’s/Heroine’s Journey and mark with a star where you are on that life adventure.

## HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN STORIES

Rick and Brady explored a number of different ways to create *Star Life Keepers*, which required a lot of critical thinking and analysis. Here are some examples of what they used for worldbuilding.

- Books, movies, and TV shows
- Mapmaking and artwork
- Sketches on a whiteboard, blackboard, iPad/tablet, etc.
- Simulations with archery and medieval wooden swords
- Hikes and other outdoor activities

- ✦ Videogames
- ✦ Internet searches to (1) develop profiles of people and (2) find ideas for their fantasy worldbuilding such as Place & Time, Characters & Creatures, Everyday Life, Magic Systems & Spirituality, and Technology & Warfare
- ✦ Drama & roleplaying

## Essential Story Elements

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| ✦ Primary characters and their points of view | ✦ Plot; climax; aftermath           |
| ✦ Secondary characters                        | ✦ Action scenes                     |
| ✦ Villains and threats                        | ✦ Conflicts and emotional struggles |
| ✦ Worldbuilding and setting                   | ✦ Theme                             |

## RELECTION & DISCUSSION

1. Who are some of the secondary characters in *Star Life Keepers*? How do they affect and/or enhance the story?
2. What is your favorite worldbuilding part of the story and why?
3. What is an example of an interpersonal conflict between the book's characters? How did they resolve it?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Browse Amazon's online bookstore and identify three midgrade fantasy books like *Star Life Keepers*. What makes these three similar? How are they different?
2. Create three of your own characters. Make a list of their eye colors, hair colors, clothes, and likely favorite foods, books, music, and movies if they lived in the modern world.
3. Create your own dinosaur hybrid and/or humanized dinosaur; draw a picture of it in a make-believe setting.

See [www.writewithyourkids.com](http://www.writewithyourkids.com) for complimentary materials on *Building Fantasy Worlds with Kids: Ideas from Star Life Keepers* and opportunities to learn from the Dragon & Dinosaur Chronicles team.