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Things to Know About *The City of Ember*

Why Your Young Reader Might Love This Book

- It is a story of action, adventure, and mystery. Though the novel is not short in length, the writing is exciting and fast-paced.
- Even though the story takes place in a fantastical setting and is about fictional events, the two main characters are realistic young people who know that all is not right in their world and do what they can to solve the problem. As they do this, they don't always make the right choices or execute their plan as they intend to.
- It is empowering in that the children work toward solving the mysteries of their universe and finding ways to solve the problems they see.

Why You Might Love that Your Young Reader Is Reading this Book

- The young characters in this book are not superheroes. They do not have powers. They are just blessed with curiosity, energy, and awareness: traits that actual children in the real world can have.
- The adults in this novel are not all mindless or villainous (though some are). For reasons integral to the plot, everyone who lives in the city of Ember has very little understanding of how nature and the world works. This levels the playing field in a way that is more realistic than most novels that feature children saving the day.
- This novel can inspire conversations about environmental consciousness, doing what's right for the common good, and why ignoring problems can have long-term consequences.
- This book is highly rated and recommended by teachers and parents. It overwhelmingly receives 5-star customer reviews on book-selling websites.

What Concerns Parents Might Have

The City of Ember is generally appropriate for most upper elementary to middle school readers. However, here are some potential red flags. (Note: The following list contains some minor plot spoilers.)

- **Fear of the Dark** (Chapter 1 and beyond): Many times, the city's lights go out and everything becomes completely dark. The citizens of Ember begin to worry that the lights will one day go out and never come back on. This is a potentially horrifying scenario that may cause sensitive readers distress.
- **Death and Mortality** (Chapter 2): The main character (Lina) lost both of her parents to a "coughing sickness" that swept "again" through the city. (Chapter 10) Lina's grandmother gets ill and her condition deteriorates. She dies in her bed one night, and Lina finds her there.
- **Religion** (Chapter 7 and beyond): A group called the Believers think that those who built the city of Ember will come to save everyone. They do not have any proof for this belief, and it turns out to not be correct. The Believers play a very small role in this novel, but they could be seen as a stand-in for organized religion. Some readers may find this implication offensive.
- **The 2008 Film** (if you choose to watch it with your child): In the novel, there are rumors of "rats as big as garbage bins" in the Unknown Regions. The film expands this line to create a storyline about giant animals surviving under the city. An enormous star-nosed mole chases and attacks the main characters. At the end of the film, this creature reappears, and it is implied that it kills a minor character. Before viewing this film you may wish to watch the clip for yourself to determine its appropriateness. (Type "video City of Ember star nosed mole" into an Internet search engine to locate a clip.)



Activity #2: A Revealing Message

The box in Granny's closet contains a message, but Poppy has chewed it up and it contains many holes. Lina feels it may be important, and so she shows it to three different people.

Name each person she shows. Choose the names from the box below. Then explain each character's reaction to what they see.

Allis Fleery

Doon Harrow

Lizzie Bisco

First, Lina shows the message to _____, the messenger captain.

Why does she think this person should see the message? _____

How does this person react to seeing the message? _____

What do you think this tells us about this character? _____

Next, Lina shows the message to _____, a childhood friend.

Why does she think this person should see the message? _____

How does this person react to seeing the message? _____

What do you think this tells us about this character? _____

Finally, Lina shows the message to _____, a Pipeworks Laborer.

Why does she think this person should see the message? _____

How does this person react to seeing the message? _____

What do you think this tells us about this character? _____



Answer Key for Activity #2

Page 20 Answers

First, she shows **Allis Fleery**, the messenger captain.

Why: She thinks the messenger captain is the perfect person to show a message to. She would know about official documents.

Reaction: Captain Fleery does not think it is important. She thinks it may be an old homework assignment or something like that.

What her reaction reveals: Captain Fleery believes it is a waste of time to think about doing anything other than just going about your normal business. She is a Believer, and she thinks that everything will take care of itself. There's no need to be curious or adventurous.

Next, she shows **Lizzie Bisco**, her childhood friend.

Why: Lizzie is quick and smart and might have some good ideas.

Reaction: Lizzie is too busy talking a mile a minute to stop to really look at the message. She begins talking about something else and gets off topic quickly.

What her reaction reveals: Lizzie is not someone you can count on to give something serious and careful consideration. She talks quickly, often without thinking.

Finally, she shows **Doon Harrow**, a Pipeworks Laborer.

Why: She knows that Doon is a serious person who gives careful thought to things. He also works in the Pipeworks, and Lina believes that one of the words in the message is "Pipeworks." She thinks he'll be interested in the message.

Reaction: He is instantly curious about the message. He recognizes that it may be important. He is more focused on what it may say, and he does not have a set idea about what it could say.

What his reaction reveals: Doon doesn't dismiss things because they are unlikely or hard to understand. He examines and analyzes things carefully. Like a scientist, he doesn't decide ahead of time what something could be. He lets the facts tell him what it is. He was the perfect person to share this secret with.

Activity #4: Focus on Figurative Language

The ideas of light and dark are doing a lot of work in this novel. After all, the phrase “in the dark” can have both a literal meaning and a figurative meaning.

- **Literal (to be without light):** “When the lights went out, we were left in the dark.”
- **Figurative (to be deliberately kept from knowing something):** “No one would tell me how this book ends, so I was in the dark until the very last page.”

Think about each usage of the phrase in the novel.

1. How are the people of Ember sometimes literally in the dark?

2. How are the people of Ember figuratively in the dark in each of the following ways:

About where they live?		About how they got there?	
About nature?	About language?		About time?
About their mayor’s activities?		About what they are meant to do?	

Novel Vocabulary: Mysterious Words from the Book

While in the library, Doon finds a book called *Mysterious Words from the Past*. And in a box in Granny's closet, Lina finds a message. She also finds that it's hard to read words when they have missing letters.

Each of these vocabulary words below are from *The City of Ember* and are missing a few letters. Follow the directions to read these words.

Directions:

1. Draw a line to match the missing letters (on the left) to the word they complete (in the middle).
2. Write in the missing letters to complete each word.
3. Draw a line from the completed word to its definition (on the right).

Missing Letters	Words from <i>The City of Ember</i>	Definitions
ener	1. as _____ nment	• nonsense
fuge	2. eg _____ s	• a machine that converts energy into electricity
ica	3. fug _____ es	• people who have escaped or are in hiding
itiv	4. g _____ ator	• people who have been forced to leave somewhere to find a better place to live
res	5. hog _____ h	• a task given to someone as part of a job
sig	6. pred _____ ment	• a difficult or unpleasant situation
was	7. re _____ es	• an exit or way out of somewhere