



WALKER BOOKS DISCUSSION GUIDE

(CHAOS) WALKING

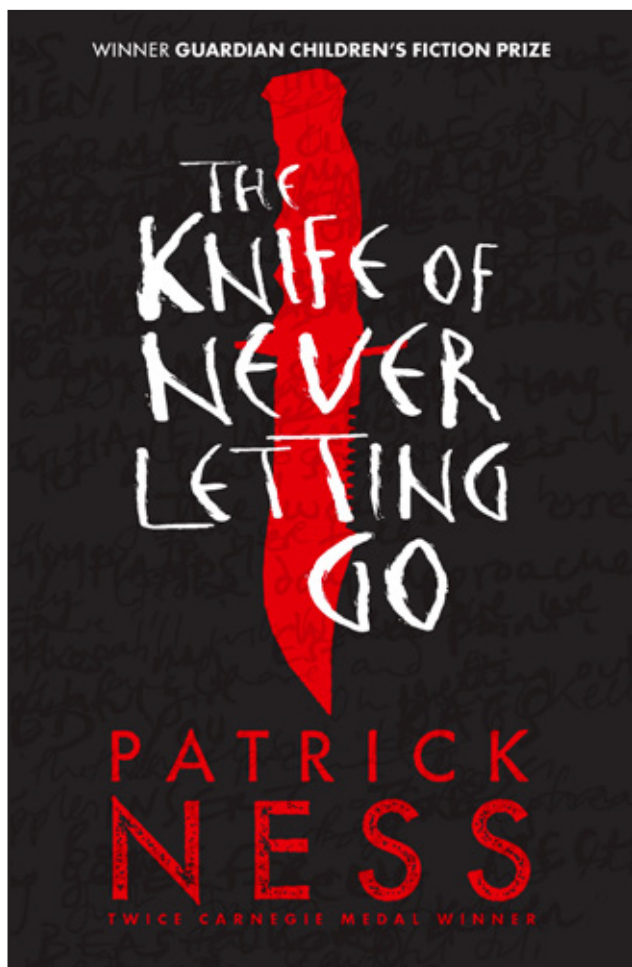
THE NOVELS BEHIND
THE MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

PATRICK
NESS
TWICE CARNEGIE MEDAL WINNER

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NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE
CHAOS WALKING
PATRICK NESS
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THE KNIFE OF NEVER LETTING GO

The first book in the **CHAOS WALKING** series
Winner of the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize

"I look at the knife again, sitting there on the moss like a thing without properties, a thing made of metal as separate from a boy as can be, a thing which casts all blame from itself to the boy who uses it."

ABOUT THE BOOK

Todd Hewitt is the only boy in a town of men. Ever since the settlers were infected with the Noise germ, Todd can hear everything the men think, and they hear everything he thinks. Todd is just a month away from becoming a man, but in the midst of the cacophony, he knows that the town is hiding something from him – something so awful that Todd is forced to flee with only his dog, whose simple, loyal voice he hears as well. With hostile men from the town in pursuit, the two stumble upon a strange and eerily silent creature: a girl. Who is she? Why wasn't she killed by the germ like all the females on New World? Propelled by Todd's gritty narration, readers are in for a white-knuckle journey in which a boy on the cusp of manhood must unlearn everything he knows in order to figure out who he truly is.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Patrick Ness chose to write Todd's voice in the vernacular, as Todd actually speaks, with grammatical and spelling errors. For instance, on page 4, Todd thinks, "The plans are being planned, the preparayshuns prepared, it will be a party, I guess, tho I'm starting to get some strange pictures about it." His voice reflects things about his environment and how he was raised. What, in particular, does Ness's use of the vernacular show us about Todd? About Hildy? Wilf? Look for more examples of Ness's use of the vernacular in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*.
2. Think about the title of the book: *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. On pages 83–84, Todd says, "But a knife ain't just a thing, is it? It's a choice, it's something you *do*. A knife says yes or no, cut or not, die or don't. A knife takes a decision out of your hand and puts it in the world and it never goes back again." Todd describes the knife on page 341 by saying, "As long as I hold it, as long as I use it, the knife lives in order to take life, but it has to be commanded, it has to have me to tell it to kill, and it wants to . . . but I have to want it to as well,

my will has to join with its will.” What does the knife symbolise? What does Todd do, and not do, with the knife? Think about the Spackle, the turtle, and Aaron. What happens to the knife in the end? What do you think this signifies?

3. On page 8, Todd talks about the “crops” in the swamp. When you read his description of the crops, you realise they are not like the crops we might be familiar with. They are “easily big enough to kill an almost-man and his dog. The fins on their backs look just like a row of rushes and if you get too close, *WHOOM!* – outta the water they come, flying at you with their claws grasping and their mouths snapping.” In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Ness imagines what it might be like to settle a new world. In a July 2009 interview at yareads.com, he said, “I started thinking, how would settlers really be? What would they really do? I thought that they would take names from Earth and stick them on whatever seemed closest. Some people don’t realize they’re on another planet for a hundred pages, which I like. Todd has always lived there, so it’s not another planet, it’s home. I really like that kind of world building.” What clues did you pick up early on that led you to the conclusion that the book is set in a world different from our own? Look for words and phrases such as grublets, cassors, crested pine, fissionbike, and Packy Vines. What do these unfamiliar terms refer to?
4. Todd tells us on pages 18 and 19 that he has had little education. In fact, reading and writing are forbidden by the Mayor of Prentisstown. On page 51, Ben tells Todd that “knowledge is dangerous.” At one point in the story (page 142), Todd realises, “The world’s a dangerous place when you don’t know enough.” How does Todd’s lack of education and knowledge affect his journey, especially in terms of his inability to read Ben’s note and map or his mother’s journal? How does the denial of education allow totalitarian governments (like that in Prentisstown) to control their citizens?
5. On pages 20–22, Todd refers to the Noise that fills his life. The author indicates Noise through the use of font. Do you think this effectively communicates what Noise might look and feel like? Where did this Noise come from? On page 391, Todd describes Noise as “Informayshun, all the time, never stopping, whether you want it or not. . . . And too much informayshun can drive a man mad.” And on page 42, he says, “The Noise is a man unfiltered, and without a filter, a man is just chaos walking.” (Note that this last phrase, *Chaos Walking*, is the title of the trilogy of which *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is the first book.) Dystopian novels – ones that describe a future that is bleak, dark, and often fearful – offer the author a chance to comment

on present-day society. What in our contemporary lives might we consider Noise? What positive and negative impact do you think this Noise has on our lives?

6. On page 26, Todd tells us that Old World (Earth) was full of “corrupshun and sin.” On page 163, Hildy says, “Old World’s mucky, violent, and crowded, a-splitting right into bits with people a-hating each other and a-killing each other, no one is happy till everyone’s miserable.” Is Patrick Ness making a statement about the world in which we currently live? What do you think of his assessment? If the people of Prentisstown have come to the New World to find a paradise – “a new way of life, one clean and simple and honest and good, one different from Old World in all respects, where people could live in safety and peace with God as our guide and with love of our fellow man” (page 414) – have they been successful and changed their ways? Explain.
7. When New World is described as “a whole new Eden” on page 26, this is an example of an allusion. Patrick Ness assumes that the reader will have heard of Eden and know what it means. Ness also makes allusions to Nazi Germany, Al Qaeda and terrorism, and so on. Look for additional allusions throughout *The Knife of Never Letting Go*.
8. Prentisstown is characterised by a complete lack of privacy. Patrick Ness said, speaking about contemporary life in an interview at www.bookdepository.com, “No one’s allowed a private life, because even your friends might sell you to the papers if you’ve allegedly done something ‘shocking.’ And with camera phones and Facebook, suddenly every action, even ones meant for just close friends, can be broadcast to the entire world. . . . I think it’s robbing us of something.” Do you agree or disagree with Ness? Do we suffer from a lack of privacy? What are some examples? What are the costs of lack of privacy? Are there any benefits?
9. In chapter 1, “The Hole in the Noise,” Todd mentions Spackles and uses the racial slur “Spacks.” He describes them on page 69. What is a Spackle? On pages 413–419, Viola reads to Todd from his mother’s journal. His mother writes that Aaron has said some things she doesn’t agree with “about the natives of New World. Which are called the Spackle . . . and which were a BIG surprise, since they were so shy at first neither the original planners back on Old World or our first scout ships even knew they were here! They’re very sweet creachers. Different and maybe primitive and no spoken or written language that we can really find but I don’t agree with some of the thinking of the people here that the Spackle are animals rather

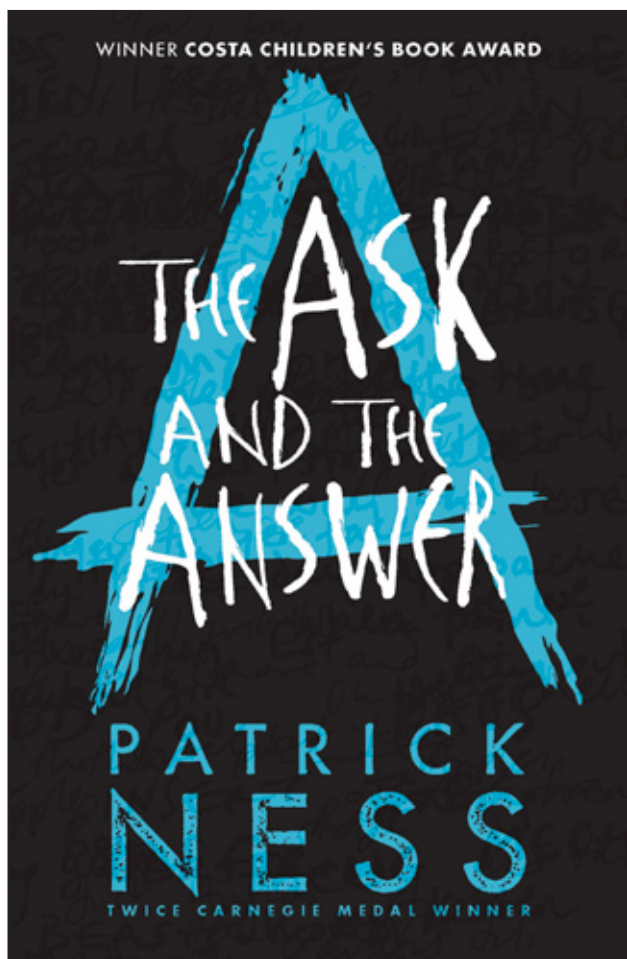
than intelligent beings.” How is the treatment of the Spackle reminiscent of the treatment of the Jews during Hitler’s regime and the treatment of Native Americans by European colonists? In chapter 25 (pages 271–280), why do you think Ness decided to show the participation of the hero of the story, Todd, in the degradation and destruction of a Spackle? How do these actions change Todd? How do these actions change Viola’s feelings about Todd? Do they change your feelings about Todd?

10. Throughout *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Ness explores gender roles. In a February 10, 2010, interview at presentingLenore.blogspot.com, he said, “The gender roles were more a way of exploring my theory about how bad we are as a species at handling difference. If something is different, it’s either better (in which case we need to destroy it) or worse (in which case we need to exploit it). That was more a plea to accept difference as merely difference.” How would you respond to Ness’s comments?
11. On pages 68–72, when Todd sees a girl for the first time, he’s surprised that she is not what he expected a girl to be like. He says, “Girls are small and polite and smiley. They wear dresses and their hair is long. . . . They do all the inside chores. . . . They reach womanhood when they turn thirteen . . . and then they’re women and they become wives.” Viola tells Todd when they are in Carbonel Downs that the women there “clean and they cook and they make babies and they all live in a big dormitory outside of town where they can’t interfere in men’s business” (page 362). What do you think of Todd’s description? Think about Ness’s use of gender roles in the novel. How does Todd, through Viola, eventually see women and their roles? (Check out pages 380 and 408 if you aren’t sure.)
12. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Todd faces many ethical dilemmas, in which he has to choose between what is right (and usually more difficult) and what is wrong (and usually easier). In some cases he makes the right decision. In others, he does not. For instance, on page 79, he realizes that the girl he has found is considered a “sign” and is wanted by the citizens of Prentisstown to be sacrificed. He considers giving her over to Aaron and the Mayor: “They could have what they want and leave me alone and I could go back and everything could be like it was . . . it might save me.” What does he ultimately decide to do? Why? Look for additional examples of ethical dilemmas that Todd faces. What is the ethical dilemma that Ben and Cillian face in how they raise Todd? (See pages 393–397 if you need help.)
13. Follow the relationship between Todd and his dog, Manchee. At the beginning of the book, Todd tells us that Manchee was an unwanted birthday present. On page 333 Todd says, “I rub the ears of my . . . ruddy *great* dog that I never wanted but who hung around anyway . . . and who’s right there when I need pulling back from the darkness I fall into and who tells me who I am whenever I forget.” The two become true friends and companions. List the ways in which Manchee shows his devotion to Todd. Explain Manchee’s part in Todd’s ethical dilemma.
14. In the last hundred pages of the book, there is much talk of hope. Ben talks to Todd and Viola about hope. In her journal, Todd’s mother says, “*Let me tell you about the place you’ve been born into, son. It’s called New World and it’s a whole planet made entirely of hope*” (page 414). Later Todd says, “I think how hope . . . may be the thing that keeps you going, but that it’s dangerous, too, that it’s painful and risky.” (page 423). For Todd and Viola, hope lies in what they think they will find in Haven. It is what allows them to continue their journey and not give up. Do they find what they hope to find at the end of the road? Explain.
15. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, though the men can hear one another’s thoughts via Noise, do they really know one another? Todd says on page 308, “the lesson of forever and ever is that knowing a man’s mind ain’t knowing the man.” Though Todd cannot hear Viola’s Noise, he eventually is stunned to realize that he knows “what she’s thinking and feeling and what’s going on inside her. . . . I can read *her*” (pages 419–420). Think about the development of their relationship. How is it that Todd knows these things in the midst of Viola’s silence?
16. One of the themes of *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is that “*war makes monsters of men*” (page 430). What occurs in the story that proves this to be true? Can you think of present-day examples that either support or negate this idea?
17. In the climax of the book (starting on page 440), Todd must face his final ethical dilemma. What is the ethical dilemma that Aaron forces him to confront? How does this tie in with Aaron’s preaching that “if one of us falls, we all fall,” which is stated several times throughout the story? How does Viola help Todd resolve this dilemma?
18. Todd uses what some consider obscenities in the book. Why do you think Patrick Ness made the choice to have Todd use these terms? Does it add to, or detract from, his character development? Why does Todd sometimes use euphemisms like “effing” in place of the obscenities themselves? What does that tell you about him?

19. In an interview at www.yareads.com, Patrick Ness says that the books in the Chaos Walking series are “probably most about how hope lies in the people we love, that if you can find someone to count on and who counts on you, then that’s probably the best meaning life is going to get. A hopeful message.” How is this idea communicated in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*? What do you predict will happen in *The Ask and the Answer*, the second book in the Chaos Walking series?

20. *Publishers Weekly* conducted an interview with Patrick Ness in October of 2009 in which he says, “Teenagers are a terrific audience. You have to respect them or they’ll put you down immediately. There’s no sentimentality about it; if they don’t like you, they just won’t read you. . . . If you can keep their respect and get them to come with you, they’re willing to follow you anywhere, much farther than an adult audience.” Has Ness earned your respect as a writer? Why or why not?

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THE ASK AND THE ANSWER

The second book in the **CHAOS WALKING** series
Winner of the Costa Children's Book Award

"It's not that you should never love something so much it can control you. It's that you need to love something that much so you can never be controlled."

ABOUT THE BOOK

As *The Ask and the Answer* begins, Todd and Viola have reached the end of the journey that began in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. But they do not find healing and hope in the town of Haven. Instead, they find their worst enemy, Mayor Prentiss, waiting to welcome them to "New Prentisstown", where they are pushed into separate lives: Todd faces impossible choices when forced to join the Mayor's oppressive new regime, the Ask, while Viola is swept into Mistress Coyle's ruthless activities and those of the mysterious Answer. In alternating narrations, Todd and Viola, torn by the conflicting messages they receive from those they interact with, struggle to understand what it means to be human and what it means to love. As the clouds of war begin to gather, Todd and Viola's faith and trust in each other will be tested again and again. In a *Booklist* starred review, Ian Chipman says, "If *Knife* provided the cut, this follow-up provides the fester."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the first question that Mayor Prentiss asks Todd when he wakes up at the beginning of the book? Even though the Mayor already knows the answer to the question, why does he persist in making Todd answer it? Why does Todd refuse to answer the question? What does it symbolise when, on page 19, he finally answers the question?
2. Authors often use figurative language to describe people, places, and events in their stories. In *The Ask and the Answer*, Patrick Ness uses similes, metaphors, and personification to help us see, smell, hear, taste, and feel

what the characters experience. Below are some examples of figurative language from *The Ask and the Answer*. As you are reading, look for additional examples of each. What impact does Ness's use of figurative language have on you as a reader?

- A simile uses "like" or "as" to compare two things.

Page 307: "The blackness starts to overwhelm me, starts to fall over me like a blanket, like water rising above my head."

Page 152: "Her expression is solid as stone."

- A metaphor is an implied comparison between two things.
Page 443: “The snake of the army slithers up the hillside.”

- Personification gives human qualities to something that is not human.

On page 214 Corinne says, “There’s so much life here, Viola. So much, in every corner of every forest and stream and river and mountain. This planet just *hums* with it.”

3. Patrick Ness writes Todd’s voice in the vernacular. He writes like Todd actually speaks, with errors in grammar and spelling. For instance, on page 9 Todd says to Mayor Prentiss, “I ain’t afraid of you. . . . I ain’t afraid to die.” On page 260, Todd describes the work on the monastery like this: “We’ve nearly dug all the trenches and blocks for the foundayshuns to be poured, something Davy and I are sposed to supervize even tho it’s gonna be the Spackle who know how to do it.” What does Todd’s use of poor grammar and spelling tell us about him?
4. The concept of the Noise again plays a significant role in *The Ask and the Answer*. Author Patrick Ness talks frequently about the fact that we live in a noisy world, a world in which teens have less privacy than they have ever had. As the book opens, Todd notices right away that Mayor Prentiss and some of the other men of Prentisstown have no Noise. On pages 26–27, the former mayor of Haven, Con Ledger, tells Todd about the cure for the Noise and how it was developed. Who takes the cure and who does not? Mayor Prentiss tells Todd on page 286, “A man who can control his Noise is a man with an advantage.” How does Mayor Prentiss use Noise and the cure to control those under his power? How do other characters like Todd and Wilf use their Noise? Can teens today control the noise around them? What impact can the ability to control noise, or not, have on you personally?
5. How does the addition of a second first-person narrator impact *The Ask and the Answer*? How would the story have been different had only Todd told it? In the third book of the Chaos Walking trilogy, *Monsters of Men*, a third narrator is added. Any guesses as to who that might be?
6. The relationship between Todd and Viola drives this story. When Todd wakes up at the start of the book, his first thought is about Viola and where she is. When Viola wakes up at another location, her first word is “Todd?” Both Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle understand the power of this relationship. Todd realizes on page 118 that Mayor Prentiss has used this relationship to his advantage. He thinks, “Mayor Prentiss has used her to control me. *Duh*. Any effing idiot would know it. If I don’t do what they say, they kill her. If I try to escape, they kill her. If I do anything to Davy, they kill her.” Describe the relationship between Todd and Viola. What makes it special? What makes it enduring? In what other ways does their relationship allow others to manipulate them?
7. When “President” Prentiss first addresses the citizens of Haven/New Prentisstown, he tells them on page 40, “You *are* conquered. You are defeated. And I read to you your doom. . . . But it is not I who conquered you. . . . It is not I who has beaten you or defeated you or enslaved you. . . . You are enslaved by your idleness. . . . You are defeated by your complacency.” What does he mean by this statement? Do you agree with him? What options did the people of Haven have in terms of their response to the arrival of Mayor Prentiss and his army? What would the pros and cons of these different options have been? What can we learn from the people of Haven by their actions, or lack thereof, when Mayor Prentiss and his army arrive?
8. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, the boys of Prentisstown become men when they kill another human being. In that book, Todd kills a Spackle. The people of the New World do not regard the Spackle as human. What does it cost Todd when he kills the Spackle? Even though he tells Mayor Prentiss on page 10 he has killed, is Todd really capable of taking a human life? He claims to have killed Aaron, one of the antagonists in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, when he says on page 11, “I done what Aaron wanted! I murdered him! I became a man by yer own laws.” Why does he make this claim? Speaking about Todd on page 421, Viola says, “But he couldn’t, could he? He couldn’t and still be himself. He couldn’t and still be Todd Hewitt. The boy who can’t kill. The *man* who can’t. We are the choices we make.” In the end, is Todd a killer? How do you see him as a result of his choices?
9. Mayor Prentiss repeatedly tells Todd that he is capable of leading others. On page 18, he tells Todd, “You could be a leader of men, Todd. You have proven yourself very special.” Do you agree with this assessment? What qualities does Todd have that would make him an effective leader? What qualities does he have that might deter him from being successful in this role? Do you believe that Mayor Prentiss is sincere when he makes these statements? On page 49 Mayor Prentiss says, “Come, Todd. . . . Ready to be a leader of men?” At this point, is Todd ready? As the story progresses, do his feelings about being a leader change?
10. What is the role of gender in *The Ask and the Answer*? For much of the book, men and women are essentially separated. Why do you think Patrick Ness has chosen to separate them? Do the men and the women in the story operate in the same way? Explain. Think about

how Mayor Prentiss, the leaders of New Prentisstown, and Davy treat women. How does Mayor Prentiss use the treatment of women to manipulate both the women and the men in the story?

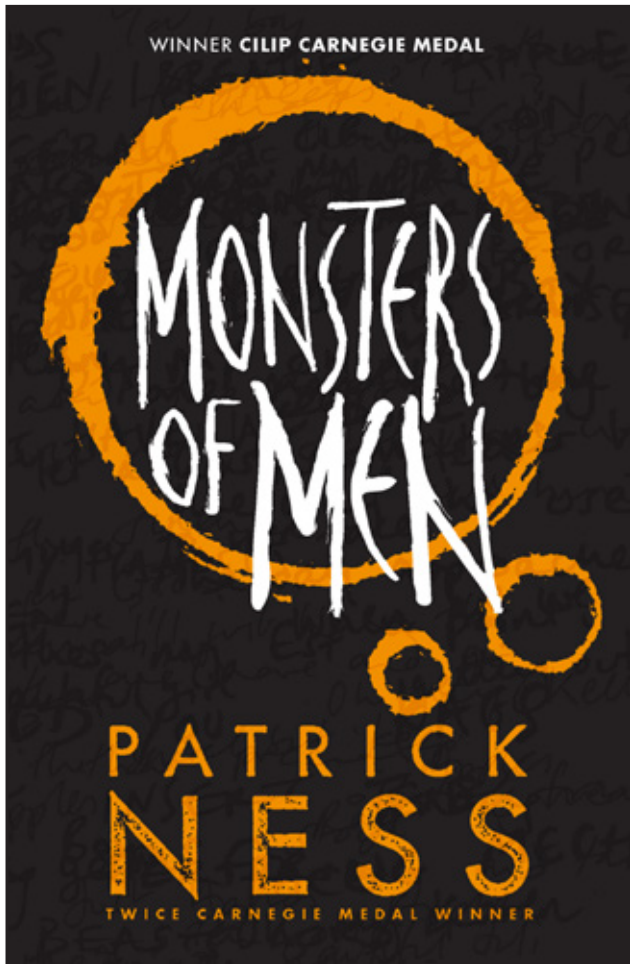
11. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Todd had a dog named Manchee. Describe that relationship and how it developed. In *The Ask and the Answer*, Mayor Prentiss gives Todd a horse named Angharrad from his private herd. In the beginning Todd has no knowledge of horses and is very skittish about riding her. Describe how the relationship between Todd and Angharrad develops throughout the second book. How does it parallel his relationship with Manchee?
12. Think about Mistress Coyle and Mayor Prentiss in terms of their leadership styles. Compare and contrast how they lead. Who is more effective? Why? On page 95, Corinne says that according to Mistress Coyle, “being a leader is making the people you love hate you a little more each day.” Is this true? If so, are Mistress Coyle and Mayor Prentiss successful? Give examples. Mayor Prentiss tells Viola on page 129 that “Leadership isn’t grown. . . . It’s *taken*.” Is this true? Do Mistress Coyle and Mayor Prentiss develop into leaders, or do they simply seize control? What about Todd and Viola? Explain. Look up the words *totalitarianism* and *tyranny*. How do they relate to the leadership styles of Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle?
13. Todd and Viola constantly wonder who or what they can trust and have faith in. Both Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle claim that they are trustworthy. On page 50, Todd asks Mayor Prentiss how he can know whether the Mayor is keeping his promise not to harm Viola. Mayor Prentiss says, “You don’t. . . . I want your faith in me, Todd, and faith with proof is no faith at all.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How do you personally define *faith*? On page 331, Mistress Coyle says, “Either you trust me, Viola, or you do not. . . . Which will it be?” Think about examples from your own life in which you have been asked to have faith without proof.
14. To *redeem* means to reform or make amends. Davy does and says many cruel things to Todd, the Spackle, and the women of New Prentisstown. On page 54, Davy’s father says of him, “I know my son is a liar. . . . I know he is a bully and a brute and ignorant of the things I hold dear. But he is my son. . . . And I believe in redemption.” What is the irony in this statement? Observe how Davy grows and changes throughout the book. Do you believe that Davy deserves to be redeemed by the end of *The Ask and the Answer*? Explain. Does Todd deserve redemption for the terrible things that he feels he has done? On page 393, Viola tells him, “We

all fall, you said. . . . We all fall but that’s not what matters. What matters is picking yourself up again.” If we all fall, do we all deserve redemption?

15. Todd struggles throughout *The Ask and the Answer* with the question of what it means to be human, especially in regard to the Spackle. When he and Davy are first assigned to overseeing the imprisoned Spackle, Todd thinks on page 59, “There’s so many of ’em, so many long white faces looking back at me, their eyes too big, their mouths too small and toothy and high on their faces, their ears looking nothing like a man’s. But you can still see a man’s face in there, can’t you? Still see a face that feels and fears—And suffers.” Todd recognises their humanity and vows that he will treat them well and protect them. What are some examples of the less than humane ways the Spackle are treated by the guards, Davy, and Todd? Do the Spackle do anything at any time to “deserve” this treatment? How is it that Todd gets through these situations? Think of instances from history in which certain groups have not been treated humanely. What have been the consequences of these events? Why is it that such inhumanity continues?
16. Ivan is a man that Todd and Viola met in Farbranch in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. On page 62 of *The Ask and the Answer*, he tells Todd, “You go where the power is. . . . That’s how you stay alive.” He is referring to the fact that he is now working for Mayor Prentiss. Think of instances from history where people have gone “where the power is” in order to survive. Have you ever done this in your own life, even though you disagreed with the person in power? Does Ivan redeem himself at the end of *The Ask and the Answer*?
17. Mistress Coyle tells Viola on page 91 that “information is power.” On page 453, Mayor Prentiss tells Todd, “If you can control information, you can control others.” One way those in power can control others is by restricting the flow of information. Think of all the ways Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle control the flow of information. For instance, they will not give Todd and Viola information about each other. By controlling this information, they are able to control Todd and Viola. Also, Todd cannot read, so the information and advice left to him by his mother is meaningless. Give some examples of ways the flow of information is controlled in both *The Ask and the Answer* and in our world, and the impact this has. What might be the author’s message about information, knowledge, and education?
18. On page 430 of *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Ben tells Todd that “War makes monsters of men.” On page 102 of *The Ask and the Answer*, Mistress Coyle tells

- Viola, "If you ever see a war . . . you'll learn that war only destroys. No one escapes from a war. No one. Not even the survivors. You accept things that would appall you at any other time because life has temporarily lost all meaning." Does this hold true for the characters in this series? Give examples from history and contemporary times that support and negate these statements.
19. In chapter 11, Todd learns that his new job is to "number" the Spackle. Why and how is this done? How does it impact Todd? How does it impact Davy? What are the repercussions of this act? In chapter 30, we learn that the numbering does not end with the Spackle. Explain. How do these events parallel events in our own history? What are the consequences of such actions?
 20. Both Todd and Viola are orphaned. Review what happened to each of their parents. On page 148, Mayor Prentiss tells Viola, "I know how lonely you must be, and nothing would please me more than if, one day, maybe, you could consider me as your—" How do you think he meant to finish this statement? On page 382, he says to Todd, "I came into this town with one son . . . but it has blessed me with another." Is he sincere in these statements? Describe Mayor Prentiss's relationship with his own son, Davy. What does he want from his son? What does Davy want from his father? If he has his own son, why does he want or need Viola and Todd to be his children?
 21. "We are the choices we make" is Mistress Coyle's motto. This statement is repeated several times in *The Ask and the Answer*. What do you think this statement means? How is it supported by the actions of the characters? Consider the character of Corinne. Review pages 296–299. Does Corinne's fate support or negate the belief of some characters that "we are the choices we make"? Is this statement true in your own life? Explain.
 22. In chapter 19, Viola meets Lee, who is part of the Answer. Discuss his background. Review their conversation on pages 271–273 and 331–332 as they talk about weapons, war, and killing. How does Lee respond when Viola cries? What does this show us about their relationship? What do you think Ness's purpose was in creating the character of Lee?
 23. Describe 1017. How is he different from the other Spackle? How is Todd's relationship with 1017 different from his relationship with the other Spackle? What happens to 1017? What impact does this have on Todd?
 24. Define *genocide*. Give some examples of historical and contemporary genocides. See pages 305–310. Who commits the act of genocide in *The Ask and the Answer*? What is the purpose of the genocide? What message does this send to the reader? Who survives this genocide? How and why does this character survive?
 25. How did the Answer and the Ask get their names? Compare and contrast the two in terms of their purpose and their operation.
 26. There are many scenes of torture in *The Ask and the Answer*. In chapter 29, Mayor Prentiss forces Todd and Davy to witness the torture of a woman. What is his purpose in making them watch? What does he claim is the purpose of using torture? Does the torture accomplish anything? How do Todd and Davy respond to what they witness? How did you as a reader respond? What do you think the lesson is here?
 27. Discuss the development of the relationship between Todd and Davy, from Davy calling Todd "pigpiss" to Davy calling Todd a friend and a brother. What do you think causes Davy's feelings for Todd to change? Is there evidence that Todd's feelings about Davy also change as the story progresses? What are usual ways that friendships may develop between people who do not like one another?
 28. Do the members of the Answer and Mistress Coyle deserve the moniker "terrorists"? Defend your opinion.
 29. "Never love something so much it can be used to control you," Mayor Prentiss tells Viola and Todd on page 484. Later, on page 492, Viola thinks, "The Mayor's wrong—He's wrong forever and ever—It's not that you should never love something so much it can control you. It's that you *need* to love something that much so you can *never be controlled*." How do these statements apply to Todd and Viola? How do they pertain to your own life?
 30. Describe how author Patrick Ness sets up the third and final volume of the Chaos Walking trilogy, *Monsters of Men*. The final volume is a story of war. Mayor Prentiss says on page 517, "Finally, we come to the real thing, the thing that makes men men, the thing we were *born* for, Todd . . . War." At the end of *The Ask and the Answer*, what factions does it appear will be involved in this war? For what reason, and to what purpose, will they be engaging in this war?

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MONSTERS OF MEN

The third book in the **CHAOS WALKING** series
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“What a sad thing men are. Can’t do nothing good without being so weak we mess it up. Can’t build something without tearing it down.”

ABOUT THE BOOK

In *Monsters of Men*, the final instalment of the Chaos Walking trilogy, a horrific war surges around Todd and Viola, and it forces them to face monstrous decisions. The indigenous Spackle, thinking and acting as one, have mobilized to avenge their murdered people. The ruthless human leaders of the Ask and of the Answer prepare to defend their factions at all costs as a convoy of new settlers approaches. As is often true in war, the projected will of the few threatens to overwhelm the desperate desire of the many. The consequences of each action are unspeakably vast: To follow a tyrant or a terrorist? To save the life of the one you love most, or thousands of strangers? To believe in redemption, or assume it is lost? Becoming adults amid the turmoil, Todd and Viola question all they have known, racing through horror and outrage toward a shocking finale. As Robert Dunbar writes in *The Irish Times*, *Monsters of Men* “triumphantly concludes what will almost certainly come to be seen as one of the outstanding literary achievements of the present century.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Publishers Weekly* called *Monsters of Men* “one of the most important works of young adult science fiction in recent years.” Michael Cart, an editorialist for *Booklist* magazine, named *Monsters of Men* his top young adult book for 2010, and it was also his pick for the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature. In addition, *Monsters of Men* received several starred reviews. As you begin reading the final instalment in the Chaos Walking trilogy, look for evidence that the book is deserving of these accolades. Discuss what qualities make this book an award-winning book.
2. In the opening line of *Monsters of Men*, Mayor Prentiss says, “War. . . . At Last.” Many have called the book a war story. In *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and *The Ask and the Answer*, Todd’s caretaker, Ben, tells him that “War makes monsters of men.” *Monsters of Men* clearly demonstrates the ugliness of war. Which characters in this final book of the trilogy could be considered “monsters” who do monstrous things in the midst of war? Does war make them monsters, or are they monsters to begin with? Mayor Prentiss disagrees with Ben’s statement when he says on page 11, “It’s war that makes us men in the first

place. Until there's war, we are only children." Do you agree or disagree with Mayor Prentiss? Explain.

3. On page 10, Todd describes the Noise of the Ask's army as "a monstrous thing, tuned together and twisted round itself, roaring as a single voice, like a loud and angry giant pounding its way down the road." This is an example of what type of figurative language? Explain.
4. Examine the four factions involved in this war and their leaders: the Ask (Mayor Prentiss), the Answer (Mistress Coyle), the Spackle (the Sky), and the newcomers (Simone Watkin and Bradley Tench). What are the similarities and differences in their military tactics and leadership styles? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these different tactics and styles? How do these leaders prepare Todd, Viola, and the Return for leadership? Do Todd, Viola, or the Return want the roles that are being thrust upon them? Explain.
5. Todd continuously repeats, "I am the Circle and the Circle is me." Where does the line come from, and what is its significance? The Mayor tells Todd many times that if he controls his Noise, he can control the world. On page 75, Todd thinks, "If I can control my Noise, I can control myself. And if I can control myself—Maybe I can control him." Describe how Todd's Noise changes throughout *Monsters of Men*. How does he learn to control his Noise? Does he ever use it to control Mayor Prentiss or others? What are the consequences?
6. Keep track of the ways war is described throughout *Monsters of Men*. Find examples in the story that either support or negate these descriptions. For instance, on page 37, Mistress Coyle says, "War makes ugly necessity." On page 49, Todd thinks, "There ain't no time for nothing in war except war." On page 62, Todd says, "That's the nasty, nasty secret of war. . . . When yer winning, it's effing *thrilling*." On page 85, the Sky tells the Return, "Today was a battle. . . . But a war is made of many battles." Bradley repeatedly tells Viola that war can't be personal. Mayor Prentiss tells Todd on page 190, "That's how war goes. You have to make impossible decisions." Viola thinks on page 287, "Wars make no sense. You kill people to tell them you want to stop killing them." What do these statements mean? Do you think there is truth in each statement? How do they relate to our lives in general? Explain.
7. On page 580, Viola says, "It's a hell of a thing to kill someone—Even when you think they deserve it." Is Viola a killer or not? Is Todd a killer or not? Both are faced several times in this war with the need to kill or be killed (see page 35, for example). What happens in each situation when they are faced with this moral dilemma? In the end, when they are perhaps ready to kill, how are they saved from this dilemma? How are Todd and Viola and the Return alike in this sense?
8. Discuss Todd's relationship with Angharrad, Viola's relationship with Acorn, and Mayor Prentiss's relationship with Morpeth and Juliet's Joy. How is the personality of each of these animals similar to that of their human counterparts? What is the fate of each of these animals?
9. On page 68, Viola tells Bradley, "If you ever doubt anything here, if you ever not know what to think or who to trust, you trust Todd, okay? You remember that." Though Todd and Viola say they trust each other and that they will always tell each other the truth, there are moments when they experience doubt and are not entirely truthful with each other. This is partly due to Mayor Prentiss's and Mistress Coyle's manipulations, and partly a matter of their own choosing. What are the secrets they withhold from each other? Why do they withhold the truth in these instances? What impact does withholding the truth have on them and their relationship? Once they supposedly reveal the truth to each other (see pages 260–261), they assure each other that everything is under control. Is it?
10. Patrick Ness introduces a third narrator on page 77 of *Monsters of Men*. Who is this narrator? Review this narrator's story on pages 194–199. Do you feel the addition of this voice is necessary? How does the addition of this voice add to or detract from the story? This narrator talks of the *Sky*, the *Land*, the *Clearing*, the *Burden*, the *Return*, and the *Knife*. What is the meaning of each of these terms?
11. How is the language of the Land different from the language of the Burden and of the Clearing? What impact does this have on the members of each? What does the language of each group tell the reader about their belief system?
12. The Return speaks of his "one in particular." What does this phrase mean? Who is this? Describe the development of their relationship, how it ended, and the impact this had on the Return. Read pages 268–270. Are there details that surprise you? The Source tells the Return about his own "one in particular" on page 426. How are their situations similar?
13. The Return talks to the Sky about the Knife on page 84. He tells the Sky that the Knife "is worse than the others. . . . He is worst of all of them. . . . Because he *knew* he was doing wrong. He felt the *pain* of his actions. . . . The rest are worth as much as their pack animals . . . but worst is the one who knows better and does *nothing*." What is your response to this statement? The Return's motivation in this war seems to be to avenge the actions of the Knife. Why? Explain how his motivations shift as the book goes on.
14. Viola wears a band with the number 1391 on it. Why does she wear this band? How does it impact her? What might the band be symbolic of? The Return wears a similar band. Why does he wear it? What impact does it have on him? What does it symbolize? Who else wears bands? What is the fate of those who wear the band? Explain.

How is this eventually resolved? When Mayor Prentiss says on page 565, "And that . . . is my parting gift to *you*, Viola," to what is he referring?

15. On page 114, the Return thinks, "The Land is all one, is it not? The land has no *others*, it has no *they* or *those*. There is only one Land." Compare this philosophy to the thinking of the Mayor, Mistress Coyle, Todd, and Viola. Do these characters value separateness or unity more? How does this influence their actions, especially in terms of the war that is being waged? Are there those who are seen as "others" in our culture? How does this thinking affect us all?
16. Which characters advocate for a peaceful solution to the war? What is their reasoning for this solution? Do you feel that, even in the end, peace is actually possible for those on New World? How about for humans on Earth? Explain your reasoning.
17. Todd and Viola are completely devoted to each other. In their conversation on page 164 Viola says, "If they'd hurt you, if they'd *killed* you . . . I'd have killed every last one of them." Todd replies, "I'd do the same, Viola . . . without even thinking twice." On page 166, Viola wonders, "Does it make us dangerous?" What do you think she means? What specific action on her part causes her to ask this? Other characters recognize the power of Todd and Viola's devotion to each other and use it to manipulate them. Do you think this makes them dangerous? Explain.
18. Mistress Coyle says to Viola on page 175, "Ideals, my girl. . . . Always easier to believe in than live." Bradley responds by saying, "But if you don't at least try to live them . . . then there's no point in living at all." What is the definition of *ideal*? What are the ideals being discussed here? Do you agree with Mistress Coyle and/or Bradley? Explain.
19. Choice is discussed many times throughout the Chaos Walking trilogy. For instance, in *The Ask and the Answer*, Mistress Coyle tells Viola, "We are the choices we make." (page 98). On page 182 of *Monsters of Men*, Bradley tells Viola, "To say you have no choice is to release yourself from responsibility and that's not how a person with integrity acts." What are some good choices and some poor choices that Todd, Viola, and the Return make? What impact do these choices have on their lives and the lives of others? Think of situations in your life where you have made choices that have significantly impacted the course of your life. Did you or did you not take ownership of these choices? What were the consequences of these actions?
20. On page 183, Todd looks through his mother's journal and can only read the words "*My dearest son.*" He thinks the pages of her journal contain "my ma, talking and talking. And I can't hear her." The fact that he is illiterate haunts him. Author Patrick Ness continues to remind us of Todd's illiteracy through Todd's use of misspellings ("projekshun," "impayshuntly," "emoshunal") and poor grammar ("ain't," "speechify"). On page 249, Mayor Prentiss offers to teach Todd to read. The irony is that Mayor Prentiss is the reason that Todd can't read. In the end, is this an honest offer? Explain how the Mayor uses books and education to manipulate Todd and the others. What might we learn from Todd's experiences with education and reading?
21. The concept of redemption is a key theme in *Monsters of Men*. On page 190, Mayor Prentiss tells Todd that before his son's death Todd had redeemed Davy: "You changed him, Todd Hewitt. . . . He was a wastrel, and you nearly made him a man." Does Todd redeem Davy? Give examples to support your response. The Mayor is described by Mistress Coyle on page 393 as a "terrible, savage, brutal genius." However, the Mayor says on page 396, "You've *redeemed* me, Todd Hewitt. Redeemed me when no one else would have thought it possible. . . . Or even desirable." However, Todd says on several occasions that Mayor Prentiss is not redeemable. For instance, on page 374 he says, "I look at his face, his completely untrustworthy, unredeemable face." Does Todd change and redeem Mayor Prentiss? Think of the events that take place at the end of the book. Is the Mayor capable of redemption? Does he deserve redemption? Explain.
22. The leaders of the different factions involved in this war believe that the death of one or a few is sometimes necessary in war to save the whole. On pages 209–210, when apologizing to Viola for the bomb in the cathedral that could have taken her life, Mistress Coyle tells Viola, "Leaders must sometimes make monstrous decisions . . . and my monstrous decision was that if your life was likely to be lost on an errand *you* insisted on taking, then I would at least take the chance, however slim, to make your death worth it. . . . Then you would have been a martyr for the cause . . . and we would have fought in your name. . . . You'd be surprised at how powerful a martyr can be." What is a martyr? How is the idea that martyrs have great power borne out in *Monsters of Men*? After the death of several members of the Land, the Sky says, "*Necessary in small numbers only. . . . Necessary to save the entire body of the Land. And necessary to finish this was before the convoy arrives.*" (page 235). Think of modern-day warring factions. Do they knowingly sacrifice individuals for the sake of the whole? Explain and give examples. How do you feel about this military tactic? Can we consider these individuals martyrs?
23. On pages 255–256, Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle each describe the actions of the other. Review these accusations. Do you feel that these accusations are accurate?
24. Mistress Coyle says of Mayor Prentiss on page 300, "Usually when a man calls a woman a bitch . . . it's because she's doing something right." What are your thoughts on this?
25. The relationship between Mayor Prentiss and Todd is multilayered and complex, as is the relationship between

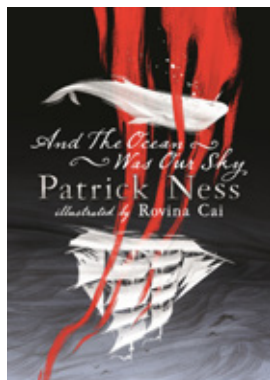
Mistress Coyle and Viola. Describe these relationships. Do you believe the Mayor when he repeatedly tells Todd things like, “You’re a remarkable young man, you know that?” (page 325)? What about Mistress Coyle when she says things to Viola like, “You’re lucky, you know. So young. So many chances ahead of you. You could turn out to be a better version of me. A version of me who’s never forced to be so ruthless” (page 330)? Consider Mistress Coyle’s and Mayor Prentiss’s final acts. Do these acts support or negate the statements above? Explain. How do Todd and Viola see the Mayor and Mistress Coyle? Discuss how Todd and Viola’s feelings for the Mayor and Mistress Coyle change throughout the book.

26. At one point, while looking at Bradley, the Return realises that he “is only newly arrived, a forerunner of all those who are still to come. Still to come to push the Land out of its own world. Still to come to make *all* of us the Burden. And more will no doubt come after. And more after that” (page 346). Why is it that Bradley’s and Simone’s people cannot return to their homeland? Think of examples throughout history where a member of an indigenous group may have looked at a colonialist and thought these same things.
27. “Can you blame me if I’m curious about new technologies?” the Mayor asks Todd on page 376. This is an example of Ness’s use of foreshadowing. What events does this statement foreshadow?
28. Which character makes a surprise return in *Monsters of Men*? Where has this character been? (See page 453.)

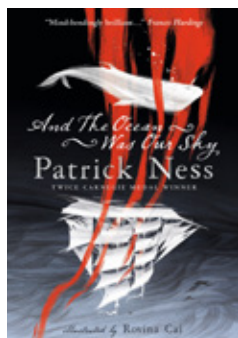
Why do you think author Patrick Ness made the choice to bring this character back? What impact does this character’s return have on the relationship between Todd and the Mayor, and on the story in general? Do you feel that the return of this character was necessary to the story?

29. On page 452, the Source says to Todd, “That’s the secret of this planet. . . . Communication, real and open, so we can finally understand each other.” What prevents humans on earth from having that “real and open” communication being talked about here? Could this type of communication be the solution to the conflicts between contemporary warring factions? Why or why not?
30. The Mayor tells Todd on page 532, “So many important things have happened to you in churches . . . I thought it only fitting to bring you to one for what is either your last chapter. . . . Or your first.” Later, on page 555, Viola gets a “sinking feeling of how many terrible things have happened to me and Todd in churches.” What are some important events that have taken place in churches throughout the three books in the Chaos Walking trilogy? In the present day, what important events often take place in churches? Have any significant events in your own life taken place in churches? Do you feel that any of the characters in the series are particularly religious or spiritual? What do you think the churches in Chaos Walking symbolise?
31. What is your interpretation of the last section of *Monsters of Men*, “Arrival”? What do you think will happen after the story ends? Is there hope to be found in the final pages of the trilogy?

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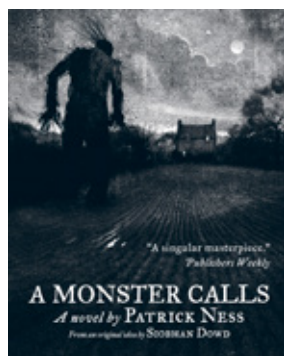
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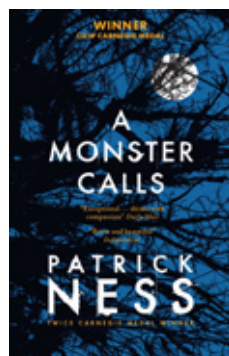
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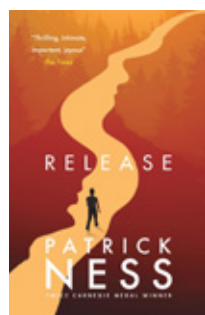
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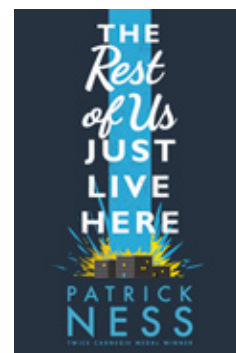
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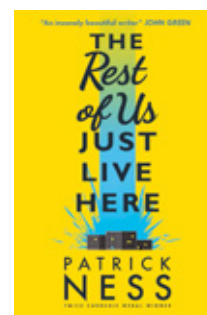
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This discussion guide was written by Terri Evans, media specialist at Champlin Park High School in Minnesota. In 2010, Patrick Ness visited Champlin Park High School to spend three days discussing *The Knife of Never Letting Go* with the nearly 3,500 students and staff who had read the book over the summer.