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THE GREATEST MAGIC IS HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT...

# SPELLSTONE



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DISCUSSION GUIDE



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# **SPELLSTONE** by Ross Montgomery

## Discussion Guide

### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

A sparkling fantasy adventure, *Spellstone* will thrill readers with its soaring imagination and modern take on British myth and legend. Evie, twelve years old and increasingly ignored by everybody, even her parents, struggles to fit in. But when the mysterious Wainwright tells her how important she is going to be before he disappears, her life changes in an instant. With a secret calling and a motley band of wizards trying to protect the world from untold evil, Evie finds herself in a race against time to discover her true self and the secrets of the spellstone. Another classic fantasy story from Montgomery, *Spellstone* is brimming with heart and danger, and steeped in mystery and excitement.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Ross Montgomery** started writing stories as a teenager, when he should have been doing homework, and continued doing so at university. He has been shortlisted for the Costa Children's Book of the Year Award twice, for his debut novel *Alex, the Dog and the Unopenable Door* and for *The Midnight Guardians*. His books have also been nominated for the CILIP Carnegie Award while his picture book *Space Tortoise* was nominated for the Kate Greenaway Award and included in the *Guardian's* Best New Children's Books of 2018. He lives in London with his wife and their cat, called Fun Bobby.

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION:**

There are many themes worthy of exploration in *Spellstone*, and plenty of opportunities to develop understanding of book craft and creative writing. The novel takes some inspiration from the King Arthur myths, and it is worth checking familiarity with these at the outset (though knowledge of these isn't necessary to enjoy the book). There are also themes of abandonment, family loss and loneliness, therefore ensure adequate support is in place should any members of the group be affected by these during discussion.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

#### **Getting started:**

Ask group what they thought of the book. What did anyone like about it? Can anyone explain why they feel that way? Did anyone have a favourite character? Why? Or a favourite part of the story? Who has read any of Montgomery's other books? How did *Spellstone* compare? Were there any similarities? What were the differences?

#### **1. Evie**

'No matter what she told her parents – whether it was about food, or about school, or about *anything*, in fact – nothing seemed to stick any more' – p.18

At the start of the novel, what did members think of Evie? Did her sense of being ignored by her parents seem odd? If not, why not? Why does Montgomery start the book this way? By the end of the novel, has Evie changed? If so, how?



## 2. Wainwright

'That was the problem with magicians – they always took amazing things for granted. Wainwright sighed.' — p.9

What qualities did Wainwright bring, as a leader of the Order? Why does anyone think the reader sees so little of Wainwright, before he dies? Why does the author choose to begin the story at the end of Wainwright's part in it?

## 3. Vale

"It's people, Evie. They're the ones he should have been defeating. They're the monsters." — p.286

What ultimately motivates Vale? What is his ambition? Why does he want to do this? Can anyone understand why he feels this way? How did anyone feel reading the scenes in his memories? How does this compare to the ambitions of other villains that members have read or seen?

## 4. Myth and legend

"And they said that he is still there, waiting for the moment when the world is at its point of greatest peril, and only then will he return." — p.223

Did any group members notice any relation between this story and other myths and legends they might have read? Which ones? What were the references? Was this book 'inspired' by those myths? A retelling? A whole new myth? (Depending on the group you may wish to introduce the key elements of the King Arthur myths, or recap the most well-known elements – Merlin, the Sword in the Stone, the fabled return of the Once and Future King, etc.)

## 5. The last place he'll look

'She could pick out a friendly person from a hundred paces.' — p.27

What did Wainwright mean by 'the last place he'll look'? Did it have more than one meaning? Think back across the novel – when does the reader first get a hint of Evie's power? Why is her power so much more powerful than others?

## 6. Finding your power

"It's rubbish, having a superpower that no one else has in the world... and it's *this*. I must be the worst magician of all time." — p.103

Why does Montgomery give the members of the Order limited powers? Why is it important that each wizard has only one power? Are the powers each wizard has a good thing, for them? As a group, think through each member and explore how they feel about their powers. Is power a gift or a burden? What does, e.g., Onslow's power say about him? Is it as useless a skill as he thinks it is?

EXTENSION: Individually or in groups, explore what single power you would want, if you were a wizard in the Order. Why would you want that power? Would it come with any limitations or restrictions? Compare everyone's ideas as a group.

## 7. Sacrifice

"Just because no one knows about the sacrifice," she said, "It does not make it worthless" — p.274



What sacrifices do the Order of the Stone have to make? Think about the restrictions their powers put on them, including in their wider lives – Rish unable to dream of his mother, Lady Alinora unable to assume human form, etc. Consider the given quotation – what does this mean? Does a sacrifice have to be well-known to be meaningful? What ‘hidden’ sacrifices might people make all the time?

### 8. Concentrated evil

“You understand now, Evie,” he said. “I made a mistake, putting all that power in one place.” — p.241

Why is it a mistake for Emrys to concentrate all of the darkness and evil in the Spellstone? What did he do wrong? What could he have done instead? Consider the very end of the novel; what is the author suggesting about the dangers of bringing evil together, rather than it staying where it is? What about concentrating goodness in one place – is this a good idea? Why, or why not?

### 9. Planting seeds

‘Emrys giggled, like a child. “Planting seeds.”’ — p.240

What is Emrys’s plan, all along? Why does he pour his magic into the earth? What does he think will happen to it if he does? How does this connect with Evie’s power? What is the true magic and power in the novel?

### 10. The Order of the Stone

“The Order of the Stone is only as strong as the links that bind us together.” — p.146

Look together at the section headings of the book. What does anyone notice? Why is this significant? Is Evie the only central character in the book? Does the Order of the Stone really fail? If so, why? If not, why not?

EXTENSION: Creative writing – rewrite part of the story from the perspective of another character, e.g., the episode in Vale’s dreams, but from Rish’s perspective.

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