

DISCUSSION GUIDE

“Stroud is a genius” *Rick Riordan*

THE OUTLAWS SCARLETT & BROWNE

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THEIR DARING
EXPLOITS AND AUDACIOUS CRIMES



JONATHAN STROUD

AUTHOR OF LOCKWOOD & CO.

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“You won’t be able to put this down. A classic in the making.”

Eoin Colfer

WALKER BOOKS

THE OUTLAWS SCARLETT & BROWNE

BY JONATHAN STROUD

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Scarlett McCain is an outlaw, bandit and wanted thief, roaming through the Seven Kingdoms of a post-cataclysmic Britain. When she finds herself reluctantly paired up with the hapless Albert, as serenely happy-go-lucky as he is clumsy and awkward, the two must journey together across the Wilds and the Surviving Towns. But Albert's sinister past catches up with him, and he proves to be much more than he first appears. This enthralling novel from award-winning author Jonathan Stroud sings with adventure, spine-chilling horror, and an imagination as broad as the worlds within its pages.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Stroud wrote his first novel - *Buried Fire* - while working as an editor at Walker Books. He is the author of two internationally bestselling series: the award-winning Bartimaeus sequence, which has been published in 36 languages worldwide, and the critically acclaimed Lockwood & Co, which is currently being adapted by Netflix. His other novels include *The Leap*, *The Last Siege* and *Heroes of the Valley*. Jonathan lives in Hertfordshire with his wife and three children.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Outlaws Scarlett & Browne is a novel that refuses to be pigeon-holed, and as such offers huge scope for discussion and engagement. Although in many respects a dystopian fantasy, there are nonetheless various themes which may evoke strong responses, from the suggestion of a climate-crisis apocalyptic event, to discrimination, abandonment, torture, religion, murder and family make-up. In discussing the novel it may be appropriate to look out for any suggestions that topics are uncomfortable for members of the group, or that certain themes need to be handled more sensitively than others.

Group members will likely also have differing knowledge of Stroud's other books and series. It may be useful for group leaders to familiarise themselves with the Bartimaeus series, and the Lockwood & Co. books. Group members who enjoyed *The Outlaws Scarlett & Browne* may well equally enjoy exploring these series if they do not know them.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Ask the group what they thought of the novel. Who liked it? Did anyone not enjoy it? Would anyone like to expand on their feelings? Did it remind any readers of other books? Or stories in other media?

Discuss the group members' respective understanding of Stroud's other books, too. It may be prudent to agree together that no spoilers should be discussed of his other titles, for those that haven't read them.

1. Scarlett

'...Scarlett McCain woke up beside four dead men. Four! She hadn't realised it had been so many.

No wonder she felt stiff.' - p.9

'Scarlett had no time for little kids. They were annoying and distracting, and only got in the way.' - p.222

What drives Scarlett to do what she does throughout the novel? What do the group make of her motivation?

Discuss the contrasts in her nature - her feelings about killing compared with her cuss-box, her constant movement with her meditation and prayer mat. What suggestions does Stroud give about her own secret past?

2. Albert

'Putting his hands in the pockets of his prison trousers, and whistling huskily between his teeth, he set off after the girl.' - p.49

'Then he settled back to read Scarlett's mind and watch the world drift by.' - p.101

Discuss the way the author presents the character of Albert to the reader. Consider the quotations given here. Why do we only slowly learn significant details about him? What were group members' responses to the character as we learn more about him? Is he a danger to others? How should his power be managed?

3. Genre

'WANTED: DEAD OR ALIVE - Albert Browne' - p.139

'The Frontier Wars were long over; ferry-boats organised by the Ancient Company of Watermen...' - p.277

The novel spans various genres and styles. How would readers define or describe the book to others?

Discuss the ways in which the author draws on traditions from fantasy, dystopian fiction, Wild West stories, horror, comedy, historical fiction and other genres. You may want to spend a little time on each genre, drawing out and discussing various elements.

4. The cataclysm

'On the edge of the low-lying Oxford Sours, the great Cataclysm of the past had sent up a spur of land.' - p.221

'...a battered copy of *Tompkins' Complete Bus Timetable*, covering Wessex, Mercia and Anglia.' - p.138

No explanation of what caused the cataclysmic event is provided. What do readers think of this unknown past? When does anyone think the book is set? Why does the author not give more details as to what might have happened? What can anyone deduce from the clues about the world they live in now, about past events?



5. Worldbuilding

“‘Towns aren’t more civilised than the Wilds. In some ways they’re worse.’” - p.105

‘With an almost shocking abruptness, the endless woods gave way to scrubland, and the scrubland to reed marshes and low green water-meadows.’ - p.240

Discuss the Britain within the novel - the Seven Kingdoms. How does the author build the reader’s understanding of this world? What do members think of the different landscapes and territories - the Surviving Towns, the Wilds, the river, the Free Isles? What about the way the characters speak? What do members of the group like about the Seven Kingdoms?

6. Presence and mindfulness

‘And all because of Albert. He was messing up her meditations too...’ - p.137

‘...the same big, dreamy eyes gazing out at something far away.’ - p.138

Consider the themes of self-awareness, presence of mind and living in the moment in the novel. Scarlett is envious of Albert’s obliviousness; Albert admires Scarlett’s quick-thinking and intelligence. How do both characters support one another to be more aware? How do the characters complement and contrast one another? How do Joe and Ettie fit within the dynamic of the journey down the river?

7. Faith houses

“‘The people who are after you, the High Council of the Faith Houses, they run all the houses across the Seven Kingdoms.’” - p.150

Unlike many dystopias, or visions of the future, religion in this novel is a free choice, blended between many recognisable religions. What does this say about the place of religion in this world? How did group members feel about the idea of multi-faith Faith Houses? If people are free to choose whatever religion or interpretation they like, what is the purpose of the Faith Houses?

8. Unnatural forms

‘It is death to go near her. She will laugh in your face as you spin and burn.’ - p.194

“‘Did you see the monsters in the woods and rivers? The shadows in the forest? The unnatural forms passing beneath your raft?’” - p.379

Throughout the novel, Scarlett and Albert are beset by dangers, evils and monsters of all kind - the Wilds, mutated animals, the Tainted, Dr Calloway, the Brothers of the Hand... Discuss some of the portrayals of danger in the novel, and how they differ to other books and stories members can think of. How does Albert’s response to Dr Calloway differ from his response to, say, the threat of the giant otters in the river? Which of all the dangers they face are they each most afraid of, and why?

9. Outsiders

“‘That’s cannon for shooting outsiders like you and me.’” - p.105

‘Albert looked. “What, that pretty mound with all the flowers on the sides?’”

“Yes. That’s Execution Hill. It’s where we burn them.’” - p.119

How is the idea of being different, or an outsider, treated in the novel? What happens to people who are deemed unfit, or ‘defective’? What does this say about the societies portrayed in Stroud’s Seven Kingdoms of Britain? Does it hold any comparison with Britain today?

