

GREEN RISING

DISCUSSION GUIDE

LAUREN JAMES



*In a climate
catastrophe...*

*...resistance is
taking root*

GREEN
RISING

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“A must-read for teens today.”

- Laura Lam



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DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Green Rising, the latest YA sci-fi novel from Lauren James, is a brilliantly imagined and timely exploration of the climate crisis facing the planet. As Earth sleepwalks towards its own environmental destruction, teenagers around the world inexplicably develop the power to grow plant life at will. Theo, whose family's livelihood is destroyed by the giant oil conglomerate Dalex, is thrust into a dizzying new world with the other "Greenfingers", including Hester, daughter and heir to the Dalex empire. But with radical protests taking place around the world, accusations of terrorism, plans being laid to terraform Mars and the planet's natural resources still being depleted, can they master their powers in time to make a change?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren James is the twice Carnegie-nominated author of *The Reckless Afterlife of Harriet Stoker*, *The Quiet at the End of the World*, *The Loneliest Girl in the Universe* and *The Next Together* series. She has been shortlisted for the YA Book Prize and the STEAM Children's Book Award. Lauren teaches creative writing for Coventry University, WriteMentor and Writing West Midlands, and has written articles for numerous publications, including the *Guardian* and the *Children's Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*. She is the founder of the Climate Fiction Writers League, and a passionate advocate of STEM further education. She lives in the West Midlands and you can find her on Twitter at @Lauren_E_James or via her website: <http://www.laurenejames.co.uk>

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

There are many aspects of *Green Rising* that could be discussed, but inevitably there will be a focus on climate change and anthropogenic global warming. It may be useful to have data and articles to hand. The book includes mention of climate fear paralysis, and it may be prudent to consider the responses of group members to the crisis, with thought given to meaningful support to any who are overwhelmed, scared or paralysed by the fear that there is nothing that can be done. Lastly, the acknowledgements within the book include a long list of further reading, largely non-fiction and books on climate science and ideas for reversing the climate crisis. If possible, it may be of benefit to source some of these books for group members to access, via a local library or similar.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

To begin with, ask for the group's general thoughts on the book. What did anyone like about it? How did anyone respond to the central idea of "Greenfingers"?

1. Greenfingers

Hone those powers. Train your Greenfingers to the max – p.33

Why does James ensure that all the Greenfingers in the novel are teenagers? What might she be saying about teenagers today and the climate crisis? Why is it so significant that these Greenfingers find a way to connect to one another through their powers? Do their specific powers in any way reflect their personalities?

2. Multi-media

[33 EPIC THINGS GREENFINGERS DO WITH THEIR POWERS – p.84](#)

The book includes huge amounts of additional material in the form of social media, public announcements and other media between chapters. Why does James include this in the novel? What effect does it have on the reader's understanding of the world of the book? Discuss how important these sections are to the narrative – what do they achieve throughout the novel?

3. Theo

[“Seaweed is all I can grow!” he admitted, feeling utterly miserable. “I’ve tried, but it’s the only thing that comes out.” – p. 118](#)

How does Theo differ from the other Greenfingers? And in what ways are they similar? Discuss the change in Theo as he learns to understand the specifics of his power – why is he so important to the Greenfingers' activism?

4. Hester

[This was a good thing, wasn't it? It meant the firm was donating money for research. Dad had always been interested in the science.](#)

[Still... – p.126](#)

Hester's journey through the novel is the most profound – what brings about such a radical change in her attitude? Is this change linked to her physical change, her power? What about the change brought about by conversation, by more diligent research, by learning about the crisis? What part does Theo play in this transformation?

5. Misinformation

[Fraudulent Science Study Climate Science Debunked](#)

[Energy Company Spreads Misinformation Through Biased Research](#)

[Misuse of Scientific Data Used by Dalex to Spread Fake News – p.126](#)

How does Hester, early on, present the misinformation Dalex has historically promoted? How does Dalex manipulate reality to present a different version of events? How does this reflect the world we currently live in? What can be done to help stop the spread of misinformation and bad science?

6. Edgar Warren

[Edgar Warren Posts Cryptic Mechanical Equation Online After Political Debate; Baffles Followers – p.122](#)

Discuss the idea of Warren as a character. Does he reflect real-life tech billionaires and entrepreneurs? In what way? Discuss some of the actual plans that members have come across, e.g. for colonizing space. What are the potential advantages of maverick billionaires to the planet? What are the risks? How could this be managed in real life? What does anyone in the group think drives these people to do what they are doing?

7. Terraforming

[He needed the Arctic oil for a venture that would cost far more than he could ever drum up from investors: terraforming Mars. – p.289](#)

Edgar Warren wants to terraform Mars, but the Greenfingers desperately want all resources to go towards saving Earth. What is terraforming? What do the group think of the idea of terraforming another planet? Is it a visionary act of salvation for the living world? A defeatist capitulation that condemns Earth? Something in between? Where do members stand on this?

8. Failed actions

[Dead zone, dead zone, dead zone, Theo's mind whispered, like an awful heartbeat. – p.166](#)

The first deliberate attempt at rewilding in the book goes horribly wrong, as the Greenfingers create an algae bloom

that in turn creates a dead zone in the ocean. What are the risks of deliberate climate engineering? How could they be justified? Are these risks worth taking, and if so, who should be responsible for them?

9. Losing humanity

Anxiety had leached away from him, as his bones and organs abandoned the over-complicated, stress-ridden form of a mammal. – p.348

Discuss the idea of “humanity” in the novel, and the many threats it faces. How is humanity portrayed? What might James be suggesting in the constant efforts to keep humanity alive? You might like to consider Theo’s losing himself in the plant-life networks, or Hester’s father’s reaction to the lawsuit Hester files, the plans to melt the ice caps deliberately, or even the idea that the Greenfingers have to leave Earth in order to find a way to try to save it.

10. Climate denial vs climate activism

He still wasn’t sure if he agreed with the methods Gabrielle had used. – p.358

In the novel is the full spectrum of the climate crisis, from outright denial and propaganda to illegal protest and activism, justified on moral grounds. By the end of the novel there is an ambiguous sense of redemption; Hester leads Dalex towards a better future but climate activism has taken measures so drastic it’s impossible to know if other measures might have succeeded. How do group members feel about the climate crisis we are facing at this point? What action is justifiable? Are there limits to this? What would be going too far? Discuss, also, the balance of responsibility between citizens and companies that drive pollution and carbon release – what does accountability look like? How can we, as a species, move towards this?