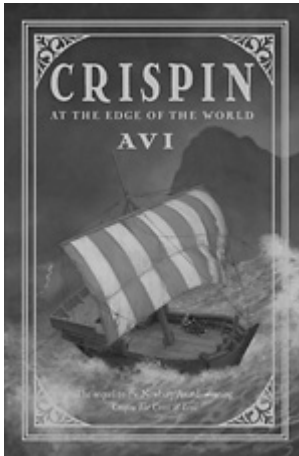


HYPERION

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

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TEACHER'S GUIDE



CRISPIN: AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

By Avi

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ABOUT THE BOOK

At the conclusion of the Newbery Award-winning *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, Bear and Crispin are free to follow new lives. Though Crispin's endurance, courage, faith, and honor have been continually tested, he has learned many lessons from his mentor, Bear. But Bear has been both wounded and weakened by his ordeals, and is tended to by an elderly wise woman, Aude, and her apprentice, Troth. Crispin learns to trust these strangers in spite of their allegiance to unfamiliar gods. When Aude is killed by a fearful, ignorant mob, Crispin rescues Troth, and the three set off for a safer land. They come upon the coastal town of Rye just one week after a brutal attack by the French and Castilians.

While working in Rye, Bear continues to regain a measure of his former strength, until he is again hunted by his former friends, members of Ball's brotherhood. Bear's makeshift family—his “cubs,” consisting of Crispin and Troth—set sail for Flanders, only to be shipwrecked on the French coast. A “free” company of English soldiers, whose loyalty is only to their own gain, usurps the bedraggled threesome. Their leader, Richard Dudley, has his eye on treasure and inflicts the same atrocities on a French town that his countrymen are still reeling from in Rye. In order to loot the treasures of the local church, Dudley enlists the diminutive Troth to gain entrance through a drain, and Bear is held hostage. Crispin helps Troth with her task, and the two of them rescue Bear—Crispin by sawing through the tether that binds the once-mighty man, and Troth by keeping Bear from killing his captor. They escape with the wounded Bear, who, weakened by his final battle, passes away during the night. They bury their adoptive father and set off for the fantastical land Bear once told Crispin of—where there are no kings or lords, only ice—truly at the edge of the world: Iceland.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

Discussion questions, ideas for activities and more are included here to help deepen the understanding of this compelling novel in classrooms, book clubs, and literature circles. Avi continues the themes of freedom, family, and spirituality found in *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, and further explores the impact of war on both its victims and perpetrators.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. The conclusion of *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* is jubilant when Crispin succeeds in securing the freedom of Bear and himself. *Crispin at the Edge of the World* begins almost immediately where the previous novel left off, but Crispin and Bear's euphoria has subsided and they are left with virtually nothing. What is the cost of freedom for Crispin and Bear?
2. Bear tells Crispin that "old friends make the worst enemies (chapter 3)." How is this proven true over the course of the story? Have you ever made an enemy out of a former friend? What examples can you see of this in today's world?
3. Whereas *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* was filled with the religious order and imagery of Christianity, *Crispin at the Edge of the World* provides an additional spiritual context through the introduction of Troth and Aude and the "old religion." Compare and contrast these two belief systems. Does Aude find a place in Christian society? How?
4. How does Crispin come to trust Aude? How does his perception of Troth evolve over time? Why does Crispin pledge to protect her when the mob murders Aude? Troth is disfigured and scorned by the villagers, but comes into her own in spite of her "affliction." Do you know any examples of people who have overcome challenges in your world?
5. Bear calls Crispin and Troth his "children." How has this become true? How does Crispin's understanding of family change over time?
6. In the middle ages, most people spent their entire lives in the same small village in which they were born. The children's ignorance of the "sea" is caused by their limited life experience. How do Crispin and Troth deal with their lack of knowledge? Is ignorance still an enemy of growth? Explain your answer.
7. Crispin truly comes of age in *Crispin at the Edge of the World*. How does he learn to be a man? How does Bear characterize manhood? What rites of passage do we have today for becoming an adult?
8. When recalling the attack of the French, a man in Rye recalls that the attackers "claim St. Dennis as their protector, he who is a defense against strife (chapter 20)." We see war from both sides—with each side serving as victim and aggressor. What does this show us about the nature of war? How can the same divine being be on both sides?
9. Bear seems to age before our eyes in *Crispin at the Edge of the World*. His mortality is a constant companion for the makeshift family. How does Crispin respond to Bear's weakness and his fight with death? How does Bear justify his life? If you knew you were about to die, what would you be proud of? What would you wish you could change?

10. The edge of the world is continually over the next horizon for Crispin. In the Middle Ages, the entire world was a village for most people, and even for the highly educated, it ended with the borders of what was called Christendom. How does Crispin's world broaden? How does his world grow both in physical and in metaphysical terms? What is the edge of your world? How has it changed as you've grown older or perhaps traveled more? How has your imaginative world expanded?

ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE ARTS

As you read throughout *Crispin at the Edge of the World*, you'll see that Bear has a way with a proverb. Here are just a few:

- "To love a man, you must know his failings." (Chapter 10)
- "I mock no man's ignorance, but his ignorance of ignorance." (Chapter 11)
- "The man who must prove himself a man is still a boy." (Chapter 12)
- "Freedom is not just to be, but to choose." (Chapter 16)
- "No matter where they go, the ignorant never travel far." (Chapter 17)

Find more proverbs in the pages of the book, or update the proverbs above into today's terms with contemporary examples.

ART

Avi provides descriptions about cogs in chapters 21 and 23. Invite students to list all available details (e.g., 75 feet long) and then draw their own version of the medieval sailing vessel. For the particularly ambitious, use Popsicle sticks, glue, and paper to provide a three-dimensional model. Be sure to include a miniature figure of a man to provide scale and give viewers a sense of the size of a typical cog. For further information, research the "Bremen cog" on the Internet as Avi suggests in his Author's Note at the end of *Crispin at the Edge of the World*.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The fourteenth century and the Hundred Years War have been called a "distant mirror" by Barbara Tuchman, who compared the catastrophic events of that time to the issues that trouble us today. Think of two countries at war anywhere in the world and imagine them in the roles of England and France during the Hundred Years War. Marauding soldiers are as much of a problem now as they were then. Create a poster with the Middle Ages on one side and the Modern World on the other. List the similarities and differences regarding the impact of war.

MUSIC

Songs in the Middle Ages were as potent a form of communication as they are today. Divide your students into small groups and ask each group to develop a melody for Aude's song in chapter 8 or Bear's song in chapter 16. The students can select a composer and a singer from their group and, for added fun, someone to pass the hat, just as Troth did!

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Juggling is no mean feat, as the villagers who were privileged to witness Bear's performances can attest. Invite an expert on juggling—you may be surprised at who among your acquaintances can juggle—to share their talent with your class or group. Provide smooth round beanbags or balls so that everyone can have a try—and make sure that each potential juggler has enough personal space!



AUTHOR INTERVIEW

1. The action in *Crispin at the Edge of the World* picks up right where *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* leaves off—you can almost hear them panting in their race for freedom away from Great Wexly. How did you bring yourself back into the moment to continue the story of Crispin and Bear? What did you find most challenging about writing the sequel? What did you enjoy most about spending time with these characters again?

Avi: What I worried most about was: could I recapture the voice, the tone, the words of Crispin, the narrator of the book? Of course I read and reread the first book—and then I plunged in. To my great delight, I felt comfortable there, and in control. It was a great relief. You cannot write an effective sequel unless you feel great attachment to your characters. Sounds silly, perhaps, but you have to love them, want to know what they will do, can do, try to do. I've never written with more pleasure about a character than I have about Bear and Crispin.

2. Again, the time and energy you have invested in historical research paid off! What was the most surprising revelation you encountered in your research that you were able to incorporate into the book?

Avi: In the process of writing the book, I went to France. There I visited what are called “bastides,” medieval communities built as fortress villages. Not only are they still there, they are quite extraordinary. It was like time travel. The town described in the climax of the book—where the battle takes place—is, I hope, an accurate description of a place I visited. I even slept in the castle!

3. Perhaps the most precarious balance to maintain in writing historical fiction is to make the language sound honestly archaic yet completely understandable for today's readers. How did you achieve that in your novels about Crispin? What advice would you offer aspiring historical fiction authors?

Avi: When I wrote the first Crispin, I read the English poetry of the period (Langland, Chaucer). They wrote in what is called Middle English. It's only something like what we speak today. You can hear it when it's read by an expert, but I find it very hard to read. What I tried to do was use the rhyme structure of that early English poetry. In fact, when I first wrote Crispin, it was in verse. I also checked an historical dictionary and tried not to use key words that came into the language after 1377. For example, the word *map* is relatively modern, but then so is the concept.

But the hardest part of historical fiction—if writing realistically—is to get a sense of how people thought. In this sense the title of the book, *Crispin at the Edge of the World*, embodies that notion: the world you knew was only what you could see with your own eyes. How different than today!

4. The toll of war—both in material and spiritual terms—is important in *Crispin at the Edge of the World*. What lessons can we take from his story as we look at wars in today's world?

Avi: I cannot say that I am a pacifist, but I do hate war. It is always cruel. It is always devastating. It is often blind. I suppose the worst about war is that it makes us less human. I am hardly an expert on the subject of violence, but sometimes I think that the root cause of brutal acts of strength comes from feelings of weakness—as if the violence will prove or establish strength. That's to say, the bully is a bully because he/she feels weak.

In *Crispin at the Edge of the World*, we learn of things that Bear had done, which he had come to feel were very bad. He gains his humanity, not by acts of violence, but through his love of Crispin and Troth. Perhaps there is a lesson in that.

5. What is next for Crispin and Troth? Do they indeed journey to Iceland? In other words, can we look forward Crispin continuing to push at the edge of his world in future books?

Avi: I don't want to give away what happens, because I'm not that sure myself. Until it's on the page, it hasn't happened. But, sometime in the spring of 2007, I'll start learning where Crispin and Troth go and what happens to them. Can't wait to find out!

ALSO AVAILABLE:

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This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of *Reaching for Sun* (Bloomsbury). Visit her Web site at tracievaughnzimmer.com to find many other guides to children's literature.