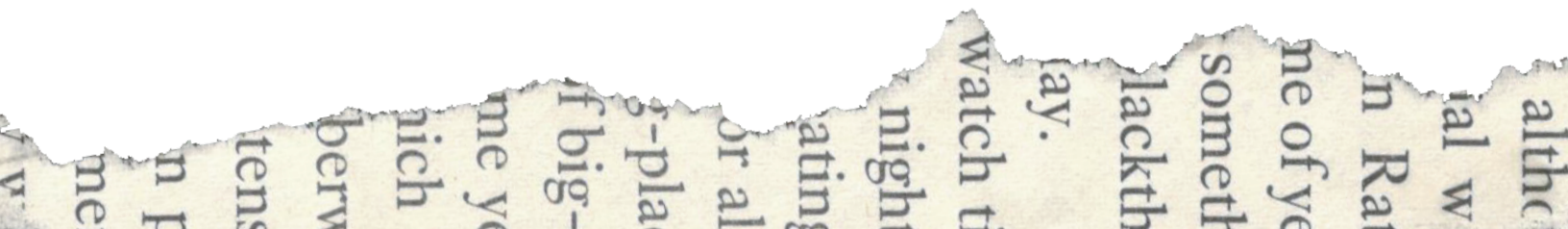
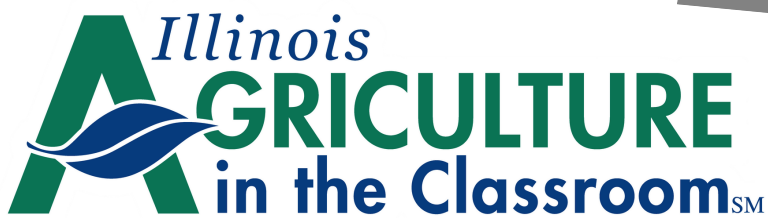


# A READING GUIDE

FROM





# INTRO TO THE READING GUIDE

## SUMMARY OF TEXT

Herc Beal knows who he's named after -a mythical hero- but he's no superhero. He's the smallest kid in his class. So when his homeroom teacher at his new middle school gives him the assignment of duplicating the feats of the mythical Hercules in real life, he's skeptical. After all, there are no Nemean Lions on Cape Cod - and not a single Hydra in sight.

Missing his parents terribly and wishing his older brother wasn't working all the time, Herc figures out how to take his first steps along the road that the great Hercules himself once walked. Soon new friends, human and animal, are helping him. And though his mythical role model performed his twelve labors by himself, Herc begins to see that he may not have to go it alone.

## QUESTIONS

Use these questions as discussion starters, reading checks, or just for students to follow along in whole-class or individual reading.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Use these extension activities to further strengthen students' understanding about the book as well as agriculture. These extension activities challenge students to connect themes in the story to real life topics and information in the world of agriculture.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The 12 Labors of Hercules-

[https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/The\\_Myths/Labours\\_of\\_Heracles/labours\\_of\\_heracles.html](https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/The_Myths/Labours_of_Heracles/labours_of_heracles.html)



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 1

- We get to see just how much Hercules loves Truro. He even describes it as “the most beautiful place on earth.” Is there any place that you love as much as Hercules loves Truro? What makes you love it?
- Achilles had to give up “the best job in the whole freaking world” to come back and run the Beal Brothers Farm and Nursery. How do you think he felt giving up a career that he loved during one of the hardest times of his life? Why did he do this?
- What do you think Lieutenant Colonel Hupfer was “measuring” while shaking Hercules’ hand at the door?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

By chance, Hercules finally gets a dog. He seems to have an instant connection with Mindy. Describe your favorite pet you’ve ever had. If you’ve never had a pet, describe the ideal pet you’d like to have someday.



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 2

- Look back at the final page of Chapter 2. Analyze this brief conversation between Colonel Hupfer and Hercules. What does the Colonel mean when he tells Hercules, "But I think you already know that."
- Before giving out the assignments to the class, Lieutenant Colonel Hupfer explains classical mythology, "They are stories meant to convey something about the world and your place in it." Then he assigns each student a project. Besides the fact that Hercules shares a name with the Greek Hero, why do you think Colonel Hupfer chose this project for Hercules Beal?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Pretend it's your first day in Mr. Kelderman's "Geography and You" class: Write or talk about the place you live just like Hercules did.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

- What grows where you live.
- What you like about where you live.
- What the seasons are like.
- What you find beautiful or interesting.
- The history of where you live.



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NEMEAN LION

- What do you think Hercules means when he talks about becoming a “secret to yourself”?
- Elly tells Hercules not to worry because even though she wasn’t sure what would happen, the “right something” always happens. Do you agree or disagree with Elly? Do you prefer to wait for something to happen or make something happen?
- What is a “labor” in your life that could compare to Hercules capturing the Nemean Lion?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

This chapter highlights art forms of sculpture, drawing, and even writing. What is an art form that you appreciate or enjoy doing yourself? Why do you connect with this form of art?



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 4

### THE LERNAEAN HYDRA

- In school, Hercules learned a lot about systems. How many parts of your life involve systems? Do systems apply to everything or just ecosystems? Are there different types of systems--what are they?
- Hercules knew that he wouldn't be able to get all the plants that Mrs. DeJong needed himself, so he asked his family for help completing a nearly impossible task. What big tasks have your families helped you with, or vice versa?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Using the internet, look up one of the latin names of the plants referenced in this chapter. Then, share what you learned about it.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

- Where this plant is originally from.
- What the plant looks like.
- How you can take care of this plant as a houseplant or in a terrarium.



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CERYNEIAN HIND

- For Hercules' fifth labor it was Henry who came up with the idea and made the flyers. Why do you think that he was so willing to help Hercules?
- Based on his reaction, how do you think Lieutenant Colonel Hupfer felt about the kids painting the leaves of the tree?
- If people would have waited just a few more days, the leaves would have changed colors all on their own and Hercules would have needed a different labor, but he wouldn't have gotten in trouble. What are some real-life examples of getting a better outcome if you wait just a little longer, or as Colonel Hupfer says, "being still"?



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 6

### THE BOAR OF ERYMANTHUS

- When Mr. Neal came to the door for help to find his wife, the boys ran out of the house immediately. Why do you think Hercules and Achilles were so willing to help, even though it was dangerous for both of them?
- Hercules admits to us, the readers, that he was thinking about his parents during the ordeal at the Neals' house. Why do you think they were on his mind during this emergency situation?
- One "millimillionth" of a second is used a lot by Hercules in his reflection. What, good or bad, has happened to you that changed your life in a "millimillionth" of a second?





# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 7

### THE AUGEAN STABLES

- This chapter brings Lieutenant Colonel Hupfer and Hercules together in new ways. Explain how their relationship has changed throughout the book and predict how it might continue to change.
- Hercules led the effort of organizing everyone at the school clean up even though he was one of the youngest people there. Why do you think everyone so willingly listened to him? What qualities does an effective leader have?



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 8

### THE BIRDS OF STYMPHALUS

- What are some traditions that your family has around the holidays?
- After the detention is over, Lieutenant Colonel Hupfer opens up to Hercules. Why do you think he decides to tell Hercules more than his usual "I don't care?"
- What is the impact to Hercules when he finds out that Achilles knows he goes to the Dune? In what ways was it significant when he invites Achilles to go with him on Christmas?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Trees grow in rings. If you cut a tree trunk crosswise, the rings can tell the story of that tree's life. Tree rings can show storm or insect damage, years of drought, and years of perfect growing conditions. Use the internet to research tree rings and see some examples of what the rings can show us. Then, use a paper plate to mimic a cross-section of a tree trunk. Draw a ring for every year of your life. Add in bumps or spots where meaningful events in your life happened. You can also briefly explain or identify the moments in your life that have made the biggest impact on you as a person.



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 9

### THE CRETAN BULL

- Hercules talks about everything they have to do at the nursery to get ready for winter and prepare for next spring. Can you think of ways that farms around you have to prepare for the change in seasons?
- How does Hercules' view of Mr. Moby change in this chapter? What important lesson does Hercules learn?



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 10

### THE MARES OF DIOMEDES

- What do you think would have happened if they hadn't caught and relocated the coyotes? Was it a good thing they were there, or would the area have been better off without them?
- How do the coyotes fit into the "systems" mentioned earlier in the book? What role do they play in the local ecosystem? In your opinion, why was it so important to Hercules to release the coyotes?
- In Lieutenant Colonel Hupfer's response he broke one of his own rules and opened up to Hercules. Why do you think Lieutenant Colonel Hupfer feels comfortable getting personal with Hercules? Is it only to help Hercules or is it beneficial for him too?



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 11

### THE BELT OF HIPPOLYTA

- Mrs. Savage tells Hercules, “maybe art tells the truth best when it admits our mortality.” What does she mean by this? Do you believe that art can “tell the truth”?
- Why do you think it was so important to Hercules to get Ira back for Mrs. Savage?
- In his response, Hercules talks about how Hercules the myth still hasn’t learned anything. What do you think Hercules Beal has learned from his life and his “labors” so far?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Hercules is bored by the study of rocks at school. He might not realize that, without rocks, he wouldn’t have the soil that the Beal Brothers Farm and Nursery needs to grow crops. Using the internet, research the connection between rocks and soil.



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 12

### THE CATTLE OF GERYON

- Why was it so important to Hercules that Achilles and Viola don't give up on each other? How does he help them start communicating again?
- Predict what will happen with Hercules and Elly's friendship since she is now in Ohio and likely not moving back.
- What do the pillars that Viola placed in the yard represent? How do they relate to the real Hercules and his Labors?



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 13

### THE GOLDEN APPLES OF HESPERIDES

- How well do you think Hercules handled Achilles and Viola being gone?
- Why is it so important for the nursery to be taken care of? What would have happened to all the plants if they had just left it for two weeks?
- How has Hercules and Mr. Moby's relationship grown throughout the book?
- What life lessons has Hercules Beal learned through the events of this chapter?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

The setting of the Beal Brothers Farm and Nursery is very important to the book and the author has described it in detail in many chapters. Draw a map of the Beal Brothers Farm and Nursery based on how you imagine it in your mind after reading this chapter. Be sure to label each part of your drawing.



# CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CHAPTER 14

### CERBERUS

- When Hercules is in the hospital waiting to hear about Achilles he keeps saying, “It was all the same” and then he talks about how Hercules the myth was such a jerkface for making Theseus remember. Do you think Hercules really wants to forget?
- How do you think Hercules felt when he found the dune was gone? What does the dune being gone represent?
- Do you think it was the right decision for Hercules and Viola not to tell Achilles about flipping the car? Why or why not?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

The book is all about The 12 Labors of Hercules, as well as the Labors of Hercules Beal. Recall all 12 of the labors described in the book and then think of times in your life that could represent them.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

- Struggles you’ve gone through.
- Achievements you’ve made.





# FINAL DISCUSSION GUIDE

## QUESTIONS

- How did Hercules and Lieutenant Colonel Hupfer's relationship change and grow throughout the book?
- In what ways were Hercules the myth and Hercules Beal alike? In what ways were they different?
- Explain Hercules' growth throughout the book. Consider: his growth in relationships with family, friends, and neighbors, how he handles situations, and how he communicates.
- Which labor do you think Hercules learned the most from?
- Of all 12 of Hercules' reflections, which could you relate to the most? Why?