

KEARA'S RAVEN: ESCAPE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Some of the following questions give away details about the plot of *Keara's Raven: Escape*. Don't read the questions until you have finished reading the novel!

1. Throughout *Keara's Raven: Escape*, Caw assures Keara that he is taking various negative thoughts and emotions from her (including rebellion, fear, jealousy, and despair.) Is Caw successful in taking those feelings? What effect does Caw's taking have on Keara?
2. Keara must hide from the titheman until she has paid for her tax tattoo. Having missed last year's payment, Keara owes the titheman for two years, plus a penalty. Is it fair for Keara to pay for both years? One year only? Should she be required to pay the penalty? What does Mother owe Keara with regard to the titheman?
3. Keara believes that Mother does not love her, basing that belief in part on Mother's strict rules. Nevertheless, when Mother pays the titheman, Keara says "Mother *did* love me." Do you think that Mother loves Keara? Why or why not?
4. After Keara refuses to kill Caw, Mother warns her that the Inquisitors will come, to help Keara find the path to righteousness. What does it mean to be righteous? Is Keara righteous some of the time, all of the time, or none of the time? Give examples to support your conclusions.
5. When Taggart interrogates Keara, he tells her, "Details are important, girl. Details make the story." Do you agree? What details make Keara's world seem real?
6. When Keara joins the Travelers, she lies about her age. Later, Vala lies about taking Goran's clean shirt. Still later, Goran lies about the extent of his injuries, after he serves Keara's sentence in Patrius's godhouse. Was it right for any of the children to lie in these instances? Is it ever appropriate to lie? If so, under what circumstances?
7. The words of the Travelers' Holy Plays have been kept the same from the time they were first performed; however, Common Plays can be created by any troupe, and Common Plays can be changed. Why do you think Holy Plays are kept the same? Should Travelers be allowed to change Holy Plays? Common Plays? Why or why not?
8. Keara's society has strict lines between children and adults – for example, language (the endearments added to children's names, like Keara-ti and Goran-tu) and acceptable behavior (the pranks played by Vala and Goran). What are the advantages of having strict divisions between the worlds of children and grown-ups? What are the disadvantages?
9. After the Travelers begin performing their new revel, *The Twelve*, before disapproving audiences, Caw tells Keara, "Humans fear new things." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
10. In the final chapter, Taggart reveals a major secret. What were the costs – to Taggart and to others – for him to remain silent as long as he did? Was Taggart right to keep his secret? Was he right to reveal it when he did?

KEARA'S RAVEN PROJECTS

Some of the following projects give away details about the plot of *Keara's Raven: Escape*. Don't read the projects until you have finished reading the novel!

1. Each part of *Keara's Raven: Escape* (after Part One) begins with a short flashback, where Keara tells a story about something that happened in the past. In each flashback, she learns a lesson, and Caw takes one of her failings. Write your own flashback, about something you have learned in your own life. Pretend that you have your own darkbeast, and have him or her take your failing. Remember to describe how it feels to have your darkbeast accept your failing.
2. Each of the Travelers' revels is written as a poem, with short rhyming lines. For example, in the revel performed at the cath, Taggart recites:

All Lutezia is a godhouse, and Bestius's priests look on,
The Primate brings the Twelve here, to watch this darkbeast pawn
Meet his death — long waited, meet his death — now proud.
This boy does what he must do, for you, the watching crowd.

Write a scene from one of the Travelers' revels, creating your own poem. Choose from one of the Holy Plays mentioned specifically in *Keara's Raven: Escape* — *Bestius and the Darkbeasts*, *Clementius and the Mariner*, *Mortana and the Dance of Death*, *Nuntia and the Rainbow*, *Patrius and the Primate*, *Pondera and the Broken Scales*, or *Tempestia and the Sheaf of Wheat*.

3. Each of the Twelve has a sigil, a symbol that is specific to that god or goddess. Draw each of the sigils. (You will have to specify some of the sigils on your own, choosing animals appropriate to the Twelve.) The ones specified in *Keara's Raven: Escape* are:

Aurelius: Ermine
Bestius: Fly
Madrina: Cow
Mortana: White raven
Nuntia: Bay mare
Patrius: White stag
Pondera: Cat
Venerius: Chestnut hound

4. Imagine the animal that would be your own darkbeast. Create a sculpture of your darkbeast, using papier maché, clay, or some other medium. Remember to include a leash, to connect you to your darkbeast.
5. The Travelers create elaborate sets and costumes for their revels. Using a shoebox or a similar container, build a diorama that depicts the Travelers' stage for one of the Holy Plays (see Project 2 for a list of the plays specified in *Keara's Raven: Escape*.) In the alternative, create costumes for one of the key roles in one of the Holy Plays.

GROWING UP: RITES AND RITUALS FROM DIFFERENT TIMES AND PLACES

Throughout history, people have used different rites and rituals to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. Some of these traditions continue today.

BREECHING: From the Middle Ages until the late 19th century, young boys and girls wore nearly identical outfits. Infants were dressed in long gowns, similar to today's christening gowns. Toddlers and young children wore dresses. These garments probably made it easier to toilet-train both boys and girls, and dresses left room for fast-growing children. Also, dresses were easier for a child to handle than the complicated laces on trousers, before the use of buttons or zippers.

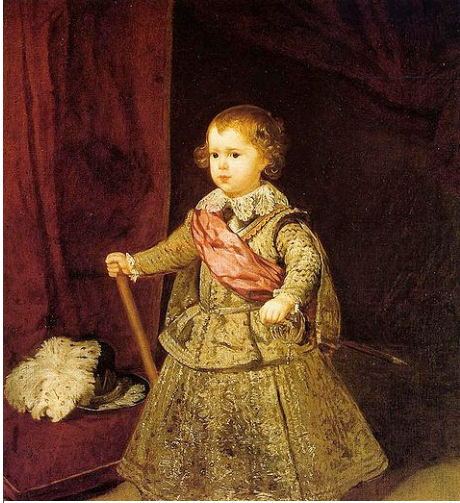


Figure 1 - Principe Baltasar Carlos, by Diego Velazquez

In paintings, it can be difficult to tell which children are boys and which are girls. Boys, though, often held blunt swords or scepters. Also, boys usually did not wear jewelry (but they did wear lace.)

When boys matured, they celebrated a "breeching ceremony", where they were dressed in their first pair of trousers.

Friends and relatives would attend, sometimes giving small presents to the boy. Symbolically, the boy left behind the

world of girls and women; after breeching, boys became more closely connected with their fathers. Breeching happened at different ages – sometimes as young as two, sometimes as old as seven.

BAR OR BAT MITZVAH: According to Jewish law, a boy becomes a "son of the Commandments", a bar mitzvah, at age thirteen. A girl becomes a "daughter of the Commandments", a bat mitzvah, at age twelve. This rite of passage means that the child is now responsible for his or her actions. He or she can lead prayers and participate in community life.

In the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony, the young person reads part of Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and part of the Haftarah (the Bible's books of the Prophets.) The words are in Hebrew, and they are usually chanted. The bar or bat mitzvah also usually leads a discussion about the Bible portions, explaining the words to the congregation. (In some traditional congregations, though girls are not allowed to participate.)



Figure 2 - Bar Mitzvah, by FourTwentyTwo on Flickr

Traditionally, the bar or bat mitvah receives gifts to honor the occasion – books with educational value, religious items such as a prayer shawl, or money. Gifts of money are usually made in multiples of 18 for good luck, because the number 18 corresponds to the word "life" in Hebrew.

QUINCEAÑERA: In many Latin American communities, a girl celebrates her fifteenth birthday with a ceremony to mark her transition from a child to an adult. Ceremonies vary from country to country. Often, the girl wears elaborate makeup and a fancy dress that resembles a brightly colored



Figure 3 - Quinceañera Dress, Tiara, and Last Doll, by Shootingstarpv on Flickr

wedding gown. She is often accompanied by dressed-up female friends ("damas") and male friends ("chambelanes"). Usually, she wears a tiara, a symbol that she is a princess to her family and before God. Sometimes she is given – and sets aside – a doll, as a symbol of the childhood toys that she leaves behind.

Some quinceañera ceremonies include a religious service, a Catholic mass of Thanksgiving. Afterwards, family and

friends enjoy a feast and dancing. Traditionally, a girl's first public dance was a waltz with her father, then with her chambelanes.

METATAH: In Bali, young Hindu adults celebrate their coming of age by having six of their teeth filed down. The ritual symbolizes the change from animal nature (represented by sharp canine teeth) to human nature. Filing protects teenagers from the "sad ripu", six enemies of human nature: desire, greed, anger, intoxication, confusion (leaving tasks unfinished) and jealousy. There is no set age for the ceremony. Because it is very expensive to perform, communities often wait until several people are ready to participate.

The filing is completed by a "sangging", a priest who uses a small hammer, a carver, and a file to do his work. The sangging wears a ruby ring to protect himself and the young people from attacks of black magic during the ceremony. Participants dress up for the ceremony; young women often wear gold headdresses. The entire community celebrates with a large feast after the filing.



Figure 4 - Balinese Tooth Filing, by Randomplaces on Flickr

HOW TO HOST A *KEARA'S RAVEN* BIRTHDAY PARTY

Keara's Raven: Escape begins just a few days before Keara's twelfth nameday. Keara is about to take her place as an adult in her society – all she has to do is kill her darkbeast, Caw, the magical creature who has taken all of her dark deeds and emotions. In honor of Keara's nameday, why not host a birthday party with a *Keara's Raven* theme? Here are a few party ideas:

Discover Your Darkbeast: At the party, have each guest decide on their own darkbeast, taking into consideration their own favorite (and least favorite!) animals.

Face Painting: Before the party, purchase face painting supplies at a craft store. For simplicity's sake, you only need black paint – all darkbeasts are black! At the party, assign each guest a partner. Then, have the partners paint each other's darkbeast on their faces. Variation 1: Have guests paint their own darkbeast, using handheld mirrors.

Create a Revel: In *Keara's Raven: Escape*, Keara loves the Travelers' revels, their plays. Before the party, collect a variety of costumes and props and divide them into two or more bags. At the party, divide the guests into two or more groups. Give each group a bag and tell them they have fifteen minutes to create a play, using all the costumes and props in the bag. Take turns presenting the plays. Variation 1: Select costumes and props that relate to the twelve gods of Duodecia. Variation 2: Select costumes and props that tell the story of specific revels described in *Keara's Raven: Escape*.

Take it to Your Darkbeast: Before the party, buy a roll of toilet paper and various supplies for challenges (see below). At the party, have all the guests sit in a circle. Pass the roll of toilet paper around the circle and ask each guest to take as many squares of paper as he or she needs. (Don't tell anyone why they're doing this – part of the fun is seeing how many squares people take!) After each person has their paper, tell them they need to take their pasts to their darkbeasts – for each square, they need to tell one truth. Guests who don't want to tell truths can undertake challenges instead. (See attached list of truths and challenges, to get your ideas flowing!)

Animal Shelter Gifts: If the birthday girl or boy has decided not to ask for gifts, ask each guest to bring one item for donation to a local animal shelter. (Check with your local shelter for a list of their current needs – these often include towels, toys, and high quality food.) Before the party, buy supplies for making greetings cards (e.g., construction paper, markers, stickers, etc.) At the party, have each guest make a card for the shelter, to include with their gift.

Tea (and Cake): In *Keara's Raven: Escape*, Keara's mother harvests various herbs to heal a variety of illnesses. Before the party, buy some looseleaf herbal teas, along with one tea infuser or fillable teabag for each guest. Consider buying honey or other sweetener as well. At the party, encourage the guests to smell each tea, then combine the herbs into unique combinations, mixing the dried herbs in a small cup or bowl. Fill the

infusers or teabags with the special blends. With adult supervision, brew the tea in cups and serve with birthday cake.

Party Favors: At the end of the party, give the guests party favors, including a tea infuser (if purchased), a sealed plastic bag with each guest's tea blend, and a copy of *Keara's Raven: Escape*.

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For additional information, please contact Mindy Klasky – mindy@mindyklasky.com (or visit her website – www.mindyklasky.com).



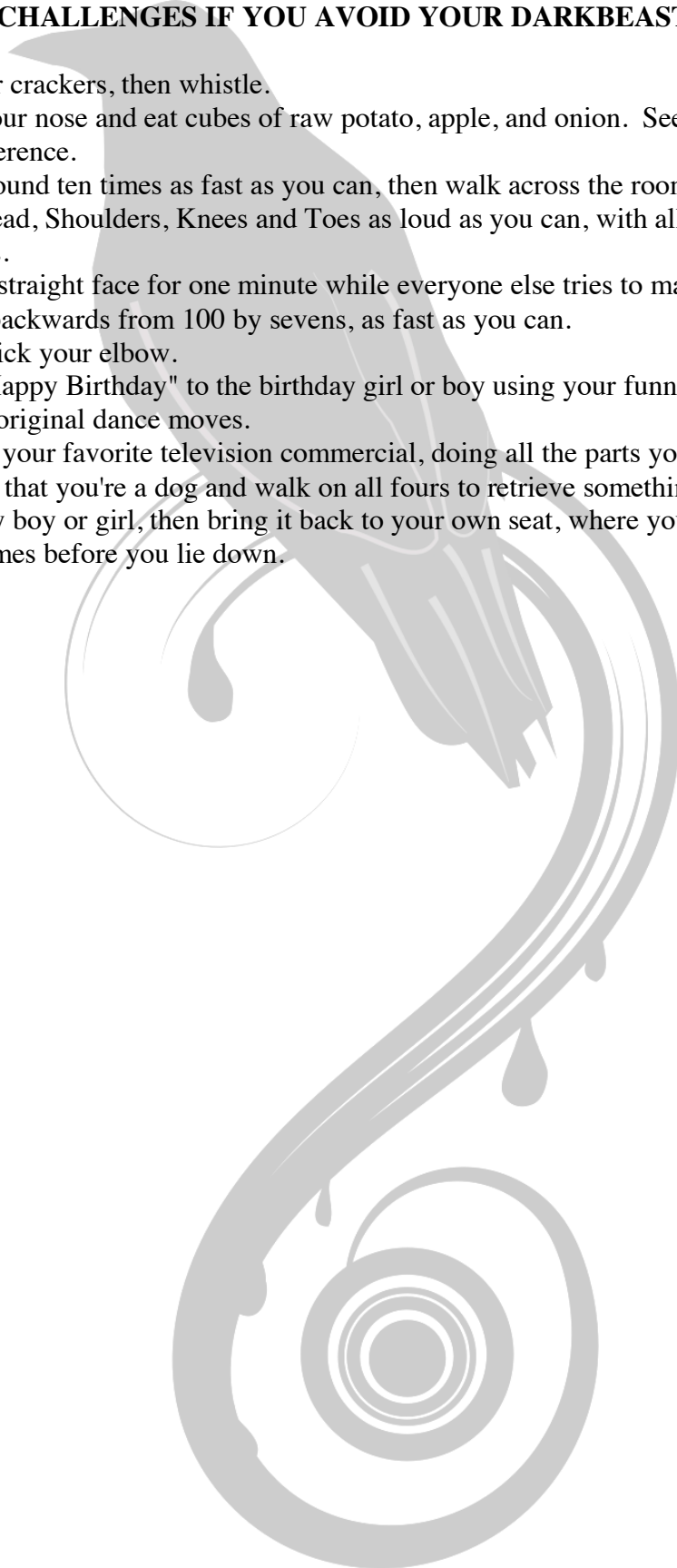


TRUTHS TO TAKE TO YOUR DARKBEAST

1. Have you ever been mean to anyone in the room? If so, who?
2. What is your biggest fear?
3. What is the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to you?
4. Do you sleep with a stuffed animal or a blankie?
5. What is one thing you'd like to change about yourself?
6. What is the worst present you ever received?
7. If you could be any animal, what animal would you be? Why?
8. If you won a million dollars, what would you do with the money?
9. What is your worst habit?
10. Have you ever cheated to win a game? If so, when?

CHALLENGES IF YOU AVOID YOUR DARKBEAST

1. Eat four crackers, then whistle.
2. Hold your nose and eat cubes of raw potato, apple, and onion. See if you can tell the difference.
3. Spin around ten times as fast as you can, then walk across the room.
4. Sing Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes as loud as you can, with all the hand motions.
5. Keep a straight face for one minute while everyone else tries to make you laugh.
6. Count backwards from 100 by sevens, as fast as you can.
7. Try to lick your elbow.
8. Sing "Happy Birthday" to the birthday girl or boy using your funniest voice, adding original dance moves.
9. Act out your favorite television commercial, doing all the parts yourself.
10. Pretend that you're a dog and walk on all fours to retrieve something from the birthday boy or girl, then bring it back to your own seat, where you turn around three times before you lie down.



HOW TO SET UP AN AUTHOR VISIT FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Like many authors, Mindy Klasky loves to visit schools and libraries to promote literacy among young readers. This summary will help make every visit a success. Don't be intimidated by this long list – while this summary is broken out by time ranges, lead time for visits can often be dramatically condensed.

2-6 Months Before Event

- Contact Mindy to schedule the event. Mindy will need to know:
 - Specific date and times.
 - Grade level of the students. (Mindy can tailor visits to students from fourth through twelfth grade.)
 - Number of classes, assemblies, etc. and their duration.
 - Specific classroom unit(s) being addressed, if any (e.g., "writers and writing", "world culture", etc.)
- Mindy will provide you with her fee information (including an honorarium, transportation, meals, and accommodations, if applicable). Payment is due on the day of the event. (See section below on funding events.)
- If Mindy will be speaking to more than 50 people at a time, please make a microphone available.
- In general, Mindy prefers to communicate by email – mindy@mindyklasky.com. Prior to the event, Mindy will provide you with a phone number for emergency communication.

2 Months Before Event

- Prepare a draft event schedule, allowing time for an Autograph Party and breaks between presentations.
- Recruit Event Helpers including:
 - Event Coordinator (who will organize the event),
 - Media Liaison (who will publicize the event), and
 - Author Aide (who will escort Mindy during her visit – this may be a student, for high school visits).
- Order books for students, teachers, and the school library. Mindy strongly recommends that books be purchased and delivered well before the event, so that students can get the most out of her visit. Books can be purchased the following ways:
 - From a local independent bookstore. For school visits in D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, Mindy can provide contact information to a local bookstore, which will prepare an Order Form, typically including a somewhat discounted price.
 - Directly from Ingram Spark, a book wholesaler (which includes a discount off the cover price, allowing the school to use the purchase as a fundraiser.)
 - Directly from a bookstore with a past tradition of working with the school.

- Consider ordering extra books for classroom collections, school fundraisers (e.g., silent auctions), etc.

1 Month Before Event

- Event Coordinator tasks:
 - For Teachers: Copy and distribute information about Mindy for teachers to share with their classes, including Mindy's biography, Discussion Questions, and Classroom Projects, all of which are available on the Snowy Wings Publishing website – www.snowywingspublishing.com.
 - For Librarian: Coordinate information to display Mindy's books in the library.
 - For Students: Pick up and distribute purchased copies of Mindy's books, so that students can complete reading prior to her visit.
 - For Mindy: Provide directions to your school, along with parking information and instructions for school security.
 - Consider inviting educators from neighboring schools to attend the event. (This will help spread the word about author events, enriching students' experiences.)
- Media Liaison task: Announce Mindy's visit to various media, including school newspaper, PTA/PTO newsletter, parents' listservs, etc.

2 Weeks Before Event

- Event Coordinator tasks:
 - Plan an Autograph Party in the school library, including:
 - Party set-up (decorations and snacks, if any),
 - Collecting last-minute sales money, if any
 - Table with two chairs, for Mindy and the Author Aide
 - Order additional books, if necessary
- Possible classroom activities:
 - Have students design one or more bookmarks to commemorate the event. If completed early enough, Mindy can sign the bookmark, so that it can be copied onto cardstock and distributed to all students.
 - Have students decorate the classroom for Mindy's visit.
 - Have students complete one or more of the Classroom Projects (available on Snowy Wings Publishing website – www.snowywingspublishing.com).
 - Have students prepare questions for Mindy.

1 Week Before Event

- Event Coordinator task: Send home reminder with students, if last-minute book sales are allowed.
- Media Liaison task: Announce the author event over the school's public announcement system.

1 Day Before Event

- Event Coordinator tasks:
 - If a microphone will be used, test equipment. Locate a back-up microphone, in case of failure.
 - Brief the Author Aide on escorting Mindy from location to location and assisting Mindy during the Autograph Party
- Media Liaison task: If your school has a marquee, use it to welcome Mindy.

Day of the Event

- Event Coordinator tasks:
 - If a microphone will be used, test equipment.
 - Greet Mindy one half hour before her first presentation. If possible, introduce the principal and the librarian. Introduce the Author Aide.
 - Set up the Autograph Party.
- Clarify lunch plans, if Mindy will be at the school during lunch. If you are not able to host Mindy for lunch, let her know so that she can make alternative plans. Otherwise, consider:
 - Inviting Mindy to join teachers at their table or lounge, or
 - Inviting Mindy to join a selected group of students (chosen by raffle, or as prizes for classroom achievement).

After the Event

- Possible classroom activity: Have students write letters to Mindy, discussing the event.
- Event Coordinator tasks:
 - Return unsold books, if any.
 - Contact Mindy, letting her know if you have any recommendations for changes in future programs. (Include news articles, photos, student letters, and artwork, if any.)
 - Confirm that Mindy received payment.
- Tell other educators, including librarians, about the event, encouraging them to host their own.
- Begin planning your next author event!

Funding the Event

Mindy understands that it can be difficult to fund author events. Outside sources of funding include:

- PTA/PTO
- Friends of the Library
- Grants (see, e.g., <http://cynthialeitichsmith.blogspot.com/2004/08/grants-for-school-visits.html>)
- Traditional fundraisers, like bake sales, car washes, etc.
- Pooling funds with nearby schools, libraries and/or independent booksellers.



Special Note: Skype Visits

Skype is a software program that allows users to connect for free video calls. In order to use Skype, you need:

- A computer connected directly to the Internet (wireless connectivity typically is too slow for a successful Skype visit),
- Skype software downloaded to that computer,
- A camera (either built-in or attached to the computer).

In addition, you will probably want to project the video call onto a large screen.

Skype visits benefit from the same sort of planning as in-person author events. (Obviously, though, there will be no Autograph Party!) Special considerations for a Skype visit include planning a trial run, where you will test connectivity at a pre-set time.