

*An academy at the bottom of the sea, cryptic messages coming from the earth's core...when cadets go missing, others will find only one way out: going deeper.*



At the bottom, there's nowhere to go but down...

Being afraid of failure is normal, but no one fears success except eighteen-year-old Jazwyn Ripley, who has worked her entire life for a chance to become more than the scant apprenticeships in the Seaboard North stacks can offer. Only the best can begin career training at Gaia Sur, the elite academy on the ocean floor, but when Jazz begins receiving cryptic messages from past Gaia cadets originating from within the earth's core, she and her friends discover that the road to everything they've ever wanted now leads somewhere they never intended to go.

*Author Bio:*

Tracy Korn is a USA Today bestselling sci-fi / fantasy author and veteran high school English teacher who has worked with teens for over two decades. Her students inspired her first series, *The Elements*, a four-book dystopian collection that explores the power of everyday superhero qualities like courage, compassion, and drive against antagonistic, Jules Verne-esque landscapes, beginning with the unknown depths of ocean floor in *AQUA*, book one. An all around science geek, in fact, her passion for STEM education has given her the opportunity to coach all levels of competitive robotics teams over the years and to specifically encourage young women to take their seat at the table.

When she's not inventing dystopian worlds (and subsequently saving them or wrecking them more), she reads about other people doing it, works on expanding both her ever-evolving garden and personal jungle, and researches ways to live more self-sustainably. Korn's life goal is to create as many meaningful, cross-cultural connections as possible in the short time we all have here together and to leave the world a little better off, even in the smallest ways.

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In addition to her books through Snowy Wings Publishing, Korn is the author of the *First Bloods* series with Animus Ferrum Publishing, an adult dystopian collection that shares the *Raising the Veil* world of her urban fantasy books with Snowy Wings. She holds Masters degrees in Secondary education, in Language, Culture, and Literacy education, and in English. Stay in touch by visiting her website, subscribing to her newsletter, and reaching out via social media!

**<http://www.TracyKorn.com>**

Visit [www.tracykorn.com/aqua](http://www.tracykorn.com/aqua) for additional resources such as book trailers, posters, and character profiles.

**Themes:**

Culture

Prejudice

Identity

Duty vs. Dreams

Coming of Age

Relationships

Grief

Leaving Home

Materials: Four small, opaque gift bags. Four random items, one for each bag (these can be anything from everyday items like a light bulb to something more unique).

**Introductory Activity:**

- Count off students one-four and direct them to form four groups with their like-numbers (all the ones, all the twos, etc.) in different parts of the room.
- Inform the students that they will momentarily be given a cultural artifact from the tribe they will soon create. It will be their job to work together to assign meaning to the item in context to the role it plays in their tribe's culture.
  - For example:

If students pull a Slinky out of the bag, is it a Slinky, or is it a relic of the last bit of technology that remains in their culture after the robots rebelled and started a devastating war? Students should answer the critical thinking questions when describing their artifact: 1) What is the artifact (name and function)? 2) Who is the tribe the artifact represents (values, laws, social expectations, economy, etc.? 3) Where in time/space does this tribe exist? 4) Why is this relic important to their tribe/culture? 5) How is the culture governed? Is it a utopia? A dystopia? How so?

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### **Post Reading Activity:**

Students will be able to analyze the components that make up a society (“tribe”) and explain how these components contribute to the shared identity of the society.

- After reading AQUA, create a heading on the board for each of the different cultures occupying the territories in the story (Seaboard North, Skyboard, etc.).
- Ask students to work with a partner to brainstorm as many distinct characteristics about each of these cultures as they can remember.
- After several minutes, invite students to the board to write down one characteristic for a designated group—continue until each column has several traits.
- Once the columns are filled, ask students to again brainstorm, but this time, they should think of characteristics, experiences, or qualities that all the cultures have in common.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What are some of the assumptions each of the cultures make about the others in the beginning of the story, the middle, and the end. Do these assumptions change? If so, how?
2. As the characters discover new things about their peers from other cultures, how do they adapt so they can all work together? What are some of the shared values they have that make this possible?
3. How is Jazwyn’s assumption about the students from Skyboard wrong, and how does realizing this make her reevaluate other things she thought she understood, either about others or herself?
4. How have the adults in the story embodied both selfless and selfish priorities in their respective communities? How have these differing perspectives affected the community as a whole?
5. Which character do you believe has grown the most in this story in terms of both their relationships with each other and their knowledge of themselves? What are some of the defining moments in the story that have contributed to this growth, and how?