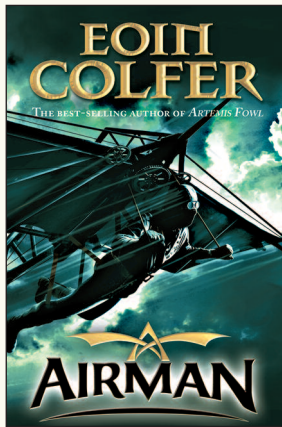


This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and children's author. Visit her Web site at www.tracievaughnzimmer.com to find hundreds of other guides to children's and young adult literature.



AIRMAN

By Eoin Colfer

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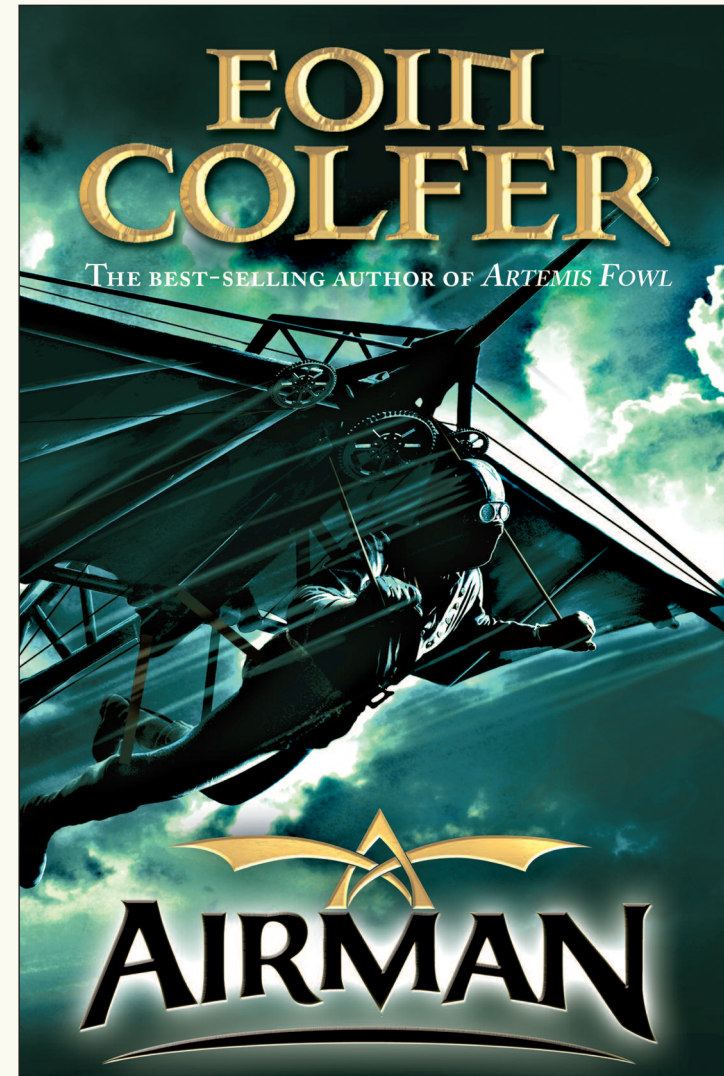
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HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

ABOUT THE BOOK

Conor Broekhart was born to fly. In fact, legend has it that he was born flying, in a hot air balloon at the Paris World's Fair.

In the 1890s Conor and his family live on the sovereign Saltee Islands, off the Irish coast. Conor spends his days studying the science of flight with his tutor and exploring the castle with the king's daughter, Princess Isabella. But the boy's idyllic life changes forever the day he discovers a conspiracy to overthrow the king. When Conor tries to expose the plot, he is branded a traitor and thrown into jail on the prison island of Little Saltee. There, he has to fight for his life, as he and the other prisoners are forced to mine for diamonds in inhumane conditions.

There is only one way to escape Little Saltee, and that is to fly. So Conor passes the solitary months by scratching drawings of flying machines on the prison walls. The months turn into years; but eventually the day comes when Conor must find the courage to trust his revolutionary designs and take to the skies.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

This guide includes discussion questions and projects intended to extend the use of the novel into classrooms, book clubs, and literature circles. It should promote discussion on the themes of the novel, including adventure, risk, choices, fate, sacrifice, revenge, and hope.



PRE-READING

After reading the prologue, discuss why you think the author chose to write such an extensive prologue to open the novel. What do you learn about the characters, setting, and plot before the opening chapter?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 Write three interview questions based on the events in the first chapter. How does this heroic event give us insight into Conor's personality and his relationship with Isabella? What do you think is the most important thing you learned about Conor? Why?
- 2 Describe Conor's education and training with Victor Vigny. What did he learn from his mentor? Who would you pick as your own mentor? Why?
- 3 Explain in detail how Bonvilain gains his power on the island. How does he dupe Declan and Conor simultaneously? To what effect?
- 4 What is Conor's name changed to on Little Saltee? How is this a symbol for his complete transformation from his previous life? Have you ever felt as if you wanted a new name? Why or why not?
- 5 Linus Wynter assures Conor that "we all can kill." Do you agree with him? Must Conor murder to survive on Little Saltee? How is this issue resolved? Can intelligence always outwit violence? Why or why not? How does Wynter teach Conor to survive the prison?
- 6 What is the story that Declan, Catherine, and Isabella believed about their son? How is it different from what Conor thinks? How are they affected by the loss of Conor? Conor pushes away all thoughts of home and those he loves. Why? What would you do to survive such cruelty?

- 7 Describe Conor's incarceration at Little Saltee. How is this prison different from a typical one? What do you think would be the most difficult part of being a prisoner on Little Saltee? How does he plan his eventual release? Recount how Conor's escape attempt unfolded. How did the author build anticipation for his readers?
- 8 Who influences Conor's conscience after his escape? How does he challenge Conor to think about his responsibilities and duty? Do you agree with Conor that the island owes him diamonds and a future, or with Linus, that Conor must change the destiny of his homeland? Why?
- 9 How does Conor become known as the Airman? How is he able to exact revenge on Billtoe? What is Billtoe's fate? In literature, is all cruelty eventually rewarded? Compare it to real life.
- 10 How does Bonvilain learn of Conor's plans and ideas? How does he plan to stop him? Describe the ultimate confrontation between Conor, Bonvilain, and Conor's family.



PROJECTS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Imagine and write a scene that may have been deleted from the novel, or one that could be part of a prequel or sequel. Be sure to make the dialogue sound like the characters, and the action to be believable in the style of *Airman*.

Fill out the following character chart as you read the novel. Use for discussion or study.

CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION	CONNECTION TO CONOR	FATE
Conor Broekhart			
Isabella Trudeau			
Declan & Catherine Broekhart			
King Nicholas Trudeau			
Victor Vigny			
Marshall Bonvilain			
Linus Wynter			
Arthur Billtoe			

ART

“Conor made a lampshade for the light in his room. A paper screen painstakingly decorated with depictions of da Vinci's wing flapping device, a Montgolfier balloon, and Kaufman's theoretical flying steam engine.” (p. 57) These images whirled around his room and gave him inspiration. Create a lampshade or another piece of art inspired by the masters you most admire, in the field of your choice. Explain your piece in a brief artist's statement. Be sure to hang it in your room for inspiration!

SCIENCE

Study the physics necessary for flight. What obstacles must be overcome, and what materials are best suited to accomplish it. Based on what you know, create paper airplanes and compete for distance and speed in flight.

HISTORY

Research one of the following topics from the novel and create a PowerPoint, Web page, or poster based on what you learned:

- Diamond mining
- History of human flight
- History of incarceration
- Saltee Islands



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EOIN COLFER is the *New York Times* best-selling author of the Artemis Fowl series, *Half Moon Investigations*, *The Supernaturalist*, *The Wish List*, *Eoin Colfer's Legend of . . .* books, *Benny and Omar*, and *Benny and Babe*.

He lives in Ireland with his wife and two children.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

1 Can you describe your writing process for this epic adventure novel?

I approached this novel differently from my other books. As it is a historical book, I tried to immerse myself in the eighteenth century by reading novels and articles from the time. I needed to develop a more formal style of writing that would be evocative of the period. Of course I had to do a large amount of research, as mistakes and inaccuracies can destroy the credibility of an entire book. I thought about wearing a helmet as I wrote, but discounted that idea, as sometimes we have visitors and I didn't want to embarrass my family. These things aside, my routine was pretty much the same as always. I dropped the kids to school and then worked until they came home. I used to be a teacher and I still work teacher's hours. A nice luxury.

2 How do you know when an idea is worth the effort a novel requires?

I often agonize over the merit of a particular idea for many months. There are little signs that give me the confidence to proceed. I will find myself thinking about the idea as I try to sleep at night, and I will wake up thinking about it. Also, and most shallowly (is that a word?), if I think of a cool name—I get very impressed with myself and forge ahead with the book. Laughing aloud

is a good hint too. If I find myself snorting with laughter at one of my own ideas, then I know I am on to a winner.

3 How has your teaching influenced your writing? How would your teaching change based on what you now know about being a writer?

Teaching first introduced me to kids as real people. I had forgotten all about that, as it has been some decades since I was a little chap. I relearned quickly that children are just as sharp as us grown-ups but with slightly less worldly experience and slightly shorter trousers. I decided then that I would never treat kids differently to how I treat grown-ups, which is generally not too bad. Honest. If I was to go back teaching now I would shower gifts on the little dearies and never give them homework. I am not serious about the gifts, but I am totally serious about the homework, especially for the younger ones. Family time is precious enough without sending home assignments for the parents.

Find out more about Eoin Colfer.

Visit his Web site at www.eoincolfer.com

