

Sardis McCoy and the Stolen Years

A discussion guide for families, libraries, and book clubs

By Mark Crowley · Book 1 · Suggested readers: ages 10–14

A missed school bus is a small problem. A hidden civilization beneath the ocean is a much bigger one. As Sardis follows the possibility of finding his father, he must decide whom to trust, how to question the rules, and what he owes other people.

Use any questions that suit your group. Readers can answer aloud, write, sketch, or pass. Ask them to point to a scene that supports their interpretation; different answers are welcome.

Start here: questions 1–6

These questions discuss the setup and early adventures. They avoid the ending.

1. **Being ordinary.** Jennifer works hard to give Sardis an ordinary life. What is she protecting? What might Sardis lose when she makes decisions for him? Can you understand both of them?
2. **The three friends.** What does Sardis bring to his friendship with Kale and Isaiah? What do they give him that being clever cannot replace? Choose a funny moment that also shows they care.
3. **Trusting Athena.** Athena gives Sardis astonishing information while withholding other important facts. At what point would you ask her to stop and explain the plan? What would you need to know before agreeing to go?
4. **Pieces of the walrus.** Athena uses a walrus to explain how people can hold different pieces of the truth. Where does a character mistake one piece for the whole picture? How could they check their understanding?
5. **A city with rules.** Atlantis is beautiful, but arriving there involves credentials, scans, and controls. Which rule seems reasonable? Which one would you question? What separates protecting a community from controlling its people?
6. **Winning differently.** In the Agons, Sardis faces competitors with much more preparation. When does he rely on observation or adaptability? Does a rule that applies equally to everyone always create a fair contest?

After finishing the book

Late-book spoilers: the following questions discuss the quarantine, Sardis's medical crisis, and the ending. Keep this section out of opening-chapter handouts and promotional posts.

7. **Choosing under pressure.** Sardis chooses a dangerous intervention during the quarantine. His parents and friends fear losing him. How does the scene allow both his courage and their objections to matter? What would genuine consent require when everyone is frightened and time is short? Discuss the characters' situation; nobody needs to say what they personally would risk.

8. **The years ahead.** The epilogue changes what Sardis expects from his future. Why does the book end with him beginning a conversation with his friends? What can companionship offer when it cannot solve the problem?

Activity 1: Build an Agon on paper

10–15 minutes · No ending spoilers · Paper and pencils

Design a fictional challenge that rewards attention, cooperation, or problem-solving rather than strength alone. Draw three obstacles and give the course one rule, one safety feature, and one consequence for a mistake. Swap plans with another reader. Ask: Is there more than one way to succeed? Who might the design accidentally exclude? Revise one feature after hearing the answer.

This is a drawing and design exercise, not a physical obstacle course.

Activity 2: The information map

10–15 minutes · Adaptable to any stopping point · Paper and pencils

Choose a scene the whole group has read. Make three columns: **What Sardis knows**, **What another character knows**, and **What the reader knows**. Add a short quotation or scene reference in each column. Circle one missing fact that changes a decision. Then write two or three lines of dialogue in which Sardis asks the question that might uncover it.

For an opening-chapter session, use Jennifer's choices about Sardis's education. For a full-book discussion, choose a later scene without revealing it to readers who have not reached it.

A closing question

What is one question you would want to ask Mark Crowley about a choice he made while writing the story?

Author visits and reader inquiries: mark@austindatenights.com