

From *New York Times* best-selling author

NEAL SHUSTERMAN
AND ERIC ELFMAN

TESLA'S ATTIC



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION BOOKS

About the Book

After their home burns down, fourteen-year-old Nick, his younger brother, and their father move into a ramshackle Victorian house they've inherited. When Nick opens the door to his attic room, he's hit in the head by a toaster. That's just the beginning of his weird experiences with the old junk stored up there. After getting rid of the odd antiques in a garage sale, Nick befriends some local kids—Mitch, Caitlin, and Vincent—and they discover that all of the objects have extraordinary properties. What's more, Nick figures out that the attic is a strange magnetic vortex, which attracts all sorts of trouble. It's as if the attic itself has an intelligence . . . and a purpose.

Ultimately Nick learns that the genius Nikola Tesla placed the items—his last inventions—in the attic as part of a larger plan that he mathematically predicted. Nick and his new friends must retrieve everything that was sold at the garage sale and keep it safe. But the task is fraught with peril—in addition to the dangers inherent in Tesla's mysterious and powerful creations, a secret society of physicists, the Accelerati, is determined to stop Nick and alter destiny to achieve its own devious ends. It's a lot for a guy to handle, especially when he'd much rather fly under the radar as the new kid in town.

Fans of intrigue, action, humor, and nonstop surprises are guaranteed a read unlike any other in *Tesla's Attic*, Book One of the Accelerati Trilogy.

Common Core Alignment

This guide is aligned with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) for Reading Standards for Literature, Writing, and Language. The broad CCR standards are the foundation for the grade level–specific Common Core State Standards. Each question and activity in this guide includes a reference for the CCR strand, domain, and standard that is addressed. To support instruction also reference the grade level–specific Common Core State Standards to scaffold the questions for your students.

Curriculum Connections

READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING

Pre-reading Activity

As a pre-reading activity, have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

Before Reading	After Reading	Statements
		Adults always know better ways to approach problems than kids do.
		All mysteries are worth solving.
		Family should always be protected, no matter what.
		When in danger, it is best to play it safe rather than take a risk.

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements they agree with and a “0” next to those they disagree with. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there should be no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 6.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 6.1., 6.2., 6.3. Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 7.1., 7.2., 7.3.

Writing Prompts/Discussion Questions

The following questions may be utilized throughout the novel study as reflective writing prompts. Alternatively, they can be used to as targeted questions for discussion and reflection.

- 1 As *Tesla's Attic* begins, readers learn that Nick's family has suffered greatly with the recent death of his mother and the loss of their home to a fire. In what ways does the opening scene (the toaster falling down from the attic and injuring Nick) set the stage for the events to follow?
- 2 Why is Nick's garage sale such a success? Given the enthusiasm of the attendees, should he be surprised to learn the items from the attic are no ordinary junk?
- 3 Caitlin is described as "one of those rare girls who managed to strike a perfect balance between being wildly popular and wildly original." Can you find examples from the novel that support these two descriptions of her? As the story evolves, do you find her being more one way than the other?
- 4 Why do you believe Nick feels compelled to serve as a caregiver to his family? Do you believe that he's ultimately successful at this endeavor? Why or why not?
- 5 Consider the cover art for *Tesla's Attic*. In what ways is the image represented symbolize the events that transpire throughout the course of the book?
- 6 Describe Nick's first interaction with Ms. Planck. What is it about the lunch lady that surprises him? Consider her advice to him as a new student—do you think she's right to suggest what she does? Does her advice serve him well? Why or why not?
- 7 What was your earliest impression of Mitch? Did you find him to be a trustworthy person? Is he a good friend to Nick? Using examples from the text, support your position.



- 8 In what ways do the objects claimed at Nick’s garage sale help Caitlin, Mitch, Vincent, and Petula? How does each of these inventions seem to be the just the right device for them? What makes these devices troublesome tools?
- 9 Describe some of the specific ways in which the Accelerati exercise their power? In your opinion, what makes this organization so threatening?
- 10 Explain the significance of the title, *Tesla’s Attic*. In your opinion, does it accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in the novel?
- 11 Describe Nick. What makes him a dynamic person? Is he the type of individual you would want to befriend? Why or why not?
- 12 After Ms. Planck reveals herself to Petula, readers learn that Petula thinks that “in a sense she felt like she’d been hiding in plain sight all her life, but now it would be with a purpose.” How does this this new understanding of her place within the Accelerati make her feel empowered? Predict what role Petula will play as the series moves forward.
- 13 Which of Tesla’s inventions did you find most intriguing? The most useful? The most dangerous?
- 14 After discovering the nefarious plans of the Accerlerati, Nick and Caitlin realize that their world may never be the same. In your opinion, what are the best and worst parts of having an understanding of what the organization is capable of doing?
- 15 How does learning about Mitch’s dad’s incarceration change Nick’s understanding of Mitch’s behavior? What makes his father’s absence so difficult for Mitch?
- 16 Describe the relationship between Nick and Caitlin. How does it evolve over the course of the novel?
- 17 While describing the hatred between Edison and Tesla, Svedberg tells Nick and Caitlin, “Envy is a powerful motivator.” Do you agree? Based on what you learn in the novel, how does Edison’s jealousy of Tesla’s true genius fuel the creation of the Accelerati?

- 18 Use the phrase “This is a story about . . .” to supply five words to describe *Tesla’s Attic*. Explain your choices.
- 19 Consider Theo’s plan to “wedge himself between Nick and Caitlin.” What can you infer about his character based on learning the work he has done to appear mediocre? Why does this make him dangerous?
- 20 Given the events of *Tesla’s Attic*, what do you predict will happen in the next installment in the Accelerati Trilogy?

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 6.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 6.1., 6.2., 6.3. Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 7.1., 7.2., 7.3.

Literary Elements Analysis

Use the following activities to allow students to show their understanding of various literary elements in *Tesla’s Attic*.

Cast It for the Big Screen

Have students imagine the director-producer wants a casting director to make recommendations to star in a movie adaptation of *Tesla’s Attic*. Decide who will be the actors and actresses. Include photos and descriptions of the stars and tell why each one is “perfect” for the part. Write a report to convince the producer of the selections.

Advice Column

Ask students to describe one of the problems faced by a character in *Tesla’s Attic* and write advice to him or her. Students may choose to be serious or humorous. Use the letter format common to newspaper advice columns, where the person with the problem writes for advice and the adviser writes back. Often the person seeking advice disguises his or her name with a descriptive name associated with the problem.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4. R.L. 6.1., 6.2. R.L. 7.1., R.L. 7.2.

Fortune Cookies

Have students imagine they are dining with three characters from *Tesla's Attic*. Have them create fortune cookie statements for each character, making sure they tell you which character received the fortune and why it is fitting.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details

C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4. R.L. 6.1., 6.2. R.L. 7.1, R.L. 7.2.

Gift Giving

Have students select five or more gifts that would be perfect to give to one of the characters in *Tesla's Attic*. While these gifts can be tangible or intangible, they should be things that the character would really want or need. Be sure that students give an explanation for each gift and why it is appropriate.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details

C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4. R.L. 6.1., 6.2. R.L. 7.1, R.L. 7.2.

Character "To Do" List

Remind students that like us, literary characters have tasks they need to complete. Students should select a character of their choice from *Tesla's Attic* and then create a list of the most important tasks at hand for that character, with explanations as to why those tasks are so necessary.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details

C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1. R.L. 5.1. R.L. 6.1. R.L. 7.1

Setting

Consider the variety of settings for *Tesla's Attic*. Why are these locations so important? Using the descriptions provided in the book, illustrate the four places within the park you believe to be most important to the story. In addition to the illustrations, include a short explanation of the significance of each place, and why you believe it is important.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details

C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4. R.L. 6.1., 6.2. R.L. 7.1, R.L. 7.2.

If These Walls Could Talk

Ask students to create a conversation between one of the characters in *Tesla's Attic* and some intangible thing: justice, love, goodness, greed, etc., or the character's own conscience. Have them script the conversation for dialogue, making sure they use appropriate punctuation.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4. R.L. 6.1., 6.2. R.L. 7.1, R.L. 7.2.

Character Report Card

Ask students to examine the ethical nature of a character's actions and choices in *Tesla's Attic*. Have them set up a "report card" using a chart, and include the following four categories: respect, responsibility, cooperation, caring, integrity, self-control, honesty, and effort. In addition, include a teacher's comments section. In each category, students should give the character a letter grade that they believe he or she deserves based on actions and choices made in the book. In the comments section, they should use two specific pieces of evidence from the novel to explain/support the grade.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3, R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.3., R.L. 6.1., 6.2., 6.3., R.L. 7.1., 7.2., 7.3. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas. C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.7., 4.9. R.L. 5.7., 5.9. R.L. 6.7., 6.9. R.L. 7.7., 7.9.

Character Trait Silhouette

Have students form small groups to create a character trait silhouette about your favorite or least favorite character in *Tesla's Attic*. Begin by tracing an appropriately sized member of the group onto butcher paper. The silhouette must be life-size. The traced silhouette should reflect physical traits of the character, so modify as you draw. Next, cut out the silhouette and include a list of ten values. These need to be the most important traits of your character. For each trait include a quote from the book that supports the description. Inside the silhouette, draw symbols that represent your character's interests, personality, beliefs, skills, or profession.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1. R.L. 5.1. R.L. 6.1. R.L. 7.1

Research and Activities

Much of the story of *Tesla's Attic* focuses on Nick and his friends trying to make sense of Nikola Tesla's inventions and his greater purpose in placing things in the attic of Nick's home. Using a variety of reference sources, have students research Nikola Tesla and consider the following:

- When and where did Nikola Tesla live?
- What was his educational background?
- What types of inventions did he create?
- How were they financed?
- What were his goals as an inventor?
- How did his contributions reshape the world?
- Why did Tesla and Edison have a tumultuous relationship?
- What are some additional facts you found interesting?

After gathering their findings, have them individually or in groups create a digital presentation and share with the class.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 6.4 and Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 7.4.

Tesla's Attic focuses on Nick and his relationships with his family and friends. Ask students to consider their most special relationships. What makes those individuals so important? Have them compose a personal journal entry where they share their thoughts, and be sure they answer the following questions:

- Who are the individuals who mean the most to you?
- Why are those particular relationships so special?
- What's the greatest sacrifice you've made for the people you love?
- In what ways have the changes you've experienced in your life affected those you are closest to?

To culminate, ask for volunteers to share their writing with the class.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4. R.L. 6.1., 6.2., R.L. 7.1, 7.2. and Writing: Production and Distribution C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. W.4.4., W.5.4., W.6.4., W.7.4

Throughout the course of the novel, readers are offered insight about Nick through the events of *Tesla's Attic*. Have students assume the role of one of the secondary characters from *Tesla's Attic* and draft a diary entry detailing what they experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five Ws (*who, what, when, where, and why*). Remind them to write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what they saw, smelled, heard, etc.).

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4. R.L. 6.1., 6.2., R.L. 7.1, 7.2. and Writing: Production and Distribution C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. W.4.4., W.5.4., W.6.4., W.7.4

Many of the characters in *Tesla's Attic* are not as they appear. Consider the importance of appearances and the need to disguise yourself or appear to be something very different from who you really are. What might be a rationale for doing so? What are the ramifications and consequences of such a choice? Have each student one character from the novel and write a short analysis of his or her choice to use a disguise.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4. R.L. 6.1., 6.2., R.L. 7.1, 7.2. and Writing: Production and Distribution C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. W.4.4., W.5.4., W.6.4., W.7.4

Tesla's Attic Readers Theater Activity

Nick's bedroom in the attic is his safe haven as well the center for his adventures and the mysteries that unfold. Using the following directions, have students demonstrate an understanding of text structure by retelling and sequencing a scene from *Tesla's Attic*.

Directions

- Read *Tesla's Attic* with the class. After reading the novel, have students complete a story analysis graphic organizer or a SWBS chart as a way to make observations about the characters, setting, conflict, and plot.
- To enhance understanding, take a well-known story (such as a fairy tale) and model writing a Readers Theater script as a whole class activity. After discussing dialogue

and performance with the whole class, divide the students into small group. Each group will create an original script using a chapter from *Tesla's Attic* as inspiration.

- Next, allow students ample time to practice, and be sure to conference with each group to answer or clarify any questions they may have.
- Finally, it's showtime! Allow students to create costumes, props, and sets for the final Readers Theater performance. Groups will perform for other teams of students. For additional fun, consider filming each performance to share with the whole class.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.3., R.L. 6.1., 6.2., 6.3., R.L. 7.1, 7.2., 7.3. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas. C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.7., 4.9., R.L. 5.7., 5.9., R.L. 6.7., 6.9., R.L. 7.7., 7.9.

About the Authors

Neal Shusterman (www.storyman.com) is the author of thirty books for young readers, including the best-selling *Unwind* and *Skinjacker* trilogies, and the critically acclaimed *The Schwa Was Here* and *Downsiders*. As a screen and TV writer, Neal created scripts for the *Goosebumps* and *Animorphs* TV series, and he wrote the Disney Channel original movie *Pixel Perfect*. Neal has two grown sons, and he lives with his two daughters in Southern California.



Eric Elfman (www.elfmanworld.com) is a screenwriter, a professional writing coach, and the author of several books for children and young adults, including *The Very Scary Almanac* and *Almanac of the Gross*, *Disgusting & Totally Repulsive*; three X-Files novels; and two books of scary short stories, *Three-Minute Thrillers* and *More Three-Minute Thrillers*. He has sold screenplays to Interscope, Walden Media, Revolution, and Universal Studios. He lives in Brandywine Canyon, California, with his wife and son.



Photo by Lou Meluso



This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, a teacher and school librarian in Coppell, Texas. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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Tesla's Attic

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