



RICK RIORDAN PRESENTS

THE  
STORM  
RUNNER  
J.C. CERVANTES



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Zane has always enjoyed exploring the dormant volcano near his home in New Mexico, even though hiking it is challenging. He'd much rather hang out there with his dog, Rosie, than go to middle school, where kids call him Sir Limps-a-Lot, McGimpster, or Uno—for his one good leg. What Zane doesn't know is that the volcano is a gateway to another world and he is at the center of a powerful prophecy.

A new girl at school, Brooks, informs him that he's destined to release an evil god from the ancient Maya relic he is imprisoned in—unless she can find and remove it first. Together they return to the volcano, where all kinds of crazy happens. Brooks turns into a hawk, a demon attacks them in a cave, and Rosie gives her all while trying to protect Zane.

When Zane decides to save his dog no matter the cost, he is thrust into an adventure full of surprising discoveries, dangerous secrets, and an all-out war between the gods, one of whom happens to be his father. To survive, Zane will have to become the Storm Runner. But how can he run when he can't even walk well without a cane?

## THE MAYA

### CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVILIZATION

#### CHOCOLATE

It is believed that the Maya discovered cocoa. The word *chocolate* comes from the Mayan word *xocolatl*. They learned to extract liquid from the beans inside the cocoa pods. The cocoa beans were also known to be used as currency to exchange for food or clothes.

The Maya goddess Ixkakaw (goddess of chocolate, first mentioned on page 48 of *The Storm Runner* as having been one to go to battle with Ah-Puch) was known as an ancient goddess of fertility and happiness, imparting knowledge and tools to create a life of abundance.

#### ASTRONOMY AND CALENDAR

The Maya made accurate calendars with 365-day years using astronomy and mathematics to track the cycles of the sun, moon, and planets about 5th century BCE (before the Common Era).

The pyramid of Kukuulkaan (also known as El Castillo) is located in the ancient Maya city of Chichen Itza, Mexico, on the Yucatán Peninsula. The pyramid consists of four sides, each side having ninety-one steps ascending to the top, for a sum of 364 steps plus the top step, totaling 365 steps. Each step represents a day in the Maya calendar. Zane, Brooks, Jazz, and Hondo find themselves in front of this pyramid on page 343.

#### THE CONCEPT OF ZERO

The Maya developed positional value and zero. Without the number zero, it would be difficult to define place value. In the number 205, for example, the zero is in the tens place. Without zero, however, there would be no way to distinguish 25 from 205. The author references the significance of the number zero on page 277.



## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

On page 258, Brooks and Zane go to meet the twins, Jordan and Bird, to ask for advice on how to best beat Ah-Puch. Zane discovers that he would have to trade something for their help, but the twins prefer to trade in magic.

Zane says to Brooks, "But humans don't have magic." Brooks replies, "Sure they do."

Think about the traits that humans possess that could be considered magic. Keep a list of these as you read the book.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 In the first chapter, we learn that one of Zane's legs is shorter than the other and he needs a cane to help him walk with his "dumb limp." He uses words like freak and misfit to describe himself. What insight do these terms give you into Zane's attitude?
- 2 Despite Zane's physical challenge, we learn early in the book that he possesses the unique ability of perfect eyesight in the dark. Do you believe, like him, that it's another "freak-of-nature" thing, or a gift? Explain why.
- 3 Zane's mother gives him a cane with a brass dragon head with flames flying out of its mouth. She tells him that the dragon symbolizes protection. Identify other symbols in the book and explain their meaning as it relates to the story.



- 4 Brooks tells Zane the Prophecy of Fire says that “a powerful innocent with ancient blood would be born, and he would release the great god of death, and evil would be unleashed during the a solar eclipse.” Brooks says that all clues lead to Zane. What clues is she referring to?
- 5 After doing battle with the demon runner, Zane loses Rosie to the underworld Xib’alb’a. Zane wakes up and finds himself alone with Ms. Cab, who reveals she is a Maya seer and that it is her job to watch over him. She tells him that nawals are tricksters and can’t be trusted. Given Brooks has disappeared, should we question her loyalty to Zane?
- 6 Zane wants to run away from the prophecy, but Ms. Cab tells him, “No amount of running or hiding is going to keep it from finding you.” Discuss a time when you have wanted to run away from something that you could not avoid.
- 7 To save both Brooks and Rosie, Zane has to pledge himself to Ah-Puch. Ah-Puch tells Zane that “in Xib’alb’a you’ll be whole and strong, you’ll be able to do what only gods and kings can do. You’ll have power beyond your wildest dreams.” To Zane, “that all sounded pretty good” and it would also save his friend and dog. Do you believe Zane has no other choice? Would you take the pledge to Ah-Puch, knowing the consequences? Explain why.
- 8 In Chapter 19, Zane meets Pacific, sent by his father to gift him a jade jaguar tooth. As she pushes him back on shore, Pacific calls him Storm Runner. When Zane looks back, he sees a “jaguar’s face looming in the dark sea.” What assumptions can you make based on this event?
- 9 Zane becomes intrigued with a tarot-card reader who seems to know about him and the prophecy. Zane thinks it just might be worth it to have his future read. Brooks says, “NO! *You* make your future, Zane. Got it?” Do you think it’s possible for Zane to make his future given that his destiny is tied to the Prophecy of Fire?
- 10 In Chapter 21, Zane spirit-jumps and meets his father, Hurakan, for the first time. How does their first meeting compare to your expectations? Does their encounter make things better or worse for Zane?
- 11 In Chapter 27, Zane discovers that the twins can do nothing to help him overcome Ah-Puch. As much as Zane wanted to “disappear, hole up in the Caribbean somewhere,” he knew he couldn’t. What does this statement reveal about Zane? Is he the same person we were introduced to in Chapter 1?
- 12 Even though Zane knows Hurakan is his dad, he says it’s not the same as family: “Being a member of my family wasn’t automatic—it had to be earned.” What is he referring to in this statement?
- 13 Kukuulkaan tells Zane that even though Zane is godborn, “Godhood has to be earned. Fought for. Your power arrives gradually, and when . . .” Complete the sentence with what you think Kukuulkaan was going to say.
- 14 By claiming Zane as his son, Hurakan admits that he broke the Sacred Oath and will suffer imprisonment. Why would Hurakan sacrifice himself for Zane?
- 15 What was Ah-Puch’s blind spot and how did Zane harness his power to overcome him?

## POST-READING ACTIVITY

"I kind of thought my limp would have disappeared now that I was a claimed godborn who could control fire, but I guess magic doesn't work that way. Still, it didn't bother me. It didn't seem like a weakness anymore, just part of who I was."

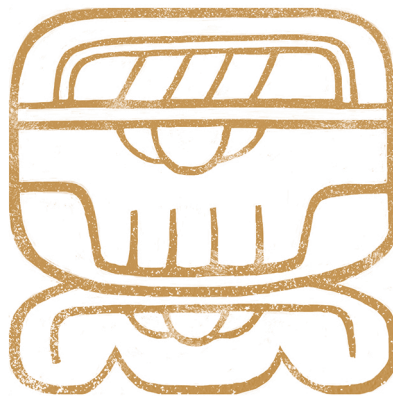
Now go back through the list of "magic" traits you started at the beginning of this book and use them to answer this question. Do you think Zane's acceptance of his "weakness" would have happened even if he had not been "godborn"?

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- 1 Plan and build a version of the pyramid of Kukuulkaan, El Castillo, using various types of materials.
- 2 Intricate mosaic masks made from stone, gold, shells, jade, and obsidian were found in Maya tombs. Create a mosaic mask using cardboard and colorful square pieces of tissue paper.
- 3 Research the cyclical Maya calendar and convert a significant date to the Maya calendar date.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- Cocking, Lauren. "The Magical Mathematical World of the Ancient Mayans." Culture Trip, July 20, 2017, <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/mexico/articles/the-magical-mathematical-world-of-the-ancient-mayans/>.
- *Living May Time: Sun, Corn, and the Calendar*. Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, <https://maya.nmai.si.edu/>. Accessed 22 August 2018.
- Maya. History, <https://www.history.com/topics/maya>. Accessed 22 August 2018.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. C. CERVANTES ([www.jennifercervantes.com](http://www.jennifercervantes.com)) is the author of *Tortilla Sun*, which was called “a beautiful and engaging debut” by *Kirkus*, an “imaginative yet grounded novel” by *Publishers Weekly*, and “lean and lightly spiced with evocative metaphor” by *School Library Journal*. *Tortilla Sun* was a 2010 New Voices pick by the American Booksellers Association and it was named to Bank Street’s 2011 Best Book List. Jen is an avid reader, a champion for the underdog, and a believer in magic. She is currently working on a sequel to this book, *The Fire Keeper*. Follow her on Twitter (@jencerv), and Instagram (@authorjcervantes).



STUDIO E

## Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

- 1 Throughout the book, the characters shift languages in their conversations. Why was it important for you to include code switching in their dialogue?

Where I’m from, this is a very natural way of communicating, so I wanted to be sure that my characters also felt muy natural.

- 2 It is quite fascinating to see how Zane’s story is weaved into Maya myth. How did the idea for this story come to you?

I live on a hill that overlooks a beautiful mesa where there are several dormant volcanoes. I love the view especially as the sun sets and turns everything pink and orange. And as all my stories begin, I thought, “What if. . .” What if there was a secret buried inside one of the volcanoes? What if a boy uncovered that secret? What if he was an unlikely hero who had to save the world?





- 3 Can you share with us how much and what kind of research you did to bring the Maya to life for your readers?

A lot! I had all the stories I had heard growing up, but I knew I also needed to delve into this world in a deeper way. I read at least ten texts and watched several documentaries. I also worked with two Mayanists to get the language right because it was so important for me to be as authentic as I could.

- 4 Your characters are incredibly rich, complex, and compelling. Did they stem strictly from imagination or were they modeled after people you know? Do you have a favorite?

Ha! Strictly from my imagination with the exception of Hondo. He is absolutely based on someone I know and anyone who reads the book and knows the “real” person always notices. Oh no! Favorites? Such a hard question, because I adore them all, but I really enjoyed writing Ixtab with all her snark and flair. Hondo might be a close second because who couldn’t root for a feisty, wrestling Flamin’ Hot Cheeto lover who yearns to be a hero in some way?

- 5 The moments of comedy in *The Storm Runner*, especially with Ms. Cab and Hondo, are quite funny! Where did humor come from, and are you a secret comedian?

No. I joke all the time that I am so not funny (even when kind people tell me I am). Although, I do love pranks and I’m known to tease my friends and family. I think the humor comes directly from the characters. Once I get into their minds and hearts, their personalities pop and they demand their page time even if it means becoming a chicken!

- 6 What parts of *The Storm Runner* are a reflection of you and/or your story?

The idea of wanting to be something greater than you are really resonates with me and I think it also resonates for so many others going through this human experience. I also relate to Zane feeling left out. It’s a universal emotion/experience for most kids and even adults for that matter. And all the elements of Mexican cuisine? My 100 percent comfort food and the spicier the better!



This guide was written by **Maribel Castro**, a former school and academic librarian, currently serving as the Director of Technology & Information Services at Louise S. McGehee School in New Orleans, LA. Castro has served on several reading list committees, served as President of the Texas Library Association and was a member of the Executive Board of the American Association of School Librarians. She is the child of migrant workers from Mexico who did not have much in terms of wealth, but got her a library card, opening up a rich world of words and thoughts. Castro believes that children of diverse backgrounds deserve to be reflected in the pages of the books they read.

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