



RICK RIORDAN PRESENTS

TRISTAN STRONG

— SERIES —



BY *NEW YORK TIMES* BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

KWAME MBALIA

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION

TRISTAN STRONG PUNCHES A HOLE IN THE SKY

ABOUT THE BOOK

Tristan Strong is a seventh grader who is navigating the road to healing following several difficult life events. First, he blames himself for the death of his best friend, Eddie. Then he disappoints his family by losing a highly anticipated boxing match. When it seems like things can't get any worse, he is sent to spend a month at his grandparents' farm in Alabama. During his first night on the farm, a series of strange events occurs. To his surprise, someone tries to steal the only thing he has left of Eddie—a journal. Tristan chases the assailant and ends up in another universe filled with new friends and enemies. Following his arrival, Tristan strategizes a way to win a high-stakes war by enticing the trickster god Anansi. Can Tristan save his new friends and avoid more loss? Readers everywhere will appreciate the connections to familiar African and African American folklore, adventures, and the character development of Tristan throughout the novel.



COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

The Tristan Strong series provides a great opportunity to apply complex literacy skills such as inferencing, deconstructing vocabulary, identifying author's purpose, answering text-dependent questions, and making textual connections. This discussion guide provides suggestions aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Reading: Literature, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. Each activity in this guide includes a reference for the CCSS strand, domain, and standard that is addressed. To support instruction or obtain additional information visit the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) website www.corestandards.org.

- **Instructional Note:** *During each of the activities, please encourage students to support their claims with evidence from the text and illustrations. Providing young learners with the opportunity to answer text-dependent questions is critical to success with Common Core State Standards (CCSS).*

ACTIVATING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Explore Important Connections Before Reading

1. Traditional fables typically have the following components, (1) they feature an animal with human characteristics (e.g., the ability to speak); (2) each character usually has one personality trait, such as being clever, that is evident throughout the story; (3) a problem or conflict; (4) a resolution, moral, or lesson that others can learn. Think about familiar fables and consider whether the statements below are true or false.

Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Statement 4
Fables often reflect the beliefs/values of the individual who is telling the story.	Heroes in fables always make positive decisions.	The animals in fables are usually villains.	Fables are often passed down as spoken stories.
TRUE OR FALSE	TRUE OR FALSE	TRUE OR FALSE	TRUE OR FALSE

- A. When you complete the novel, return to these statements and decide whether you still believe they are true or false. Discuss your initial responses and make changes as necessary based upon evidence from the novel. (*Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration, 5.1, 6.1*)



2. Brainstorm the following: What African and African American tales (fables or folktales) have you heard in the past? Describe the stories briefly. Look at the table below. Did you mention any of the included characters during your brainstorm? If yes, note important adventures or character traits of each individual. Next, explain why each individual is significant to African or African American cultural beliefs/values. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1*)

Folklore Character	Descriptions	Cultural Significance
Gum-Baby		
Brer Rabbit		
Brer Fox		
Kwaku Anansi		
John Henry		
High John		
Nyame		

A. Select one character from the table above to research using text and online resources. Be sure to explore the characteristics, problem, and resolution/moral throughout multiple stories about the character. Summarize your findings in one page and share with a small group. (*Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge, W.5.7, 6.7*)

3. Read the description of the novel, review chapter titles, and examine the adinkra symbols drawn at the beginning of each chapter. What are important events that you think will take place in this novel? What must you think about as you read a fictional text (e.g., story structure)? How is the strategy different from reading an informational text?

A. Think about an adventure novel that you have read in the past. How does this text seem similar to that text? How does this text seem different? Explain the connection using details from your previous reading. (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, RL. 5.9*)

ANNOTATION GUIDE

Monitoring Comprehension While Reading

As you read, use the notations below to monitor your understanding. Share your notations with a peer and/or adult to build discussion and meaningful inquiry questions while reading the novel.

Symbol	Considerations
?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This part is confusing because . . .• What does the statement _____ mean?• I don't understand what sequence of event(s) just happened.• I wonder . . .• What does the character mean when she/he says _____?
*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is really important to understanding the plot of the story.• This character action helped me learn more about him/her.• This is something important to remember about the character.• This detail is important because . . .• This is a really interesting detail that I would like to discuss.
!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am surprised by this event.• I was not expecting this character to . . .• I am really surprised by the new information the author shared.
∞	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This information connects to something important in another chapter because . . .• This information connects to my life because . . .• This information connects to another book because . . .• This action connects to something I've seen on television.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

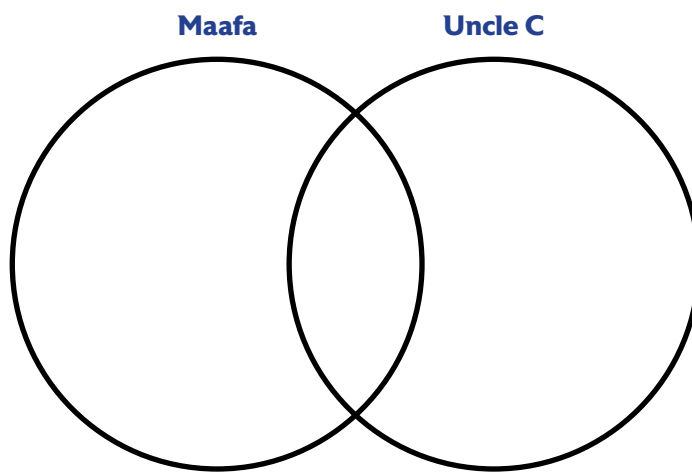
Explore the questions individually and in small groups while reading.

1. When Tristan Strong first talks about his name he states, “I hated that name. It made me appear to be something I’m not. My name should have been Tristan Coward, or Tristan Failure, or Tristan Fake. Maybe Tristan How-Could-You-Lose-Your-First-Boxing Match” (p. 2). Based upon this statement, how does Tristan feel about himself? How does his family view him (i.e., his parents and grandparents)? Support your response with textual evidence. Is there something about yourself that you have disliked in the past? Why?
 - A. As you read, consider whether you believe this statement is accurate? How does Tristan’s point of view about himself develop and/or change throughout the story? Which events cause the development and/or change? Provide examples.
2. Using details from the story, explain why the journal appears to be special. Which events throughout the car ride and at the farm suggest it is supernatural? What does Tristan’s nana explain about the origins of the symbol on the journal? Why does Tristan seem to avoid the journal? How might the journal be connected to Tristan’s future adventure? Make a prediction using textual support.
3. During several moments in the book, Tristan affirms that he is not “soft.” For example: “A flashlight lay on top of the blankets next to me. Not that I’m scared of the dark, you get me, but in case I had to use the bathroom or get a drink of water” (p. 24). Why do you think the author includes this information? How does it help us understand Tristan? Are there moments you try to show others you are not “soft”? Why? Provide an example.
4. Describe the first interaction between Gum Baby and Tristan. What characteristics are evident about Gum Baby? Do you think Gum Baby is a friend or foe? Why? Use textual evidence in your response.
5. In Chapter 5, should Tristan trust the shadow he meets? Why or why not? How does he feel while interacting with the shadow? What did his nana previously tell him about the Bottle Tree forest? Why is this information important? Support your response with details from the novel.
6. When Tristan first arrives in the new world, he asks a lot of questions, but his inquiries are quickly dismissed. Why isn’t anyone willing to answer his questions? Support with evidence. How does the suspense in the chapter help the author develop the plot?
 - A. In Chapter 7, what does Tristan learn about the origins of Alke? Why is this important to understand? Provide details in your response.
 - B. In Chapter 9, what does the author reveal about “folktale characters” in Alke? What is their role and purpose? How does this differ from Tristan’s previous understanding of the characters? Cite evidence.
7. In Chapter 9, Brer Fox warns against speaking about the Maafa to prevent giving it strength (p. 97). Tristan reflects about the following advice from his counselor: “we can’t hide from our fears. We have to be able to talk about them, or else they’ll fester like poison, eating us from the inside.” Who do you think gave the better advice? Why?
 - A. When the novel is complete, consider whether storytelling was a positive or negative influence throughout the novel. Explain whether the stories are a source of strength or destruction based upon the events.

8. How does Tristan respond when he meets John Henry for the first time in Chapter 11? Why? In the novel, which different versions of John Henry's story are shared? Describe John Henry's character traits based upon his interactions with Tristan.
- A.** Can you think of other fables or folktales with multiple versions, endings, or events? In your opinion, why might multiple versions of the same fable or folktale exist? Provide an example.
9. As Tristan narrates the novel, he often talks about "grown-ups." Based upon his perspective, how is he treated by adults? How does he view the adults in his life? For example, consider Tristan's reflections in Chapter 12. Can you relate to Tristan's perspective of adults? Why or why not?
10. When explaining the term "Anasesem" John Henry shares, "A storyteller. But more than just words, more than *once upon a time* and *the end*. It's about the entire experience, from the audience to the stage to the spectacle. There's music, too, I reckon" (p. 126). What does this suggest about storytelling in Alke? Why is an Anasesem someone special? In your opinion, what makes a good storytelling experience (e.g., imagine telling someone about a really good movie)?
- A.** At the end of the novel, return to this question and add details to the characteristics of a good storyteller based upon Tristan's adventure.
11. How does Tristan use boxing throughout the novel? How do John Henry and Tristan connect while talking about boxing? What gift does John Henry give to Tristan? How might the gift help him during his journey? Explain with evidence.
12. In Chapter 20, Tristan admits, "I don't want to go because I'm afraid" (p. 185). How does this acknowledgment differ from his communications in previous chapters? Do you think admitting his fear makes his "soft"? Why or why not?
13. Describe the sequence of events that occurs when Tristan arrives in the Golden Crescent. What problems are they facing in the Golden Crescent? Why is Nyame important to Tristan and his allies? Explain.
14. How does Tristan earn the nickname Bumbletongue at the beginning of the story? Support with textual evidence. As the story progresses, does it seem like a fitting nickname? Why or why not?
15. Nyame shares, "Alke is a land divided" (p. 245). Based upon events in the novel, why is the divide problematic? What are potential resolutions to this divide? Make a prediction. Can you think of ways that we are divided in our society? How does division impact our society? Explain.
- A.** As you read the novel, consider which moments throughout the story suggest people may be unifying. Be specific by providing examples.
16. What is the definition of an adinkra? How does the author intertwine adinkras throughout the story? Which adinkras does Tristan collect? What is the meaning of each symbol? How does each symbol help Tristan during his journey? Cite details from the novel.
17. In Chapter 28, how does Anansi's lair reflect his character traits? What does the team discover in Anansi's lair? Why is this information important? Do you think Tristan's plan should include Anansi? Why or why not? Support with textual evidence.
18. During several parts of the story, Tristan states, "Strong's keep punching." What does this phrase mean? When does he tend to use these words? How does it help him navigate different situations?
- A.** Is there something that you say to encourage yourself in challenging situations? If not, what phrase could you adopt? Provide an example.

- 19.** How do the individuals in the Ridge defend themselves? Why are they leery of the visitors seeking their help? Who are the important decision makers in the Ridge? How does Tristan convince the leaders of the Ridge to fight a common enemy?
- A.** Describe Thandiwe, how might she be helpful to the team? How is she similar to both Ayanna and Tristan? Support with evidence from the text.
- 20.** Based upon Tristan’s explanation, why is High John Eddie’s favorite folk hero? How does High John both challenge and help Tristan? How does High John explain the power of the story box?
- A.** When Tristan has to face his enemies, what power does the story box provide? How does Tristan attempt to tap into the strength of the story box? Explain using evidence.
- 21.** Although Eddie is deceased, he is a very important character throughout the story. What key events occur that involve Eddie? For example, Chapter 9: “The Paper Giant.” Why is Eddie an integral character? How does he influence Tristan’s development?
- A.** In the novel, what does it mean when Eddie states, “You’re talking to the wrong one” (p. 140, p. 336, p. 448)? How do each of these exchanges make Tristan feel? Why?
- B.** In Chapter 42, Tristan states, “Well, all memories serve a purpose. . . . What are memories except stories we tell ourselves, right?” (p. 379). Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? Based upon Tristan’s memory and description of the bus accident, do you think he is to blame for Eddie’s death? Why or why not?
- C.** In Chapter 48, describe the reunion between Tristan and Eddie. What occurs? Why is this moment important? What new details does the reader learn about their friendship? Support with evidence.

- 22.** Reflect upon the events leading up to the conclusion of the story. How does each character transform from the beginning to the end of the story? Did you find the ending of the story surprising? Why or why not? What theme or lesson does the author want the reader to learn from the novel?
- A.** If you could write an alternative ending to the story, what would you make happen? Why?
- 23.** Think about the main antagonists in the story, Uncle C and the Maafa. How does each source cause destruction in Alke? While in their presence, how does each source make individuals feel? What is each antagonist’s goal? How are they similar and different? Compare and contrast using evidence from the story in the Venn diagram below.
(*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.3*)



Standards Aligned to Discussion Questions

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details:
RL.5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure:
RL.5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
RL.5.9

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Creative Projects and Writing Extensions

1. Small Group Discussion: Prior to the discussion, prepare notes citing textual evidence and relevant questions to pose to the group using the guiding questions in parts A–E.

(Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL. 5.1, 6.1)

- A.** How do the characters in the novel compare to their original fable or folktale adventures, actions, character traits, and attributes?
- B.** How did the author make connections to previous tales?
- C.** In the novel, which interactions between characters suggest a previous history within stories? For example, Nyame and High John, Nyame and Anansi, Gum Baby and Mmoatia, etc.
- D.** How did the author change the fable and folktale characters in the novel? How did those adjustments enhance Tristan’s adventure?
- E.** Choose one character to compare and contrast between the original tales and the new depiction in *Tristan Strong* using the graphic organizer below.

Compare and Contrast a Fable or Folktale Character Character Traits, Actions, Problems/Solutions	
Original Depiction in Fable or Folktale	<i>Tristan Strong</i> Depiction
Similarities in Both	

2. **Art Connection:** Readers traveled to many different locations in Alke with Tristan Strong based upon the rich descriptions provided by the author. Create a map of the different places that Tristan visited using detailed images and accurate map lines to show the separation between locations. Present your map to peers and explain the significance of each place in the novel. (*Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: SL. 5.5, 6.5*)



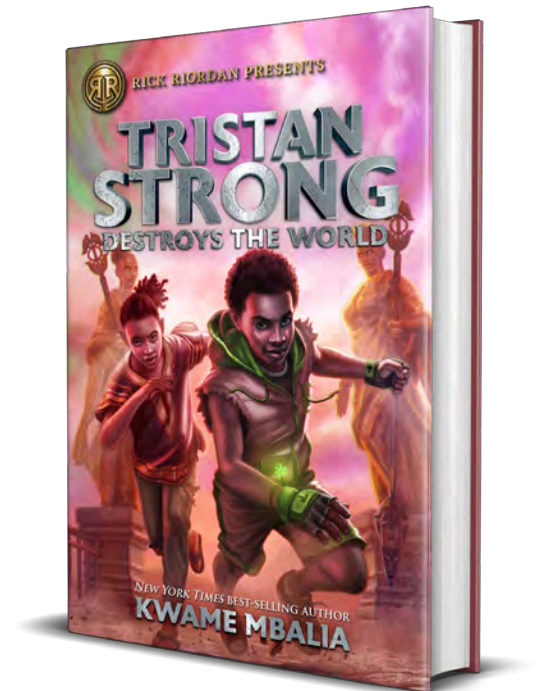
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3. **Creative Writing:** As readers learn throughout the novel, fables and folktales are often viewed as an important fabric that ties a culture and community together. Create your own fable using the steps below. (*Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.5.3, 6.3*)
- A. Brainstorm fable ideas based on familiar tales and events in the novel. Then group similar ideas together and select your favorite idea.
 - B. List the character traits of the main character in your fable and the events that will make those traits evident.
 - C. Draft your fable by making clear connections to the setting, character descriptions, problem, and solution with a moral.
 - D. Allow a peer to read over your fable and make suggestions.
 - E. Revise the fable based upon suggestions and add meaningful illustrations to the story.
4. **Current Events:** In the story, we learn that Alke is a divided world, which proves to be problematic throughout Tristan's journey. With a partner, research a current event that shows a division between two communities, countries, cities, etc. If conflict exists, discuss resolutions that might bridge the divides and/or resolve the existing issues. In a written summary, describe the existing division, the impact of the division, aligned solutions, and cite your sources. (*Writing: Research to Build and Present Ideas: W.5.8, 6.8*)

TRISTAN STRONG DESTROYS THE WORLD

ABOUT THE BOOK

Tristan Strong is back on his grandparents' farm following his exciting adventure in Alke—a realm inhabited by West African gods and African American folktale heroes. During his journey, Tristan overcame many obstacles and proved himself to be a hero. Despite his success, he is feeling a great deal of trauma and stress. To make matters worse, Tristan begins hearing voices while he is boxing in his grandparents' barn. When a mysterious evil villain named the Shamble Man kidnaps Tristan's nana, Tristan is forced to spring into action. To save his nana, Tristan must return to Alke and reunite with his old friends and new allies. But how is Tristan supposed to succeed when the only god he can summon to his side is the trickster Anansi, who is imprisoned inside a cell phone? This new adventure is nonstop action, storytelling at its best, and includes heroes that every reader will cheer for.



ACTIVATING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Explore Important Connections Before Reading

1. Retell the main events from the last novel. What was the problem? Solution? Who were the protagonists and antagonists?
 - A. To review, create a character map that shows the connection between individuals in the first novel. Also, note words that highlight Tristan's *perspective* of each character, since the story is told from his point of view. Build several connections until all the important characters are listed. For example:



(Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.6.6)

2. The second novel in the Tristan Strong series continues to highlight West African gods and African American folktale characters. Look at the names of the characters below and note (a) previous adventures of the individuals in traditional folktales, (b) an important moral we learn from the characters, and (c) character traits. Use your background knowledge, multiple books about the character, and/or online tools to engage in research. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1; Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge, W.5.7, 6.7*)

Folklore Character	Stories Unique to the Character <i>Events and Moral</i>	Character Traits
Keelboat Annie		
Mami Wata		
A boo hag		
BRER CHARACTERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brer Fox • Brer Rabbit • Brer Bear 		

3. Based on how the last novel concluded, the synopsis of the second novel, and chapter titles of the second novel, what do you think this story will be about? Who do you think will be the main protagonists and antagonists of the story? Make a prediction. Support your prediction with evidence. (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, RL. 5.9*)

VISUALIZING

Monitoring Comprehension While Reading

As you read, it is important to visualize the key events taking place in the novel by creating a movie or detailed images in your mind. When readers visualize a novel, they enhance their understanding of the text. At the end of each chapter, describe what you visualized with a partner orally or through a detailed drawing.

(Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, RL. 5.7, 6.7)

Notation: As you read, underline the key words in the text that help you visualize the events, setting, and/or characters. Remember to look for clues about all five senses to visualize:

- What did you see as you read?
- What did you hear as you read?
- What did you smell as you read?
- What did you feel as you read?
- What did you taste as you read?

Discussion: Verbally describe what you visualized or show your detailed artwork.

Listening Challenge: How do your visualizations change when you hear the story read aloud? What new or different details do you “see” or “hear”?

Partner Challenge: How was your visualization similar and/or different from someone else’s? Explain.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Explore the questions individually and in small groups while reading.

1. Think about the author's writing style. Why does the author add some of Tristan's thoughts in parentheses? For example, "SBP (Story Box Phone—give me a break, let me be lazy)" (p. 9). How might this text feature engage the reader? Do you like this writing style? Why or why not?
2. When Tristan describes the barn he says, "But the real eye-catcher was a giant mural depicting two men, a weary boxer with one fist up as he curled a bicep, and his cornerman, towel slung over his shoulder, standing behind him with both arms flexed" (p. 4). What is the significance of this art? Why does Granddad hang it up to "commemorate" the event? What lesson can Tristan learn from Granddad's explanation? Use textual evidence to support your response.
3. Describe the fight between Tristan and Reggie. At the end of Chapter 2, why does Tristan say "Fight for something. Fight for something!" (p. 20)? What does this phrase mean to Tristan and his family? How do these phrases impact the tone of the chapter and events? What surprising events occur during the sparring match? Explain.
4. What is the Story Box Phone (SBP) referenced on page 9 of the novel? What events transpired in the first novel before the phone was created? How is Anansi responding to his new setting? Support your response with evidence.
 - A. In Chapter 3, what does Tristan need from Anansi? What deal does Tristan make with Anansi in order to obtain his help? Should Tristan trust Anansi? Why or why not?
 - B. As the story progresses, describe how Anansi and Tristan's relationship develops.
 - C. Record the names of the apps that Anansi creates and how they aid Tristan. What is the name and purpose of each app? Be specific.
5. Anansi explains the meaning of Diaspora as "a group of people who originally came from one spot and then dispersed" (p. 24). In your own words, what is Diaspora? Why is this concept important for an Anansesem? Provide details to support your response.
6. When Tristan talks to Nana about his feelings she says, "Exactly. 'Cause it sounds like you've gone through some trauma. . . . Yes, baby. Trauma. A rough patch in your life. Something that deeply distressed you. Can be physical or emotional, or a combination of the two" (p. 42). What trauma has Tristan experienced in the past? How do Nana and his counselor, Mr. Richardson, suggest he deal with trauma? Explain.
 - A. As you read, note events that distress Tristan and connect to his previous trauma. How does Tristan respond to traumatic reminders?
 - B. How does trauma change characters in the story? How do characters in the story deal with trauma? Based upon the events, what healthy and unhealthy approaches are taken to address trauma? Describe based upon events in the story.



Adinkras and Gifts	Purpose	When It is Used in the Novel <i>Cite Pages</i>
The spider's web		
Akofena (the crossed swords)		
Gye Nyame (the symbol of the sky god)		
The Amagqirha's glimmering bead		
The gloves from John Henry		

7. Several times in the novel Tristan uses the adinkras and gifts from the gods to help him out of tough situations. Explain the purpose of each gift and specific times they aid Tristan in the novel. (*Above*)
8. In Chapter 6, what does Tristan learn about Nana? Describe Nana's "special thread" (p. 52). What is the purpose of the quilt she creates? Support with evidence from the novel.
- A.** In Chapter 7, after looking at the quilt "fragments," Nana says, "Sometimes there ain't no fixing something, baby. If you wanna rebuild, you gotta break it down and start all over. Might seem hard, but it's the only way if you wanna get it right" (p. 64). How might this advice connect to Tristan's upcoming journey?
9. Anansi says, "Ifs are pretty powerful. You can collect them like a lazy man collects excuses. If this, if that. If I can't, if I could. Better watch it, little storyteller, or you'll build yourself a wall of ifs you can't get around" (p. 60). Can you relate? Have you ever doubted or second-guessed yourself? When? Should Tristan listen to Anansi's advice? Why or why not?
10. In Chapter 8, Shamble Man says, "Come out," says the little hero. 'Come out!' But does he really want me to, *grum grum*? Little man might not like what he seess" (p. 74). Describe what the Shamble Man looks like? Why might his appearance be troubling to Tristan? Explain.
- A.** As the conversation progresses, Shamble Man says, "*Tristan Strong punched a hole in the sky / And let the evil in / Cities burned. / Now what did we learn? Don't let him do it again*" (p. 74). What do readers learn about the cause of Shamble Man's anger toward Tristan? Why is this conversation important to the development of the plot? Support your response with textual evidence.

11. After Nana is taken, Tristan struggles to tell stories. He says, “But for some reason, trying to gather up the story felt like collecting water through a vegetable strainer. It was like I couldn’t focus” (p. 87). What solution does Anansi propose? Is it effective? Why or why not?
12. Describe the sequence of events that occur before Tristan meets Keelboat Annie. Who is Keelboat Annie and how does she help the people of MidPass? What is Annie’s view of John Henry and the gods? Why? Do you agree or disagree?
 - A. How are personal stories of families connected to Annie’s travels? Why is collecting stories also an important role of an Anansesem? How does this task connect to the theme or central idea of Diaspora? Provide examples.
13. When Tristan arrives on the coast of the Golden Crescent (Chapter 13), how does he feel? What physical evidence of the previous battle is apparent when he looks around? What still needs to be rebuilt in MidPass? Why do you think the author included this scene in the novel? How does it help us understand Tristan and trauma?
14. Why is Tristan bothered by Junior’s words, “We get it. Everyone knows who you are. The *hero*. What, did you think there’d be a parade when you arrived?” (p. 127)? What are Junior’s criticisms of Tristan? Are his feelings warranted? Support with evidence.
15. In Chapter 15, what do John Henry and Tristan discuss? What does John Henry mean when he says, “Now’s not the time to be a hero, Tristan. It’s the time to be a leader. Sometimes them things ain’t the same” (p. 151)? Why is this advice important? What does Tristan discover about John Henry’s condition? How? Why would the gods keep John Henry’s true condition a secret? Explain using textual details.
16. In Chapter 17, how does Nyanza (the Storm Lands) appear different from the original description? As Tristan’s journey into the land continues, what is odd about the outer and inner section of Nyanza? Describe.
17. Describe the encounter with Kulture Vulture in detail. What are the characteristics of a real vulture? Based upon the text, is the name *Kulture Vulture* fitting given his actions, conversation, and/or intent? Why or why not? What is Kulture Vulture wearing that disturbs Tristan? How does Tristan respond?
18. What events cause the Story Box Phone (SBP) to break? Why is the broken Story Box Phone a huge problem? What solution does Chestnutt propose? Do you think the suggestion will work? Why or why not?
 - A. Later, how does the solution for the Story Box Phone (SBP) relate to the theme or central idea of Diaspora? What is the function of the “Diaspor-app”? Why is the new app important and what important details does it reveal? Support your response with textual evidence.
19. In Chapter 21, what is happening at the juke joint when Tristan arrives? What problems do he and his friends encounter? How does each character respond to the challenges (i.e., Tristan, Ayanna, Gum Baby, Junior, Lady Night)? How do the events at the juke joint help the plot develop? Provide examples.
20. What information does Tristan learn about Junior at the juke joint? How does the suspense about Junior’s identity help the author develop the plot? Support your response with evidence. In Chapter 25, the reader learns Junior’s true identity. Was it surprising? Why or why not? Which clues throughout the novel suggested his origin?

- 21.** In Chapter 22, Tristan recalls what Nana shared about boo hags. Based on her story, what powers do boo hags possess? Should Tristan trust a boo hag? Why or why not? What does Nana’s advice mean, “You just gonna have to decide who to believe—the witch, or the one writing the witch’s story” (p. 230)? Why is it important to think about who writes the story? How does this advice relate to any story that we read? Support with evidence.
- 22.** As Tristan reflects in Chapter 25, he states, “Yes, I had fixed my mistake (with help from others), but it had cost a lot of people dearly” (p. 268). How does this acknowledgment shift from his perspective in previous chapters? What mistake is he referring to? What is the Shamble Man’s true identify? Describe his character traits in traditional folktales. Are his current actions warranted? Cite textual evidence in your answer.
- 23.** In Chapter 28, how does Ayanna describe MidPass before the iron monsters? Tristan relates to her positive memories by acknowledging that he understands “[t]he feeling of good times tucked into nooks and crannies, spilling out of windows and doors” (p. 312). Where is that place for Tristan? Can you relate? What place makes you feel that way? Why?
- 24.** In Chapter 32, what is everyone’s role in creating the quilt? How does each character’s contribution reflect their skills and talents? Support your claims with evidence. How does the presentation of the quilt to Bear help the plot unfold? What does the quilt reveal to Bear? What is Bear’s response to the quilt? Why? Be specific.
- 25.** How does Mami Wata’s kidnapping connect to the destruction of Alke? Explain. How does Mami Wata’s role also highlight the text theme of Diaspora? Consider the statement “All connected by origin” (p. 324). Why is this idea important? Cite textual details.
- 26.** What is the impact of the storm on Alke? What does Tristan see through Nyame’s adinkra during the storm? What other magical tools or adinkras does Tristan use to counter the storm? What is the result? Provide the sequence of events.
- A.** Think about Tristan’s observation during the storm, “Everyone clutched at one another, even the gods. There was something terrifying in that, but it was also reassuring. Even the strongest of us needed support, and that was okay” (p. 376). How does this moment relate to one of the themes embedded in the text? Do you agree that everyone “needs support”? Why or why not?
- 27.** What does Tristan mean when he says “Alke is a story” (p. 390)? How does this idea connect to the events that transpire in the final chapter? Did you like the ending of the novel? Why or why not? What do you believe might happen in the next novel?



POST-READING

Comparing Novels

1. How does Tristan's *storytelling* in the first novel differ from the *shared storytelling* and *story collecting* in the second novel? Why are both actions important? What are common and contrasting themes that you noticed in each novel? How does Tristan's *point of view* as a *hero* and *leader* develop and change in both stories? Describe events that support his development.
2. Think about recurring characters and the climate in Alke throughout both novels. How do character perspectives shift between the first and second novel? What new character traits are evident in the second novel? How are the societal challenges in Alke similar and different across novels? Support your response with textual evidence.
3. In your opinion, which novel was the most exciting? Why? Who are your favorite characters? Explain. What are your favorite scenes in each novel? Why? Cite details from the text.

Standards Aligned to Discussion Questions

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

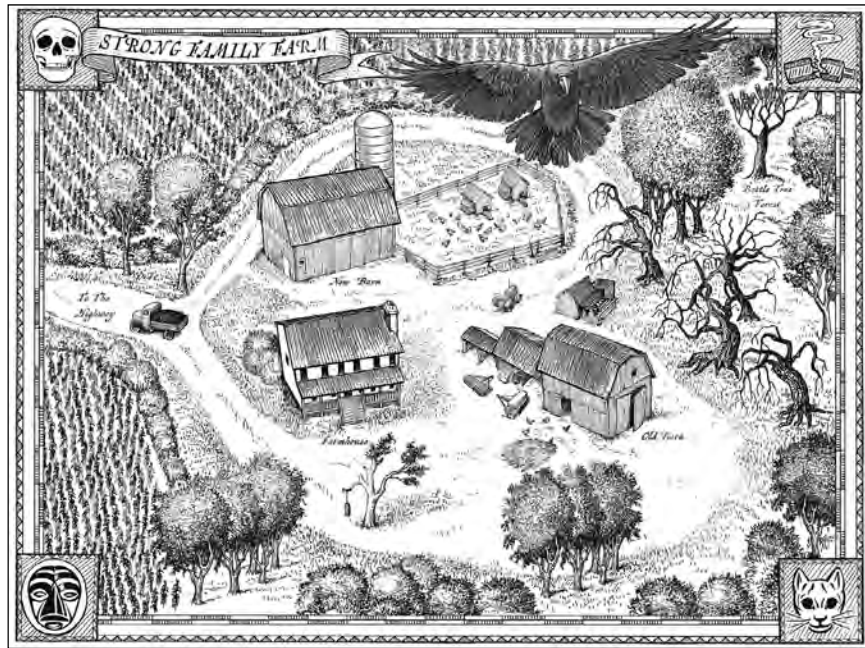
Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.5.9

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Creative Projects and Writing Extensions

1. **Small Group Discussion:** Engage in a discussion about *school curriculum* with a small group to share your perspective and clearly express your ideas. Before the discussion, be sure to form your opinion and collect evidence to support your views. During the discussion, actively listen to your partner's ideas by making eye contact, taking turns, posing questions, and providing comments that build upon ideas. At the end of the conversation, reflect upon the conversation by paraphrasing key ideas shared by each participant.
A. Prompt: There are many cultural stories that go untold in schools. When Nana shares her story about boo hags with Tristan, she says, "Bout time you learned. Shame you don't get this in your school, but that's neither here nor there. I'm called to teach, and you about to learn" (p. 229). Which stories and history are typically taught in schools? Do you think that adjustments should be made to school curriculum? Why or why not? If you could add one new thing to the school curriculum, what would it be? Why? (*Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL. 5.1, 6.1*)
2. **Sharing Recipes:** When Lady Night fixes the Story Book Phone (SBP), she says she uses "jollof rice, of course. Jollof fixes everything" (p. 246). What is the origin of jollof rice? Rice is a dish that is made in many different ways across cultures. Research a rice dish unique to a specific country, make the dish, and share with others. Explain the process to make the dish, key ingredients, foods that typically accompany the rice, and at least four to five facts about the country.



- 3. Art Connection:** Tristan thinks about how happy his grandparents' house makes him by stating, "When you think of it, a smile crosses your face and memories appear like hidden treasures suddenly found" (p. 312). Take a look at the art of the farm, pictured above, from the inner cover of the novel. Use the descriptions in the novel to accurately design a specific location on the farm (e.g., interior of barn, bottle tree). Share your art with others and explain where you found details in the text to support your design.

(Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: SL. 5.5, 6.5)

- 4. Research:** Conduct research by exploring several online and/or print resources to answer one of the questions below. Create a report aligned to credible sources that includes the following: (1) introduction, (2) summary of findings, and (3) bibliography. Select the research option below that is of greatest interest:

OPTION 1: At several points in the novel, characters suggest placing the broken Story Book Phone (SBP) in rice. Can you remember which characters make that suggestion? List them. What is Tristan's response to the advice? Research ways to repair a phone. What are ways to fix a water-damaged phone? Is it possible?

OPTION 2: Quilts are a key part of the novel. Can you recall how are quilts used in the novel? Explain. Research the origin of quilting. How do varying patterns and images in quilts convey meaning? How were quilts used in African American communities in the past? Explain.

- 5. Social Studies:** The theme of trauma for both individuals and communities is evident throughout Tristan's journey. When Tristan asks his Nana about whether a community can experience trauma, she responds, "Of course, baby. Sometimes an evil will rock a community, strip their will and feeling right from them, until they're raw and bleeding and hurting, inside and out. Tulsa, Oklahoma. Ferguson, Missouri. Oh yes, baby, a whole city can hurt all at once" (p. 43). What community trauma is Nana referring to in her response? With the help of an adult, select and watch a recent news story that reports on a community experiencing trauma. Engage in a discussion about the traumatic event. Discuss the impact of the trauma, resolutions to help prevent further trauma, and ways we can collectively help those affected.

(Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL. 5.2, 6.2)

TRISTAN STRONG KEEPS PUNCHING

ABOUT THE BOOK

In the final novel of the trilogy, Tristan continues to inspire readers by revealing hidden untold stories, seeking justice, and attempting to interrupt King Cotton's terrible plans. He knows that to succeed against King Cotton and many other evil haints he needs the help of his Alkean friends and the support of the gods. Along his journey, he finds new skills within himself to address past and present wrongs. As usual, the adventure is exciting to read, the characters are memorable, and each chapter explore themes that are very relevant and important for youth.

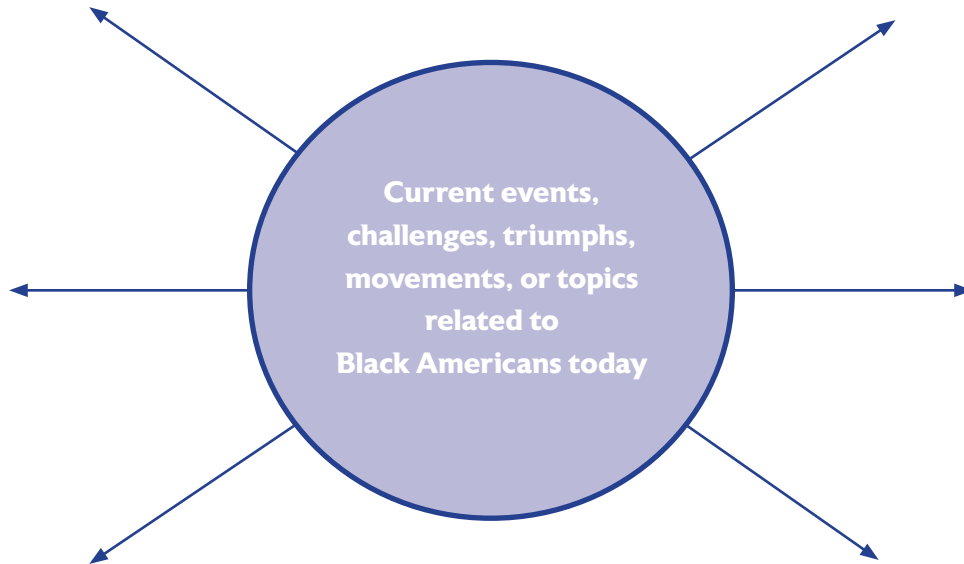


ACTIVATING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Explore Important Connections Before Reading

1. Think about the first two novels in the Tristan Strong trilogy. What were the important themes, lessons, or messages in each novel? Retell the main events in both novels and explain how the events relate to specific themes. Compare and contrast the challenges characters face and solutions across the novels. In your opinion, what challenges from the last two novels must be addressed in the final book to conclude the adventure? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details, R.L. 5.2, 6.2*)
2. How do you think Tristan's journey will end in the final novel? Make a prediction. How did the characters change or develop from the first to second novel? Which characters do you anticipate will be in the final book? Why? Who are your favorite characters thus far? Why? Support your responses with evidence. (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, R.L. 5.9*)

3. In *Tristan Strong Keeps Punching*, the author makes many connections to Black history in cities like New Orleans. Can you think of current events, challenges, triumphs, movements, and topics related to Black Americans today? Complete the word web included below with ideas. As you read, select at least one item from the web and explain how it is related to a historical event that is mentioned in the novel. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details, R.L. 5.1, 6.1*)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Explore the questions individually and in small groups while reading.

1. As you read, note each city that is used as a setting for the events. What makes each city special? Where do families usually travel for family reunions? What types of activities do families engage in during a family reunion? Have you ever been to a family reunion? If yes, how is Tristan's family reunion similar or different from your own experience? Provide details.
2. In Chapter 1, Tristan thinks about his last adventure and says, "Unfortunately, it was also my last trip there. Alke had been destroyed, and the only way to save its inhabitants had been to weave the story of their world into mine. Now Alkeans were scattered across the country, and it was my responsibility to help find them and make sure they were okay" (p. 4). In your own words, explain events that transpired to cause the Alkeans to be scattered? Cite relevant details.
3. Grandad's response when Tristan is feeling disheartened about locating the Alkeans is, "Sometimes . . . you just have to hold on. Clinch, and catch your breath. The world is going to hit you hard, son. Clinch and don't let go until you can keep on fighting. Hear me?" (p. 13). How might this advice be relevant to Tristan's adventure? What other advice has Grandad given that has been helpful to Tristan in previous novels? Discuss textual evidence.
4. What special tools, gifts, and skills does Tristan utilize to save the Alkeans? What events occurred in previous novels for Tristan to obtain his Alkean gifts (e.g., adinkras)? Tristan says, "That's my role as an Anasesem—a seeker, recorder, and teller of stories. I didn't ask for the title—the title chose me when I was in Alke" (p. 7). How is being an Anasesem a powerful role that can save others? Explain.
5. In Chapter 3, Tristan discusses the first two minutes of events in detail. What goes wrong based on his account? What attempts are made to enter the barge and what are the barriers? Lastly, retell Chapter 3 in your own words using a timeline of events.
6. Chapter 4 begins with "I wanted to fight" (p. 43). How does this statement connect to the events in the chapter? What boxing moves and tactics does Tristan use during the fight? Think about the following quote, "I silently thanked Granddad for all of those drills he'd put me through, from forbidding me to use my hands to block attacks to forcing me to bob and weave at the end of every training session when I was drained and exhausted. Right now, they were the only things saving my life" (p. 45). How has Tristan's training with his granddad helped him? How have Tristan's past battles with protagonists like Kulture Vulture or Shamble Man also prepared him for the fight? Provide textual evidence.
7. In Chapter 4, how do the gloves transform during the battle? Describe the appearance of Tristan's gloves. What does the transformation suggest about the Tristan's power? What is problematic about the confrontation and gloves? Explain using textual detail.
8. In Chapter 5, when advising Tristan, Nana says, "A little bit of Alke goes a long way, so just stay on the boat and relax. Focus on dealing with that anger inside you. Ain't no good gonna come until you do" (p. 64). How is Tristan's anger impacting the events in the novel? Can you relate to how Tristan feels? Have you ever felt extremely angry? If yes, why? In your opinion, should Tristan listen to Nana's advice? Why or why not?

9. What is the importance of Tristan’s dream in Chapter 6? Specifically, High John says, “Let’s pick up where we left off. The buried narratives. Finding the stories within the story, the ones that exist in the white space. The blanks on the pages . . . what do they frame? . . . What do you see, boy?” (p. 71–72). What does High John’s statement and question in the dream suggest? How can a narrative be hidden? Why are hidden or buried stories important to explore? Whose stories might be hidden or untold? Support your response with textual evidence.
10. What do the different adinkra charms reveal to Tristan in Chapter 6? The spirit bead? The sky god’s charm? Why do you think the charms are activating on their own? How is this process different from how Tristan used the adinkras in the previous novels? In your opinion, is this a positive or negative change? Why? Provide details.
11. In Chapter 8, what does Tristan learn from Memphis? What issue is Memphis trying to solve? Describe Memphis and their mission. What does the following quote mean? Memphis says, “The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend . . . Basically, people will try their hardest to ignore something that

doesn’t fit in with their reality” (p. 102). How is this statement relevant to the chapter’s events? How does Tristan help Memphis before they part ways?

A. As you read, discuss where this message is reiterated: “The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend” (p.102). How does this message relate to the events of the story? Explain using details.

12. Describe the sequence of events that occurs before arriving at Angola. What is Angola? Based on the details in the story, why does Tristan ignore the warning of the spirit of the ferry boat by continuing to Angola? What does Tristan see that no one else is noticing about Angola? How are Cotton’s plans connected to Angola? What does Cotton create? Describe the prison monster, Old Angola (p. 135). How can it cause destruction? Cite evidence.
13. Many significant and historical terms related to slavery are presented throughout the novel. What was the purpose of a “coffle” (p. 46)? How was a barge used in the past? Traditionally, who are Redliners (or the act of redlining, p. 245)? Who were Breakers (p. 326–27)? Use the graphic organizer below to list the terms, their historical meaning, and their relevance within the text. Continue to add terms as you come across them while reading.

Term	Historical Meaning	Relevance in Text

14. How does the theme of anger connect to the story? How is Tristan's anger impacting everyone around him? When has Tristan's anger taken over or gotten out of control? For example, Ayanna states, "Cotton is doing the same thing, Tristan. The same thing! He's baiting you. Making you so angry you can't think! And then you go off after him without considering your safety or the safety of others" (p. 139-40). Do you agree? Why or why not? Is this similar to or different from his actions in other novels?

A. How does Anansi's advice differ from Ayanna's? Anansi says, "No one said don't fight—it's about staying in control. That's what training does. Ask for help when you need it, but remember, people, spirits, and even gods are counting on you to fix this. So fix it" (p. 144). How does Tristan feel about receiving different advice from everyone? Why is that difficult? Explain.

15. Who are the main protagonists in the novel? How are the protagonists in the novel connected to oppression? Why is Patty's mission flawed? Do you agree with Tristan's opposition to Patty's mission? He states, "People were always trying to teach us the 'proper' things, when the facts we needed to learn weren't included in any history books" (p. 153). Based upon this quote, what is Tristan's criticism of textbooks? Who are Harold and Darla? What is their flawed perspective? Explain.

16. How does High John's story connect to slavery? What does Tristan see in the flashback about High John? What is the significance of the soldiers? How is Tristan's experience with High John's story unique? He says, "It was one thing to be able to see spirits, another to be able to see the stories that made up the world. But it was something else entirely to be an

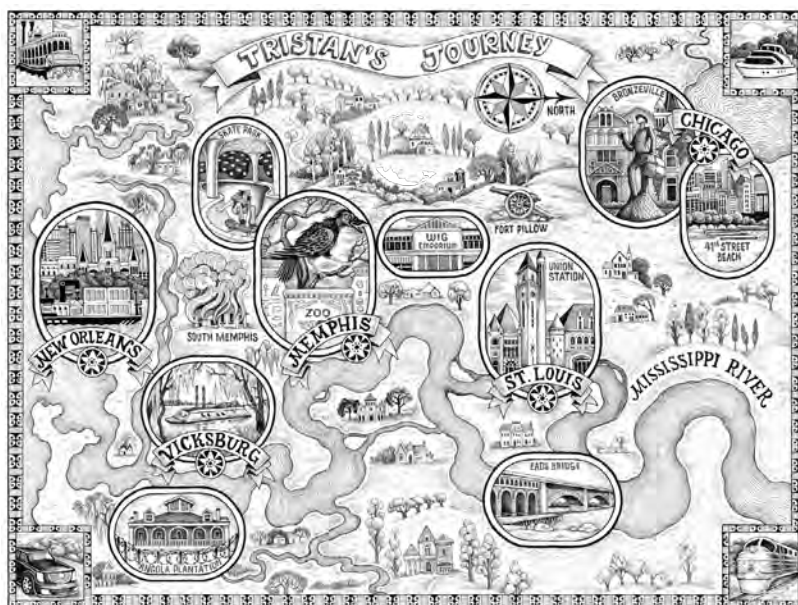
active participant in those stories. I couldn't describe the experience other than to say it felt like my skin was made of lightning and my words were thunder" (p. 166). How might this flashback relate to the events in the novel or finding a solution to the key problems? Provide textual evidence.

17. Tristan is surprised when Mami Wata says, "Anansi . . . has requested that your title of Anansesem be revoked and that his time under your supervision be considered complete" (p. 173). Is Anansi's request surprising and/or valid? Why or why not? What are Anansi's criticisms of Tristan? In your opinion, should the request be granted? Support with evidence.

18. How are Tristan and Thandiwe reunited? What has Thandiwe accomplished in New Orleans? Who is Granny Z? What does Granny Z notice about Tristan when she states, "You're ignoring the people right in front of you just because you got something personal brewing between you and that haint. Boy, don't you see you're playing right into his hands?" (p. 241). How is her comment like previous advice and observations of Tristan? Who does she suggest Tristan is ignoring? Why? What does the conversation with Granny Z reveal about the source of Tristan's anger? Cite textual evidence.

19. Based upon Chapter 22, describe Patty Roller's Wig Emporium. What does it mean when Tristan states, "But inside Patty Roller's Wig Emporium, the products weren't weird or unnecessary. They were just . . . wrong" (p. 258). Why did the author choose a "wig" store for Patty's location? What might be the underlying meaning or significance? What types of disturbing posters are in the emporium and what do they mean? For example, "*Gentrifying a community for eventual displacement? Try our special, the Currency Combover*" (p. 259).

- 20.** What has been causing Tristan’s powers to intensify? He says, “I saw that my fragment, unlike the others I’d seen, wasn’t just one thread. Instead, different colors had been braided together. The silver of Isihlangu, the gold from the Golden Crescent, sapphire blue from Nyanza, and more. Each region of Alke, woven together. . . . Black is a Rainbow” (p. 306)? What does “*Black is a Rainbow*” mean? What makes the thread powerful? When you read the final chapter, explain how this idea connects to the final events that transpire. Provide evidence.
- 21.** What is Tristan’s plan during the battle on the beach? Do you think it is an effective plan? Why or why not? He says, “But hear me out. No, listen! Someone once told me that it wasn’t my job to get sucked into every skirmish in the war against evil, but to fight the battle that will turn the tide. Old Angola is that battle” (p. 364). Whose advice is Tristan heeding in the quote? Explain the significance.
- 22.** Describe the relationship between Anansi and Junior. How was Anansi impacted when Junior went missing? Be specific about Anansi’s attitude and actions. Why might Junior have mixed emotions seeing his father? How does the following quote highlight Junior’s many emotions: “Junior stared at his father with a fierce gaze that alternated between pride and anger” (p. 365)? Explain with evidence.
- 23.** In Chapter 31, describe the inside of Old Angola. What is the significance of the whispers Tristan hears? How are the two whispers different? How does Tristan save Gum Baby? What is the meaning of Gum Baby’s song? Tristan sings, “*The ballad of the gummy, ballad of the gummy. / Strongest and the fiercest, and her nose is never runny. / Sap attack, back it back, the hero of the hour. / Riding on her bumbly steed, who needs to take a shower*” (p. 380). How does Gum Baby respond to the song? Provide textual details.
- 24.** In Chapter 32, what is everyone’s role in the final battle? How does each character’s contribution reflect their skills and talents? What does it mean when Tristan states, “One last round in a fight to save me, save my friends, and save the world. I punched” (p. 394). How does this action relate to the overall theme of the story? Support your claims with evidence.



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POST-READING

Exploring the Trilogy

1. How do Tristan’s skills evolve from the first to the final novel? What emotions does Tristan grapple with throughout all the novels? How does Tristan’s approach to battles change in the final novel? Describe events that influenced his development.
2. How does each character adapt and change in the final novel when they are no longer in Alke? Specifically, how does being in the human world influence each character? Which setting did you like best throughout the novels? Why?
3. In your opinion, what are the most important details revealed in the final novel? Why? Based on the epilogue in *Tristan Strong Keeps Punching*, what needs to happen to fully restore Alke? Cite textual evidence. What questions do you still have after finishing the trilogy? Explain.
4. Describe one important theme or message from each novel and how the lesson can help readers in their own lives. Why do you think the author focused on the specific themes? Can you think of another novel with a similar theme? If yes, explain how the novels are similar and different.

Standards Aligned to Discussion Questions

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.5.9

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Creative Projects and Writing Extensions

1. **Graphic Art and Discussion Connection:** Tristan visits several cities in the novel, such as New Orleans, Memphis, and Chicago. Select one of the options below to research something new about a city featured in the text. Create a report aligned to credible sources that includes the following, (1) introduction, (2) summary of findings, (3) graphic representation, and (4) bibliography.

(Writing: Research to Build and Present Ideas: W.5.8, 6.8)

OPTION A: Create a detailed map of the locations that Tristan visits in one of the cities from the novel (e.g., New Orleans, Memphis, and Chicago). Then describe the relevance of at least three historical sites related to Black history from the text. For example, “Congo Square. That was the name of the clearing we entered. A sign on a pole near the path explained that the space had once served as a meeting spot for enslaved Black folks. This was where they had exchanged news. Exchanged songs. Exchanged solace, comfort, and hope” (p. 18–19).

OPTION B: When Tristan arrives in Chicago, several stops are announced as he rides the disguised L train. Study the local public transit system for a city you have visited or would like to visit. Create a map of the selected transit system and provide directions to three historical sites related to Black history you could reach by taking the transit.

- 2. Folklore Research:** In the novel, we learn that there are many versions of High John’s story. High John says, “Tristan, you have no idea. I found old John tales and young John tales. John the trickster and John the tricked. Free John and Slave John. So many stories. I traveled across this country, me and Old Familiar, lookin’ for more. You don’t understand, boy—every time I read one of my stories, I could feel the power in them. So I took them. Reclaimed them” (p. 200). Conduct research using several online and/or print resources that highlight multiple story accounts of “High John.” Discuss why it is important to explore more than one version of a folktale with a partner. Then share your research outcomes by making eye contact, highlighting relevant details, and asking questions of others in the group. (*Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: SL. 5.5, 6.5*)
- 3. Music Connection:** Spirit John says, “The power to send messages, messages that lead to freedom. *Swing low, sweet chariot, coming forth to carry you home.* That’s what is important. That is what you should remember. Because I did. I wasn’t born a slave, and I didn’t die a slave—the power in the stories made sure of it” (p. 284). Using online research tools, select at least one song that enslaved people used to secretly send messages. Review the song line by line, and be prepared to discuss the hidden meaning with a partner. During the discussion, actively listen to your partner’s ideas by making eye contact, take turns sharing, pose questions, and provide comments that build on your partner’s ideas. At the end of the discussion, reflect upon the conversation by paraphrasing key ideas and sharing your favorite new fact about the songs. (*Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: SL. 5.5, 6.5*)
- 4. Boxing Connection:** Select your favorite boxing scene from any of the Tristan Strong novels. Then describe the boxing moves, explain when the moves are most effective in a match, and suggest countermoves that might be important against the attack. For example, “In boxing, we call multiple punches thrown in quick succession a *combination*, or *combo* for short. Boxers use them to string together attacks, target weaknesses, and overwhelm opponents. Combos are cool to watch, and when you’re in the ring and you pull one off successfully, it’s pretty sweet” (p. 87). Record yourself individually (without a partner) shadow boxing Tristan’s moves from the novel and share the video with a small group. Explain the boxing movements and how they may have helped Tristan win the battle in the story. (*Writing: Production and Distribution: W.5.6, W.6.6*)
- 5. Service Project:** In the novel, Tristan thinks deeply about homelessness as he meets children from the city of New Orleans. Tristan states, “I’d never given much thought to kids being homeless. Dad worked with a group shelter back in Chicago, but here, seeing it firsthand and realizing that some of the kids were no older than my cousin Terrence, made me wonder how something like that could happen” (p. 232). Explore the rates of homelessness and community support organizations in the state, town, or city that you reside using an online search tool. How can you help families and children who are homeless? Design a one-page service project proposal that overviews ways to connect with local organizations to help families in need through actions such as fundraising or providing food or clothing donations. (*Writing: Research to Build and Present Ideas: W.5.8, 6.8*)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kwame Mbalia (kwamembalia.com) is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*, for which he received a Coretta Scott King Author Honor award. The book was also named to best-of-the-year lists compiled by *Publishers Weekly*, the Chicago Public Library, and the *New York Times*. The second book in the trilogy is *Tristan Strong Destroys the World* and *Tristan Strong Keeps Punching* is the third. Kwame lives with his wife and children near Raleigh, North Carolina, where he is currently working on several projects, including a new middle grade series. Follow him on Twitter @KSekouM.



Photo Credit: Bryan Jones

Q&A WITH KWAME MBALIA ABOUT *TRISTAN STRONG PUNCHES A HOLE IN THE SKY*

- Q:** At the beginning of the novel, you write, “For the stories untold and the children who will tell them.” Can you explain why that statement is meaningful to you personally and within the novel?
- A:** This statement refers to the missing stories of the world, the ones forgotten or skipped over or just plain ignored. You’d be surprised how many of those exist in the corners of society. But children will find them no matter how deeply they’re hidden, because children are good at looking for things adults have conveniently forgotten.
- Q:** While you were growing up, who told you fables and folktales? Which story was your favorite? Why?
- A:** We used to get tucked in and our parents would put on a cassette tape of Anansi tales, and the exploits of the trickster would carry us off to sleep. I’ve always been partial to the story of how Anansi won the sky god’s stories, as it is Anansi at his finest.
- Q:** How did you select which fable and folktale characters to tie into your novel? Was it a difficult decision?
- A:** Ha! I tried to stuff them all in there. Have you seen the size of that book? Sweet peaches, that thing is huge.
- Q:** Who was your inspiration for Tristan’s character? How do you see him evolving in future novels?
- A:** Believe it or not, a lot of Tristan’s personality was based on my oldest daughter. She’s entering middle school in the fall, and at the time of me writing the book, she’d lost her grandfather. Coping with loss and grief while undergoing personal change is a monumental task, and I’m proud of both her and Tristan. And in the future, we’ll see how both will handle the roles they’ve taken on at this new stage of life. But if my daughter suddenly acquires a tiny, sticky loudmouth as a companion, I’m calling for help.

Q: Tristan experiences great loss through his best friend, Eddie. Why do you think it is important for readers to explore the theme of loss and healing through Tristan's life events?

A: Because it's a part of life. There are ups and downs, and we have to understand that we can grieve and mourn the loss of someone, while at the same time be happy and thankful for the time we spent with them. This is all a part of being human and it's okay.

Q: What do you want readers to learn as they explore your novel? How can they apply this lesson in their own lives?

A: I want to pass on the stories that were passed to me. I want to develop a new group of Anansem to carry the stories of the trickster and his friends, of John Henry, of High John the Conqueror, of Brer Rabbit . . . all of them. Create new ones. Share them. Pass on a story to someone and let it come back to you a little different so that we all become richer for it.

Q: What did you enjoy most about writing this novel? Why?

A: I enjoyed the research. I read so many wonderful folktales and fables from around country, and who knows . . . maybe a few new ones will pop up in the sequel. . . .



This guide was written by **Dawn Jacobs Martin, PhD**, an assistant clinical professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. She has spent her career supporting students with disabilities through various roles as a practitioner, researcher, special education director, and teacher educator.

She continues to improve the academic outcomes for students with disabilities through teacher development, instructional design, and research in the areas of literacy intervention, social support, and parent involvement. Feel free to contact her with questions at jacobsdml@gmail.com.

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