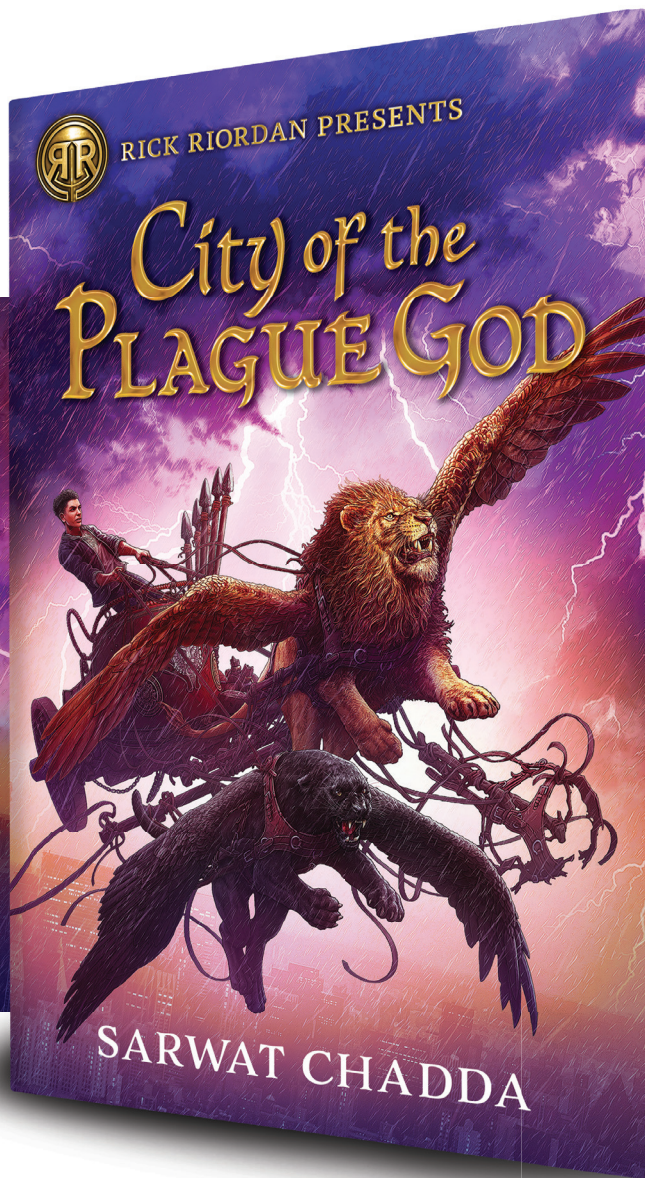




RICK RIORDAN PRESENTS



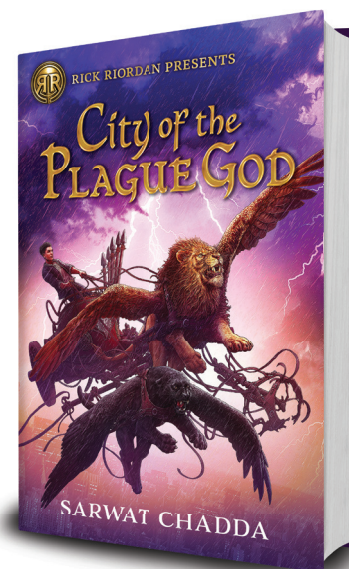
EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION

ABOUT THE BOOK

Thirteen-year-old Sik wants a simple life going to school and helping at his parents' deli in the evenings. But all that is blown to smithereens when Nergal comes looking for him, thinking that Sik holds the secret to eternal life. Turns out Sik is immortal but doesn't know it, and that's about to get him and the entire city into deep, deep trouble.

Sik's not in this alone. He's got Belet, the adopted daughter of Ishtar, the goddess of love and war, on his side, and a former hero named Gilgamesh, who has taken up gardening in Central Park. Now all they have to do is retrieve the flower of immortality to save Manhattan from being wiped out by disease. To succeed, they'll have to conquer sly demons, treacherous gods, and their own darkest nightmares.



Sikander Aziz is back with a different adventure—one that raises questions about destiny and fate and our purpose in the world, takes you on a ride to the sights and sounds of London with gods and goddesses of Mesopotamia, and invokes fundamental questions about love, family, and sacrifice. An action-packed thriller from one of the best storytellers.

This discussion guide provides suggestions aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Reading: Literature, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. To support instruction or obtain additional information, visit the Common Core State Standards website: www.corestandards.org.

BEFORE READING

To build some context and aid the understanding of the story, consider discussing the following topics with the students and have them research briefly:

- A. If students in the class have read *City of the Plague God*, ask them to share a summary.
- B. Provide a brief refresher of the Mesopotamian civilization and its fundamental tenets, including religion, food, language, and culture. Review the glossary at the end of *Fury of the Dragon Goddess* and related words in this context.

WHILE READING

Instructional note:

For each guiding question, please encourage students to support their claims with textual evidence for each guiding question. The opportunity to consistently answer text-dependent questions and engage with the novel is critical to success with Common Core State Standards.

Discussion Questions:

Fury of the Dragon Goddess provides a rich story that offers many opportunities to weave in meaningful and exciting topics for discussion. The quotes below can be categorized into four categories to provide cues for discussion and also provide a more nuanced understanding of many concepts behind the story:

- (i) Muslim kids as heroes
- (ii) Inspiring Muslim leaders/ contributions
- (iii) Celebrating Islam
- (iv) Folktales from Islamic traditions

USE THE FOLLOWING QUOTES IN THE BOOK AS DISCUSSION POINTS TO DISCUSS THESE IDEAS:

- *“This entire museum was built on loot. These historians are nothing but thieves.”* (p. 104)
Discussion prompt: Where have established museums obtained most of their collections from? Are most prominent museums located in the West? Why do you think that’s the case?
- *“You know what history is? Just a long series of dates and battles. Nothing more. You pretend there’s some great noble purpose to your existence, but there isn’t. It’s all just chaos, Sikander.”* (p. 105)
Discussion prompt: Why is history relevant and something we should study and delve into? Do you find history interesting? Why or why not?
- *... but one raider dashed out of the Japanese gallery dressed in full samurai gear, yelling “Banzai!” in an outrageous display of cultural appropriation.* (p. 108)
Discussion Prompt: What does cultural appropriation mean? Share examples in pop culture where you may have observed it. What can we do to prevent it?
- *“Seriously, why can’t we all just get along?”* (p. 117)
Discussion Prompt: This one is about people getting along—what causes differences among people, and what is the impact of those differences? What can we do as a community and a



collective to further world peace?

- *“Property is theft. . . . The world was meant to be shared, not hoarded.”* (p. 125)

Discussion Prompt: Do you agree or disagree? What would be the ramifications if this was true? Are there any benefits to the capitalist form you see?

- *“Water was delivered every other day and rice on Wednesdays and Fridays. Food packages from the NGOs.”*(p. 133)

Discussion Prompt: What image does this invoke? Connect this to refugee movements worldwide in the last several decades and their impact on communities and humans.

- *“It’s the greatest artifact in all creation. It’s the tablet of destinies.”*(p. 145)

Discussion Prompt: Many cultures and mythologies have magical artifacts and instruments that do things we could never imagine can be done. List some of these items and then research your list.

- *“When a butterfly flaps its wings, that minute movement can lead to a tornado in the Midwest or hurricanes across the Pacific.”*(p. 147–8)

Discussion Prompt: Let’s use this sentence to explore cause and effect. Can you think of some event in your life that occurred because of a prior small event and how it has impacted you?

- *“Two versions with different pasts, memories, talents.”*(p. 149)

Discussion Prompt: As you’ve grown up, do you think there are different versions of you? Like you may be different with your friends versus with your family?

VOCABULARY GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Use the graphic organizer below to figure out new words in the novels. Record the following information in the organizer: **(a)** the word, **(b)** a context-clue strategy that supports understanding, **(c)** a personal definition, and **(d)** an image to use as a helpful reminder. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.4.4; RL.5.4; RL.6.4)

Important Word	My Definition
Context Clues in Text AFTER READING	Graphic or Image Reminder



CHARACTER ANALYSIS:

For each of the characters below, identify something that you admire about them and something that you wished they did differently.



NAME OF CHARACTER	A character trait you admired and examples of this trait in the story	A character trait that you found challenging and examples of this trait in the story
Ishtar		
Belet		
Sikander		
Mo		
Daoud		
Gilgamesh		
Nergal		

WRITING PROMPTS:

- a. Identify examples of words used to denote action, thrill, and adventure in the story. Write your action-thriller scene while using similar words.
- b. What did you learn about the impact of war on Iraq and the Middle Eastern community?
- c. Sik, Mo, Daoud, and Belet are all of Middle Eastern heritage. How are they similar or different? Identify examples of family bonding that you noticed in the book and connect them with one of your experiences similar to those in the book.
- d. If there was one thing you could change in your life, what would it be? What other things will that impact in your life?

CLASSROOM PROJECTS:

This story and book provides numerous opportunities for hands-on learning and book club picks. Below are some ideas:

- a. Divide the class into different groups and have each group present on one aspect of life across different ancient civilizations (Mesopotamia, Indus Valley, Egypt, etc.) such as food, knowledge, or religion.
- b. Do a hummus-making competition and tasting in class.
- c. Ask children to draw any one of the imaginary characters from the book.
- d. Explore cuneiform and other Arabic scripts by having children do code-breaking exercises or writing their names. See this website: <https://www.penn.museum/cgi/cuneiform.php>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Gauri Manglik and Sadaf Siddique, *Muslims in Story: Expanding Multicultural Understanding through Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ALA Editions, 2019.
- Suggested book pairings:
 - Jeanette Winter, *The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq*, Clarion Books (picture book, 2005)
 - Doug Kountz and Amy Shrodes, illustrated by Sue Cornelison, *Lost and Found Cat: The True Story of Kunkush's Incredible Journey*, Crown Books for Young Readers (picture book, 2017)
 - James Rumford, *Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad*, Roaring Book Press (picture book, 2008)
 - Mark Alan Stamaty, *Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq*, Knopf Books for Young Readers (graphic novel, 2004)
 - N. H. Senzai, *Escape from Aleppo*, Simon & Schuster (middle grade, 2018)
 - Roshani Chokshi, the Aru Shah series, Rick Riordan Presents, Disney-Hyperion (middle grade)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarwat Chadda, a first-generation Muslim immigrant, has spent a lifetime integrating the best of his family's heritage with the country of his birth. There have been tensions as well as celebrations, but he wouldn't wish it any other way. As a lifelong gamer, he decided to embrace his passion for over-the-top adventure stories by swapping a career in engineering for a new one as a writer. That resulted in his first novel, *Devil's Kiss*, back in 2009. Since then he has been published in a dozen languages, writing comic books, TV shows, and novels such as the award-winning Indian-mythology-inspired Ash Mistry series and the epic high-fantasy Shadow Magic trilogy (as Joshua Khan). While he's traveled far and wide, including Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, he's most at home in London, where he lives with his wife, two more-or-less grown-up daughters, and an aloof cat. Feel free to drop him a line @sarwatchadda.



Photo Credit: Joel Meadows

Q&A WITH SARWAT CHADDA

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood? What did you enjoy doing most when you were in middle school?

A: Okay, I am pretty old, and my childhood was way back in the 1970s and 1980s. I guess my big passion was reading, especially myths and fantasy adventures. Some things basically haven't changed at all! But in about 1980, I was introduced to Dungeons and Dragons, and that pretty much changed my life. I've been keen on role-playing games ever since and think it's the best training to becoming a writer anyone can have.

Q: How and when did you decide to become an author?

A: I graduated with a degree in engineering and had been working in the construction industry for about fifteen years when I realized I was keen to try something new. At first, my wife and I thought about something related to engineering, perhaps specializing in low-energy design, but then the subject strayed on to doing what would you love to do. The answer was simple. Tell stories. I had dabbled in writing role-playing adventures, but not a proper novel. So I thought I'd give it a go. I was in my midthirties by then. I wrote my first story, then wrote some more, and some more and so on. Each time getting a little better than previously. Then, in 2007, I entered a writing competition, and that led me to an agent, which led me to my first book deal, which has led me here!

Q: Can you describe your writing process? How do you go from an idea to a book?

A: I get my ideas for a book a hundred different ways. Sometimes it's an image, or a newspaper title, or something someone's said or done. Any book is made up of a hundred different influences. Some are deep and personal, what I feel about the world and the people around me, and sometimes it's an exploration of a theme or bond between characters. For me it's rarely a single spark that sets the whole thing off. I have many, many abortive drafts in my desk! But you never know. Sometimes a group of ideas that don't work individually might just work combined. Keep yourself free and open, then the ideas come.

Q: What kind of research did you do for *City of the Plague God*?

A: *City of the Plague God* is my decision to write a Muslim character. Much of the research was just exploring how I felt about my religion, and how I felt it was (often) portrayed in the media. The next aspect was Sik, our hero. Again I wanted him to be as mundane and as relatable as possible. But now I had him. I also knew I didn't want to do a typical *Arabian Nights* story with genies and flying carpets and they were a cliché when it came to Islamic fantasy. I wanted to explore another Middle Eastern mythology and fortunately live near the British Museum, which has a vast Mesopotamian exhibit. I love archaeology, and much of what we know about ancient Mesopotamia comes from characters like Layard, who did much of the excavations of Babylon, Nineveh, and the Library of Ashurbanipal. His discoveries form the main exhibit.

Q: Can you describe your partnership with Rick Riordan in the development of this book? How did he and you work together?

A: Rick and I have overlapped a few times over the years. He was a great supporter of my Ash Mistry books (I think he was getting tired of being asked when he would do Indian mythology), and we both have the same editor.

So when Rick Riordan Presents was kicking off, I was contacted to see if I wanted to be a part, which I did but at the time didn't have a story! Aargh! I'm glad I didn't lose my slot because it took about a year to develop the idea of *City of the Plague God*. The process is very straightforward. I devised a detailed outline for the first few chapters to see if the tone fitted Rick Riordan's Presents, and off it went to Rick. Got the thumbs-up and then went and wrote the whole manuscript, did edits, then returned to Rick for his comments. There was a little to-and-fro, then one more draft and there we have it! We had a great chat some months ago as part of his *Tower of Nero* tour.

Q: Given there is so much mythology woven into the book, did you struggle between accurate representation of such mythology and a creative license to create the fantasy? How did you strike the balance?



A: The mythology is the springboard, but that does present an interesting question. I love mythology generally. I grew up reading Greek, Norse, and British myths, and then the stories of India, which formed the basis of my Ash Mistry trilogy. Joseph Campbell takes about the monomyth, and the fact most myths repeat the same pattern. There is something intrinsically fundamental about mythology, and despite being thousands of years old, it remains incredibly current. There are technical details you want to get right, but I am not working on an academic thesis. I am trying to tell a fun, exciting story that makes the reader feel connected *emotionally*, rather than intellectually.

Q: What were some of the considerations you had in mind when you were developing Sikander's, Mo's, and Daoud's characters?

A: Sik, Mo, and Daoud are all about family. There is deep love, of course, but there is jealousy, rivalry, and regret. When you strip the story down to its fundamentals, that's what it's about. It's about Sik trying to protect the ones he loves. But each represented a different viewpoint of both the immigrant and Muslim experience. But after a point, they started telling the story themselves!

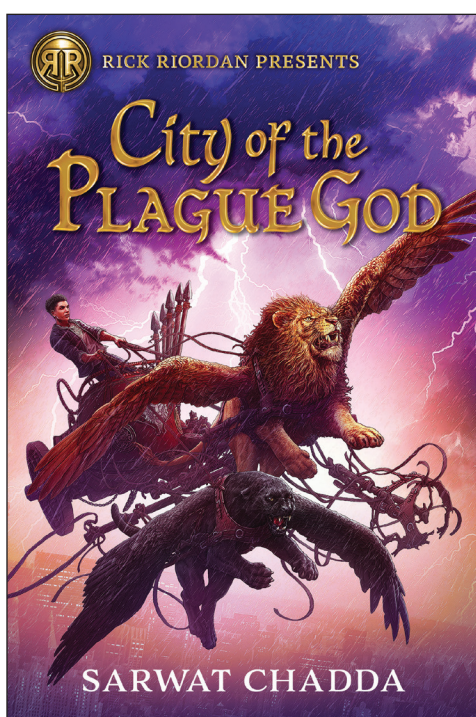
Q: How do you hope young readers all over the world will respond to this story about the plague hitting the world and this young Iraqi boy saving them from it?

A: What a time to write about a plague! I hope young readers will see we are all playing our part in defeating the plague god. We will beat Covid-19 with all the small victories. We look out for each other, we help those that need us, and we win because we work as a community. That's what Sik is all about.



This guide was prepared by Gauri Manglik, who is the coauthor of *Muslims in Story: Expanding Multicultural Understanding through Children's and Young Adult Literature* and a lawyer by training. As a first-generation immigrant mother raising her two boys in California, she felt strongly about advocating for increased diversity in children's literature in schools and libraries. This led her to start KitaabWorld, a literary organization that spreads awareness about South Asian children's literature. She has written numerous articles and book reviews and presented in various forums such as NCSS and NCTE on using diverse books to build empathy. She routinely consults on sensitivity readings and is working on a few writing projects of her own.

Many more guides can be found on the Disney • Hyperion website at www.DisneyBooks.com.



CITY OF THE PLAGUE GOD

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