

DISCUSSION GUIDE



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Feather by M. G. Leonard

Discussion Guide

ABOUT THE BOOK

The fourth book in the Twitchers series, *Feathers*, is every bit as engrossing and exciting as its predecessors. As ever, Twitch and the rest of the Twitchers are on the lookout for strange goings-on around Aves Wood, and this time it's Ava who first spots trouble when the nearby natural history museum is robbed. With the police on the wrong trail, hundreds of rare birds missing, time running out, a suspicious raven and a mysterious girl, she'll need the help of every member of the Twitchers to solve the mystery, and maybe just save a life in the process. Exhilarating action is paired with a core of kindness and friendship in this instantly enjoyable, heartfelt classic from Leonard.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M. G. Leonard is an award-winning, bestselling writer of children's books, as well as a member of Author-s4Oceans. Her books are sold in 40 countries, and there is currently a TV series in development based on her Beetle Boy series. Her first picture book, *The Tale of a Toothbrush*, is out now. She is also co-author of the critically acclaimed Adventures on Trains series. Before becoming a writer, M. G. Leonard worked as a digital media producer for the National Theatre, the Royal Opera House and Shakespeare's Globe. She lives in Sussex by the sea with her husband, two sons and pet beetles.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Before discussing, check the group's knowledge of the other books in the series, or any other M. G. Leonard titles. You might want to agree as a group on whether to reveal spoilers about previous books, if some haven't read them. It's also worth noting that there are themes of forced labour and family oppression in the book, and care should be taken to ensure all group members feel safe and comfortable.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

What did anyone like about *Feather*? Why? How was it similar to other books in the series? What was different about it? How did it compare to the others?

1. Ava

"He gave her a look of admiration and shook his head. 'You're a freakin' ninja!'" – p. 172

This story starts from Ava's perspective, unlike the other books. What effect does this have on the reader's impression of the children? Does it change the novel compared to the others in the series? What do we learn about Ava that we didn't know before?

2. Dead zoos

"...they've got cases of stuffed animals instead of cages of living ones." – p. 247

Why are museums sometimes called "dead zoos"? Is that a fair name? What is important about museums of natural history? How can we learn from the past, or from what's no longer there?



EXTENSION: Assign research tasks to individuals of smaller groups to look at specific historical collections, like the Wallace Collection (which in real life is kept by the Natural History Museum). Present back to the rest of the group

3. Rae

"Ava saw the purple shadow of a faded bruise around her right eye and wondered how she'd got it." – p. 35

How is Rae introduced to the reader? Discuss the first impression the reader has of her – how does the author make us feel about Rae? How do the Twitchers feel about her, as the novel progresses? Is the reader's experience the same? Or different? Talk about the techniques the author uses to create this effect.

4. Caliban

"Yes, but I've never had a relationship with a bird like the bond you have with Caliban. To be honest, I'm a bit jealous." – p. 205

What did anyone think of Caliban? Has anyone ever seen a raven? Did members believe that birds can be that intelligent? As a group, look up some footage of ravens, e.g., problem solving. What would it be like to have a raven bonded to you? Who likes the idea? Why? Why not? As a group, watch the clips the author mentions in the author note, about how intelligent ravens can be.

EXTENSION: Creative writing – imagine if Caliban could articulate thoughts and ideas. Rewrite an episode from the book from Caliban's perspective. How might he feel? How would his actions and motivations differ from, say, Rae's?

5. Pam

"She glared at each one of them in turn. 'You wouldn't even know about her if it wasn't for me...'" – p. 193

What does anyone think of Pam? Is she a real Twitcher? Why? Why not? Does she put on a false persona in front of the others? She seems to only care about being a YouTuber – does she really feel this way? Discuss how everyone feels when they don't tell Pam about their trip.

6. The Dead Zoo Gang

"She'd been frightened of the Dead Zoo Gang in the railway arch, but this was Aves Wood." – p. 260

How do the Dead Zoo Gang compare to the villains in the other books in the series? Did anyone associate the idea of a violent criminal gang with something like a museum heist? How do the Twitchers deal with the genuine danger they find themselves in? Do they act responsibly?

7. Feathers

"Perhaps someone wanted pretty feathers," Jack suggested." – p. 45

How many uses for feathers are discussed in the book? Think about anywhere you might see feathers, day to day. As a group try to remember all the reasons they come up with to explain why someone might rob the museum. What purposes do feathers serve for birds? You might like to watch some online clips of birds mentioned in the book, like birds of paradise.

EXTENSION: Fine feathered friends: In groups, research and present your choice for the best-feathered bird. Think about all the ways they use their feathers, and what makes them the best, then try to persuade the group that your bird is best. Have a competition, and select your favourites.



8. Detectives extraordinaire

“‘I can’t stand it when kids think they’re detectives.’ His words felt like a slap.” – p. 115

Not for the first time, the Twitchers were underestimated by adults in the novel – particularly the police and the Dead Zoo Gang. Is being underestimated a strength? What makes the Twitchers so successful as a group of detectives? Could children really be detectives? In what other ways might children be underestimated by adults?

