



Book Study: *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* – Syllabus

Course Description: *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* by Andrew Peterson is a modern fantasy novel that is rich with meaningful themes—courage, family, sacrifice, truth, purpose, and more. We could spend a whole school year digging into each theme and still not cover them all. For purposes of this class, we have chosen to focus on the theme of identity, that of discovering who one truly is. Through the journeys of Janner, Tink, and Leeli Igiby, students will examine how characters change and grow in response to hardship, responsibility, and discovery.

Students will read the complete text of *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* and complete weekly written responses. Optional weekly vocabulary lists will be supplied, which can be further expanded at home as daily spelling practice. **Students must have a copy of *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* to read.** *Prerequisite: Essay Basics or equivalent five-paragraph essay experience highly recommended.*

Course Outline:

Week One: *First Impressions*

- Meeting Andrew Peterson
- Read Prologues-Chapter 4
- First Impressions: The Igiby Children

Week Two: *Identity & Responsibility*

- Read Chapters 5-12
- How Responsibility Changes
- Fear and Responsibility

Week Three: *Family Identity*

- Read Chapters 13-19
- Family Dynamics
- How Family Shapes Identity

Week Four: *Identity & Fear*

- Read Chapters 20-27
- Fear
- Courage

Week Five: *Unlikely Friends*

- Read Chapters 28-34
- Loyalty

Week Six: *Secret Identities*

- Read Chapters 35-39
- How Secrets Shape Us

Week Seven: *Courage & Sacrifice*

- Read Chapters 40-45
- Drawing Courage from Others
- Being Courageous *For* Others
- Sacrifice

Week Eight: *The Truth*

- Read Chapters 46-51
- The Truth
- The Changes in the Igiby Children
- Final Responses

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Growing Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



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Lesson Two: Identity and Responsibility

Last week, we were introduced to the world of Aerwiar and the Igiby children. We began to notice how characters are presented when we first meet them, and *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* certainly gave us a good picture of the Igiby family and the quiet life they are leading.

But things are about to change quickly. Janner is already irritated that he is constantly asked to think about others, watch over his younger siblings, and be responsible, even when he would rather be free to do what he wants. This is where identity and responsibility begin to overlap. Janner may want freedom and the chance to make his own choices, but he is about to realize that part of his identity is found in being the oldest Igiby child.

Assignment 2A: Read Chapters 4-12 of *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*.

RESPONSIBILITY –

Responsibility is not always exciting. In fact, it often feels like the opposite of excitement. It can feel limiting, frustrating, unfair, or heavy. It can mean giving up something we want in order to do something that needs to be done. It can mean choosing someone else's comfort and wellbeing over our own wishes.

At first, responsibility may seem like it's taking freedom away from Janner. All he wants is to play a zibzy game and enjoy the same kind of freedoms other children seem to have. But instead, in Chapter 4, Podo reminds him that their lives have been shaped by sacrifice, danger, and loss, even if Janner doesn't fully understand that yet.

Finally, Podo cleared his throat. "Well, you must trust me. I see your father in you. He was a great man. He fought for us. *Died* fighting for us. Your wee sister and brother are treasures, same as you, and we wouldn't have our treasures lost." The old man leaned forward and lowered his voice. "Blood was shed that you three might breathe the good air of life, and if that means you have to miss out on a zibzy game, then so be it. Part of being a man is putting others' needs before your own."

Assignment 2B: Putting someone else first is not easy to do—something Janner is quickly learning. It is easy to become bitter and angry about the sacrifices you need to make.

Write about a time you had to put someone else’s needs before your own. Describe the situation and consider how you felt in that moment. **(Minimum 250 words)**

THE SHIFT –

One of the most difficult parts of responsibility is that it asks us to think beyond ourselves. Janner has to think about Tink and Leeli, not just about what he wants. This is not easy for him. He is still a child, and he has his own desires, dreams, and frustrations. But as the story continues, his feelings begin to change.

At first, responsibility feels like a burden. But then, in Chapter 5, we see a moment when it begins to feel like an honor.

Janner suddenly felt pleased to be entrusted with the care of both of his younger siblings. He laughed at how quickly his feelings had changed. Only minutes ago he felt chained down by responsibility—now he was proud of it. Going to town alone with Tink and Leeli was a far song from sailing alone on the open sea like his father had done, but it would have to do.

Janner wondered what his friend, old Oskar N. Reteep at the bookstore, would say when he saw the Igbys with no parents in sight. Would Oskar give him more work in the store or let him take home more books? Maybe he’d finally allow Janner to read the books reserved only for older folks, the thick ones on the top shelves with the ancient binding. He smiled to himself. *Responsibility might not be so bad after all.*

Assignment 2C: Janner has suddenly realized that being responsible might not be as bad as he first thought. Maybe there are some perks that come with being responsible.

Write about a time you enjoyed being responsible. Describe the situation and consider why you enjoyed the responsibility. **(Minimum 250 words)**

FEAR –

Though Janner discovered some of the ways responsibility can be enjoyable, he quickly learns another very important lesson: responsibility does not remove fear.

In fact, responsibility can often make fear stronger.

When we are only responsible for ourselves, we may not think too far ahead. But when we become responsible for others, we begin to imagine all the “what ifs” and what could happen to those we’re responsible for. We begin to notice danger more clearly. We begin to understand that choices may affect more than just our own lives.

This is exactly what happens to Janner when he loses track of Leeli, and she ends up in a very dangerous situation. Though they are able to escape, Chapter 9 shows us the moment that Janner realizes just how heavy responsibility truly is.

When they were back in the open street, two of the three children and Nugget felt a little better. Leeli was mostly happy that Nugget was fine, Tink was mostly glad that Leeli was fine, and Janner was mostly terrified because he was the oldest and had begun to think of the future.

Assignment 2D: When we think of responsibility in terms of the future, it can certainly seem daunting. It’s easy to become fearful and overwhelmed.

Write about a time when responsibility seemed terrifying. Describe the situation and consider why you were scared. **(Minimum 250 words)**

Janner is slowly beginning to realize that responsibility is not just something that adults assign to him. It is something that changes him and begins to reveal his identity. He may not always want the burden of being the oldest; he may not always feel brave, or wise, or ready. But responsibility is already pressing on his identity, shaping him into someone who must learn to think beyond himself. Responsibility may cost comfort, freedom, or the chance to do what *we* want to do. But as we’re already beginning to see, responsibility also demonstrates courage and love. It teaches us that who we are is not only shown in the adventures we dream about, but also in the people we protect, the sacrifices we make, and the needs we choose to place above our own.