

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Of especially naughty children it is sometimes said: “They must have been raised by wolves.”

The Incurrable Children actually were. Found running wild in the forest of Ashton Place, the Incurrables are no ordinary children: Alexander keeps his siblings in line with gentle nips, Beowulf is alarmingly adept at chasing squirrels, and Cassiopeia has a bark that is (usually) worse than her bite. Luckily, Miss Penelope Lumley is no ordinary governess. Only fifteen years old and a recent graduate of the Swanburne Academy for Poor Bright Females, Penelope embraces the challenge of her new position. Though she is eager to instruct the children in Latin verbs and the proper use of globes, first she must help them overcome their canine tendencies. Can Penelope successfully instruct her young charges while also solving the many mysteries of Ashton Place?

★ “It’s the best beginning since *The Bad Beginning* and will leave readers howling for the next episode.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

★ “Smartly written with a middle-grade audience in mind, this is both fun and funny and sprinkled with dollops of wisdom.”

—*ALA Booklist* (starred review)





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does *incurrable* mean? Do you think Alexander, Beowulf, and Cassiopeia really are incurrable? Could any of the other characters in the novel be described as incurrable?
2. The narrator says that Penelope Lumley is “perfectly match[ed]” to “what any reasonable person might expect a young governess to look like” (p. 7). What adjectives would you use to describe Penelope?
3. When Penelope first tells the story of the ponies, she says that Silky’s rough behavior is not his fault because he has “known no kindness or tender care in his life” (p. 40). Do you agree or disagree? Are people and animals responsible for acting badly if they’ve never been taught to act in a better way?
4. Penelope insists that “children should sleep in beds, in clean pajamas, and have bedtime books read aloud” (p. 52). What other things do you think children need?
5. Consider how Lord Fredrick claims ownership of the Incurrables after finding them on his property. Should the rule Lord Fredrick calls “finders keepers” pertain to all situations (p. 53)? If yes, why? If no, in which situations might it not apply?
6. Describe Lady Constance. By the end of the story, do you feel any pity or compassion for her? Why or why not?
7. Despite being absent for most of the novel, Lord Fredrick has some key scenes and makes some key decisions. What do you *know* about Lord Fredrick from the text? What do you *suspect* about him?
8. What is foreshadowing? How does the narrator use foreshadowing both to build suspense and to alleviate tension?
9. How does the author incorporate humor into the story? Which scene or line from the book do you think is the funniest?
10. Penelope explains irony to the Incurrables as “when you say one thing but mean something else . . . or when you expect things to happen one way and then they turn out quite differently” (p. 153). Based on this definition, can you find three examples of irony in the novel? How does the author use irony as a form of humor?
11. The narrator defines hyperbole as the “practice of overstating the case” (p. 188). Find an example of hyperbole in the book, and explain why you think the subject of your example is being exaggerated. Is it for humor, emphasis, dramatic effect, or something else?
12. Penelope buys books as presents, and she carefully tries to pick out the perfect book for each person on her list (pp. 153–154). Make a list of five of your family members or friends. If you could give each of them the perfect book, what would you choose? Explain your selections.
13. Famous literary governesses and teachers include Amelia Bedelia, Albus Dumbledore, Jane Eyre, Ms. Frizzle, Nurse Matilda, Merlin, and Mary Poppins. What qualities does Penelope Lumley share with these teaching colleagues? How is she unique?
14. What other stories about orphans have you read? Consider *Anne of Green Gables*, the Boxcar Children books, *The Graveyard Book*, the Harry Potter series, *Oliver Twist*, *The Secret Garden*, and A Series of Unfortunate Events. How are other orphan stories similar to and different from *The Incurrable Children of Ashton Place*? Why do you think stories about orphans are appealing to young readers?
15. What is a mystery? What mysteries are introduced in the book? Which of these mysteries are solved during the course of the narrative and which remain unsolved? Do you have any suspicions about how some of the unresolved mysteries might play out in later books in the series?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- 1. Tableau Vivant.** Lady Constance has high hopes for her *tableau vivant* but has to call the thespians offstage when the only stories they show are about wolves. The Incorrigibles try to help by making their own tableau for *The Wreck of the Hesperus*. Now it's your turn! Choose a scene or event from the novel and plan a tableau. Which characters will you show? How will they stand? What will they wear? What props will you use to make your staging realistic? Present your tableau to the class and see if your peers can guess which part of the story you're showing.
- 2. Agatha Swanburne's Famous Sayings.** Compile a list of Ms. Swanburne's sayings. Then look up often-quoted sayings by famous writers and thinkers, such as Confucius, Benjamin Franklin, Dorothy Parker, William Shakespeare, or Mark Twain. Create an advice book for grown-ups by combining Ms. Swanburne's sayings with some famous ones that you especially like. Can you create your own succinct, no-nonsense maxims to help adults be better behaved and better solve their problems? Add your original sayings to your book.
- 3. Not Just Bum-De-Bum-De-Bum-De-Bum.** Penelope is impressed with the poems created by the Incorrigibles. Create your own hilarious, Incorrigible-inspired poem, incorporating questions and exclamations, repetition, rhyme, or sound effects.

- 4. Performance Reading.** Whether it's the tale of Rainbow and Silky or *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, it's clear that Penelope loves reading aloud. Choose a short piece of writing (from this book or another) that you'd like to polish to perfection and practice reading it aloud. For whom will you perform your selection? What reactions do you want your audience to have as you're reading? How can the way in which you read bring about the reactions that you want? How will you know if you're telling a good story?
- 5. Illustrated Captions.** Jon Klassen's illustrations charmingly complement Maryrose Wood's words in *The Incorrigible Children of Ashton Place*. Choose a line from the story to serve as your caption (one that Mr. Klassen hasn't already depicted) and create your own accompanying illustration. Possible lines to illustrate include: "Ashton Place was a very grand house indeed" (p. 16), "the light from Mrs. Clarke's candle entered a step before the woman herself" (p. 127), "they spent the journey looking wide-eyed out the carriage windows" (p. 149), or "Lady Constance let out another snore, which everyone politely ignored" (p. 205).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tess Steinkolk

Maryrose Wood is a former Broadway actor, comedian, and playwright. The author of several books for teens, she makes her debut as a children's author with *The Incorrigible Children of Ashton Place*. Maryrose Wood lives in New York with her two children, two kittens, and small, feisty, red-headed dog. You can visit her online at www.maryrosewood.com.

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