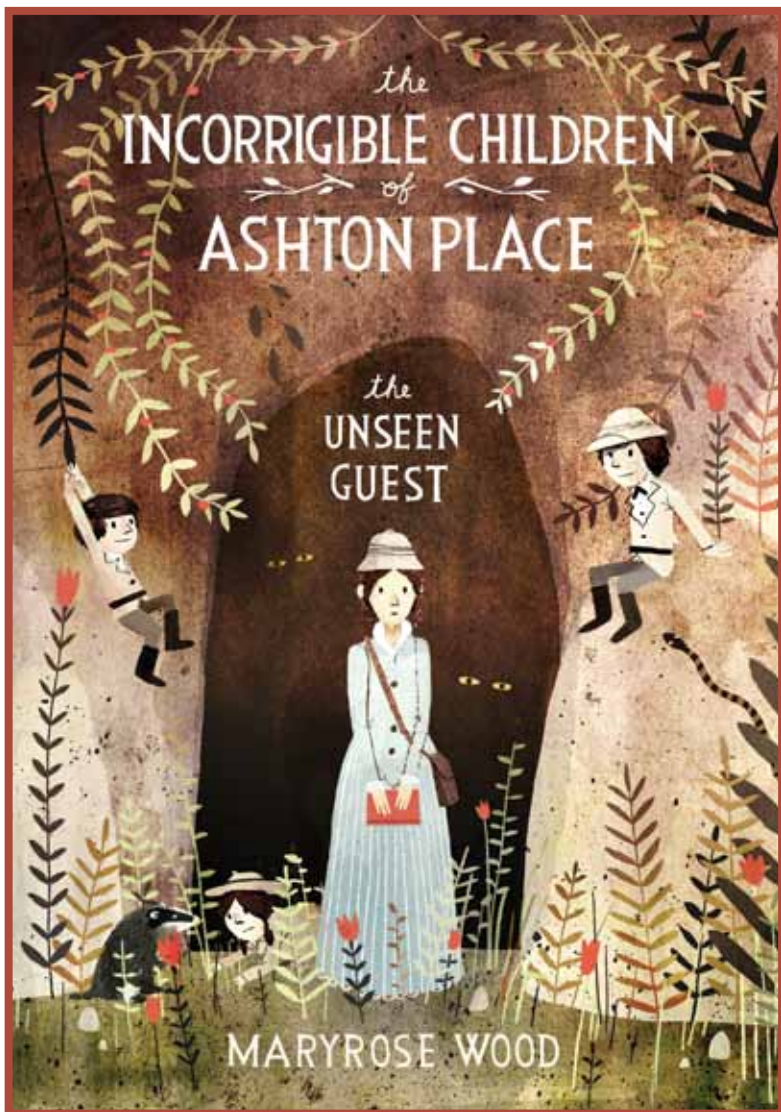


DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

The hunt is on in the third installment of *The Incorrigible Children of Ashton Place*. This time, plucky Penelope Lumley and her charges are off to the woods, where they find a speedy African bird, unusual canine companions, and refreshments that mysteriously appear just when they're most needed. Readers will delight to discover how the children are maturing under Miss Lumley's wise tutelage (they're becoming proficient with whole sentences and rhetorical questions!) and teachers will be eager to share a story that provides strong encouragement and words of wisdom for students as they grow into the "strapping" young men and women that they are "no doubt" on their way to becoming.



★ "This continues to be one of the cleverest series around, and its fans are legion. The cliff-hanger ending will keep them waiting impatiently."
—*ALA Booklist* (starred review)

"The story is rife with colorful characters, catchy phrases, mad-cap adventure, and a touch of mystery."

—*School Library Journal*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Describe how the Incurrables have changed since the first story in the series. Penelope doesn't picture the children being at home in the world of proper English gentlemen, but she's unsure what other fate to imagine (p. 93). What do you think the children will be like as they get older?
2. What is Penelope like as a teacher? Compare the initial scene (which takes place in the nursery) to the lessons she attempts to deliver in the woods. What do all her lessons have in common?
3. The Admiral maintains that experience plays a large role in education; he says that "you don't know what you're made of until you're alone in a canoe and drop your paddle in piranha-infested waters" (p. 102). Do you agree? Give examples of times when you've learned things in difficult circumstances.
4. The Incurrables are tender toward animals: consider Cassiopeia's treatment of Nutsawoo, or their collective sadness about the dodo. Is this surprising? Find other examples of their compassion, and compare their behavior to that of Lord Fredrick or another adult at Ashton Place.
5. Bertha is not as keen about ostrich racing as Admiral Faucet is. What do you make of his plan? Is it right to keep wild animals enclosed? What happens to greyhounds and other current-day racing animals at the end of their careers? Is it okay to use live creatures for entertainment? Why, or why not?

6. Penelope is cross with Miss Mortimer for keeping secrets about Mater and Pater Lumley and says she ought to be the judge of what's done for her own good (p. 22). Yet she also keeps secrets from the Incurrables. Why do you think this is? Is it ever right to keep a secret from people you care about?
7. Penelope is described as being "angry" at her parents but also "missing them" (p. 21). How do these two conflicting feelings work together? Are there other examples of people who have contradictory feelings in the story?
8. Lady Constance tells Widow Ashton that she hasn't heard a thing about Lord Edward's condition (p. 77). Why wouldn't Lord Fredrick have told her about his father's scratching and howling? The younger Lord and Lady Ashton hardly seem to confide in each other. If you were to guess, why do you think Lord Fredrick married Lady Constance?



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



9. Penelope's interest in Simon isn't strictly professional, but she maintains a mostly formal relationship with him. Do you think she realizes that she has feelings for him? Consider her lingering fascination with Edith-Anne Pevington's fictional friendship with Albert. Can you find other clues that Penelope might be increasingly interested in love?
10. Why do you think Widow Ashton agrees to let Madame Ionesco conduct the séance? Does she want to marry the Admiral? Why else would she spend so much time with him?
11. There are many questions bandied about in the story, but few concrete answers. Where do *you* think Lord Edward has gone? What *really* happened in the Bavarian tarpit? Could there be a connection with Pax Ashton's untimely demise? (Death by murderous pheasant is, after all, a *bit* out of the ordinary.)
12. Mysteries abound in the woods: Why do you think the cave is so cozy, and who could be providing the sandwiches? How did Mama Woof come to care so much for three human children? Do you have any theories about where the Incorrigibles came from, and how they found their way to Ashton Place?



13. Consider two particularly enigmatic characters, whom Penelope regards with very different degrees of trust. Who is Old Timothy, and what sorts of things has he heard as a coachman? What is the real shape of Judge Quinzy's nose, and what might he want with Ashton Place and (gulp!) Swanburne Academy?
14. Lady Constance and Madame Ionesco are hardly two birds of a feather, but they agree on one thing: it looks as if the Ashtons might be cursed (pp. 81, 91). What do you think is in store for Lord Fredrick in the next book?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



- 1. Survival Skills for Swanburne Girls.** Penelope has many skills, but outdoorsmanship is not among them—she’s at a loss when it comes to surviving in the woods. Find guides and stories that might be of use for her. Consider fiction and nonfiction (while stories like *Hatchet* don’t have cannibals, there *are* many items of interest). Then, write a letter with advice for her next trip. For more fun, consider writing to Penelope in the sage style of Agatha Swanburne herself.
- 2. Birds of Your Place, as Seen with No Jumping Out of Windows.** The Incurrables create a guide to local birds, and Beowulf turns out to be a regular Audubon. Find examples from an original Audubon guide (look for drawings by John James Audobon or his book titled *The Birds of North America*) and use them to inspire your own book of local flora and fauna.
- 3. Don’t Bury Your Head in the Sand.** Research the ostrich or another one of the birds featured in this story. Does the ostrich really bury its head in the sand? What *are* its natural defenses? Share the facts you learn with your friends. As an extension, try thinking like a somewhat more compassionate Admiral Faucet: What sort of habitat would your bird need if it was far from home?

- 4. Dead as a Dodo.** Explore the use of similes in the story. Find examples to supplement those in the book (p. 36), then try your hand at writing some. What similes can you use to describe Miss Lumley or the Incurrable children? What about your own teachers or classmates? As a bonus, consider using homonyms, synonyms, acronyms, or another one of the literary devices described in the story to paint a fuller picture of your surroundings.
- 5. Do Bears Live in the Woods?** The story is also full of rhetorical questions. As suggested by the narrator, you can search for many “instances within these pages” (p. 65). After you find several samples, record your own statements about things that are obviously true. Can you turn those truisms into your own rhetorical questions to use with friends? (As an example, *A Swanburne girl is plucky* might become *Is a Swanburne girl plucky?*, as on p. 135.)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tess Steinkolk

Maryrose Wood has acted on Broadway, and performed improvisational comedy in New York City clubs, and she began her writing career as a playwright, lyricist, librettist, and screenwriter. She has written two other books in the Incurrable Children of Ashton Place series: *The Mysterious Howling* and *The Hidden Gallery*. She lives in New York with her two children, two cats, and a dog who likes to chase squirrels. You can visit her online at www.maryrosewood.com.

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Discussion guide created by Kate Coxon, Academic Dean of Rocketship Si Se Puede Academy, Palo Alto, California.