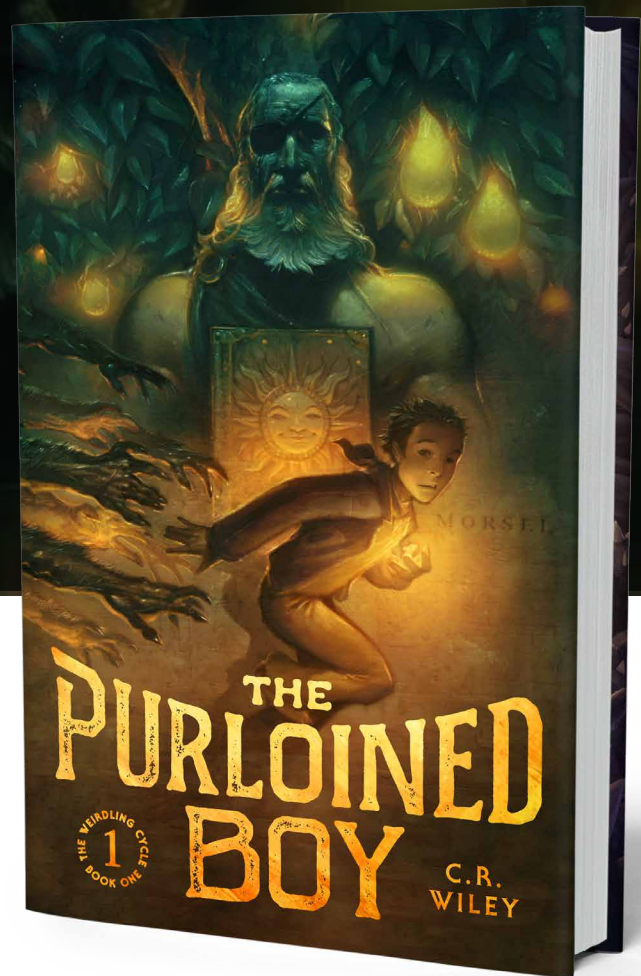




# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

**WHEN HE WAS LITTLE, TREVOR UPJOHN WAS KIDNAPPED BY BOGEYMAN AND TAKEN FAR AWAY TO THE UNEARTHLY KINGDOM OF SUPERBIA.**

Most children in Superbia don't know where they came from—but Trevor's own vague memories launch him on a collision course with lots of hungry bogeys, the fishers, a guild of secretive humans and their mystical tree, a dark sorcerer, spiders, and much more. Trevor must choose whether to help out his new acquaintances in their desperate struggle or continue his search for a home he scarcely remembers.



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## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

This may be surprising to learn about such an action-packed story, but *The Purloined Boy* was inspired by some of history's great thinkers and is rich with allusions to literature and philosophy. In fact, C.R. Wiley has even joked that *The Purloined Boy* is almost a mix between R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series and...the ancient Greek philosopher Plato! (See below for more on that.) As a pre-reading activity, ask students if they are familiar with the type of monster called a "bogyman" and the basic plots of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. Readers should also keep an eye out for biblical allusions and references to salvation and biblical virtues. As far as symbols, they should notice the significance of the tree and Zephyr throughout the book; watch what happens with both, and why.

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS: QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**MORAL EFFORT**—When Zephyr begins to save him, Trevor makes two mistakes. First, he tries really hard to run instead of keeping his eyes on Zephyr. Then, when he realizes that he’s not doing it at all, he tries to just let Zephyr carry him and ends up flat on his face (p. 53).

What is wrong with putting all our trust in ourselves and our own efforts? What, on the other hand, is the problem with not doing anything at all to exert ourselves and grow in virtue?

**TRUTH**—At the beginning of the book, Epictetus says, “Something’s stirring in you that threatens everything that Superbia stands for. It is a germ of truth. Once caught, it spreads: first in your own mind and eventually to others. Superbia is false all the way down to the bottom and a little truth—even from a boy—could bring it all down” (pp. 23-24). If they’re younger students, ask them how Trevor’s classes in Superbia are all based on lies. If they’re older, perhaps tell them about George Orwell’s 1984. Consider discussing how political injustices in history, such as injustices found in Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia (or today) rooted in lies?

Have students write a paragraph or two about the importance of truth as the foundation of a just society.

**REALITY AND GOODNESS**—If the readers are older, consider introducing them to Plato’s “myth of the cave” and see if they can find similarities throughout the book. In that myth, Plato says that people don’t ever know about “real” things, which he calls “forms”—instead, we only know about “shadows” of those real forms. It’s as if we humans are all sitting in a cave, looking at the shadow of a tree reflected on the wall of the cave in the firelight—and we think we know what a tree is! But the “real” tree is in the sunlight outside the cave! In one sense, Trevor is also “trapped” in a cave (Superbia), and he’s trying to find his way back home by looking at firelight shadows of good things (memories, lessons he learns, friends, etc.).



At the beginning of the book, Trevor needs to find someone who can help with the reality of things—because the kids in school with him are just as confused (looking at shadows) as he is. Who can help Trevor find what’s real?

**SERVICE**—Why is Epictetus, ironically, the Master in Olton (p. 87)? Why is this very surprising news to Trevor?

Why do you suppose it is that authority so often gravitates to people who are willing to serve other people? What does the Bible say about this?

**PRUDENCE**—Paracelsus plants the idea in Trevor’s mind that they could conceivably rescue all the children. Trevor then makes the suggestion to Epictetus (p. 149). How does Epictetus respond (pp. 149-150)?

Have the students discuss “prudence” and “wisdom.” Why shouldn’t Trevor try to rescue all the children? Should that be something he wants to do in the future?

**CHANGE**—At the beginning of the book, students should notice that Trevor doesn’t do much. The only thing he wants is to get home. At the end of the book, he desperately wants to help and fight. Zephyr points this out: “Nothing’s different. Things were bad then; things are bad now. The only difference is you” (p. 241).

How has Trevor’s character changed? Have students compare him to the other boys in Superbia, especially the ones who are tempted by Santa Claus.

## CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

**LANGUAGE ARTS**—The Purloined Boy takes its title from Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*; Poe was a writer of the first horror stories. Students may be disturbed by the bleak beginning of the book, so teachers should point out that the darkness is not random, but is deliberately designed to give the novel a dark atmosphere (just as in Plato’s cave!), right up to the bitter end.

Superbia should also remind students of orphanages in Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* and of the reeducation classes in Orwell’s 1984. However, the most significant allusions are to Plato’s Republic, which contains the famous myth of the cave (as we discussed earlier). For instance, in Plato’s imaginary Republic, children are separated from their parents, much like Trevor. Furthermore, Trevor not only comes from the darkness of the cave into the light, but he does so by remembering home. In Plato’s Republic, people return to the realm of the forms by remembering it. Furthermore, one-eyed Epictetus (named after a another Greek philosopher) is a one-eyed man in the land of the blind who brings everyone else into the light.

The tree at the end is clearly a reference to a certain tree found in the Bible, and the name “zephyr” means “wind,” which is an allusion to the Holy Spirit. The “fishers” are an allusion to the disciples’ former occupation. See if the students can figure out these allusions on their own.

**SOCIAL STUDIES**—Although the orders of Alchemists and Illuminators are fictional, they are based on real occupations that were common during the Middle Ages. Some of the alchemists were the first chemists, and the illuminators made beautiful illustrations while they were preserving the greatest works of literature ever written from dark ages and destruction. Have your students look up what alchemists did, and perhaps have them learn more about the historical Paracelsus himself and see if you can figure out what the book is doing with them. Show them pictures of the funny characters in illuminated manuscripts (like the Bible or the Book of Kells)

**MATH**—Epictetus gives Maggie a rather complicated task: after memorizing a string of directions, she has to remember that “right is wrong, and wrong is right,” which means that they have to go to the left of wherever the stone is pointing. Consider stretching your students brains by giving them directions along the same lines and seeing if they do as well as Maggie.

**ART**—The Purloined Boy is a fantasy novel. As such, you won’t find much art in it from the real world, but it’s a great opportunity to make a map. Make sure your students make careful longitude and latitude lines and specific vectors where they can put particular locations, such as Superbia, the Railroad, the Pantry, the Sewers, Olton, Trothward (remember Alchemists in the South; Illuminators in the East; Fishers in the West; and miscellaneous folks in the North), and the tunnels.

### VOCABULARY AND USE OF LANGUAGE—

This book use the popular device of “authorial intrusion” throughout. For instance, at the beginning, the narrator says, “What did they think [when they thought of Trevor]? They thought—*My, what a clumsy looking boy.* ‘Gangly’ would have been a better word, kinder too. But he wasn’t in a place where people cared so much about words, or kindness for that matter” (p. 3). The author is stepping away from the facts and actually commenting on them, and he does the same throughout the book (see examples on pp. 39, 43, 175, and 211).

Ask students to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them, taking clues from the context. Such words may include: *creases* (p. 5), *sinewy* (p. 17), *incorrigible* (p. 34), *culinary* (p. 39), *gossamer* (p. 40), *tributary* (p. 73), *bandied* (p. 80), *furrowed* (p. 98), *succulent* (p. 115), *clod* (p. 122), *pungent* (p. 125), *ponderous* (p. 139), *corpulent* (p. 174), and *surfeit* (p. 189).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

C.R. Wiley is a senior contributor to *The Imaginative Conservative* and a pastor in Manchester, CT. His short stories have appeared in *The Mythic Circle* and *Fear and Trembling*, and his nonfiction has appeared in *Touchstone Magazine*, *Relevant Magazine Online*, and *Modern Reformation*. He is the also the author of *Man of the House*. *The Purloined Boy*, Book 1 of the Weirdling Cycle, is his first children’s novel.