



### *Discussion Guide*

Thank you for joining me to climb higher into the *Kingdom in the Redwoods* with this discussion guide. It's organized by chapter and is designed to help you explore some of the themes woven into the story; you can work through the guide as you read the story. This is a great resource for school and church groups, homeschool study, or any other group or individual study. It is my hope that this discussion guide will ignite your curiosity about the themes that unfold through the story, *Kingdom in the Redwoods*.

## Chapter One – Last Day of School

**Theme:** The story begins with a view of a world that is broken. I use the word “broken” to refer to all the lying, cheating, stealing, gossip, meanness, violence, ugliness and other evils in the world. The world where Aaron, Benji and Hannah live has unfairness, pain, and suffering in it. Aaron, Benji, and Hannah experience liars, cheaters, and mean people. You’ll notice that each character responds to this broken world in a different way. Their response shows how different Aaron, Benji, and Hannah are.

1. Aaron has a frightening dream to open the story. What do you think it means?

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2. What are some examples of the broken world Aaron, Benji & Hannah live in?

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3. How do each of them respond to the broken world?

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4. What is making Reaper use his underhanded game tactics?

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5. What is making Benji choose to cheat on his math test?

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6. What are some of the ways you see your own world as unfair or broken?

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7. How do you respond to unfairness in your own life?

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8. Describe the personality of each Parsons child: Aaron, Benji, and Hannah.

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9. Which of the three children do you think you’re most like?

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10. If you have brothers and sisters, describe how you are different from them.

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## Chapter Two – The Ranch

**Theme:** There is goodness and beauty in the world. Even though their father is gone, they visit the ranch owned by his parents - their grandparents. It's high up in the snow covered mountains away from the broken world. Despite the broken world the children experience in Chapter One, they enjoy the gift of beautiful nature and family when they're at the ranch.

1. Describe the natural beauty Aaron, Benji and Hannah find at the ranch.

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2. Describe the natural beauty where you live.

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3. What is good and beautiful about their family relationship with Papa and Grandma?

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4. Describe some good and beautiful things about your family.

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5. The children learn that their father, Peter, is away on a dangerous mission and will not be there for Christmas. Has your mom or dad ever had to miss a holiday or important family time? How did it make you feel?

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6. How does it make you feel when your whole family is together for a holiday or important family time?

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7. Papa teaches Aaron and Benji how to make pitch glue, and Grandma teaches Hannah how to make sleep tea. What are some fun things your parents or grandparents have taught you?

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8. If you could ask them to teach you something new, what would it be?

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9. Draw a picture of the Ranch.

## Chapter Three – The Redwood Grove

**Theme:** The goodness and beauty of mystery in the world. Papa takes Aaron and Benji out on the ranch. They explore the gorgeous nature of the snow covered mountain and learn a family secret that's mysterious. Aaron examines the trees in great detail, and Benji sketches the trees to appreciate their beauty.

1. Grandma makes a big breakfast for Aaron, Benji, and Hannah. What's your favorite breakfast?

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2. What chores are Aaron, Benji, and Hannah asked to do to help out?

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3. What chores do you do to help your family?

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4. Sarah asks Aaron to look after Benji as they explore the ranch. What are some of the things you do to look after people younger than you?

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5. What do Aaron and Benji discover with Papa at the Redwood Grove?

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6. What is so unique or extraordinary about it?

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7. What are some mysteries in your life that you're curious about?

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8. What do Aaron's and Benji's reactions to the Redwood Grove say about them?

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9. Draw a picture of Redwood Grove

## Chapter Four – Christmas Tree in the Forest

**Theme:** The beauty of family traditions. Papa teaches Aaron how to drive Rocky. He also introduces Aaron and Benji to a family tradition of cutting down the family Christmas tree. It is something their father had done when he was young, and now Aaron and Benji share this same tradition. They spend the evening decorating the Christmas tree.

1. What are some household responsibilities you have?

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2. What do you do to show your parents you can be trusted with responsibility?

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3. Aaron and Benji learn how to use a tree saw. What outdoor tools have you learned how to use?

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4. What tools would you like your parents to teach you how to use?

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5. How does Papa describe wisdom for Aaron and Benji?

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6. What family traditions do Aaron, Benji, and Hannah enjoy?

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7. What are your favorite family Christmas traditions?

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8. What is important about family traditions?

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9. Draw a picture of your perfect Christmas tree.

## Chapter Five – A Climb into the Fog

**Theme:** Aaron, Benji, and Hannah discover a new world filled with goodness and beauty. They climb the giant redwood, but it's a difficult climb and they have to show determination to push through the fog to see what's on the other side. There, they discover the kingdom of Himmel - a world very different from their own.

1. Have you ever climbed a tree? If so, what are some important safety tips you have for climbing trees?

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2. What are some good and beautiful things Aaron, Benji, and Hannah discover in Himmel?

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3. What is different in Himmel from the world they came from?

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4. How is Himmel different from your world?

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5. What does Benji notice about Himmel during their game of hide-and-seek?

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6. Why does the food taste so good in Himmel?

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7. How do the animals in Himmel treat each other?

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8. Describe the animals' hospitality toward Aaron, Benji, and Hannah.

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9. What (or who) motivates the animals to treat each other this way?

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10. How do the animals describe King Yasha?

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## Chapter Six – Mr. Wigglebottom

**Theme:** Aaron, Benji, and Hannah meet Mr. Wigglebottom, the caretaker to the animals who lives in a cottage near Lake Amari.

1. Describe Mr. Wigglebottom and anything unusual about him.

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2. What do you do to be kind when meeting someone who may have something unusual about them?

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3. What did Mr. Wigglebottom do to show kindness to Aaron, Benji, and Hannah?

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4. What do you do to show hospitality toward your friends?

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5. How does Mr. Wigglebottom describe King Yasha?

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6. Why was Aaron annoyed by his brother Benji?

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7. What are some things your family does that annoy you?

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8. How do you respond when they annoy you?

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9. What are some of the questions Aaron has about Himmel and King Yasha?

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10. Draw a picture of Mr. Wigglebottom.

## Chapter Seven - Shadowlands

**Theme:** The children discover there is also evil and ugliness in Himmel. Benji is drawn to the idea of a kingdom where everyone is a king ruling over their own kingdom. American sociologist, Robert Bellah, called this “*expressive individualism.*” This idea says the purpose of life is to live any way you see fit. Anything that gets in the way is bad. We become kings of our own kingdom and we get to decide what is true and what is false.

1. Why does Benji sneak out to Shadowlands without telling Aaron?

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2. How did that make Aaron feel?

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3. Have you ever done something to annoy someone in your family?

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4. Describe Shadowlands compared to the other parts of Himmel the children visited.

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5. What rules does Julia declare for her kingdom?

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6. Do you see any problems with a world organized under the idea that each person gets to decide what’s true for himself or herself?

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7. Are there untrue things in your world that you’re asked to believe?

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8. What are some things you know are true? For example,  $2+2=4$  or the color of your eyes.

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9. What are some things you aren’t totally sure are true but want to know more about? So you can decide if it’s true.

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## Chapter Eight – King for a Day

**Theme:** In Shadowlands, Benji gets his own crown and becomes a king. At first, he likes the idea of a world where everyone gets to set their own rules. He enjoys an ice cream sundae and piece of chocolate cake. Then he learns that a world where everyone declares their own rules creates a lot of problems and conflict.

1. Why does Benji want to become a king?

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2. What rules does he declare for his kingdom?

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3. Why is Julia so angry with Benji?

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4. Benji learns that even when he's a king, bad things can happen. What happens to him at the restaurant?

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5. Why are the two men fighting in the courtyard outside the restaurant?

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6. If you were King or Queen for a day, what rules would you declare?

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7. How would your rules affect people around you?

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8. According to Mr. Wigglebottom, who is the source of the good and beautiful things in Himmel?

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9. Mr. Wigglebottom tells Aaron, "The artwork is the reflection of the artist." Think about who's the artist of the natural beauty of our world. What does that beauty tell us about the artist?

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10. What does Aaron do to protect Benji? Describe a time when you did something to protect a member of your family or a friend.

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## Chapter Nine - An Adventure Awaits

**Theme:** Aaron, Benji, and Hannah prepare for their adventure. Papa and Grandma help them by passing on family wisdom. Remember that Aaron and Benji have already learned how to make pitch glue from Papa. Hannah has learned how to make sleep tea from Grandma.

1. Grandma makes delicious biscuits and honey-butter. What are some of your favorite homemade baked items?

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2. What did Aaron do at dinner after their return from Shadowlands to protect Benji? What would you have done?

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3. Aaron comforts Hannah. Describe a time you tried to comfort a member of your family or a friend when they were frightened or sad.

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4. What are some of the items Aaron packs for their adventure into Himmel?

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5. What do you do to prepare for a trip or difficult task?

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6. What wisdom or special teachings have your parents or grandparents passed on to you?

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7. What wisdom would you like to ask them to pass on?

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8. What advice does Papa give to Aaron as he is ready to begin his journey?

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## Chapter Ten – Aspen Meadows

**Theme:** The journey into Himmel begins. Aaron, Benji, and Hannah see more beauty as Enzo shows them the Razzle-Dazzle Den, and Mr. Wigglebottom teaches them how to play Ziggety-Zag. The animals lead them on a journey toward the City of Light to meet King Yasha. On the way, they have a strange encounter with a boy named Ian, who thinks he’s a bear.

1. Do you have a special place where the beauty is amazing?

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2. What did Aaron learn about the goodness of community from the fish in the Ziggety – Zag game?

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3. What is so special about the Razzle-Dazzle Den?

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4. What advice does Mr. Wigglebottom give to Aaron?

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5. Why do the animals want to travel with Aaron, Benji, and Hannah to City of Light?

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6. What was Ian’s attitude about King Yasha and his paintings?

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7. Why was Ian’s perspective so different from Jack’s and the other animals?

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8. What does Midnight Clover do to the person who eats it?

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9. Draw a picture of the Razzle-Dazzle Den or the characters playing Ziggety-Zag

## Chapter Eleven – City of Light

**Theme:** Aaron, Benji, and Hannah reach the City of Light. On the way, they meet Hank the farmer who shares his ideas about living in a loving community. They also meet Thomas and Sophia and observe a different way of living than the world they came from.

1. Describe some of the amazing animals in Asha Grasslands. What does that say about the creativity of the artist king who made them?

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2. Why does Hank get emotional when Benji asks him why he helps others?

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3. Describe Hank's hospitality towards Aaron, Benji, and Hannah and their traveling companions. What example does it provide for us?

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4. What does Piper Bear do for Hannah when she's tired?

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5. Was there a time you helped someone smaller or weaker? How did it make you feel?

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6. Was there a time someone bigger or stronger helped you? How did it make you feel?

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7. Enzo played a game of Simon Says with the children, but it got difficult because they were so different. What do you do to help others play games so everyone can enjoy them?

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8. What decorates the walls of King Yasha's home, that's called his chateau?

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9. Why do you think King Yasha decorated his home that way?

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10. What do you notice about the people in the City of Light?

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## Chapter Twelve – An Audience with the King

**Theme:** The children have a formal visit with King Yasha. He shows them his paintings and explains how he rules over the kingdom he has created. King Yasha discusses what it means to be made in the image of the King.

1. Describe King Yasha. What words would you use to describe him?

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2. What is so special about his paintings?

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3. According to King Yasha, in what ways are people made like King Yasha?

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4. Do you see these same things in yourself? In others?

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5. Does this change the way you see yourself? In what ways?

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6. Does this change the way you see others? In what ways?

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7. According to King Yasha, why does he make people like himself?

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8. Does this change how you see your purpose of life?

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9. According to Thomas and Sophia, what (or who) is the final standard for determining what is good and beautiful in the world?

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## Chapter Thirteen – A Royal Banquet

**Theme:** King Yasha throws a grand banquet for Aaron, Benji, and Hannah. The King answers more questions and describes the two most important rules of his kingdom. He explains how time and space work differently in the kingdom of Himmel. King Yasha meets privately with Benji to uncover deep wounds in Benji that prevent him from living with joy.

1. Why is King Yasha weeping when Aaron finds him on the balcony? What does this show us about the heart of King Yasha?

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2. Why is Shadowlands so different from Highlands and the City of Light?

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3. Describe the freedom King Yasha gives the people of Himmel. Can our freedom sometimes lead us into trouble? How?

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4. What are the two chief rules King Yasha has for the people of Himmel?

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5. Why does King Yasha have these two rules?

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6. According to King Yasha, should we only love people who deserve to be loved?

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7. Are there rules in your life that you don't like? Why?

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8. Do you see how rules can be for our benefit?

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9. According to King Yasha, what is the effect of the water running from Gali fountain?

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10. How was Benji changed by his conversation with King Yasha?

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## Chapter Fourteen – Kingdom Tour

**Theme:** King Yasha shows Aaron, Benji, and Hannah the crisis in the kingdom of Himmel. He explains Malby’s desire to destroy the goodness and beauty of Himmel, and the pride that motivates Malby to defeat King Yasha. King Yasha asks Aaron, Benji, and Hannah to take on a dangerous mission to defeat Malby.

1. They sing *My King* on their tour of Himmel. What words in the song stand out to you when describing King Yasha?  
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2. Why did King Yasha make the water slide for Aaron, Benji, and Hannah? What does that say about King Yasha’s heart for the children?  
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3. Why is Malby opposed to King Yasha?  
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4. How does Malby use the water treatment plant to turn people against King Yasha?  
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5. Are there people or things in your life that are working against what you believe to be good, beautiful and true?  
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6. Describe a time you were asked to take on a difficult task or mission to protect someone or something?  
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7. If you know the story in the Bible, describe the similarities of that story and this one.  
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8. Draw a picture of the water slide.

## Chapter Fifteen – A Secret War

**Theme:** Malby explains his plans to defeat King Yasha. His Road to Destruction Plan includes five steps along the way: 1) sowing doubt in what the person believes about King Yasha; 2) bringing on distrust of King Yasha and his creation; 3) causing the person to depart from King Yasha; 4) replacing him with something else, and 5) landing the person in a prison of his or her own making. Malby describes deception and selfishness as two secret weapons they will use to defeat King Yasha.

1. Do you see Malby's five steps in your own world? List some examples.

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2. Explain how Malby uses deception to help his plan along.

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3. What does the term Achilles heel mean and how does Malby use the term?

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4. How do Malby and King Yasha differ in their commitment to the truth?

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5. Explain how Malby uses selfishness to aid his plan.

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6. Do you see any areas where you show selfishness?

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7. Why does Malby want to carry out his plan?

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8. Like Malby, our world tells us many lies about what defines us - our identity: money, fame, good grades, sports stardom, popularity, our clothes, our possessions, our looks, our friends. List some of the ways our world tries to define you.

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9. King Yasha defines the identity of the people in Himmel as made in his image. Write down some words that define who you are.

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## Chapter Sixteen – Spy Craft

**Theme:** Aaron, Benji, and Hannah must decide if they will accept the dangerous mission King Yasha has asked them to take on to save Himmel. They decide to do so and come up with a plan to spy on Malby. Sophia goes undercover to hear Malby’s plan to destroy King Yasha and his kingdom.

1. List the pros and cons that Aaron, Benji and Hannah discuss when deciding whether to accept King Yasha’s mission.

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2. Why do they finally decide to accept the mission?

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3. What are some difficult decisions or choices you have had to make?

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4. What things did you consider to make the decision?

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5. King Yasha doesn’t tell Aaron, Benji, and Hannah all he knows about Malby and his plans. Why do you think he held back some of the information?

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6. Why would an artist king who is the source of all that is good, beautiful and true hold back information from those he loves?

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7. Describe Malby’s plan that Sophia overhears.

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8. What are the two things the 1,000 ravens were trained to do?

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## Chapter Seventeen – Counter Espionage

**Theme:** Aaron, Benji, and Hannah develop their plan to defeat Malby. It's a complicated plan that includes holding the first ever Himmel Games, tricking the guards to drink sleep tea, blowing up the water treatment plant, and spraying the ravens with cleansing water.

1. What is special about King Yasha's water?

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2. What has Malby done to poison the water?

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3. What vice does King Yasha suggest they use to trick the Shadowlands guards?

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4. Do you see pride in yourself or in others around you?

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5. King Yasha uses rocks as an illustration with Hannah. What do you think he means?

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6. What does Hannah learn about King Yasha and herself?

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7. Make a list of words you think help describe yourself.

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8. Now make a list of words describing how God sees you.

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9. Describe King Yasha's emotions at the end of the chapter when describing the children and the people of Himmel.

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## Chapter Eighteen – The Himmel Games

**Theme:** They hold the first ever Himmel Games to trick the guards. The events have been set up so that the Shadowlands team will be jealous of the winning Himmel team and let their guard down. This will make the guards want to drink the sleep tea, which has cleverly been renamed royal tea. Malby believes he can redefine truth by telling the story he wants told, even if it is not the truth.

1. Why do Middie and Dusty want to be in the Himmel Games?

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2. What do Malby and Fister plan to do to tell the story they want told?

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3. Malby and Fister have made a habit out of lies and deception. What's the problem with telling lies?

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4. Why is the Shadowlands team so confident before the Himmel Games?

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5. How did the Highlands competitors treat the Shadowlands competitors?

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6. How do you treat people who are lost or blind to the truth?

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7. Hannah hesitates before giving the royal tea to Aaron. What do you think she is thinking?

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8. How did pride make the Shadowlands team easier to trick?

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## Chapter Nineteen – The Battle Begins

**Theme:** Aaron, Benji, and Hannah launch their attack on Shadowlands. The Blue Team blows up the water treatment plant, and the Green Team moves into position to spray cleansing water on the ravens. Unfortunately, Malby discovers their plan and foils their effort just as they're about to spray the ravens with King Yasha's cleansing water.

1. Who do Aaron, Benji, and Hannah trust to guide them in the battle?

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2. How did the teachings of Papa and Grandma help Aaron, Benji, and Hannah?

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3. Describe why the guards were foolish to drink the royal tea.

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4. What would a wise choice have been for the guards?

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5. If a stranger offers you food or something to drink, what's the wise choice?

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6. What do Thomas and Piper do to protect the sleeping guards, even in the midst of battle?

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7. Describe the loyalty and bravery shown by Aaron and the animals on the Green Team to protect each other when their plan fell apart.

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8. Have you had a situation where you had to show loyalty and courage?

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## Chapter Twenty – Prisoners in Enemy Territory

**Theme:** Aaron, Benji, and Hannah are held captive in prison in Shadowlands. Fister tries to get them to drink Midnight Clover water and join the Shadowlands kingdom, but they refuse. They seek comfort from King Yasha in their troubles and remain loyal to him.

1. Why does Fister want Aaron, Benji, and Hannah to surrender to Shadowlands?

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2. What is their response? Why?

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3. What gives them strength?

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4. Have you ever been in trouble for doing what you thought was the right thing?

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5. Yasha is painting a scene and lets Dio know it causes him pain. What do you think that scene in Yasha's painting looks like?

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6. Yasha asks Dio if there is any other way and Dio replies, there is no other way. Yasha answers, "*If it must be so, that is the scene I will paint. Your will be done, Abba, Father.*" Can you find a story in the gospels where Jesus faces a similar situation?

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7. Sometimes obedience to God is hard. Can you remember a time where you obeyed God and it was hard?

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8. Malby tells Fister his final goal in this chapter. What is it?

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## Chapter Twenty-One – Attack Against the King

**Theme:** King Yasha willingly steps onto the ledge and calls the ravens to attack him. He diverts their path and absorbs the full force of their attack. Grace miraculously rescues Aaron, Benji, and Hannah from prison. They return to Mt. Superior only to find that the ravens have killed King Yasha. But a surprise that no one expected comes from his death.

1. What does King Yasha do to save the kingdom of Himmel?

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2. King Yasha shouts, “*here, I AM,*” several times while being attacked. Can you find a Bible passage where God refers to himself as I AM?

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3. What is the reaction to King Yasha’s death by the children and animals?

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4. What is the reaction by Malby?

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5. What is the source of the cleansing rainwater?

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6. What impact does the water have? On the ravens? The people? Shadowlands?

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7. The children are singing My King in prison. What does this say about their trust in King Yasha?

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8. According to Grace, what did King Yasha accomplish with his death?

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## Chapter Twenty-Two – Kingdom Restored

**Theme:** King Yasha lives. Aaron goes to the ledge on the third day and finds King Yasha alive and cooking breakfast. The kingdom has been restored and is safe from the attack of Malby. King Yasha holds another banquet to celebrate the victory over Malby.

1. What does King Yasha’s miraculous return to life mean?

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2. What was Aaron’s response to finding King Yasha alive?

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3. King Yasha mentions he gave the dream to Aaron. What was King Yasha seeking from Aaron?

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4. What are the areas of your life where you have the most trouble trusting God? (grades, friends, sports, health, safety, etc.)

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5. What is Malby’s reaction to this turn of events – finding King Yasha alive?

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6. Why is the reaction from Aaron and the animals so different from Malby’s reaction?

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7. How did it make you feel when you first read that King Yasha had come back to life?

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8. Dio explains his *All in All* painting. Describe what this painting means to you.

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## Chapter Twenty-Three – Christmas at the Ranch

**Theme:** King Yasha offers parting words and Aaron, Benji, and Hannah leave Himmel to return to the ranch. They enjoy Christmas Eve dinner and a surprise guest shows up – their dad!

1. What parting words does King Yasha share with the children?

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2. What has Aaron learned in his time in Himmel?

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3. What has Benji learned in his time in Himmel?

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4. What has Hannah learned in her time in Himmel?

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5. When driving Rocky back to the lodge, the children see the ranch with new eyes. In what way has their appreciation of nature changed?

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6. What do we learn about Peter’s mission?

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7. Do you see any similarity between the children Peter saved in Africa and the people in Shadowlands that Aaron, Benji, and Hannah saved?

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8. Do you recall a time you were called to step out and do something courageous to stand for what is good, beautiful and true?

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## Chapter Twenty-Four – White Christmas

**Theme:** The Parsons family celebrates Christmas together on the ranch. The open presents, but the real present is time with their family. They are surprised by their parents' decision to move to the ranch and build a cabin next to Papa and Grandma's lodge.

1. What does Aaron value more than the material gifts on Christmas?  
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2. What gift do Peter and Sarah give to Aaron, Benji and Hannah?  
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3. What does Peter and Sarah's gift say about what they believe is most important?  
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4. According to Papa, what do the strands of Yasha's Cord represent?  
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5. What do each of the strands mean to you in your own life?  
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6. How has *Kingdom in the Redwoods* changed your appreciation of family?  
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7. How has *Kingdom in the Redwoods* given you a new understanding on goodness and beauty in the world, and it's ultimate source?  
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8. How has *Kingdom in the Redwoods* changed the way you see your identity and your purpose?  
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9. Has *Kingdom in the Redwoods* given you a new understanding on God and His love for you? If so, how?  
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10. Are there any changes you want to make in your life in light of this story?  
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## Epilogue – The War is not Over

**Theme:** Evil doesn't give up. Malby and Fister plot how they can rebuild their plan to defeat King Yasha and destroy the kingdom of Himmel.

1. Have Fister and Malby been changed in any way by their defeat?

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2. Where do we see evil and ugliness in the world today?

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3. What has *Kingdom in the Redwoods* shown you about how we can overcome evil and ugliness?

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I would love to hear from you. Please email me to share your experience with this *Discussion Guide* and the *Kingdom in the Redwoods*. [bax@kevenbaxter.com](mailto:bax@kevenbaxter.com).

Thank you for joining me on this adventure!