

Kenny & the Dragon

Discussion Guide



KENNETH is a little rabbit with a very big problem. His two best friends are heading for a battle of legendary proportions – with each other! In one corner there’s Grahame, a well-read and cultured dragon with sophisticated tastes and no stomach for battle. In the other, there’s George, a retired knight and dragon slayer who would be content to spend the rest of his days in his bookshop with a pipe and a good book. But when the townsfolk in Kenneth’s sleepy little village catch wind that there’s a dragon running loose in the countryside and call George out of retirement, the stage is set. And it’s up to Kenny to avert disaster.

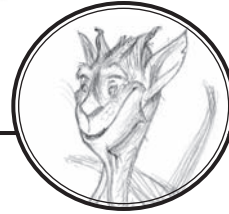
New York Times Bestseller, Tony DiTerlizzi puts a fun-filled, thoroughly theatrical spin on Kenneth Grahame’s classic tale of subterfuge and showmanship with this lighthearted romp of a retelling where it’s up to one clever little rabbit to give his neighbors front row seats for one of the best-known battles in history: the showdown between St. George and the Dragon.



TONY DITERLIZZI is one half of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling team that created *The Spiderwick Chronicles* as well as the author of the Zena Sutherland Award-winning, Young Hoosier Book Award-winning, and Buckeye Children’s Book Award-winning *Ted*. His other titles include *Jimmy Zangwou’s Out-of-This-World Moon Pie Adventure*, *G is for One Gzonk!*, and an adaptation of Mary Howitt’s “The Spider and the Fly” that was awarded the Caldecott Honor. He lives in western Massachusetts with his wife, Angela, and their daughter.

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Discussion Questions



- 1.) Are we meant to think that Kenny's solution to the battle between St. George and Grahame is deceptive and tricky or a clever and courageous act to save his friends?
- 2.) Is Kenny's bookish knowledge better than his father's life experiences?
- 3.) Does Grahame's love of the theater have any influence on Kenny's plan to save his friends?
- 4.) Does the king know in advance that the battle is an act?
- 5.) How does the game of chess mimic life?
- 6.) How can Grahame be so sure "There will be no exterminations—imminent or otherwise?"
- 7.) How was Kenny inspired by his friends to solve the problem of fighting till death?
- 8.) Are we meant to think Grahame is a coward for refusing to fight St. George?
- 9.) Grahame described his fellow dragons as being "earnest." What does this mean? How did that apply to his life?
- 10.) Has Kenny or any of his friends shown any growth in their characters?



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Word Scramble



FIRST, unscramble each word below. To make it a little easier, all of the answers can be found in the word bank to the right. Once you've found all of the answers, write the letters in the circles in the blank spaces at the bottom to answer the question.

WORD BANK

bane	earnest	insolent
bantling	exploit	oblivious
carnage	libation	sprightly
chide	imminent	reciprocate
codger	impudent	urchin

a g r a n c e _ _ ○ _ _ _ _

n a b e _ _ _ ○

d i c e h _ _ _ _ ○

t o n e s i l n _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ ○

t i n g l a n b _ ○ _ _ _ _ _

r i c h u n _ _ _ _ ○ _ _

t e m p i d u n _ _ _ _ ○ _ _

t i m m i n e n _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ ○ _ _

t a b i l i o n _ ○ _ _ _ _ _

p i e c r a t e o r c ○ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

t r e e n a s _ _ _ _ ○ _ _

d o g r c e _ _ _ _ ○ _ _

o x l e p t i _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ ○

o o v s i l i u b ○ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

l i p s y h r t g _ _ _ _ _ ○ _ _ _

What do Kenny and Grahame enjoy doing together?

reading together
reciprocate
sprightly
oblivious
imminent
insolent
urchin
exploit
codger
chide
bantering
impudent
earnest
carnage

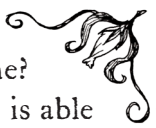



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Literary Strands



1. *Kenny & the Dragon* is based upon the story *The Reluctant Dragon* written by Kenneth Grahame. Using a chart, compare Kenny to the Boy, Grahame to the Dragon, and George to St. George. How closely do the characters compare? What differences are there? If there are any differences, why do you think those differences were made?
2. What's in a name? The author makes homage to *The Reluctant Dragon* through the use of names. Discuss why the author uses the names Kenny, Grahame, and George.
3. *Kenny & the Dragon* is set in the time of knights, dragons, and armor. Go to the library and research the different types of armor worn by knights. Research coats of arms the knights had inscribed on their shields. What did the coat of arms mean? In battle how did knights recognize their enemies from their fellow knights? Have the students make up their own coat of arms.
4. Discuss the various themes from the book including friendship, tolerating differences, responsibility, honesty, pacifism, and knowledge.
 - a. Kenny believes in being honest by correcting the King's Royal Bestiary, yet he is willing to deceive the townspeople to save his best friends. Is it possible to be honest all the time? Are there times when it is appropriate to tell lies?
 - b. Responsibility occurs several times in the story. What exactly is responsibility? How does one become responsible? An example of teaching responsibility is Kenny's parents' insistence that he do his homework and wash the dishes before investigating the dragon. Grahame refuses to try to stop the fight and insists that Kenny handle the details of stopping the conflict. Is Grahame neglecting his responsibilities? Father was prepared to drag his family from their home due to the dragon's presence, yet he allows Kenny to investigate the dragon by himself. What is the parents' responsibility in caring for their children?
 - c. Preconceived differences can influence people's behavior. Kenny and his classmates have different opinions on school. How does this difference of opinion affect the way his classmates treat Kenny? Have the students discuss ways Kenny could be accepted by his classmates. Both St. George and Grahame have preconceived ideas about each other. How do these impressions cause conflicts in the story? How do they resolve their



disagreements? What was the townspeople's preconceived impression of Grahame? Examine why the people felt Grahame was a danger to the town. Discuss how one is able to change the impression of others. Consider how difficult it may be to stand up for one's beliefs, especially when it is the opposite of what the majority believes.

- d. Define pacifism. Explain Grahame's resistance to fighting to a conscientious objector.
 - e. Explore different types of knowledge. Kenny is book smart, he loves academia yet learns that there are different kinds of knowledge. At the end of the story Kenny finds out that his unschooled father is actually very wise. His father is able to "read" the people, discover the "leader" of a crowd, and is able to "herd" them to do what he wants them to do. Does Kenny learn how to use this technique? If yes, then how? If no, then how could he have used this knowledge to his advantage?
 - f. Friendship is a strong theme in this story. Kenny is drawn into a dramatic conflict between his two best friends. Is it possible to stay friends with someone if you have different beliefs on some topics, or must friends always think alike?
5. Explore the titles mentioned in the book, including *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Lear* by Shakespeare, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* by the Brothers Grimm, and stories by Hans Christian Andersen. What elements found in these stories make them classics?
 6. Have the students write an adaptation of *Kenny & the Dragon* as a play, then rewrite and make changes. Have the students design and make scenery, gather costumes and props, and arrange for sound effects for their play. Make a videotape of the play ahead of the performance so students may critique their play and make changes if necessary. Perform the play for an audience.
 7. Introduce new vocabulary words in context to see if the students are able to determine their meaning.
 8. Grahame the dragon loves poetry. Have the students write a poem describing the dragon.
 9. Discuss ballads and their importance in history. Have the students write a ballad describing the battle between St. George and Grahame.
 10. Have the students read passages out loud from the story, making sure they pronounce words correctly and use appropriate expression.
 11. Discuss different cultural beliefs concerning dragons. For instance, in China the dragon is revered, while in England dragons are considered dangerous, evil, and pestilent. Consider different cultural beliefs, then discuss if dragons exist.

12. To enhance vocabulary retention make crossword puzzles, word searches, and word matches with definitions. After the students are familiar with the words, have them use the words in conversations to ensure they understand the correct use of the words.

13. Write a composition from Kenny's point of view describing what it feels like to know that one or both of his best friends could be seriously injured or killed if the fight between St. George and Grahame is allowed to happen.

14. Discuss the different character traits of Kenny, Grahame, and St. George. Chart the different traits for each character. Write the results of the discussion and have the students provide proof from the story to back up their claims.

15. Chess plays an important part in the story, as noted by the chessboard in George's bookshop. Research the history of chess. Understand the necessity of planning, organizing, and checking for problems, variables, and possibilities, then preparing for them, then discuss how Kenny's plan to save his friends used some of the same techniques as chess.

16. Try writing an introduction to the story that doesn't start at the beginning of the story. This is a technique for learning to organize events in sequential order.

17. Retell the story from the point of view of Porky's dad. Does the story change because of the person telling the story?

18. Take one of the illustrations in the story. Closely observe the illustration for one minute. Remove the illustration and try to recall as many details as possible. Share what is remembered with the class. Look again at the illustration for another minute then write a description of the illustration including as many details as possible.

19. To help the students understand point of view, have two students read out loud a section of the book which has a conversation. After they read, have the students describe the voice of the person they were reading. For example, was the person speaking in a happy, scared, confused, frustrated, or calm voice?

20. Ask the students to come up with solutions to the problem of a dragon who has taken up residence near their town. Choose two students to debate what should be done about the dragon. Make sure they take opposing sides and can substantiate their reasons for their argument.

