

Grade 4

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**The Season of Styx Malone**  
by Kekla Magoon

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**Novel Guide**

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# *The Season of Styx Malone*

by Kekla Magoon

*The Season of Styx Malone* tells the story of Caleb Franklin, his big brother Bobby Gene, and their amazing new friend, Styx. Caleb wants to leave their small town of Sutton, Indiana, but his father believes the world is too dangerous for them to leave home. He wants his family's world to stay ordinary.

When the brothers meet Styx Malone, he turns their world upside down. He's older, cooler, and super smart... *and* he has a remarkable plan for the summer. He teaches the brothers about the Great Escalator Trade: "a way to turn one small thing into more, and more," until they can buy the moped of their dreams.

But Styx has secrets that even Caleb doesn't know, and when one trade goes wrong, their plan and their friendship are put to the test. Can Caleb make things right and prove to his father that he is more than ordinary?

## **Additional Resources**

- If you like this book, you might also like...
  - *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina
  - *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise* by Dan Gemeinhart
  - *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang
  - *The Bridge Home* by Padma Venkatraman

- To learn more, you might look at these resources. Remember to get permission from an adult before using the Internet.
  - Kids Health is a website that teaches about the terrible effects of vaping and smoking cigarettes and juuls. If you have more questions about smoking, ask your teacher for more information.
  - *The Berenstain Bears: Trouble With Money* shows responsible ways to make and save money to buy the things you want!

# Reading: Chapters 1-4

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What is the cardinal rule of the Franklin household? What does that rule mean?
- 2) Caleb says Independence Day might be the reason he decided to become more than ordinary. Why would that holiday be the reason for his plans?
- 3) What does Caleb tell his mother they traded Susie for? Why does he tell her that?
- 4) Why don't Caleb and Bobby Gene stop Styx from looking in their bag?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) What did Caleb's father mean when he called Caleb "extraordinary"? What does Caleb think he means? Using a dictionary, find the definitions for the words *ordinary* and *extraordinary*.
- 2) Caleb keeps pictures of places he wants to visit taped above his bunk bed: the Grand Canyon, the Milky Way, Victoria Falls, and Table Mountain. Research one of these places to learn more about it.

## Imagine

- 1) Caleb says that every once in a while, he sees something on television that makes him “want to reach through the screen and touch it.” If you had the power to do that, what show or place on television would you want to interact with?
- 2) When Styx holds Bobby Gene hostage, neither brother knows what to do. How would you react if you were in Caleb’s shoes?

## Observe

- 1) What does Caleb’s dad say “ordinary folks” are like? List Mr. Franklin’s descriptions of “ordinary folks” in Chapter 1.
- 2) Throughout Chapter 4, Caleb remembers three pieces of advice his dad has given him. Find those pieces of advice, written in italics. What does this advice say about Mr. Franklin?

## Understand

- 1) Caleb and Bobby Gene try to hide the fireworks after they get caught trading Susie. Have you ever tried to hide something? Would you make that choice again?
- 2) When Mr. Franklin talks about being ordinary, Caleb finds it difficult to listen. Have you had trouble talking to someone about a topic you disagree on?

# Reading: Chapters 5-8

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What is on Styx's business card? What does Caleb notice is missing?
- 2) How will Styx help the Franklin brothers?
- 3) What types of tomatoes did Mrs. Franklin plant for each of her children? Why might she have chosen those names for each child?
- 4) What did the Franklin brothers do when their school went on a field trip to the Children's Museum? What do you know about their household that would explain this?
- 5) What is the Great Escalator Trade?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) Bobby Gene doesn't understand when Styx calls himself a "mediator." Look up the word in a dictionary, then write a definition of *mediator* in your own words that Bobby Gene might understand better.
- 2) Cory notices that the Franklins have a lot of clay in their garden. Is clay good soil for growing plants?

## **Imagine**

- 1) Look at Styx's business card. If you were designing Styx a new business card, what would it look like? What would it say?
- 2) The boys start picking up rocks they think might potentially be fossils. Imagine you were digging (with an adult's permission) in your backyard or around your school and found a fossil. What might it be a fossil of? What was the creature's life like?

## **Observe**

- 1) List the types of crops that the Franklins are growing. Based on this list, are the Franklins eating healthily or unhealthily?
- 2) What does Caleb say that makes Cory want to fight? What does Cory say that makes Caleb want to fight? Why do each of these topics make the boys angry?

## **Understand**

- 1) Why does Caleb find it strange that Cory loves playing with Susie? Have you ever had an interest that someone else has found strange?
- 2) Bobby Gene and Caleb have had a lot of trouble with Cory, but after Caleb makes them all laugh, they do not seem to be angry with each other anymore. Why might that be?

# Reading: Chapters 9-12

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What does Styx show the Franklin brothers at the hardware store? How do they plan to get it?
- 2) Caleb and Bobby Gene finally explain to Styx why they've never gone to Indianapolis—their dad won't allow it. What reason does Mr. Franklin give? Why might he feel that way?
- 3) Caleb says the three boys are “technically delinquent.” What does *delinquent* mean? Why does Caleb describe them that way, and why would he use the word *technically*?
- 4) What does Caleb notice about his mother's reaction when he quotes his grandmother? Why might she react that way?
- 5) Why do Caleb and Bobby Gene start fighting over their allowances? Why do you think each brother feels the way he does?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) One of Caleb and Bobby Gene's traditions is to slap “the atlas guy” Rand McNally's sign for good luck. What is a road atlas? What types of things is it helpful for?
- 2) Research a Children's Museum in your town or state that is similar to the museum Caleb wants to go to.

## **Imagine**

- 1) If you were going to pull off a Great Escalator Trade, what would your ultimate prize be? What item would you start off with?
- 2) If you were able to get a moped like the Grasshopper, where would you go? Who would you bring with you?

## **Observe**

- 1) Caleb tells Styx that he and his brother can tell him all about the flora and fauna of the area. What kind of flora—plants, crops, etc.—have you observed so far in the novel?
- 2) How does Caleb describe his mother’s voice when she asks to meet Styx Malone? What does that say about her intentions?

## **Understand**

- 1) Caleb thinks he and Bobby Gene live in a “small world.” Do you ever feel like your world is too small? How could you make the world feel bigger?
- 2) Why might Mrs. Franklin be nervous about her sons being friends with Styx Malone?

# Reading: Chapters 13-16

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What is the first thing Mrs. Franklin says when she sees Styx? Why might she say that?
- 2) What “guy” does Styx know who will help them with the fireworks? What do they get in return?
- 3) What does Bobby Gene say when Styx offers to hold the money? Why might he say that?
- 4) What does Caleb find interesting about the way Styx shrugs?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) Caleb says watching Styx negotiate was like watching a tennis match or someone playing badminton. What is badminton? What does Caleb mean when he says Styx “hit the birdie”?
- 2) Cory’s family has a compost pile that the boys turn as part of their chores. Research what composting is, how it works, and why it would be useful to Cory’s family.

## Imagine

- 1) Imagine you went with Styx to Robo's junkyard. What types of equipment would you look for? What would you try to fix or build with that equipment?
- 2) Caleb does not agree with his mother's description of Styx. Instead, he calls him "a pile of sand, slipping through our fingers." How would you describe Styx based on what you have read so far?

## Observe

- 1) What name does Styx call Bobby Gene? What does he call Caleb? Why might he choose those names for each boy?
- 2) What types of escalator trades has Styx pulled before? List the trades Styx mentions in Chapter 15.

## Understand

- 1) When Bobby Gene has a problem with the fireworks plan, Styx tells him, "If all of us only ever did what we were allowed to do, the world would be a pretty boring place." Do you agree with what he says? Why or why not?
- 2) Styx says that "sometimes doing wrong feels right, and vice versa." What is a time when doing something wrong feels right? What is a time when doing something right feels wrong?

# Reading: Chapters 17-20

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) How does Caleb describe Styx's first dinner at the Franklin household? Why does he describe it that way?
- 2) What does Caleb purposely not tell his mother about their fishing trip?
- 3) What does Styx's house look like? Why are the Franklin brothers nervous about knocking?
- 4) Who is Pixie? What is her real name?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) Caleb says that even though Bobby Gene is built like a linebacker, he does not enjoy playing football. What is a linebacker? What is a linebacker's job?
- 2) Styx is impressed with the Franklin brothers' knowledge of flora and fauna. What are some examples of flora and fauna where you live?

## Imagine

- 1) If you found the pond in the woods, what would you do there? Would you tell anyone about it?
- 2) Bobby Gene and Caleb play an ongoing game of Who Would Win at the pond. If you were to add two characters to their game, who would you choose?

## **Observe**

- 1) What questions does Mrs. Franklin ask Styx over dinner? If you could add any question to her list, what would it be?
- 2) Use a T-chart to compare and contrast how Styx talks to Mr. Franklin versus how Caleb talks to him. Why do they act so differently around him?

## **Understand**

- 1) Caleb says that once Styx found something to like about you, “he had your back for life.” Who is someone who has your back for life? What are some things they like about you?
- 2) Even though he and Pixie are the same age, Caleb assumes she is younger because of the way she dresses and acts. Have you ever thought something about someone but learned you were wrong once you met them?

## Reading: Chapters 21-24

### Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What does Styx want to use to trade for a motor? How do the Franklin brothers feel about it?
- 2) What does Styx say when Caleb asks him if he's ridden in a limo? Why do you think his answer is different from all the times he's told his grand stories?
- 3) How did Mr. Davis get the Grasshopper? Why isn't he keeping it?
- 4) Where do the brothers find out Styx has lived before?

### Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) As the boys think about Mission: Grasshopper, Caleb calls them “stealth agents on reconnaissance.” What does *reconnaissance* mean? Why is it important to a mission?
- 2) Styx is named after the river in the Underworld from Greek mythology. What can you learn about the River Styx?

## Imagine

- 1) When Bobby Gene and Caleb tell Styx some of their crazy stories, Caleb begins one with, “This one time, we took a jar of lightning bugs into the grocery store...” but he does not finish the story. What might have happened next?
- 2) Caleb and Bobby Gene spend part of their evening imagining what they would do if they lived by themselves: they would eat candy at midnight and ice cream for breakfast, have a twenty-four-hour video game marathon, eat pizza and no vegetables, etc. What would you do if you made your own rules?
- 3) What would you name the pond if you were there with the group?

## Observe

- 1) Styx says he will give Mr. Davis the thing he wants most. Reread the beginning of Chapter 22 and list some ideas about what this might be.
- 2) What questions does Bobby Gene ask Styx about his home? Why doesn't Styx want to answer?

## Understand

- 1) Why does the waitress get upset with Styx in Chapter 22, and what does Styx do to make the situation better? How would you respond if you were in Styx's situation?
- 2) When the group talks about their names, Bobby Gene mentions that Caleb's name doesn't mean anything. Why does that upset Caleb? How could not being named after something or someone be a good thing?

# Reading: Chapters 25-28

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) How does Cory respond when the Franklin brothers ask him to cover for them and Styx?
- 2) Why doesn't Pixie come with Styx to his office?
- 3) How can Caleb tell Styx has never been to a bonfire before?
- 4) What does Mr. Franklin say when Styx drops his hot dogs into the fire? How does Styx react?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) Caleb's father helps them build "the good kind of fire," where logs are stacked in a certain way. Research the safest way to stack logs for a fire.
- 2) Research how to plan your own model made of building blocks. How would you decide on the types of blocks needed for the project and how many blocks you would need in each color?

## Imagine

- 1) Caleb and Bobby Gene are working on a building block version of the Grasshopper. If you could choose one object, person, or place from *The Season of Styx Malone* to make out of building blocks, what would you choose and why?
- 2) The Franklin family introduces Styx to s'mores. What kind of food would you most want to introduce a friend to, and what sort of meal would it be part of? Where would you eat it?

## Observe

- 1) Styx describes Mr. and Mrs. Franklin as “cool,” even though Caleb and Bobby Gene don't believe him. Name some examples from this section of the book that illustrate why Styx might feel this way.
- 2) How does Mr. Franklin describe his positivity scale? Where do you think he puts most events, based on evidence in the book?

## Understand

- 1) Why might Styx find it difficult to talk about Pixie moving to a different foster home? What could Bobby Gene and/or Caleb do or say to help him feel better?
- 2) Styx says that the “only person you can ever count on is yourself.” Do you agree or disagree? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

# Reading: Chapters 29-32

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) How do Bobby Gene and Caleb convince Cory to help them get out of chores?
- 2) What does Cory's uncle have all over his house?
- 3) Who is Styx with when the brothers go to his house?
- 4) How does Caleb feel after Bobby Gene jumps off the train? How does Caleb change the way he feels?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) What is the difference between a boxcar train, which the boys ride, and a passenger train, which is what people normally use to travel?
- 2) Research passenger trains in your town or state. If your family were to plan a trip by train, where would you go?

## Imagine

- 1) Bobby Gene thinks it's "crazy" to get onto the train. Would you go along with Styx's plan? If so, how would you convince Bobby Gene? If not, what new plan would you suggest?
- 2) Styx believes that the cleaned-up lunch box will be the perfect trade for a motor. Are the two things a fair trade, or would you trade something different?

## Observe

- 1) Reread the scene where the boys pack their food for the day. What do we know that Caleb does not when he asks, “What are we gonna do, hop a train and ride off into the sunset?”
- 2) What does Caleb observe about Styx’s behavior when they go to his house? How is it different from how he has acted in the past?

## Understand

- 1) Caleb says that the way Styx says, “Yeah” makes it sound as though he is letting people believe what they want to believe. Why might that be a good thing, and why might it be a bad thing?
- 2) Styx and Caleb talk Bobby Gene into jumping on and off the train, even though he does not want to. When is a time someone tried to pressure you into doing something you didn’t want to do? How did you respond?

# Reading: Chapters 33-36

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What happens when the three boys finish their trade?
- 2) Why does Caleb yell at Styx?
- 3) How does Bobby Gene feel about their adventure that day? How does Caleb feel?
- 4) What does Styx do to help Caleb enjoy basketball more?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) Styx says that the vintage Superman lunch box is worth just as much as the motor. Do people collect vintage lunch boxes? Why might someone want one?
- 2) What is a phone book? How is it used?

## Imagine

- 1) Imagine you were with Bobby Gene and Caleb during their discussion about the train adventure. Whose side would you be on? What would you say?
- 2) Bobby Gene decides to call Pike's Place Auto Parts to sort out the problem, but it does not go as planned. What are some other ways the boys could fix their problem?

## Observe

- 1) Caleb begins to wonder if Styx's stories are true. Think about some of the stories Styx has told the Franklin brothers, and sort them based on whether or not you think they are true, giving reasons for your choice.
- 2) In Chapter 36, Caleb lists the good things that could come out of bending the rules. What does he list?

## Understand

- 1) Caleb is convinced that Styx deserves their trust, but Bobby Gene isn't sure. Has there ever been a time when you weren't sure if you could trust someone? How did you decide what to do?
- 2) Bobby Gene makes up with Caleb by telling him he won't stand in Caleb's way. What could Caleb do to make up with Bobby Gene?

# Reading: Chapters 37-40

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) How does Styx act when the Franklin brothers tell him they called Pike's Place?
- 2) When does Caleb take the lead on their trade? Do his actions resemble those of any other characters?
- 3) What does Caleb call his brother instead of "Bobby Gene"? Why might he do this?
- 4) What does Bobby Gene say when Styx says, "Can't count on nothing but your own smarts. Can't count on nobody but yourself"? How does he say it?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) What is Grand Theft Motor? What kind of consequences come from it?
- 2) Pretend you had to travel by something other than by foot, car, or train. Research a lawnmower and other options (e.g., a skateboard, rollerblades, a scooter, etc.) and decide which you would use and why.

## Imagine

- 1) Caleb uses a simile when he says, "Cory might have been as tough as a Harley fender, but he was just about as bright." Think about the other characters in the novel and write a simile that describes one of them.
- 2) Based on how the boys act and the events of the novel so far, predict what will happen when they go to trade for the Grasshopper.

## Observe

- 1) What are the big differences between the words *swag* and *memorabilia*? Consider each word's definition, and explain why the boys chose to use *memorabilia* in their sales pitch.
- 2) What does Styx mean when he says, "Equal risk, equal rewards"? What are some ways the three boys have lived by this motto throughout the book?

## Understand

- 1) Bobby Gene tells Styx that they are not mad at him, they are just disappointed. Has anyone said this to you before? How did it make you feel?
- 2) Styx says there are no such things as miracles. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

# Reading: Chapters 41-44

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What does Caleb tell Mr. Davis he wants the most? Why is Caleb the character who realizes this?
- 2) What do the Franklin brothers and Styx buy with their money other than the Grasshopper?
- 3) Where does Styx drive them on the Grasshopper? Why?
- 4) What does Bobby Gene do when he sees Styx running from DCS? How is this different from how Bobby Gene has acted before?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) What are some important rules for bike or moped safety? Are the boys following those rules?
- 2) What does DCS stand for? What is their job?

## Imagine

- 1) The scene where the boys ride the Grasshopper is told from Caleb's perspective, but Bobby Gene and Styx are riding too. Think about how that ride must have felt from their perspectives. Would they feel the same as Caleb?
- 2) Imagine Mr. Pike was home when Styx and the Franklin brothers came to his house. What would their conversation be like?

## **Observe**

- 1) What are some of Styx's strange behaviors that Caleb notices after their Grasshopper ride?
- 2) What snapshots does Caleb remember about Styx in Chapter 42? What emotions does he notice in each snapshot?

## **Understand**

- 1) Why would Styx lie to the Franklin brothers, his friends, about what he really wants to do with the Grasshopper?
- 2) Styx gets onto the Grasshopper while he is still angry. Is it a good idea to do things while you're mad? If yes, why? If no, what can you do instead?

# Reading: Chapters 45-48

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) Caleb picks up a piece of the Grasshopper. What does it have written on it?
- 2) Does Caleb answer his mother's questions out loud? What evidence from the text makes you think so?
- 3) What promise does Caleb say Styx has kept?
- 4) Who reported Styx to the DCS?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) What is the real city name for Indy? What does its skyline look like, and what interesting things are there to do in the city?
- 2) What does *EMT* stand for? What is an EMT's job?

## Imagine

- 1) Imagine you are Caleb or Bobby Gene, and you are trying to stop Styx from getting onto the Grasshopper while angry. What would you say to him? What else would you do?
- 2) Caleb says he wishes he had a nickname. What nickname would you give him, based on what you know about him?

## Observe

- 1) What does Caleb think has happened to Styx? What does Bobby Gene think? What evidence do the two boys have for their opinions?
- 2) The phone number on Styx's driver's license calls an auto repair business. Why might that be? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

## Understand

- 1) Mrs. Franklin brings her sons to the hospital and lets them stay there as long as they can. How do you help someone who is hurt? How do you help someone whose friend or family member is going through a tough time?
- 2) Caleb considers himself one of Styx's "loved ones," even though they are not related. Who are some of your loved ones, related or not?
- 3) How does Bobby Gene feel about being called "B.G."? What is a good way he could have told Styx and Caleb how he feels?

# Reading: Chapters 49-52

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What does Caleb say about hindsight? Use context clues to determine what *hindsight* might mean.
- 2) What does Bobby Gene notice about the piece of Grasshopper that originally said “S375-681W”?
- 3) What promise does Mrs. Franklin make Caleb? What happens when he reminds her of that promise?
- 4) How does Caleb describe the distance between him and his brother in Chapter 50? How does that distance change in Chapter 51?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) What does it mean when a person has 20/20 vision?

## Imagine

- 1) If you were Mrs. Franklin, would you respond differently when Caleb asks to go back to the hospital? Think about the ways Mrs. Franklin has acted before in the book.
- 2) Consider the actions Caleb and Bobby Gene take to see Styx. Would you act the same way, or would you come up with a different plan?

## **Observe**

- 1) What does Caleb observe about the piece of the Grasshopper in the bathtub? Why might he see it this way?
- 2) Mrs. Franklin tells her sons that they are out of chances. How many chances have she and Mr. Franklin given them so far? Is it reasonable that she has decided not to give them any more?

## **Understand**

- 1) Caleb's belly starts to roll when he thinks about Styx and when his mother won't let him go see Styx. Has your belly ever felt wrong when you weren't actually sick? How did you help it feel better?
- 2) Caleb realizes he never told Styx how special he is. Who in your life needs to hear how special they are?

# Reading: Chapters 53-54

## Ask

Use evidence or quotations from the text to answer the following questions.

- 1) What idea do Bobby Gene and Caleb present to their parents? What do Mr. and Mrs. Franklin say?
- 2) What does Mr. Franklin buy his sons? What does that say about him?
- 3) Why was Caleb upset when his father called him “extraordinary”? How has his opinion changed since then?
- 4) How have the pictures on Caleb’s ceiling changed?

## Explore

Use the resources your teacher provides to investigate the following items.

- 1) How much does it cost to raise one child per year? Do you think Bobby Gene and Caleb can afford that number using their allowance?
- 2) Caleb adds new pictures of places he has visited to those taped above his bunk bed: the Children’s Museum in Indianapolis, Chicago, and Lake Michigan. Choose one place to research, and find at least three new facts about it.

## Imagine

- 1) Imagine you are Styx Malone seeing Mr. Pike's truck there to pick him up. How does Styx feel: nervous or excited? Is he sad to leave his friends?
- 2) Caleb wants to know if there are more happy endings in his future. Think about one happy ending, based on textual evidence, that Caleb might have.

## Observe

- 1) What does the group of friends see at the Children's Museum in Indianapolis? List what they see and choose which exhibits you would like to see yourself.
- 2) How does Styx pronounce *extraordinary*? How does Bobby Gene pronounce it? Why was Caleb confused about his father calling him *extraordinary*?

## Understand

- 1) Do you think it was difficult for Mr. Franklin to buy the tickets to the Children's Museum in Indianapolis after he spent so long telling the boys the city was dangerous? Why might he have changed his mind?
- 2) Caleb eventually realizes that he is more than ordinary: He is extraordinary. How are you extraordinary too?

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As part of our in-class practice, students study and discuss this passage. I will demonstrate different ways of reading it aloud, and students will analyze what makes a good reading. They will also practice reading this passage aloud in various ways.

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Thank you for your help!



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