

# Teachers' Notes

Ready to use *Mergers* in the classroom? Here's a guide to get you started!

## Look Inside For...

- ❖ Discussion Points
- ❖ Writing Prompts
- ❖ Art Project
- ❖ Research Tips
- ❖ And More!



## About the Book

Building upon the success of *This Side of Paradise*, which won the 2001 Hal Clement Award for Best New Science Fiction Novel for Young Adults, Steven Layne has written another gripping tale featuring teens battling evil forces.

In *Mergers*, the sinister antagonist is the mastermind behind an engineered society that has wiped away all traces of race. He is intent on destroying Dirk and his friends, who have spent their entire lives in hiding because of their racial identities. Each has extraordinary powers--Nicci, the African Traveler, manipulates time; Mateo, the Hispanic Metamorph, alters his shape; Keiko, the Asian Empath, heals with her hands; and Dirk, the Caucasian Telepath, invades others' minds.

In this cautionary tale, the themes of loyalty, leadership, and racial intolerance are all called into question as Dirk and his friends struggle to conquer The Merger. When they take a dangerous journey into the past with the hope of restoring the world's natural timeline, each of them must struggle with their own inadequacies and deal with all-too-human failings, despite their special powers. *Mergers'* riveting plot and supernatural characters will keep teens engaged while reminding them of each individual's potential to change the world.

"Gives readers a lot to think about concerning race, fate, trust—and friendship."

--Margaret Peterson Haddix, author of *Turnabout* and *Double Identity*

"This book raises fundamental questions about the anatomy of racial hatred. The premises that society stagnates without diversity and that one person can sway the future bear examination and discussion. Give this one to your teens who might appreciate the Hardy Boys with a more serious twist."

--VOYA

# Talk or Write About . . .

Imagine you are one of the four teenagers in *Mergers*. Explain how you would have dealt with Lisa Tyrone's death.

Imagine you are Dirk. How would you have dealt with Marcus becoming the giant? Talk about a time when you felt trapped and had nowhere to go.

Tell of a time when you betrayed someone or were betrayed by someone. Compare that to Dirk's betrayal of Madam Moment.

Imagine that you had the power of Keiko, Mateo, Dirk or Nicci. Which power would you want and why?

Have you ever had to keep a big secret from someone you cared about? Talk about that time and why it was so important to keep that secret. Compare that to the secret that the Elders and Dirk kept from the others.

Look at the end of each chapter. How were cliffhangers used in the book?

The following quotation is an example of foreshadowing: "Almost involuntarily the image of a wasp filled his pupils ..." (Pg. 23). What other examples of foreshadowing can you find?

What was your favorite part of the book and why? What was the saddest part of the book? What was the most dramatic part? The funniest part? What would you have changed?



# COMIC RELIEF

Mrs. Morph provides much of the comic relief in *Mergers*. Consider some of her comical moments within the book.



Pg. 54 – “Come on, kiddos. You can trust me. Alright, so I may not be the girl you’d bring home to mother and all, but I know how to have a good time. If ya know what I mean.”

Pg. 59 – “You gotta learn when to keep quiet, kiddo. Margie isn’t the kinda girl who gets interrupted. Why I remember this one time when I was tryin’ to...”

Pg. 118 – “You were great. Ya know, if I was about 112 yrs. younger – I’d be chasin’ ya down the school hallways and pretendin’ ta drop all my books, Matty.”

Pg. 150 – “Mrs. Morph walked over and slapped him on the rear. ‘Aaaahh! It’s okay, kid. A young stallion like you oughta run around half-naked every now and then. It’s good for the...’”

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**Find two additional moments of comic relief from *Mergers*. Why did the author select those specific moments to provide comic “relief.” What was happening that required the author to lighten the mood? Was the comic relief effective? Why?**

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# One, Two, Three ... FREE WRITE!

The idea of a merged society and the poignant story entwined within this society provide great ideas for further thought. Read the quotes below and choose one to ponder. Organize your ideas and write your response to the quote to share with others.

“Time is a precious commodity. Do not waste it!” (pg. 43)

“Most teens are insecure. They are searching for themselves. To persecute someone else elevates them to a heightened sense of security. It is a false sense of security, but it *feels* good . . . ” (p. 64)

“We did not understand that depending so heavily on the group was keeping us from growing as individuals . . . ” (p. 73)

“The past is a very good teacher...when we are willing to listen.” (p. 77)

“To embrace hatred for anything or anyone who threatens one’s sense of what is right can allow a person to commit unspeakable acts.” (p. 85)

“He understood, too, something about valor and heroism that he had not realized before. It did not come, always, dressed in armor, moving in tanks, riding on horses, or carrying weapons. It was not found, as some might believe, only in men or only in the young. No, it came in every size and every shape, in every gender and every age. And every race.” (pg. 159)



# Literary Allusions

A literary allusion is a reference to a familiar person, place, thing, or event. There are several literary allusions in *Mergers*. One of them is found below.

“ . . . he was reminded of a tale he’d once heard of a sleeping princess who was awakened by a kiss.” (p. 19)

What tale is Steven Layne referring to in this allusion?

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How does the allusion enhance this passage? \_\_\_\_\_

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Find another literary allusion in the book. Cite the page number and copy the author’s words below.

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What makes this allusion successful? \_\_\_\_\_

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Perhaps you can use a literary allusion in your next piece of writing. Watch for a chance to include one!

# HOW DO YOU SEE ME?

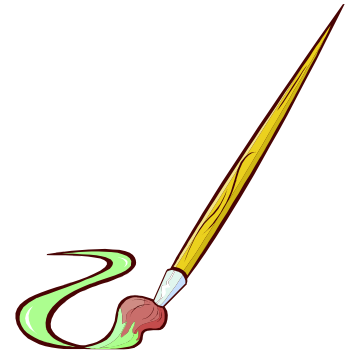


What is your life like today? Describe a typical day for you.

Now imagine you are living in a merged world. What would your typical day be like?

What similarities and differences did you notice? What would you miss most if you lived in a merged world?

# LET'S GET ARTSY



Create your own character and give that character a power (Think of something you have always wanted to do and couldn't. What power would enable you to do it?) Then, design an image of what you would look like with this power. Would you look like Superman with an 'S' on your shirt or like the Incredible Hulk with green skin? Draw, use computer graphics, or make a collage out of magazine clippings. Tell if you are in a merged society or in today's world. Explain your power, how you use it, and why it is so special. Make notes and draw sketches below to plan your character.

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# RESEARCH QUESTION

In order to improve reading and writing, we must ask questions and research them for answers. The Holocaust was a time when people were forced to conform to what the Nazi Party thought was perfection. If you did not meet their certain criteria, you were sent to concentration “death” camps. Using this starter information and what you may have already learned in other classes, research the Holocaust and especially the concentration camps and compare and contrast those camps to the society Steven Layne created in *Mergers*.

Here are some resources that might be helpful:

## **Books**

Gelissen, Rena K., MacAdam, Heather D. (1996). *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz*. Boston: Beacon Press.

This is a story of how one young girl persevered through all sorts of terrible ordeals in order to live for her younger sister, Danka.

Lagnado, Lucette M., Dekel, Sheila C. (1992). *Children of the Flames: Dr. Josef Mengele and the Untold Story of the Twins of Auschwitz*. New York: Penguin Books.

This book follows Dr. Mengele through his study of twins from Auschwitz. The fascination of this book is that it follows the lives of both Mengele and the twins in their readjustment to life away from the camps.

Opdyke, Irene G. (2001). *In My Hands : Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*. New York: Anchor.

This is an account from a non-Jew who stood for everything that was against the Nazi Party. He tells of his struggles and what he remembers from the time of the Holocaust.

Rabinowitz, Dorothy. (1979). *About the Holocaust...What We Know And How We Know It*. American Jewish Committee.

This book gives an inside view of the first death camp.

## **Videos**

Death Camps (1996). (VHS)

Holocaust (EP mode) (1978). Republic Studios. (VHS)

## **Websites**

[www.nizkor.org/faqs/auschwitz-faq-13.html](http://www.nizkor.org/faqs/auschwitz-faq-13.html)

[www.nizkor.org/faqs/auschwitz/auschwitz-faq-09.htm](http://www.nizkor.org/faqs/auschwitz/auschwitz-faq-09.htm)

[www.holocaustforgotten.com/Auschwitz2.htm](http://www.holocaustforgotten.com/Auschwitz2.htm)

[www.history1900s.about.com/library/holocaust/blauschwitz.htm](http://www.history1900s.about.com/library/holocaust/blauschwitz.htm)





# RESEARCH METHODS

When you are writing a paper, it may seem like a never-ending task that is impossible to start and even harder to complete. Sometimes your thoughts and ideas can become jumbled and it can be difficult to figure out where and when the information works best. Here is a way that may help make it easier for you to structure your paper.

1. Pick a question
  - a. Could the Holocaust and *Mergers* have happened at the same time?
  - b. How did *Mergers* and the Holocaust demand conformity?
  - c. What were the reasons behind establishing each society?
2. Research your topic
  - a. Books are a great way to find all kinds of handy information.
  - b. Websites are another way of finding anything that you want to know right at your fingertips. Keep in mind that any information found on the Web needs to be checked for accuracy.
  - c. Videos are an easy way to sit back and open your mind to visual images to help stimulate your mind and possibly create more questions that you want to research.
3. Choose a theme that will supplement and strengthen the answer to your research question. Address it throughout your paper.
  - a. Here are some themes that are commonly used:
    - i. Friendship
    - ii. Strength
    - iii. Betrayal
    - iv. Evil/Good
    - v. Or choose one of your own!
4. Helpful Hints:
  - a. Start with the body of the paper.
  - b. Use all your facts in the body and let your mind and fingers flow into writing all of the new knowledge that you have learned through research.
  - c. Finally go back and complete your introduction and conclusion. (These should be a snap now that the rest of the paper is done.)
  - d. Once the full paper is done, read through it and make sure there are no grammatical errors. Give it a title that draws readers into your research.

**Titles by  
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### **This Side of Paradise**

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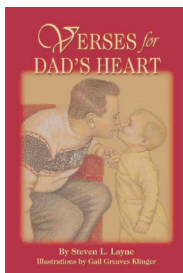
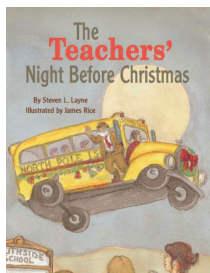
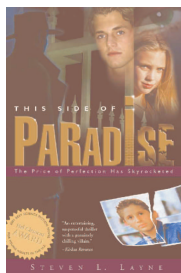
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## **About the Author**

Award-winning author and educator Steven L. Layne serves as associate professor of literature at Judson College in Elgin, Illinois. He is a respected literacy consultant, motivational keynote speaker, and featured author at conferences and literary events worldwide. He is the author of six picture books published by Pelican, including the International Reading Association/Children's Choices selections *My Brother Dan's Delicious* and *The Teachers' Night Before Christmas*, which is also one of the best-selling books in *The Night Before Christmas Series*. Dr. Layne is also the author of *Thomas's Sheep and the Great Geography Test*, *Thomas's Sheep and the Spectacular Science Project*, *The Principal's Night Before Christmas*, and *Over Land and Sea*. His novel *This Side of Paradise* won the 2001 Hal Clement Award for Young Adult Science Fiction. He has written two collections of poems praising parenthood: *Verses for Dad's Heart* and *Verses for Mom's Heart*. He lives with his wife and three children in Saint Charles, Illinois.

Visit Steve's website at [www.stevelayne.com](http://www.stevelayne.com)!

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Tiffany Rife is a graduate student in the education department at Wesley College in Dover, Delaware. She is highly qualified to teach secondary math, science, and language arts. No matter what content area she is teaching, she loves to use lots of BOOKS to enhance the curriculum!

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Dr. Jill Cole taught at Henry-Senachwine Grade School in Henry, Illinois, for 22 years. She has loved all the grade levels she has taught which include 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade literacy. In 2002, she moved to Dover, Delaware, to teach at Wesley College in the education department. She teaches courses in literacy, classroom management, and teacher research. Her passion is intrinsically motivating students of all ages to read and enjoy great books.



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