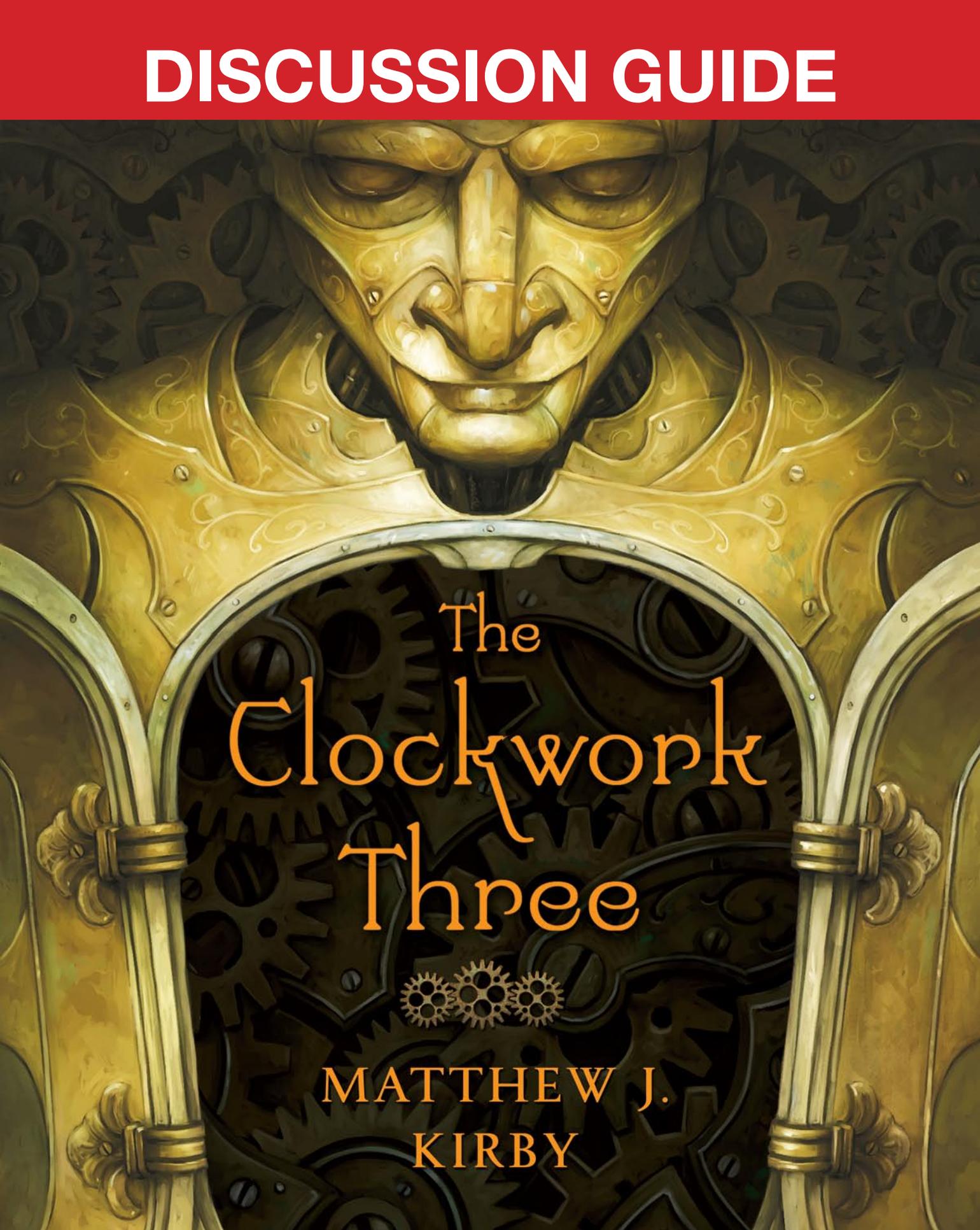


# DISCUSSION GUIDE



The  
Clockwork  
Three

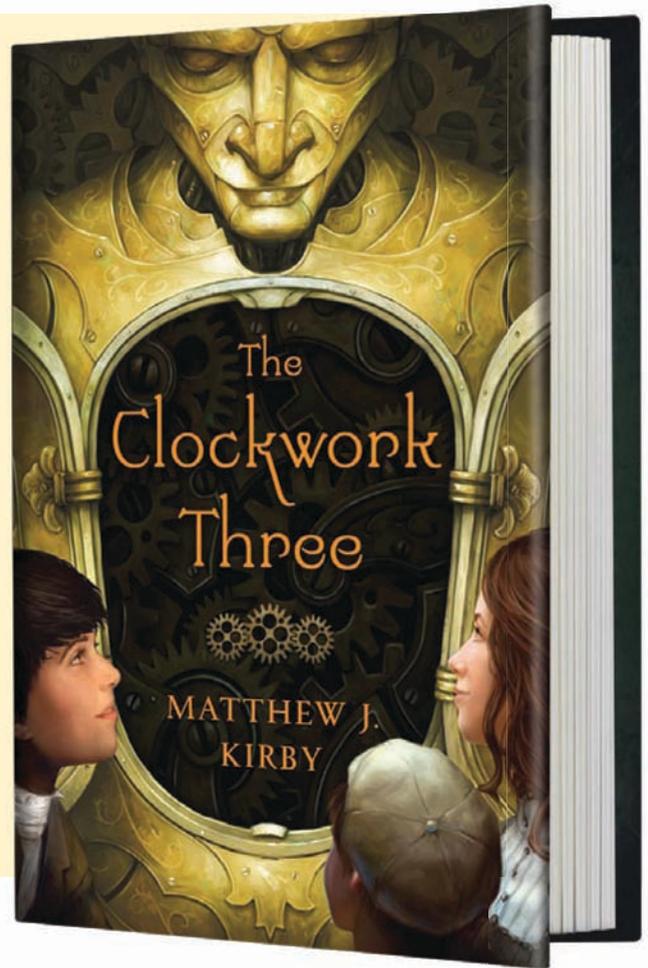


MATTHEW J.  
KIRBY

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Giuseppe, a street musician, desperately wants to escape his cruel master and return to his home country. Frederick, an apprentice clockmaker, is haunted by his past and blinded by his ambitions for the future. Hannah, a maid at a grand hotel, is the only breadwinner for her destitute family and longs to find a treasure rumored to exist in the hotel.

When Giuseppe finds a strange green violin that plays sweet music, he seems a step closer to realizing his dream. Frederick works secretly on a clockwork man, a device he hopes will gain him independence and respect. Hannah is hired as the personal maidservant of a mysterious and wealthy guest at the hotel, who may hold a key to her future. As the lives of these three begin to intersect through a series of events and coincidences, they must learn to trust each other as well as themselves. Each has something to offer the others in pursuit of their dreams.



## BEFORE READING

1. Look up the meanings of words that you will encounter in the story:  
*padrone, automaton, busker, journeyman, golem.*
2. Look up information about Albertus Magnus, a scholar and inventor from the thirteenth century.
3. Look up information about *La Traviata*, the opera that will play a role in the story.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do Giuseppe and the other boys stay with Stephano? Why don't they run away from his cruel treatment?
2. What makes Giuseppe think the green violin will be his ticket to freedom and a chance to return to his homeland? What do you think is the secret of the green violin?
3. Why does Frederick keep his clockwork man a secret from Master Branch? Why is it so difficult for Frederick to trust anyone? Why does the author say of Frederick, "Sharing his memories felt like handing over a sharp knife. A knife that others might handle carelessly"?

4. Why do you think Madame Pomeroy asks Hannah to be her personal assistant? When she “reads” the cards in their first meeting, why does Hannah become so upset? Consider Madame Pomeroy’s statement, “You will meet some who can help you if you trust and help them.” What does she know about Hannah’s future?
5. When Master Branch takes Frederick to the Guild Hall, he says to him, “We mortals storm heaven itself in our folly.” What is he trying to tell Frederick?
6. Why does Madame Pomeroy call Yakov her “golem”? What do you think is the story behind Madame Pomeroy and the mystery that seems to surround her past?
7. Why is it so important to Hannah to find the rumored treasure? What does it represent to her?
8. When Madame Pomeroy takes Hannah and Frederick to the opera, what does the story of *La Traviata* mean to Hannah? What does it mean to Frederick? How does that evening change them both?
9. When Hannah says the opera is very romantic but it’s also very sad, Madame Pomeroy replies, “The two feelings are frequent conspirators.” What does she mean?
10. Compare the experiences of Giuseppe as a busker, Frederick in the textile mill, and Hannah working in the hotel. Do some research on the history of young children working at difficult jobs and compare what you learn with the lives of characters in the story.
11. Why does Hannah steal Madame Pomeroy’s necklace? Why does Walter betray her when she asks for his help?
12. There are adults in the lives of all three children who are kind and caring, but there are also adults who are mean and hurtful. How do Giuseppe, Hannah, and Frederick learn to trust those who can help them?
13. Why does Giuseppe say to the squirrel in McCauley Park, “You’re a good mother”? Discuss the mother figures for each of the main characters. How do they each relate to their real mothers, and how do they learn to accept “mothering” from others?
14. Discuss the history of the city and the park as Pullman relates it to Giuseppe. Why is it important to know the history of the area and how does it help the characters understand where they live? What do you think is the meaning of the inscription on the grave of Phineas Stroop: “McCauley held the key to his happiness”?
15. What is the meaning of the title, *The Clockwork Three*? Discuss the interconnection among the lives of the three main characters and how they become important to each other by helping each other. How does this change each of them?

# AN INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW J. KIRBY

## *What was your original inspiration for writing *The Clockwork Three*?*

*The Clockwork Three* had three separate inspirations, and I originally thought there would be three separate books. Hannah's story came to me because I have always loved the thought of finding a hidden treasure (in fact, I used to go treasure hunting with my grandpa). Frederick's story came to me while I was sitting in a psychology class in college, thinking about the things that make us human. And Giuseppe's story came to me when I came across the story of a boy the newspapers of 1873 called Joseph.

Joseph had been kidnapped from his home in Italy and brought to New York City, where he was forced to play music on the streets to earn money for his ruthless padrone, his master. Joseph endured years of abuse, including beatings, starvation, and confinement in a cellar. And even though his padrone had threatened to kill him if he ever tried to escape, one night Joseph found the courage to do just that. He fled to the one place in New York City that reminded him of his home in the countryside of Italy: Central Park. It was there that a park warden found him, half-starved, and took him to a kind old woman. She clothed and fed him, and shortly thereafter his story hit the newspapers. His condition, and the condition of thousands of children like him, caused outrage. Eventually, Joseph's padrone was put on trial, and Joseph even testified against him. His bravery helped to change the laws to protect children like him and inspired the character of Giuseppe in *The Clockwork Three*.

You can read about Joseph here:  
[www.scholastic.com/josephnyt](http://www.scholastic.com/josephnyt)

And the book *The Little Slaves of the Harp* by John Zucchi is a scholarly examination of the padrone system.

## *Why did you not give a name to the city where Giuseppe, Frederick, and Hannah live? It seems like a very real place, yet it is not named as an historical place.*

I left the city unnamed for several reasons. First, even though some events and characters in *The Clockwork Three* were inspired by history, the book is not historical fiction, and I was worried that if I set the book in New York City or Boston, for example, then readers might think it really happened. The second reason is that the notion of serendipity is very important to certain events in the book, and I worried that those moments might be less believable if they were grounded in a historical place. The final reason is that I wanted the freedom to go where the story led me, and I didn't want to be limited by real geography or historical context.

Author photo by Azure Kirby



*Is the plot element of the “Magnus Head” based on a particular historical object or event?*

Yes, it is. “Brazen heads” were artifacts that feature in numerous legends. They have been attributed to a number of people, including the poet Virgil and the philosopher Roger Bacon, among several others. Brazen heads were seen as oracles, and could be either magical or mechanical in their function. In the case of *The Clockwork Three*, the Magnus Head was inspired by a brazen head attributed to Albertus Magnus. Having said that, I think I should note that the functioning of the Magnus Head in the novel is my own creation. The brazen heads of legend often had limitations on the types of questions they could answer (for example, “yes” or “no” questions). So I tried to think of a limitation for the Magnus Head in my novel, the one question that would distinguish it, and thus the Clockwork Man, from a real person.

I think our great capacity as human beings, and the activity in which our minds are constantly engaged, is making sense of our world. We are always asking “why” questions. Our answers to those questions are part of what makes us who we are. So I made the Magnus Head unable to answer “why” questions. I imagined that the world of a being that could not answer those questions would be devoid of meaning, and that being would be limited in its ability to relate to other people. It would never be fully human.

*Each of the young people in the story has an adult who takes an interest in them and tries to help them. Are these adults based on people you knew in your life as you were growing up?*

Not really. But growing up, there were adults in my life who taught me, guided me, and inspired me. My parents, first of all, always found opportunities for me to pursue my dreams and passions. There were also several teachers and librarians who encouraged my creativity and imagination. I did feel it was important for the children in the book to have adults who cared about them, who offered them support, but did not solve all their problems for them. Giuseppe, Frederick, and Hannah each have to take some very important steps all on their own.

*Do you expect to write more about these characters in another book, or are you working on something completely different?*

My next novel is very different. But the one after that may be a sequel to *The Clockwork Three*.

# SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

## FICTION

**Deborah Hopkinson.** *Dear America: Hear My Sorrow: The Diary of Angela Denoto, A Shirtwaist Worker, New York City, 1909.* Scholastic, 2004.

An Italian immigrant girl works in the infamous shirtwaist factory to support her family.

**Katherine Paterson.** *Lyddie.* Puffin, 2004.

This touching and compelling historical novel describes harsh conditions in the textile mills of 19<sup>th</sup>-century New England.

**Philip Pullman.** *The Golden Compass.* Knopf, 1995.

Lyra must learn who to trust and who she must fear in a strange parallel world that is mysteriously connected to our own.

**Brian Selznick.** *The Invention of Hugo Cabret.* Scholastic, 2007.

An orphaned clock keeper, Hugo lives within the walls of a Paris train station, trusting no one and secretly working on a mysterious automaton until he learns that other people are important to him.

## NONFICTION

**Russell Freedman.** *Immigrant Children.* Puffin, 1995.

Freedman relates the harsh personal histories of actual immigrant children in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Russell Freedman.** *Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor.* Clarion, 1994.

This stunning photo essay chronicles the conditions of young working children in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Joy Hakim.** *An Age of Extremes: 1880–1917 (A History of US series).* Oxford University Press, 2007.

While *The Clockwork Three* is not strictly a historical novel, it is based on the conditions in American cities in this period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when there was great disparity between rich and poor.

**Deborah Hopkinson.** *Shutting Out the Sky: Life in the Tenements of New York, 1880–1924.*

Orchard Books/Scholastic, 2003.

Hopkinson tells the stories of immigrants in New York's Lower East Side.

**Deborah Hopkinson.** *Up Before Daybreak: Cotton and People in America.* Scholastic Nonfiction, 2006.

Hopkinson describes the lives of child laborers on farms and in factories.

**John E. Zucchi.** *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Paris, London, and New York.* McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998.

This is the scholarly study in which the author of *The Clockwork Three* first learned about the plight of children like Giuseppe.

## WEBSITES

[www.matthewjkirby.com](http://www.matthewjkirby.com)

Visit the author's own website.

[www.scholastic.com/clockworkthree](http://www.scholastic.com/clockworkthree)

Scholastic's website dedicated to the book.

[www.buskersadvocates.org/](http://www.buskersadvocates.org/)

Learn about the history of street performers and their rights.

[science.howstuffworks.com/tarot-card1.htm](http://science.howstuffworks.com/tarot-card1.htm)

See images of the cards Madame Pomeroy used in the reading she did for Hannah.

[www.renaissanceastrology.com/albertusmagnus.html](http://www.renaissanceastrology.com/albertusmagnus.html)

Learn more about the medieval scholar Albertus Magnus.

[www.scholastic.com/automaton](http://www.scholastic.com/automaton)

Visit this site to see a real working clockwork man.

[www.scholastic.com/sfopera](http://www.scholastic.com/sfopera)

Learn more about *La Traviata*, the opera that Hannah and Frederick attend with Madame Pomeroy.

**The Clockwork Three** by Matthew J. Kirby

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Discussion Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant, adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature, and Editor of the 8th, 9th, and 10th books in the H.W. Wilson *Junior Authors and Illustrators* series.



Hannah



Frederick



Giuseppe



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