

# Book Club Kit

## THE MAGICIAN OF TIGER CASTLE

LOUIS  
SACHAR

#1 NEW YORK TIMES  
BESTSELLING  
AUTHOR OF HOLES





# Dear Reader,

**M**ore than four years ago I sat down to write what I hoped would eventually become a young adult novel. I recalled attending a book fair in Mantua, Italy, years earlier. I remembered the cobblestones were so uneven that women in high heels had difficulty crossing the square.

I set Anatole in an outdoor café, where he saw just that: a woman wearing high heels trip and fall. I thought this would help ground the narrative in reality before Anatole set out to tell his fantastical tale. I only had a vague notion of what that tale would be. Initially, Anatole was a ghost from the past.

Almost two years later, halfway through the third draft of the novel, I realized Anatole had become more than just my quirky and ghostly narrator. Not only was he no longer a ghost, but somehow, he had managed to make himself the center of the story!

(Here's a tip for those of you who may want to write books for young people. Your main character should not be a forty-year-old schlump.)

I continued that draft, but with a different readership in mind. This would be a novel for adults, though perhaps those adults who still kept copies of *Holes* or the Wayside School books on their bookshelves.

Over the next two years I wrote five more drafts. Like Anatole, I'd brew tea in a cast-iron pot, and then I'd slip back into the world of Princess Tullia, Pito, and the greatest magician in all the land. I was happy to be there. Those three characters had become a part of me.

Somewhere along the way, Anatole revealed himself to be something of a klutz. So, I changed the beginning. He was now the one who tripped and fell over the uneven cobblestones, not some anonymous woman in high heels.

Shortly before the final draft of the book was finished, my wife, Carla, and I vacationed in Italy, along with our friends, Mark and Joyce. I normally wouldn't have wanted to interrupt my writing, but Carla had been planning this trip for years.

I did insist on one last-minute change, however. On our way to the Dolomites, we stopped in Verona to visit the Biblioteca Capitolare, which housed a fifth-century St. Augustine manuscript. I knew that Anatole would want to see it.

Joyce and Mark didn't know why we went there. They also didn't understand why, earlier, in the village of Sirmione, I had to buy a mortar and pestle carved out of olive wood.

How could I explain that it was a present for Anatole?

I hope you are equally captivated by Anatole and his story.

With warm regards,

*Louis Huber*



# Discussion Questions

1

The book opens with Anatole in the present day, having recently gone on a tour of Tiger Castle, but most of the book takes place five hundred years in the past. Why do you think the author included the first chapter? What does it convey that would be lost if the novel just began with chapter 2?

2

Anatole sees himself as a dignified, brilliant, and much underappreciated magician/physician/scientist. How much of that is true, and how much is self-delusion and boastfulness?

3

Princess Tullia is described as “asymmetrical,” with one brown eye and the other blue. Why do you think Anatole attributes different emotions or feelings to Tullia’s brown eye versus her blue eye?

4

Does Anatole’s experimentation on a prisoner in the dungeon seem ethical? If not, why do you think we root for him anyway? Does it make a difference that Pito agreed to be the subject of the experiments if it will help Tullia? How do these actions make us feel about him as a character?

5

When Pito is facing impending execution and Anatole tells Pito he’s there to help him, why do you think Pito cuts him off, rejecting “false hope”?



6

When Anatole first asks Pito if he's in love with Tullia, his answer is, "How could I be?" The second time he's asked, he says, "How could I not be?" Are these answers contradictory? What does Pito mean?

7

Why couldn't Anatole tell Tullia about the memory potion? If he could have told her, do you think she would have agreed to it?

8

Anatole, Tullia, and Pito spend some time in a monastery. What do you think of the abbot's assertion that it is only through an ordinary and dull routine that true enlightenment can be achieved?

9

At one point in the monastery, Tullia tells Anatole that she fears Pito has fallen in love with her. Has he? Or is it wishful thinking on her part? When do you think Pito and Tullia truly developed feelings again for each other?

10

All in all, did Anatole's tamperings make things better or worse?