The Legend of Korra: Ruins of the Empire

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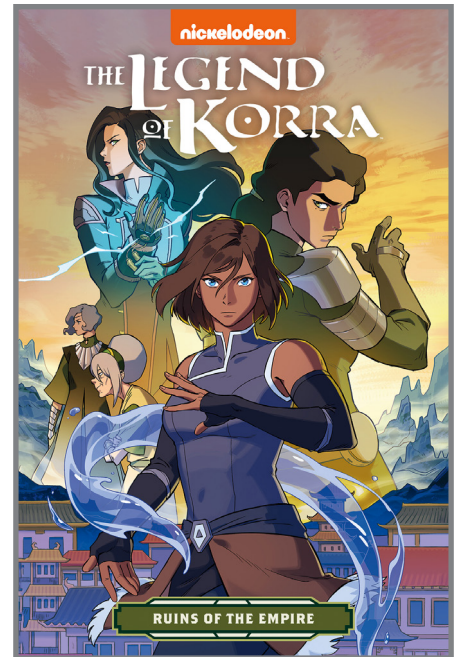
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Secondary

SYNOPSIS

To secure lasting peace for the Earth Kingdom, Korra must trust an unlikely ally! On the eve of its first elections, the Earth Kingdom's future is endangered by its past. As Kuvira works to reclaim her honour, the devious commander Guan undermines the peace Avatar Korra has established to take power for himself. Korra and Kuvira must learn to work together to ensure the future of the Earth Kingdom.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Dante DiMartino is an American animation director best known as the co-creator, executive producer and story editor of the animated TV series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Legend of Korra*, both on Nickelodeon. He was born in Shelburne, Vermont. He studied at the Rhode Island School of Design with Bryan Konietzko, with whom he created *Avatar*. Before Avatar, Mike worked for twelve years at Film Roman.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Michelle Wong is a comic artist and illustrator who likes scary stories and pretty things, especially when put together. She spent her years growing up between Hong Kong, New Zealand, and Australia, before finding her footing at art school where she fell in love with sequential art. She likes movies, exploring the city, and spending way too many hours reading about real-life paranormal experiences on the internet.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
  - What do you think the 'Legend' in the title might be referring to?
  - What genre do you think that this book is likely to be, and why do you think this?
  - What can you see happening in the cover artwork?
  - Who do you think the main character/s of this novel are likely to be?
  - What do you predict might happen in this novel? What are you basing this hypothesis on?
  - After reading the back cover of the novel, as a class, discuss what this tells you about the story.
  - Who is familiar with the *Avatar* animated television series?
  - How do you think this book might fit in with the *Avatar* series storylines?
  - What do you expect to be different in the novel than what you know from the television series, and why do you expect this?

- After reading the first section of the story, discuss what you now know about the characters and setting of this novel. As a class, discuss what you already knew about the background and world of the story, and if and how this has affected your understanding of events in the story so far.
- Kuvira has played a hugely important role in the recent history of the Earth Empire. In small groups, write a biographical summary of what you know of her and her character, and how she has changed over time.
- In your opinion, who is the most important character in the book, and why did you choose them in particular?
- In pairs or individually, write a character summary of Commander Guan. Include in your summary not just his role and behaviours, but his attitudes, opinions and relationships with others.
- Create a timeline covering the events in the novel. Note on the timeline how the tension levels change over the course of the action. Include notes on events that are covered which actually occurred outside the main timeframe of the novel overall such as flashbacks to Kuvira's childhood.
- Why, in your opinion, does the novel contain so much information on the past? What would the effect have been on the readers' understanding of events if it had been entirely set within the present day?
- How important is the visual narrative to the readers' understanding of events? In small groups, take turns reading aloud from the graphic novel to each other, without describing or mentioning the artwork. After everyone has had a turn to read and listen, discuss how much you did or didn't understand of what was going on. Re-read the same section of the novel, this time with everyone also looking at the illustrations as one group member reads aloud. How did this affect your understanding of events? What information was conveyed exclusively by the illustrations, and how important is it to overall comprehension?
- Choose a minor character from the novel, and create an eight to ten panel spread sharing their backstory. You will want to choose someone who appears in the novel, but whose personal history is mostly unknown. Think about what role they play in the novel overall, and what events, experiences and personal character traits could have contributed to their current actions and role. Express as many of these as you can within your 'backstory' sequence.
- Which is your favourite character in the novel, and why do you like them the most?
- When Wu hallucinates Queen Hou-Ting in the swamp, she tells him that people want stability rather than change or progress. Do you think that this is true? Why/why not and in what ways? Write a brief explanation of your point of view and the reasoning behind it.
- Which character do you think has changed the most in both attitude and behaviour over the course of the novel? What do they do that demonstrates this change to others?
- Compare Wu's speech at the start of the book, with the one that he gives at the end. In small groups discuss what the differences are, both the obvious ones, and the more subtle ones. Look closely at the illustrations and include commentary on his body language, personal dress, and visual presentation as well as his speech and verbal mannerisms. Individually, think of at least three descriptive words or phrases that could be used to describe his earlier speech, and three different words or phrases that could be used to describe his later speech. As a class, share the words you chose, and discuss whether you all agree on their aptness, and what your chosen words show about Wu's personal growth over the course of the story.
- Individually, consider the role that the themes of change and personal growth play throughout the novel, and the ways in which they are expressed within the personal journeys of at least two different characters. Write a short analysis of your ideas and conclusions, using evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- Guan, Kuvira, Korra and Wu all want the Earth Empire to be strong and thrive—but they all believe (or believed) in different ways of achieving this. Whose way do you think is the best and most likely to succeed in the long run, and why do you think this? Consider not just how success should be measured, but also who specifically would benefit from each different methodology and its results.
- Look carefully at the process sketchbook at the end of the book. Use the information about how the different characters and scenes were created to help you create a scene of your own that could be part of *The Legend of Korra*. You can choose an existing character and show them in a scene of your own imagining, or you might prefer to create a character of your own, and show them in a place which appears in the novel.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE