

DISCUSSION &
ACTIVITY GUIDE

The Serpent King

Jeff Zentner

Author of *Goodbye Days*



ABOUT THE BOOK

Dill is a misfit in his small, religious Tennessee town. His dad is in prison for a shocking crime, and his mom is struggling to make ends meet. The only things getting Dill through senior year are his guitar and his fellow outcasts, Travis and Lydia.

Travis is an oddball who finds comfort from his violent home life in an epic fantasy book series. And Lydia is like no one else: fast-talking, creative and fiercely protective. Dill fears his heart will break when she escapes to a better life elsewhere. What Dill needs now is some bravery to tell Lydia how he feels, to go somewhere with his music – and to face the hardest test of all when tragedy strikes.

Longlisted for the Carnegie Medal
Winner of the Morris YA Debut Award
Buzzfeed Best of 2016
Goodreads Choice Awards finalist
A New York Times Notable Book

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Zentner was a singer-songwriter and guitarist who released five albums and appeared on recordings with Iggy Pop, Nick Cave, and Debbie Harry. He is now an appellate attorney for the State of Tennessee and lives in Nashville with his wife and son.

He wrote his debut novel *The Serpent King* in a month, writing on his mobile phone on his commute and at night, weekends and lunchtimes between court cases. Visit his website: jeffzentnerbooks.com





DISCUSSION GUIDE

The main characters in *The Serpent King* have very different home lives; Dill's family live in relative poverty, whilst Lydia's family are wealthy. Reread the first chapter of the book and consider how the author provides clues about the characters' financial statuses.

Dill's father is a disgraced evangelical pastor who is imprisoned. In chapter 3, Dill visits his father in prison. What did you think about their conversation? You could discuss Dillard Early Snr's attitude to religion versus Dill's.

Think about how Lydia, Travis and Dill use the internet and the impact it has on their lives. Do you think the impact is positive or negative? Has the internet had a positive impact on your life?

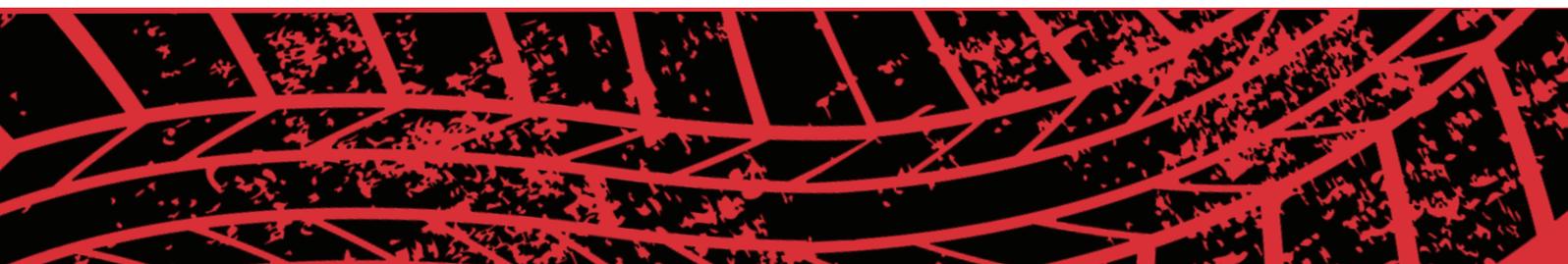
Lydia's favourite song is 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' by Joy Division. Listen to the song and discuss what it tells you about Lydia's character.

Travis loves to read an epic fantasy book series. What does this reveal about his character?

Lydia's internet friends often treat her with condescension because of where she lives ('You're so intelligent and open-minded for a Southerner!' p.53) What were your preconceptions of life in the rural American South prior to reading *The Serpent King*? How have they changed after reading?

'That ain't no lucky name he's got. That's for damn sure.' (p. 72) In chapter 8, we first learn about Dill's family history and the legend of the Serpent King. Consider the way members of their town treat Dill because of his family background.

Why do you think Jeff Zentner chose *The Serpent King* as a title?





DISCUSSION GUIDE

In chapter 10, Lydia recalls being inspired by singer Dolly Parton to set up her blog, Dollywould (*'She said, "If you don't like the road you're walking, start paving another one." So that's what I did.'* p. 90) Who inspires you (it might be a celebrity, writer, artist, sportsperson or someone in your life)?

Why does Dill dread the future?

Dill, Travis and Lydia write messages on the Column in chapter 13. What do each of their messages tell us about their characters?

Dill, Travis and Lydia have an unlikely bond. Why do you think their friendship works?

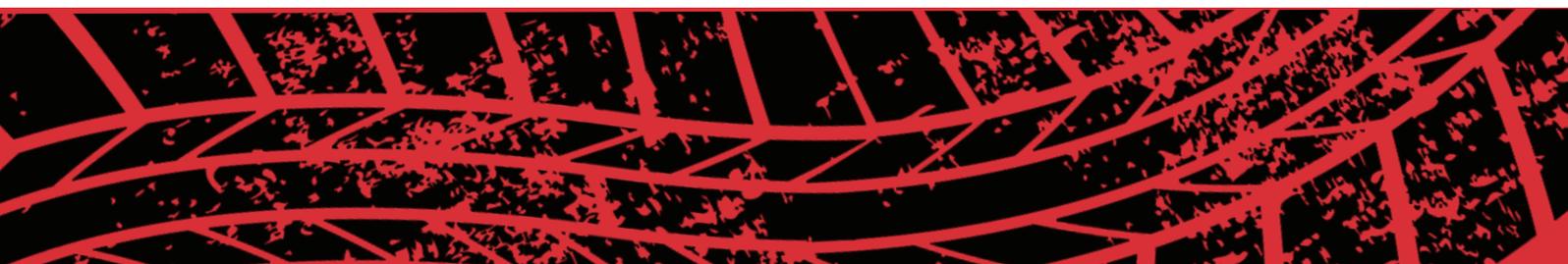
'He sang like the Holy Spirit had descended on him with a cleansing fire.' (p. 197) Why is music so important to Dill? Does his win at the talent show signal a shift in his character?

In chapter 24, Travis gets to meet his favourite author G. M. Pennington. If you could spend a day with any author (living or dead), who would you choose?

Compare how Lydia and Dill cope with their grief following Travis' death.

'Day by day, the poison spread, strangling him.' (p. 292) Consider Dill's struggle with depression. How do the people around him seek to help?

In the final chapter, Dill confronts his father about his future. How did you feel when you read the end of the novel?



CREATIVE EXERCISES

After reading *The Serpent King*, attempt one of the below creative writing exercises inspired by the book:

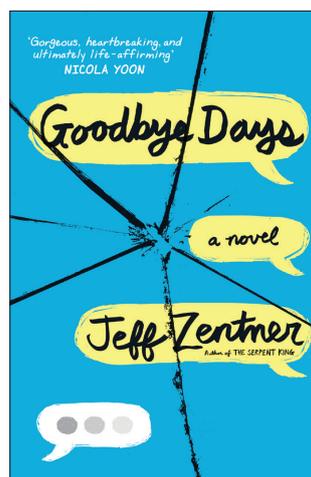
Design a cover for *The Serpent King*: think about different elements in the novel and which you think is most important. How would you represent them on the cover?

Write a chapter of the book from the perspective of Lydia and Dill in ten year's time. Do you think they will go on to achieve their dreams? What will their relationship be like in the future?

Write song lyrics from Dill's perspective (if you're unable to write an entire song, try to write a chorus or verse).

Write a 100 word review for *The Serpent King*.

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR



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