

Study Guide: Juggler in the Wind

by Wim Coleman and Pat Perrin

THE BASICS

About the Author:

Wim Coleman and Pat Perrin are a married couple who love writing books together. They have contributed to two reference books on mythology, and collaborated on science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, plays, and nonfiction books for young readers. Wim's *Nine Muses* is his collection of plays based on Greek and Roman myths, and the couple has co-authored several volumes of retold myths from various cultures.

In many stories that Pat and Wim tell, people from our own time become entangled with myths and legends. In their Red Monocle series, two young people find their way into the world of King Arthur, and into other legends as well. In their upcoming mainstream novel, *Eye of the Macaw*, a middle-aged woman encounters figures from ancient Maya mythology.

Pat and Wim have lived in various parts of the United States, and now they live in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico, with their adopted daughter, Monse. Pat and Wim also manage a scholarship program for Mexican students, sponsored by the San Miguel chapter of International PEN. For more about Pat and Wim, and to learn about their publications, visit www.playsonideas.com.

About the Inspiration:

Myths from all over the world are full of magic, wonder, absurdity, and laughter. Such qualities draw us to those stories. We like to write about characters who must summon courage and take risks—but the kind of risk that our heroes take, the kind of courage they have to summon, goes deeper than mere physical action. It is also internal, spiritual—and can be well-represented by the magic inherent in mythological tales.

According to poet and scholar Robert Graves in *Greek Gods and Heroes*, the gods were driven from Mount Olympus when people stopped believing in them. They were “forced to hide in woods and caves, and have not been seen for centuries.”

What if those often-faulty deities were still living somewhere in our world? What would they do? What would they learn? What would they have to teach us?

About the Story:

Randy Carmichael feels drawn to a tiny circus that arrives in his hometown. His mother, Faye, warns him away from Circus Olympus. She adds, “Magic is frightening when you find it.”

Nevertheless, Randy leaps into the back of a truck as the outfit leaves town. His journey with the ragtag circus is marked by strange events—a prairie earthquake, unexplained abilities, a mysterious wooden staff, a relentless energy-draining wind, dream-like encounters with a bizarre figure, and a real-life down-and-out lounge singer named Johnny Vine who resembles the man in Randy's dreams.



THE WAND BEARER TRILOGY
PART ONE



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The story climaxes with Randy's night-time battle against a supernatural shapeshifter that becomes a serpent, a mountain lion, and a bull. As he apparently dies and revives, Randy gains the strength and courage to win the fight and to save the life of Johnny Vine. With renewed—though not understood—powers, Johnny stops the terrible wind.

At last, Faye catches up with the circus. She tells Randy a strange story about the father Randy has never known.

The performers pack up and head toward the Rocky Mountains. Randy and Faye realize that their own destinies lie there too.

THE CHARACTERS

Randy Carmichael

The main character. A fourteen-year-old “klutzy bookworm,” he lives a nondescript life in a Kansas town until a shabby circus stops there. As he travels with Circus Olympus, Randy discovers much about himself, about his mother, and about his possibilities. Randy, at an undetermined older age, narrates the story.

Faye Carmichael

A single parent struggling with depression and alcohol who has hidden her secrets for too many years. At first she tries to keep Randy away from Circus Olympus; later she joins him in the quest.

The dream figure

A man with pale skin, large dark eyes, two small horns poking out through long, curly, dark hair, and a high brow wreathed with vine leaves. He carries a wildly-decorated wand and is often accompanied by chanting female voices.

Jill

A very pretty girl with the circus, the only other person who can see the figure who appears in Randy's visions.

Harry

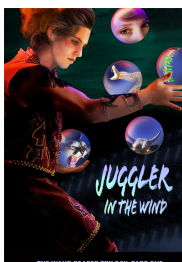
A circus roustabout.

Mitch

A circus roustabout.

Mr. Moloch

The circus freak show's marine man, whose pitchfork is both powerful and dangerously exhausting to use.



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Preston Parnell

The irritable ringmaster, boss of the circus troupe.

Leonora Dupré

Parnell's disagreeable wife, a trapeze artist.

Madeleine von Goetz

A friendly and wise woman with steel-gray eyes, a knife-thrower.

Sterling MacGower

The performer who rides across a tightrope on a unicycle, and who seems to know about things he could not possibly have witnessed.

Hugo Boccaccio

A fortune-teller who seems to narrate random possibilities rather than the past or future.

Lucinda Kane

An animal trainer who carries on conversations with Brunhilda the bear.

Professor Cretorius

A fire-breather.

Salazar

The sword-swallower.

Rupert Fitzsimmons

A clown.

Bart Hume

The side-show barker and one of the trapezists.

April Evans

The bareback rider.

Johnny Vine

A pudgy lounge singer, a carefully-maintained fifty years old or so, who somewhat resembles the figure Randy encounters in visions.



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Based on the opening chapters of the book, how would you describe Randy's mother, Faye? What is your personal impression of her?
2. Why does Randy try hard not to upset his mother? Describe a situation when you avoided a crisis by being very careful what you said to a friend or relative.
3. What is Randy's impression of Circus Olympus when he walks past it on his way to school? When he first goes to the performance? What happens that changes his impression? At that point in the story, what did you think of the circus, and why?
4. What leads Randy to skip school and go to the circus? Describe a time when you felt strangely drawn toward some place or situation without understanding why.
5. Using examples from the first five chapters, describe Randy and Faye's relationship. Did you find their relationship odd, or fairly normal? Explain why.
6. Why does Randy run away with the circus? Explain why you think it was—or was not—the right thing for him to do.
7. When do you think Randy decided to run away? Describe a situation in which you took some action without really thinking much about it in advance. What made you take that action?
8. When the pale, dark-haired, cloaked stranger first appears in Randy's vision (chapter 6) what does he seem to be? Did you find him frightening? Interesting? Did you recognize what mythological character he might represent? If so, explain.
9. What does the stranger mean by advising Randy to "Find another actor"? Do you think the stranger would describe your own life as drama? As comic or as tragic? Explain why.
10. What happens when Hugo and Sterling insist that Randy is a juggler? Why do the balls finally fall? Describe a time when you discovered that you could do something—even briefly—that you had never tried before.
11. When Randy phones his mother, Faye, how does she react to his disappearance? How do you think most families would respond in that situation? How about your own family?
12. After the phone call, why doesn't Randy warn the troupe about what Faye plans to do? Do you think he should have warned them? Explain your reasons.
13. How does the wooden staff come into Randy's possession? If you've ever had a dream that seemed to overlap with real life, describe it briefly.
14. Explain the stranger's words: "Your adversary approaches.... Or perhaps I might say that *you* approach your adversary. It doesn't much matter which. All movement is relative." What famous scientist first discussed the relativity of movement?
15. Why does Randy take the wooden staff with him when the troupe hurries to leave the next morning?
16. How are the police cars stopped? Have you ever experienced something so strange or so frightening that your body reacted physically afterward, like Randy's did? If so, describe that time.
17. Describe the relationship between Randy and Jill. Would you say that they are friends? Compare or contrast their relationship to one in your own life.
18. When the troupe finally stops to rest, why do some of them go into El Rancho de Bob? Do you think it was just a coincidence that Johnny Vine is there? Why or why not?



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19. How would you describe Johnny Vine? Why does he want to join the troupe? Why can't he go with them?
20. Describe the relationship between Preston and Leonora. Compare or contrast them with real-life people you know
21. What is happening to the troupe? Is the hot wind causing their problems? If not, what is?
22. Why do you think that Randy follows the voices into the woods?
23. Compare and contrast Randy's two battles in the woods. What changes Randy?
24. How does Randy save Johnny Vine's life? How do you think Randy feels about giving up the thrysus?
25. How has Johnny Vine changed? What does he do to save the troupe? Do you think that Johnny Vine completely understands his own powers, and why or why not?
26. Using examples from the book, describe Randy and Faye's relationship at the end of *Juggler in the Wind*. How has it changed since the beginning? What do you expect to happen next?

TOPICS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

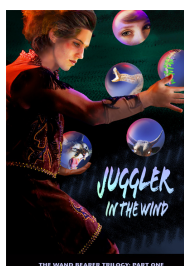
Topic #1: Mythological Characters.

Mythology is a set of traditional stories associated with a particular culture and demonstrating a particular religion or belief system. Myths offer various explanations for how the world came to be as it is. In myths, gods and human heroes do great deeds and overcome obstacles.

1. Each Circus Olympus performer represents a character in the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses. (A pantheon is all of the gods and

goddesses in the mythology of a particular culture.) If you know the mythology—or if you do a little research—you'll be able to identify some of them as you read *Juggler in the Wind*. First, make a chart where you can list each name and note the clues that might help identify each one. As you discover who they are, fill in their Greek names and describe the Greek character. See if you can identify the five listed below. (You'll be able to figure out all of them by the time you finish *The Wand Bearer Trilogy*.)

Character	Characteristics	Greek Deity
Mr. Moloch		
Preston Parnell		
Leonora Dupré		
Sterling MacGower		
Johnny Vine		



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2. Research mythological characters from other cultures—such as those told in Native American, African, Celtic, Latin American, or Norse traditions. Tell the tale of one of those characters as a short story, in a skit, using a graphic style such as a comic-book, or as a computer presentation.
3. What other fantasy or science fictions novels have you read—or what movies or TV shows have you seen—that included mythological characters? What cultures are those characters from? Using text and/or images, compare and contrast characters from specific myths with characters in *Juggler in the Wind*
4. The poet and scholar Robert Graves says in *Greek Gods and Heroes*:

As soon as the Emperor Julian of Constantinople, the last of the Roman emperors to worship the Olympians, had been killed fighting the Persians in A.D. 363, Zeus was told by the Three Fates that his reign had ended—he and his friends must leave Olympus. Zeus angrily destroyed the palace with a thunderbolt.... The Olympians were forced to hide in woods and caves, and have not been seen for centuries.

Make up your own story about what happened to the Greek gods after they had to leave Mount Olympus. Tell your tale as a short story, in a skit, using a graphic style such as a comic-book, or as a computer presentation.

Topic #2: Shapeshifters.

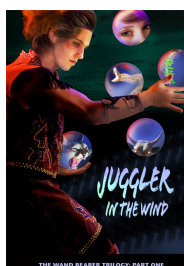
In *Juggler in the Wind*, Johnny Vine takes the form of a snake, a lion, and a bull. He tells Randy, “Shapeshifting’s not like putting on a costume. It’s not as simple as wearing a snake or lion or bull suit. Those creatures—they’re really animal sides of my nature, not *me* exactly.”

1. Research shapeshifters in other stories from books, movies, television, or in computer games. Using text and/or images, compare and contrast one or more of these other shapeshifters with Johnny Vine’s shape shifting experience.
2. Make up your own story about a shapeshifter. When does the shifting take place? Is the change voluntary or involuntary—under control or out of control? What effect does the change have on the character who shifts? On other characters? Tell your tale as a short story, in a skit, using a graphic style such as a comic book, or as a computer presentation.

Topic #3: Oracles.

Characters who can foretell the future are popular in fantasy and science fiction stories, as well as in world mythologies. In *Juggler in the Wind*, Sterling MacGower tells Randy, “Tell any oracle worth his salt that he can only foresee the future and he’ll sue you for slander. Oracles tell *time*, in all its manifold manifestations—past, present, and future; north, east, south, and west; up, down, forwards, backwards, and sideways; time in its full, glorious spectrum.”

1. Research oracles in other stories from books, movies, television, or in computer games. Using text and/or images, compare and contrast one or more of these other shapeshifters with Hugo Boccaccio in *Juggler in the Wind*.
2. Make up your own story about an oracle. Does your character see the future or the past or some alternate reality. Is the oracle’s ability change voluntary or involuntary? What effect does the oracle’s visions have on the character himself or herself? On other characters? On the development of the story? Tell your tale as a short story, in a skit, using a graphic style such as a comic book, or as a computer presentation.



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Topic #4: The Call to Adventure.

In Randy's first vision, he asks the cloaked stranger, "What if I don't *want* my life to be drama?" The stranger replies, "Oh, but you do. You've made that clear simply by going forth into the world. You're on a quest, boy—you've answered a call."

In *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, the well-known authority on mythology Joseph Campbell described the Hero's Quest. According to Campbell, a hero is called to adventure, and then,

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 30.)

The hero's call, separation, initiation, and return can take many forms. Research Campbell's ideas and explain how each stage takes place in *Juggler in the Wind*.



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