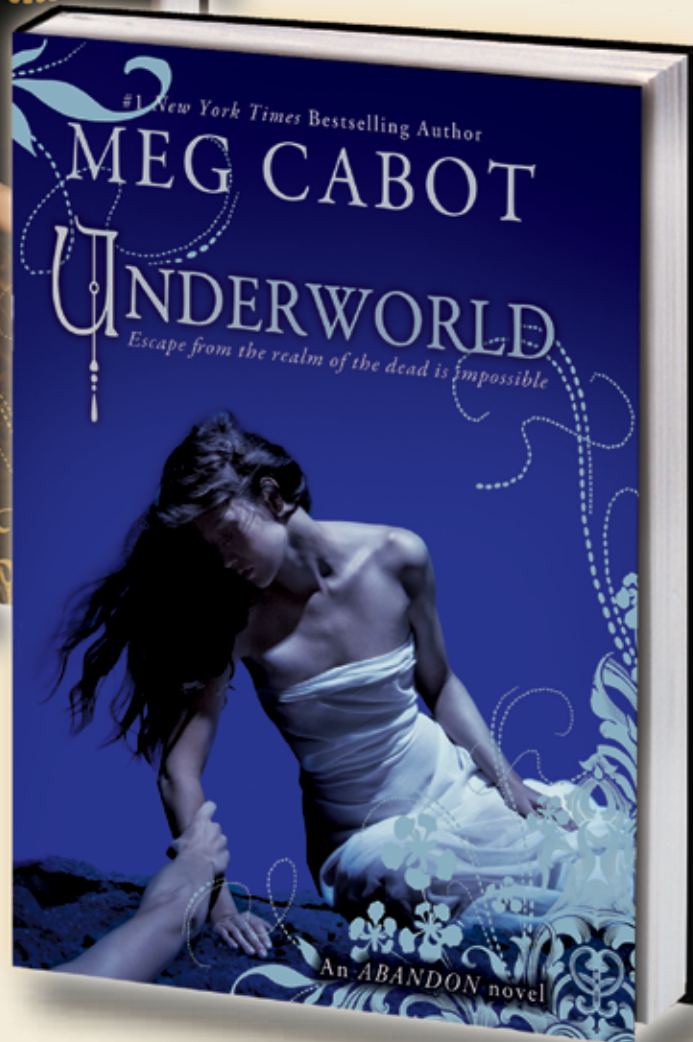


READING GROUP GUIDE

Abandon and Underworld by Meg Cabot



ABOUT *ABANDON*

Seventeen-year-old Pierce knows what happens to us when we die. That's how she met John Hayden, the mysterious stranger who's made returning to normal life—or at least life as Pierce knew it before the accident—next to impossible. Though she thought she escaped him—starting a new school in a whole new place—it turns out she was wrong. He finds her.

What does John want from her? Pierce thinks she knows...just like she knows he's no guardian angel, and his dark world isn't exactly heaven. But she can't stay away from him, either, especially since he's always there when she least expects it, but exactly when she needs him most.

But if she lets herself fall any further, she might find herself back in the place she fears the most. And when Pierce discovers the shocking truth, that's exactly where John sweeps her: The Underworld.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- At the novel's opening, Pierce states, "Anything can happen in the blink of an eye. Anything at all." How does this ominous statement foreshadow the events that transpire in *Abandon*?
- Consider the classic tale of Persephone and Hades. Though Cabot's adaptation is described as a darkly reimagined homage to this hallmark of Greek mythology, in what ways does *Abandon* remain faithful to her inspiration? In your opinion, what are some of the most important differences between the two stories?
- Abandon* is told in first person; how would the story be different if someone besides Pierce were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?
- Describe Pierce. What makes her a dynamic character? Is she the type of person you would want to befriend? Why or why not? Does she remind you of anyone you know? Does anything about her remind you of yourself?
- Consider Pierce and John's encounter at the graveyard following her grandfather's funeral; though she is still a child when they first become acquainted, how does this meeting serve as a catalyst for change in each of their lives? Offer specific examples from the text to support your statements.
- Why is the necklace John gives Pierce such an important gift? What role does it play in protecting her? Consider the necklace's own tragic history—how does Pierce's ownership of it fit into that puzzle?
- How would you describe Pierce's family? With whom does she seem closest? To what extent are the relationships of these characters shaped by the world around them? To what extent do their relationships shape that world?
- In *Abandon*, fear both motivates and incapacitates Pierce. Consider how she deals with her fears. In what ways does she acknowledge them? Are her fears justified? Is she able to turn to others for help? What are the consequences of her reactions?
- Explain the significance of the title, *Abandon*. In what ways does it accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in the novel?
- In what ways is Pierce's life similar to that of Persephone's from the classic Greek myth? How are they different? What are some of the unique challenges faced by each of them? Do you think one has a significantly easier life? Explain your answer.
- How would you characterize the relationship between Pierce and John? Do you feel that it changes over the course of the novel? If so, in what ways?
- Using the phrase, "This is a story about...", supply five words to describe *Abandon*. Explain your choices.

ABOUT UNDERWORLD

Seventeen-year-old Pierce Oliviera isn't dead. Not this time. But she is being held against her will in the dim, twilight world between heaven and hell, where the spirits of the deceased wait before embarking upon their final journey.

Her captor, John Hayden, claims it's for her own safety. Because not all the departed are dear. Some are so unhappy with where they ended up after leaving the Underworld, they've come back as Furies, intent on vengeance...on the one who sent them there and on the one whom he loves.

But while Pierce might be safe from the Furies in the Underworld, far worse dangers could be lurking for her there—and they might have more to do with its ruler than with his enemies. And unless Pierce is careful, this time there'll be no escape.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Early in *Underworld*, Pierce states, "I realized something: I wanted to believe in fairy tales, too. My subconscious—just like all the doctors had tried to reassure my mother—had worked out the resolution to a problem that had been bothering me for a long time. What I really wanted was to run *towards* John, not away from him." How does Pierce's comment capture her emotional connection to him? Do you expect this understanding on her part to change the dynamics in their relationship? Why or why not?
2. Consider the novel's cover. In what ways is the image represented symbolic for the events that transpire throughout the course of the book?
3. Describe John. What do his commitments to Pierce and his work indicate about his character? Are there any ways that he and Pierce are similar? In what ways are they different?
4. Consider the significance of John's gift of a dove to Pierce. Why does this bird become so important to her? While talking to it, Pierce offers, "I can start by taking care of you, and then move on to taking care of him. He's always needed a bit of caring for, don't you think?" In what way is the name that Pierce reluctantly gives the dove symbolic for her relationship with John, as well as expectations for her life in general?
5. At the beginning of each chapter of *Abandon* and *Underworld*, an excerpt from Dante's *Inferno* is offered as an introduction to that particular section. In what ways does this feature set the stage for the story as it unfolds? In your opinion, does this offering seem fitting? Why or why not?
6. Though she knows John disagrees, Pierce thinks, "I was never going to believe there wasn't a way to stop the evil spirits—angered by where they'd been sent after passing through the Underworld, and who'd managed to return there—determined to seek vengeance on John." What does Pierce's attitude about the Furies reveal about her? In what ways does her outlook toward them benefit John?
7. During her current stay in his realm, Pierce learns from John's crew that her previous visit resulted in changes in the operational procedures in the Underworld. What might readers conclude from this knowledge?
8. Why does Alex's desperate need to seek revenge for the pain and suffering befallen upon his father put him at such great danger? Can you offer an alternative way for him to seek justice against the Rectors and the other families who allowed to his father to be incarcerated without coming to his aid?
9. Consider the variety of settings in *Underworld*; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.
10. Describe Henry Day, Frank, Mr. Liu, and Mr. Graves. How does each of these characters show his loyalty to John, their captain? (Be sure to use textual evidence to support your answers.)
11. How does learning John's history (including his role in the death of his father) change Pierce? In your opinion, do you think John should have been more forthcoming with his past? Why might he chosen not to do so? What ultimately allows Pierce to accept John's past?
12. Throughout the novel, readers witness the complexities of the various relationships among the characters. Consider whose relationship seemed most similar to one of your own personal relationships. What about it reminded you of your experiences?
13. In what ways does the dark history of Isla Huesos and the link between John's family and the Rectors complicate matters for John, Pierce, and her family?
14. Though he knows there is great danger in allowing Pierce to leave the Underworld in an attempt to protect her cousin Alex, John does so anyway. What can

be inferred about his motivation to do so? What is significant about this act on his part?

15. In your opinion, how does *Underworld* work as a sequel to *Abandon*? Offer your predictions about the direction the author will take her characters in the next installment.

ENRICH YOUR READING EXPERIENCE

1. Meg Cabot's *Abandon* and *Underworld* can be read as darkly reimagined retellings of Persephone's story. Similarly, movies often turn to Greco-Roman stories for inspiration. Host a film screening of a movie which has been adapted from a classical story (examples could include *O, Brother, Where Art Thou?* and *10 Things I Hate About You*). After viewing, lead a discussion where the conversation includes why authors or filmmakers are inspired to take classic stories and put them in contemporary settings and circumstances.
2. Throughout history, art has captured and celebrated Persephone's story. Consider Pierce's experiences. Using a variety of mediums, create an original piece of art that is symbolic of Pierce or one of the major themes of *Abandon* and *Underworld*. (These may include but are not limited to the following: love, loyalty, and sacrifice.)
3. Music is often used to connect people to each other and the world at large. Select a favorite character from *Abandon* or *Underworld* and create an original playlist that is representative of the experiences that this character undergoes throughout the course of the novel. Offer an explanation for the selection of each song.

COMPARISONS

You can have interesting discussions comparing the themes in *Abandon* to those in the following books.

Francesca Lia Block. *Psyche in a Dress*. HarperCollins, 2008.

A young woman, Psyche, searches for her lost love and questions her true self in a modern retelling of Greek myths.

Julius Lester. *Cupid*. Harcourt, 2007.

In this modern retelling, Cupid, the spoiled and mischievous god of love, is attracted to and marries the beautiful mortal, Psyche, and both learn many lessons about the nature of love.

Alyson Noël. *Evermore: The Immortals*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2009.

Since the car accident that claimed the lives of her family, sixteen-year-old Ever can see auras and hear people's thoughts, and hides from other people until she meets Damen, another psychic teenager who is hiding even more mysteries.

Melissa Marr. *Wicked Lovely*. HarperCollins, 2007.

Seventeen-year-old Aislinn is drawn into a centuries-old battle by Keenan, the terrifying but alluring Summer King, who determines that she must become his queen and save summer from perishing.

Esther Friesner. *Nobody's Princess*. Random House, 2007.

Headstrong Helen, who will be called queen of Sparta and Helen of Troy one day, learns to fight, hunt, and ride horses while disguised as a boy, and goes on an adventure throughout the Mediterranean world.

Kelly Armstrong. *The Summoning*. HarperCollins, 2009.

Chloe Saunders is haunted by a particularly violent ghost and is sent to Lyle House, a center for disturbed teens, where she finds herself investigating a series of other paranormal happenings.

WEBSITES

A comprehensive website focused on all areas of Greek myths. <http://www.greekmythology.com/>

A site dedicated to the heroes, gods, and monsters of Greek mythology. <http://www.mythweb.com/>

A site for exploring Greek mythology and the gods in classical literature and art. <http://www.theoi.com/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Meg Cabot's many series and books for adults, teens, and tweens have included multiple #1 *New York Times* bestsellers and have sold over fifteen million copies worldwide. Her Princess Diaries series has been published in more than thirty-eight countries and was made into two hit films by Disney. Meg also wrote the *New York Times* bestselling Mediator, Airhead, and Allie Finkle's Rules for Girls series; *Insatiable*; and the award-winning novels *All-American Girl* and *Avalon High*. Meg lives in Key West with her husband and two cats. For more information about Meg Cabot, visit her at www.megcabot.com.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MEG CABOT

What was your inspiration for Abandon?

It was the myth of Hades and Persephone. I came across it in high school. I was hooked right away.... There's something so compelling about a guy who falls so desperately in love with a girl that he's willing to kidnap her and allow the earth to be destroyed rather than give her up, because he's doomed forever to rule over the dark Underworld, and he can't stand to be without her.

Why were you interested in the myth of Persephone?

I think everyone can relate to that scary feeling of falling in love for the first time—you really do think you'd be willing to do anything for that person.

And then there's that sense a lot of teenagers have of never feeling quite like you fit in. I was always longing to find that one special person who would not only understand me, but come and take me away to a place where, not only would I finally belong, but I would be wholly and completely loved.

But that kind of love and longing often turns out to be dark and scary, like it does in the myth of Persephone. And that's how it turns out in *Abandon*, too.

What can you tell us about your character Pierce Oliviera?

Pierce is definitely a heroine who has been through a lot, even though she's only seventeen. She's already died (and been revived), but she can never forget what she saw during the short time she was dead—and of course no one believes her.

Now she's got to face life after death. But she soon learns it is not as easy to start over as she had hoped, especially since the mysterious person that she met while she was dead—John Hayden—won't seem to let her.

Pierce thinks she knows what he wants, and it isn't something she's ready to give him. But he's also the only person who understands what she's been through. At the same time, *she* can't understand *him*. It's almost like he hasn't had any kind of human contact in years...which is dangerous, especially since everywhere Pierce goes, trouble seems to follow, and he seems determined to protect her.

But people can be extremely compelling when they seem dangerous...especially when they're as dark and mysterious as John. Pierce is drawn to him in a way she can't understand. And that might be what scares her most of all.

What do you hope readers will take away from Abandon?

All of the main characters in *Abandon* have actually been abandoned in some way, often because they're unwilling—or unable—to conform to societal norms.

But it's *okay* not to be normal. What some people may consider "different" or even "crazy" may actually be the thing that ends up making you special, and saving you in the end. And the person who scares you most could be the only person who knows what's truly in your heart.

***Abandon* by Meg Cabot**

Ages 14 and up, 352 pages,
Hardcover: 978-0-545-28410-3 • \$17.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-04064-8 • \$9.99

***Underworld* by Meg Cabot**

Ages 14 and up, 352 pages,
Hardcover: 978-0-545-28411-0 • \$17.99

Also available as a Scholastic Audiobook and as an eBook.

Books are available from your local bookstore or usual supplier, or from:

Scholastic, 2931 East McCarty Street, P.O. Box 7502, Jefferson City, MO 65102.
Call toll-free 1-800-SCHOLASTIC.

This guide was prepared by Rose Brock, a teacher, school librarian, and doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

 SCHOLASTIC

Point

scholastic.com | megcabot.com

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.
Photo Credit: © 2010 Ali Smith.