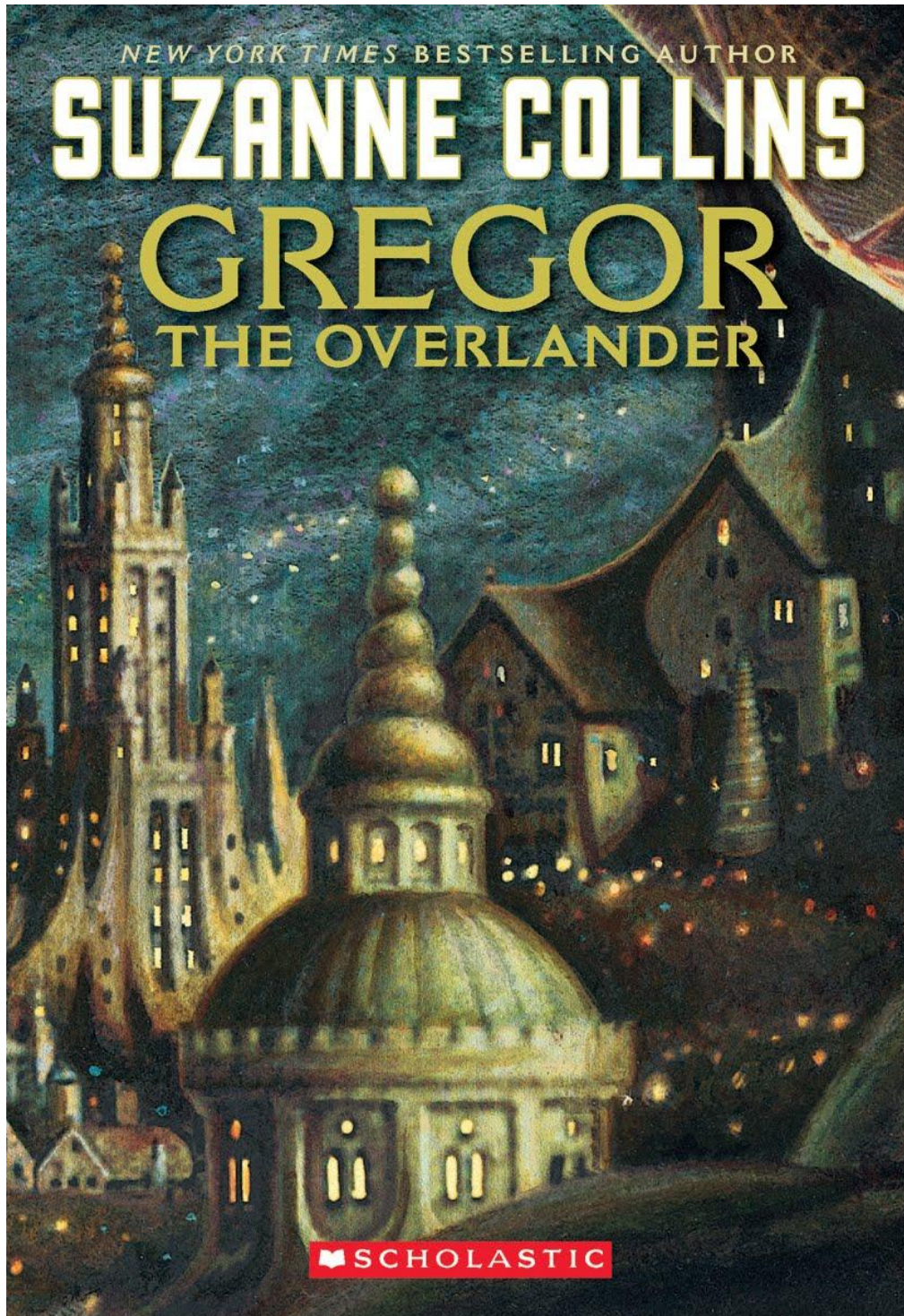


## About the book...



...

*Watching his little sister one day while doing laundry in the basement of their apartment building, Gregor sees Boots crawl into an air shaft and disappear. He quickly follows her and finds himself falling through the shaft, landing in an underground world filled with huge, talking cockroaches, giant spiders and translucent-skinned humans. Wanting to leave as quickly as he arrived, Gregor discovers he's the leader that's been promised to help the Underland inhabitants battle the giant, gnawing rats. He's not totally convinced he needs to stay until he realizes his father, who disappeared three years ago, is held captive by these rats. Together with Boots, who charms all the strange creatures, one large rat and all the cockroaches and spiders, Gregor successfully defeats the rats and frees his father in this robust fantasy.*

**-Books & Authors**

## About the Author...



Suzanne Collins was born in Hartford, Connecticut, the youngest of four children. Her father was an Air Force pilot, and her family moved several times when she was young, living in places like New York City and Brussels.

Eventually, the Collins clan ended up in the South, where Suzanne graduated high school from the Alabama School of Fine Arts in 1980. Collins then enrolled at Indiana University, where she graduated in 1985 as a double major in theater and telecommunications. She then went on to earn a master's degree in dramatic writing from New York University.

Following graduate school, Collins moved into television, writing for several children's television programs, including *Clarissa Explains It All* and *Little Bear*. Her work for those shows soon caught the notice of James Proimos, creator of the WB children's program *Generation O!*, who hired Collins as his head writer. A big fan of her writing, it was Proimos who urged Collins to try writing books.

The resulting novel, [\*Gregor the Overlander\*](#), became the first installment in Collins's "Underland Chronicles," a series of *Alice in Wonderland*-esque tales that find Gregor traversing an urban environment. Collins, who lived in New York City for sixteen years, wanted to gear her fantasy toward cosmopolitan young readers who are more familiar with city streets than sunlit meadows. As a contributor to the Scholastic Web site noted of Collins's inspiration, "in New York City, you're much more likely to fall down a manhole than a rabbit hole and, if you do, you're not going to find a tea party."

Her next series, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, became an international bestseller. Owing to her success with the Hunger Games, Collins was named as one of TIME's 100 most influential people in the world in 2010.

Collins now lives in Connecticut with her husband and two children.

For more information, visit the author's website at <http://www.suzannecollinsbooks.com/>

## Selected Writings

- *The Hunger Games* series:
  - [\*The Hunger Games\*](#), Scholastic (NY), 2008.
  - [\*Catching Fire\*](#), Scholastic (NY), 2009.
  - [\*Mockingjay\*](#), Scholastic (NY), 2010.
- *The Underland Chronicles* series:
  - [\*Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane\*](#), Scholastic (NY), 2004.
  - [\*Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods\*](#), Scholastic (NY), 2005.
  - [\*Gregor and the Marks of Secret\*](#), Scholastic (NY), 2006.
  - [\*Gregor and the Code of Claw\*](#), Scholastic (NY), 2007.

## Reviews

### *Booklist*

\*Starred Review\* Gr. 4-7. What if Alice fell down an air vent in a New York City apartment building instead of down a rabbit hole? Collins considers a similar possibility in her exceptional debut novel, a well-written, fast-moving, action-packed fantasy. Eleven-year-old Gregor expects a long, boring summer of baby-sitting his two-year-old sister, Boots, and his senile grandmother. Distracted with thoughts about his father, who disappeared three years ago, Gregor belatedly notices that Boots has crawled into an air vent in the laundry room. He

dives in after her, and the two are sucked downward into the Underland, a fantastic subterranean world of translucent-skinned, violet-eyed humans, and giant talking cockroaches, bats, spiders, and rats. Eventually, the terrified Gregor is transformed into a warrior hero who leads a successful battle against an army of invading rats and discovers his father, who has long been held prisoner by the enemy. Collins creates a fascinating, vivid, highly original world and a superb story to go along with it, and Gregor is endearing as a caring, responsible big brother who rises triumphantly to every challenge. This is sure to be a solid hit with young fantasy fans.

### *Horn Book*

Embarking on a quest of epic proportions is the last thing eleven-year-old Gregor imagines as he faces a long, hot New York City summer watching his little sister Boots and their sometimes-senile grandmother. Trying to repress thoughts about his missing father and worrying about his hard-working mother—those are the matters weighing heaviest on Gregor's mind at the start of this fantasy adventure. Collins doesn't leave him to this drudgery and sadness for long: soon a terrified Gregor and a conveniently fearless Boots are

falling down an air duct (rabbit hole-like) in their apartment building; what awaits them at the bottom is as fantastic as Wonderland but no tea party. Translucent-skinned, violet-eyed humans and giant talking cockroaches, bats, and spiders – inhabitants of this nightmarish land – are convinced that Gregor is the warrior spoken of in a centuries-old prophecy who will prevent their annihilation by gigantic rats. Collins evokes this dark, cavernous world and its archaic, agrarian society with a sure hand and sends a reluctant Gregor on the classic hero's journey. Gregor's reluctance quickly turns to urgent hope when he learns that his father is in the Underland, too, still alive but prisoner of the rats. The fast-paced, detailed narrative features vivid battle scenes (complete with gore), dangerous alliances, some frighteningly close calls, and the sobering death of comrades-in-arms. Cliffhanger chapter endings propel the story forward to its inevitable but nevertheless immensely satisfying conclusion, which, happily for readers, hints at more heart-pounding journeys to the center of the earth.

### *Kirkus Reviews*

Gregor's luminous, supremely absorbing quest takes place in a strange underground land of giant cockroaches, rideable bats, and violet-eyed humans. When his two-year-old sister Boots tumbles into an air duct in his building's laundry room, Gregor leaps after her and they fall, à la Alice, into another world. Gregor wants desperately to get home—until he hears that his father, who left Gregor heavy-hearted by disappearing two years ago, may be in Underland himself, kept prisoner by enormous, war-hungry rats. A coalition of creatures and royal humans is formed to rescue him, modeled after an ancient prophetic poem that has foretold Gregor's arrival and calls him the Overland Warrior. The abiding ache of Gregor's sadness is matched by his tender care for Boots. Creature depictions are soulful and the plot is riveting; Underland's dark, cavernous atmosphere is palpable. Explanation and subtlety balance perfectly. Wonderful.

### **Discussion Questions**

(<https://multcolib.org/gregor-overlander>)



Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

1. How have the inhabitants of the Underland adapted to their environment? What do you think would happen if any of them came to the surface?
2. Do you think that, at the beginning of the story, Gregory has given up hope of ever finding his father? Once his adventures in the Underland get under way, do you think he believes he'll find his father?
3. The Underlanders see Gregor as the great warrior told of in the Prophecy of Gray, and because of that he is to lead the quest to prevent their annihilation. But Gregor sees himself differently - he says to Vikus, "You've got the wrong guy. Really, I promise you, I'm not the warrior." Why do you think he feels this way? Why is Vikus so convinced that Gregor is the right one?
4. Talk about Gregor's personality. Of all his character traits, which do you find most admirable? Could he be your friend? Why?

5. How does Gregor's relationship with Luxa change over the course of the novel?
6. One of the most interesting characters in the novel is not a human, but a rat that Vikus has enlisted to be the guide for the questers. What traits does Ripred possess that set him apart from the others, both rats and humans?
7. Giant cockroaches, rats, and bats inhabit the Underland. Gregor is scared but keeps his cool. How and why do you think he does it, and why is it important to him that he appear brave? How would you react if you were staring down into the face of a four-foot cockroach?
8. Although he doesn't show it, it seems that Vikus knows who Gregor is from the time Gregor arrives. Why doesn't he tell Gregor from the very start? What does Vikus say that suggests he was testing Gregor to see if he was worthy of leading the quest?
9. Vikus tells Gregor: "The journey will be difficult. The prophecy warns that four of the twelve will lose life. It may be wisest to leave Boots here." While it seems that Gregor's desire to bring his baby sister on the quest is foolish, she does play a crucial role as a quester. What is it?

10. Authors sometimes plant clues in a story to foreshadow future events. Often these clues can be very subtle and it's not easy to pick up on them. Looking back in the story, what things did Henry say and do that pointed to his treachery?

11. Before leaving for the quest, Gregor is brought to the Underland museum to choose things that might aid him on his journey. He selects a flashlight and batteries, a construction worker's hardhat with a light, and a can of root beer. What did you think he would do with these items? How in fact do these things come in handy? He could have taken a baseball. Why didn't he?

12. Despite the great perils, Gregor insists on taking Boots with him on the quest. He recalls what his mother once said to him, "Stay together." Do you think his mother would have wanted him to put Boots in that kind of danger? Was there ever a time when you followed something your parents said and it got you into trouble in school or at home? Was there a time when you did what your parents told you and it paid off?

13. Gregor, Luxa, Vikus, Solovet, Temp and Tick, Aurora and Ares, Gox, King Gorger, and Ripred -

from what each of these characters say and do, imagine their voices. Then cast the actors who might play them or do their voices in a feature film of Gregor the Overlander.

14. "Good late day," said Vikus, nodding to the Underlanders. "Meet you Gregor and Boots the Overlanders, brother and sister, who have most recently fallen among us." The characters in the Underland speak in a very stylized, somewhat old-fashioned way. How does this help define who they are? Why doesn't Ripred talk this way?
15. In many fantasy stories, the main character doesn't plan to go on a quest, but is forced to do so by circumstances, and then rises to the occasion. You could call them "reluctant heroes." Why is this an appealing idea?
16. Gregor, like Alice (in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll); Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy (in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis); and Dorothy (in *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum), travels through a passageway from "the real world" to a fantastic one. Discuss the variety of ways characters find their way into fantasy worlds in these and other novels you have read.

## **Activities**

Draw a map of the Underland.

Learn more about creatures that live underground, like moles or earthworms.

## **Read-Alikes**

Jeanne DuPrau, [\*City of Ember\*](#) (2003)

Assignment Day arrives, and Lina and Doon find themselves assigned to tasks the other one covets, so they switch, and Lina becomes a messenger around her closed city of Ember while Doon toils underground repairing the aging pipeworks.

Founded 241 years ago by the Builders, this subterranean, enclosed city was meant to be occupied for 220 years but instructions for exiting the city have not only been lost but its occupants have also forgotten they even existed. With escalating power blackouts and declining supplies, Lina and Doon are increasingly concerned. They discover not only the remnants of the missing instructions, but also the hoarding of supplies by selected leaders, including their mayor, and the

two attempt an escape to save their city in this author's exciting first work of science fiction.

M.T. Anderson, [\*The Game of Sunken Places\*](#) (2004)  
Eccentric Uncle Max invites Gregory and Brian to spend a few days at his foreboding mansion in Vermont. Once the boys have adjusted to the strange idiosyncrasies of the house and its inhabitants, they discover a board game called The Game of Sunken Places hidden deep in the attic. Gregory and Brian decide to play, but when they are sucked into an alternate universe, they realize that this is no typical board game. As they navigate their way through this strange new world, the two friends encounter ogres, trolls, elves, and other bizarre characters. But one question plagues both boys: who exactly are they playing against?

Lewis Carroll, [\*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland\*](#) (1865)

A summer stroll turns into a wild adventure for a young girl named Alice when she follows a white rabbit and tumbles down a magical rabbit hole. Arriving in Wonderland, she's met with a cast of unusual characters and surprising surroundings.

Witnessing objects change shape, encountering the intimidating Queen of Hearts, and attending a bizarre tea party with the Mad Hatter are just a few of the adventures in store for Alice in this new and mysterious land.

Susan Cooper, [\*The Dark is Rising\*](#) (1973)

On his eleventh birthday, Will Stanton discovers that he is one of the "Old Ones," those who have special powers and a primary role in the battle of good and evil. The power of the Dark is on the rise. During the twelve days of Christmas, Will must learn to use his gifts to defeat the forces of evil and save his sister.

Garth Nix, [\*Mister Monday\*](#) (2003)

Arthur Penhaligon is supposed to die an early death, but he is saved by a key shaped like the minute hand of a clock, and now some bizarre creatures--including Mister Monday, his avenging messengers, and an army of dog-faced Fetchers--will stop at nothing to get the key back. Seven days. Seven keys. Seven virtues. Seven sins. One mysterious house is the doorway to a very

mysterious world -- where one boy is about to venture and unlock a number of fantastical secrets.



*Ann Arbor District Library*