

HOLIDAY HOUSE READERS' GUIDE

GEMX

NICKY SINGER

Grades 7 up

ABOUT THE BOOK

Life is good for Maxo Strang and the Enhanced humans who live in the Polis. Genetic engineering has created near perfection for bodies and superintelligent minds; but when a crack appears in his otherwise flawless face, Maxo begins to unravel emotionally. His obsession with a girl glimpsed on the TropScreen—an ordinary girl, one of the Dreggies—leads him on a strange quest to find her . . . a quest that will not end until Maxo's world is turned completely around.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Describe the life Maxo lives in the Polis. What is it like to be one of the Enhanced? Is the world of the Enhanced as perfect as they believe? Compare Maxo's view of the Polis with Igo Strang's and Gloria Orb's. Describe their family life and interaction. What are the pros and cons of having offspring genetically engineered?
- What is the quality of life for the Lorrell family in the Estates? Why is their neighborhood called the "Estates"? How does each individual member of the Lorrell family cope with his or her situation? What are the pros and cons of being "natural born"? Why would the people who live there donate their "clean genes" to the laboratory of Dr. Strang?
- Compare the feeling of "family" in the Polis and in the Estates as exhibited by Maxo's family and by Gala's family. How does Perle feel about being a mother, and how does Gloria Orb feel about being a mother? Who is the more responsible father: Finn Lorrell or Igo Strang?
- Charles Dickens, the nineteenth century novelist, was especially noted for creating names for his characters that suggested their personalities, names such as Ebenezer Scrooge and Uriah Heep. Discuss the names of Nicky Singer's characters in *GemX* and whether the author has created Dickensian names. How does the use of language subtly inform our feelings about a character? What do the names Maxo Evangele Strang, Igo Strang, Gloria Orb, Gala, Stretch, Daz, Perle, Finn, Llublo Quells, Euphony Clore, and Edwin Challice suggest to you as you encounter them? Do you develop initial feelings about the characters that change as the story progresses and you learn more about them?
- Why is Maxo so disturbed by the tiny "crack" he finds in his face? How does he try to deal with it? Why does he react so strongly to the image he sees of Gala on his TropScreen? Why does he go to the Virtual Date Palace? What happens when he has a virtual encounter with the girl he has been pursuing for so long? Compare the experience of the teenagers in the VDP with the dating experience of teenagers in your own world. Would you prefer the way the VDP works? Why or why not?
- Describe the character of Clodrone 1640. What makes him different from the other Clodrones? Why is he beginning to have thoughts that are not part of his "training"? As disturbing as these thoughts are, they also bring him some pleasure—why is that? Compare Clodrone 1640's deviation from the other Clodrones to Maxo's deviation from the other GemXs.

- Discuss the politics of the society in *GemX*. Are there any checks on the power of the Leaderene? What is the flaw in her plan to establish a society of equal intelligence and equal beauty for everyone? Does Llublo Quells agree with her plan for the explosion at the hospital? Does he have a choice?
- What is the importance of the Museo? What is Maxo's initial reaction to Edwin Challice and why does he return to the Museo later? What does the Museo represent that is missing in this society? What does it represent to you as the reader?
- Why does Clodrone 1640 struggle with matters of "right" and "wrong" when he has been programmed only to obey commands? Is his deviation from his training due only to Finn's genes? Do you think that other Clodrones are affected by the genes they have received? Why does Clodrone 1640 make the sacrifice that he does for Stretch?
- How many themes can you identify in this story? What, for you, is the main theme of *GemX*? There are many possible answers to this question, and they may be different for every reader. Ultimately, do you think this is a futuristic story, or is it a satire and a parody (though often a very dark one) on our present-day society?

Discussion Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, children's literature consultant, adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature, and editor of the H. W. Wilson Junior Book of Authors and Illustrators series.

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