



Heroes by Alan Gratz

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Discussion Questions

Author Interview/Biography

Discussion Questions

- 1.) How do Frank McCoy and Stanley Summers' personalities, values, and actions drive the plot and influence their relationship?
- 2.) Compare and contrast Frank and Stanley in terms of their appearance and values.
- 3.) How do characters like Ginny and Brooks contribute to the story's plot and the development of other characters?
- 4.) What are the different definitions of "hero" presented in the novel, and which characters best exemplify each one?
- 5.) What were the main themes or messages of the book, and how did they relate to the story?
- 6.) How does the novel portray the impact of World War II on the lives of those on the home front?
- 7.) Discuss the "Arsenal of Democracy" as a symbol in the novel. What does it represent for the characters and the larger war effort?
- 8.) How does the author use the element of adventure and superhero fantasy to explore the realities of war?
- 9.) What did you learn from the book about heroism, bravery, or the experience of war?
- 10.) Who is your hero, and are you a hero to anyone?

Author Biography

Alan Gratz is the bestselling author of more than twenty novels, graphic novels, and novellas for young readers. His 2017 novel *Refugee* has spent more than five years on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and is the winner of 14 state awards. Its other accolades include the Sydney Taylor Book Award, the National Jewish Book Award, the Cybils Middle Grade Fiction Award, a Charlotte Huck Award Honor, and a Malka Penn Award for Human Rights Honor. *Refugee* was also a Global Read Aloud Book for 2018.

Alan's 2025 novel *War Games*, 2024 novel *Heroes*, 2022 novel *Two Degrees*, and his 2021 novel *Ground Zero* were all instant #1 *New York Times* bestsellers, and were also *ABA Indie*, *USA Today*, and *Publishers Weekly* bestsellers. His 2019 novel *Allies* debuted at #2 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and received four starred reviews, and 2018's *Grenade* debuted at #3. His other books include *Prisoner B-3087*, which was a YALSA Best Fiction for Young Readers pick and winner of eight state awards; *Projekt 1065*, a Kirkus Best Middle Grade Book of 2016 and winner of five state awards; *Code of Honor*, a YALSA Quick Pick for Young Readers; and *Ban This Book*, which was featured by Whoopi Goldberg on *The View*.

Alan has traveled extensively to talk about his books, appearing at schools and book festivals in 39 states and a half-dozen countries, including Brazil, Canada, China, Indonesia, Japan, and Switzerland, and has been a Writer in Residence at Tokyo's American School in Japan, the James Thurber House in Columbus, Ohio, and the Jakarta Intercultural School in Indonesia.

Alan was born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee, home of the 1982 World's Fair. After a carefree but humid childhood, Alan attended the University of Tennessee, where he earned a College Scholars degree with a specialization in creative writing, and, later, a Master's degree in English education. A member of the East Tennessee Writers Hall of Fame, Alan now lives with his family in Portland, Oregon, where he enjoys playing games, eating pizza, and, perhaps not too surprisingly, reading books.

Retrieved from <https://www.alangratz.com/about/>

Author Interview

1) Why do you like writing? When did you first have a love for writing, and how was it formed?

I knew I wanted to be a writer from a young age. When I was in second grade, I typed up a one-page newsletter and put it in mailboxes on my street. I wrote my first book in fifth grade, called *Real Kids Don't Eat Spinach*. It was about all the food, video games, and movies "real" kids should like! I never published it. It's still on a clipboard in a box at the back of my parents' closet. I kept writing all through middle school and high school, and then studied creative writing in college. I've wanted to be an author for as long as I can remember!

2.) Who are your favorite authors which have had an impact on you? Who has affected your writing style the most?

One of my all-time favorite writers is Raymond Chandler, who wrote mystery novels back in the 30s, 40s, and 50s. He was a direct inspiration for my mystery novels *Something Rotten* and *Something Wicked*.

3.) What are your favorite genres to read and write? What are your favorite books?

Well, I love murder mysteries—I read a lot of those. Besides Chandler, also like the mystery novels of Agatha Christie, Rex Stout, and Alan Bradley. Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* is probably my favorite book ever. I'm also a HUGE fan of the Patrick O'Brian sea novels about Captain Jack Aubrey and Dr. Stephen Maturin, which begin with *Master and Commander*.

4.) What do you do when you're not writing? Is writing a part-time or full-time job for you?

I'm very lucky that writing is my full-time job! When I'm not writing (or doing other things about my writing career, like doing school visits or responding to interviews!) I love to read, travel, and play video and board games.

5.) Since your books cover World War II, how fascinated with the Second World War are you? What do you think is the most interesting aspect of the war?

I enjoy reading and writing about World War II. I think the most fascinating thing to me about the war is the rise of Nazi Germany. How could such a thing ever happen in the world? I hope students continue to study Nazi Germany for the rest of human existence, so we can hope to understand how it came to be and make sure something like that never happens again.

6.) What is your reaction whenever one of your books is nominated and chosen to receive an award, especially by the ALA and YALSA?

Getting awards from the American Library Association and the Young Adult Library Services Association are among the highest honors anyone who writes for young readers can hope to

receive, and I'm thrilled every time I get recognized by both organizations! That's always a cause for celebration.

7.) Whenever you experience a case of writer's block, what is your go-to cure?

I used to suffer from writers block all the time — I'd be sitting at my computer, ready to write, and have no idea what I was going to write. The clock would tick away, and with it would go the time I had to write that day. Then I'd come out of my office mad that I hadn't gotten words on the page. Then I learned to outline, and that's made all the difference. I now outline every novel I write, chapter by chapter, before I ever write the first word. If I hear a scene in my head, I scribble it down — when the muse speaks, you listen and take notes! — but I never try to push past the inspiration in the outline phase. Once I know in detail what is going to happen, I sit down to the keyboard and try to figure out how to tell it. Those are two very different processes, but most writers try to tackle them both at the same time. Separating them was a real breakthrough for me. I still get writers block (of a kind) when I can't figure out what's supposed to happen next during the outline phase, but at least then I don't come out of my office thinking that I've wasted time by not getting words and paragraphs and chapters written. Once I have the outline finished, I never get writers block — which is important when you're in a mood to knock out first draft pages. I look at my outline in the morning, read what's going to happen, and then start writing it.

8.) Do you have any tips to any aspiring authors or writers?

If you really want to be a writer, it's pretty simple: you sit down at your computer and start writing. If you want to write well, I suggest you a) spy on your friends and family and listen to the way people talk, b) keep your eyes open and watch everything that happens in the world around you, c) always start in the middle of the action, d) make sure your story has a beginning, middle, and an end, e) read a lot and imitate your favorite authors. Note I didn't say copy what they write—just how they write. And did I mention you actually have to sit down at your computer and start writing?

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