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## AFTER THE ASHES

by Sara K Joiner

GRADES  
5 UP

Common  
Core State  
Standards

### About the Book

In this riveting coming-of-age survival story, set during one of the most spectacularly horrifying natural disasters in human history, a stubborn and intellectual teen must fight for her life when the volcano Krakatau erupts and puts her hometown on the Javanese coast in mortal danger.

In 1883, on the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies, thirteen-year-old Katrien Courtland is determined to prove Darwin's theory of natural selection. Unfortunately, nothing causes her Aunt Greet more angst than Katrien crawling around the jungle collecting bugs in the name of science. But Katrien has no interest in changing, especially if it means socializing with mean Brigitta Burkhart. Then one stifling afternoon, Katrien's world turns upside down when Krakatau erupts. Amidst the chaos, Katrien's only hope of survival is to flee the jungle with the one person she vowed she'd never befriend.

## SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### Literature/Language Arts

**Vocabulary**—Students may be unfamiliar with some of the terms used in the story: *ammonites*, *brachiated*, *cataclysm*, *condescending*, *incipient*, *mandible*, *mutation*, *myriad*, *peripheral* (vision), *reticule*, *tenet*. Ask students to write down unfamiliar words and try to define them by using a dictionary or taking clues from the text. **CCSS RL.6.4; L.6.4**

**Historical Fiction**—This story is a work of *fiction*, meaning that it did not actually happen and comes from the author's imagination. It is *historical* because it is based on an event that actually *did* happen in the past, and therefore contains certain facts. Make students aware that the type of writing is called *historical fiction*—the story itself is not really true, but it *could be true*, since it's based on actual events. **CCSS RL.5.9**

**Author's Note**—Students should be encouraged to read the Author's Note at the end of the story, where Sara K Joiner explains her writing process, her creation of characters and her research and provides a list of books for further reading as well as a list of electronic links. Make students aware that this practice is quite common, and that they should always read authors' remarks at the beginning or ending of books they read.

### Questions for Discussion / Writing

The following questions can be used for discussion with the whole class, in small groups or as prompts for writing. **CCSS W.6.3d, e; SL.6.1; L.6.1**

**Narration**—The author decided to tell this story from Katrien's point of view, in the first person. Do you think this was the best way to tell the story? Do you think it would have been as moving if she had told it as a third-person narrator? Which type of storytelling do you prefer and why? What if the author had alternated between Katrien and Brigitta telling the story? **CCSS RL.6.6**

**Gender Roles**—Katrien is not happy with the expectations her family has for her as a girl in 1883. How have expectations for girls changed since then? How are roles for girls different from those for boys in your own family? What dreams do you have that may be different from what your family expects of you? How can you attain your dreams or aspirations?

**Relationships**—There are many situations wherein Katrien's relationships with other people are discussed, and in many cases she changes her attitude as the story progresses. Why do you think Katrien's feelings for Tante Greet, Slamet and Brigitta were so different at the end of the story? Have you ever had your feelings or attitudes toward another person change because of events that have happened? **CCSS RL.6.3**

**Imagery**—When the author describes the volcano eruption and the tsunami, the reader feels as if he/she is actually experiencing it. Make a list of the phrases the author uses that bring these events to life and make them seem so real. **CCSS RL.6.5; L.6.5**

**Philosophical Musings**—Near the end of the story, Katrien quotes Charles Darwin: “one of the first things scientists learn is how little they know.” What does this phrase mean to you? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

**Geography**—Although a relatively accurate map is provided at the front of the book, it would be helpful for students to use a world atlas, a globe of the world or online maps to get an idea of the setting. They should be encouraged to locate Java, Krakatau, Sumatra and Groningen, the Netherlands. They can also compare any of those places with where they live. How are they the same or different?

## Online Resources

The author provides a list of electronic resources at the end of the story, which students should be encouraged to access. These are some additional ones.

**Volcanoes**—[http://geology.sdsu.edu/how\\_volcanoes\\_work/Krakatau.html](http://geology.sdsu.edu/how_volcanoes_work/Krakatau.html) provides a very clear graphic on how volcanoes work and how they can create tsunamis.

**Metric Conversion**—[http://onlineconversion.com/length\\_common.htm](http://onlineconversion.com/length_common.htm) converts kilometers to miles. Since kilometers are mentioned frequently in the novel, have students use this link to help comprehend the distances described.

**Krakatau**—<https://youtube.com/watch?v=YgGkjDIEaMA> presents a 50-minute film, “Krakatoa,” of the eruption, the tsunami and its aftermath, along with some explanation by a scientist. (May be a bit graphic for some students.)

**Collecting Insects**—<http://kidactivities.net/category/Science-Kids-Collecting-Insects.aspx> presents a wealth of information kids can use to create their own humane, catch-and-release insect collections.

**Natural Selection**—[http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/evo\\_25](http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/evo_25) presents a clear, complete and well-illustrated explanation of Darwin’s theory.

Classroom Activities prepared by Sandy Schuckett, school library consultant.

## About the Author



**Sara K Joiner** is the children’s coordinator at the Brazoria County Library System in the Houston, Texas, area. *After the Ashes* is her first novel.

## Research

Students can write short reports and present them to the class. **CCSS W.6.7, 8, 9a; SL.6.2**

**Charles Darwin**—Some students may be interested in learning more about Darwin, his life and his work. They can search print and electronic sources for information.

**Collecting Insects**—Some students may be interested in starting their own insect collections. (See Online Resources below for a helpful link.)

**Photos**—Using Google Images will allow students to see photos that will enhance their understanding of many terms mentioned in the story. Things they might want to search for include: animals/insects (banded linsang, binturong, long-tailed macaque, stag beetle); birds (Asian paradise flycatcher, pink-headed fruit dove, racket-tailed treepie); foods (beras kenkur, oliebollen, volkorenbrood); and plants (banyan tree, tamarind tree, sampaguita vines/flowers).