



THE MOB

written by Clem Martini

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ABOUT CLEM MARTINI

Born in Calgary, Alberta, where he lives with his wife and daughters, Clem Martini is a man of many talents and interests. He is an award-winning playwright, the president of the Playwrights Guild of Canada, a drama teacher who has worked with troubled youth, and now, a novelist. Martini's published works include *Illegal Entry*, which won the 2000 Gwen Pharis Ringwood Award for Drama, and *A Three Martini Lunch*, a collection of plays short-listed for the 2001 Governor General's Award for Drama. He is also a three-time winner of the Alberta Writers Guild Drama Prize. Even with so much on his plate, Martini still found time to wait with his daughter for her school bus, and fortunately her off-hand comment about crows set in motion the creation of *The Mob*.

CAST OF MAIN CHARACTERS IN *THE MOB*

KYP RU KUREA RU KINAAR: An intelligent and impulsive adolescent male Crow with a flying ability that is unrivaled among the Kinaar.

KYM RU KEMNA RU KINAAR: A thoughtful, outspoken adolescent female Crow with a fascination for everything that has to do with humans.

KALUM RU KUREA RU KINAAR: The Chooser for the entire Kinaar Family; wise, very old and a great lover of food and conversation.

KUPER RU KITAKA: A large and rather silent outsider to the Kinaar. A distant relation through the Kemna Clan, his entire nest Family died tragically, and since that time, he has flown solo.

KYRK RU KUREA RU KINAAR: A stern, sometimes impatient elder of the Kurea Clan.

KORK RU KEMNA RU KINAAR: The religious and conservative leader of the Kemna Clan.



Feather and Bone: The Crow Chronicles trilogy is told from the point of view of a proud family of crows with their own ancient customs and traditions. In the style of an ancient saga, the trilogy highlights the heroic efforts of crows chosen to lead the flock through internal strife, plague and war. The third book is *The Judgment*, available in Fall 2006.

PLOT SUMMARY OF *THE MOB*

Each spring in North America, millions of Crows leave their roosts and travel north on a journey that covers thousands of miles. *The Mob* chronicles the great migration of one Crow Family — the Kinaar. The high point of this migration is their annual reunion, or Gathering, which occurs at a location steeped in tradition: the Gathering Tree. This year during the Gathering, disastrous circumstances occur that threaten to change the Kinaar forever.

Kyp, an over-confident adolescent Crow, taunts a cat and in so doing accidentally causes the death of a Family member. A tribunal is convened and Kyp is sentenced to temporary exile. When spring rains turn to snow and the temperature suddenly plummets, the Kinaar are threatened by a deadly blizzard. Kyp breaks the prohibition placed upon him and, regardless of the consequences, returns to the Gathering in an attempt to persuade his Family to follow him to safety in an underground cavern he has discovered. Tragically, the Family is split over how to deal with Kyp's law breaking, and one Clan leaves the rest of the Kinaar to find its own way in the blizzard.

Those that follow Kyp labor through treacherous flying conditions to the cavern, where they huddle in the dark — wet, terrified and exhausted. Unknown to Kyp, however, a hidden danger waits in the side tunnels. The cat Kyp taunted, intent on revenge, follows the Kinaar underground and brings other cats with him.

The struggle that follows is bitter and requires all the collective strength and wisdom of the flock. When the light of day dawns, nothing is left unchanged. The leadership of the Kinaar adapts to reconcile ancient traditions and new ways of seeing things, old divisions are healed and Kyp grows to recognize something deeper about his place in the Family.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The following discussion questions and activities are suitable for classes in language and literature, media and visual arts.

Please note that some of the activities in this learning resource require students to visit their local library or use the Internet for research.

Before Reading Questions and Activities

1. Using features of the book such as the title, the cover and the description on the flap, ask students to predict what they think will happen in the story and write down three to five predictions in point form. Then, either while they are reading or after they have finished reading the novel, they should refer back to their predictions to see how accurate they were.

2. The characters in the novel are crows. Ask students to make a list of three to five things they know about crows and write at least a paragraph. Students may use the Internet or reference materials to find more information.

During Reading Questions and Activities

1. While reading *The Mob*, ask students to refer back to the list of things they made predictions about, which they created before they started reading the book. When they find something that teaches them more about what they predicted, ask them to mark the page with a sticky note or write it down in their notebook and include a note that says "I predicted this!"

2. Explain to students that rereading is an important tool to help them understand what they are reading. Whenever they come across a passage that they don't understand or have a question about the story, ask them to stop and place a sticky note on the page or pages that seem unclear and mark the note(s) with a question mark. Next, ask students to reread the passage. If the passage still seems unclear, encourage them to introduce the passage or their question about the story in class. Explain that other students may have the same question, or may be able to provide an answer to their question. Once the passage or question seems clear, ask students to place the letter A on the sticky note.

3. Character Traits

For this activity, ask students to refer to the character trait activity page at the end of this guide and list as many character traits as they can think of per chapter for at least three major characters in the story. At the end of each chapter, or every few chapters, students should read and compare their trait charts with other classmates. Are there any similarities or differences?



4. Developing Vocabulary

While students are reading the novel, ask them to write down a minimum of two to three unfamiliar words per chapter on the vocabulary chart located at the end of this guide.

Students will be responsible for filling in the following information on the vocabulary chart: the word, the page number, the chapter, the student's own definition and a definition from a dictionary. Remind students to first create their own definition of the word using only the context of the novel, then look up the word in the dictionary and write down the dictionary meaning. For each word, students should compare their meaning to the meaning found in the dictionary to see how accurate their definition was.

For example:

Word	Page #	Chapter	Student's Definition	Dictionary Definition
Recollect	10	1		
Perspective	13	2		
Booming	23	3		
Prevailing	33	4		

After Reading Questions and Activities

1. Ask students to discuss what the main theme of the novel is with a partner.

2. Ask students to partner up and write, edit and perform a 60-second public service announcement, about the dangers of one of the following from the point of view of a crow:

- a) the Plague
- b) Humans

3. The characters in *The Mob* are crows, yet they seem to have human characteristics. This is called anthropomorphization. Encourage students to discuss in groups the effect attributing human characteristics to the characters has on them as readers. Ask students to select three examples from the novel to support their argument. Time permitting, students can write a short opinion piece of one to three pages to support their argument.

4. Knowing the author's background, called a text-to-author connection, often helps readers gain a stronger understanding of text. Ask students to read the author's biography on the book jacket, or provide them with the Q&A included at the end of this guide. Ask students to look for clues that might shed some light on what they read. Students may connect Martini's work with troubled

youth to Kyp's experiences, or they may connect his use of crows as characters to the fact that Martini is from Alberta, where crow tales are part of Aboriginal peoples mythology. Encourage students to discuss their thoughts with one another. Pending time and availability of technology, students can use the Internet to research the author to find more information on him, or to support their connections.

5. The characters in *The Mob* each have distinctive personalities. Kyp, for example, is headstrong and impulsive. Kuper is brooding. Encourage students to think about each character. Ask students to refer to the character trait charts they created for question 3 from the During Reading section. Encourage students to think about people they know, or about characters they've come across in other books that the characters in *The Mob* remind them of. Ask students to think about which character they can most closely relate to. Then ask them to write a brief monologue, to last no more than two minutes, from that character's point of view and in his or her voice. Students should pay close attention to different monologues presented by the same character. How are they different? How are they the same? Why?

Time and equipment permitting, this activity can be extended into a drama lesson in which groups of students write, rehearse and perform a script based on a portion of the novel. If video equipment is available, the performances can be recorded.

6. Kyp's punishment for leading the mob that attacked the cat was drawn from ancient customs followed for generations. The flock debated the punishment and the crime, and they were strongly divided. Following the verdict, as Kyp, Kym and Kuper try to find their way back to the Gathering Tree, we learn much more about Kyp than we knew before the attack and during the trial.

Have the class debate whether or not Kyp's punishment was suitable. Divide the class into two groups. One group will present the argument defending Kyp's punishment, and the other group will present the argument opposing Kyp's punishment. Students should use information from the novel to support their arguments. They may want to reread chapters eight and nine in which the trial and judgment take place. Depending on class size, you may want to form four groups, with two groups making the supporting argument and two groups making the opposing argument.



Q&A WITH CLEM MARTINI

Q. When did you first become interested in crows?

A. I've always been interested in crows. To me they seem to be the underdogs of the animal world. People have praise for all kinds of other animals — noble eagles, brave lions and that sort of thing — but crows are just viewed as pests. But I've always thought they were intelligent, and they seem to have a sense of humor, too.

One day I was sitting with my youngest daughter, waiting for her school bus to arrive. She saw some birds returning north after their annual migration and said, "That's just like a family reunion." I thought to myself, "Yeah, it is." That got me thinking, and one thing led to another.

Q. Did you have trouble coming up with all their names? And why do all their names start with K?

A. I started thinking about how Crows would talk. The human mouth is built to express a great number of sounds, and we're aided in this endeavor by lips and a very flexible tongue. These allow us to make all those lovely m's and p's.

Now, crows can express many, many sounds and are terrific mimics (they can and will imitate fire engines, owls and humans), but because of the way their beaks are constructed, the sound you're most likely to hear from them would be that familiar "Kaw" call. I thought, let's use that as the base sound for their vocabulary and for their names.

Q. I've heard "a murder of crows" used to describe a flock. Do you know the origin of that term? Also, where does the term "mob" come from? These are very violent words. Do crows really behave that way?

A. The term "a murder of crows" is, I think, more of a commentary on humans than it is on crows.

Humans have always been very inventive about how they have chosen to kill one another. Historically, humans fought one another in wars and left their dead lying on the battlefields. After public executions, humans left the dead swinging from gallows.

Crows are omnivores and will eat almost anything, including dead mice, dead sheep ... or dead humans. People became accustomed to seeing crows gather to scavenge following executions or battles and associated crows with those deaths. As a result of this association, flocks of crows were given the rather unsavory term "a murder." It's worth noting, though, that crows never did the killing — humans handled that on their own.

"Mobbing" is a term developed by those who study birds to describe when crows use superior numbers to drive off, or attack, animals they find threatening: hawks, owls, foxes, weasels.

Q. You are a professor of drama. Did you do any acting when you were younger? If you did, do you remember your first role?

A. Yes, I have acted, and I enjoy it. Although it's difficult to find time to devote to it now. I believe the first role I had was of a black cat in a Halloween play way back in grade two. The most notable thing about that particular performance was my tail, which I could wag rather impressively. The first role I had that involved dialogue was in Harold Pinter's small playlet *Trouble in the Works*, and I enjoyed it thoroughly.

Q. Do you prefer writing plays or novels?

A. I don't like one or the other "better," but there are aspects of each discipline that I relish. I enjoy very much the solitude and self-sufficiency of writing a novel. You don't require anything but the paper, pen and the world and characters you have created. I find the process very freeing.

Writing plays is a much more communal and friendly experience — a play doesn't really exist until actors read it. So you often meet with the artistic director as you work on the play. You may meet with the actors and hear them read a rough draft of the play. It's a less lonely way to work, and it can be great fun.

There are elements that are shared by both writing disciplines. And I think the thing I enjoy most that is common to both forms is creating the characters and finding the voices for those characters.



Q. When you started writing *The Mob*, did you know it would be three books? And did you know how the third book would end?

A. I had a rough idea. I had been thinking about crows for some time, so I knew what the crows in my stories wanted. As well, I lay out a general outline before I begin to write a novel or a play.

Nevertheless, there are all kinds of surprises that can — and I think probably should — occur as you write. There were times as I was writing *The Mob* when something I hadn't planned to happen, would. Likewise, as I was writing book two, *The Plague*, there were a number of crows who suddenly started talking ... and I didn't know who they were. I realized very quickly that they would just have to become part of the story. So I made room for them.

Q. Do you like to read children's books? Did you have favorites when you were a kid?

A. I loved books when I was a kid! I used to go on trips with at least three books — the one I was reading, the one I was interested in reading next and the one I was considering reading. When I was in elementary school, I was part of a very small, but I like to believe very select, book club at the Calgary Central Library. The membership had highs and lows and sometimes, I believe, I was the club's only member. Because I was a member of that club, the librarian would ply me with books that I would never otherwise have read. *The Hobbit* was one of them, and I remember thinking, after I'd finished the book, "Who is this guy Tolkien? I'm going to have to find more of his stuff."

My parents read to me, of course, and that's certainly one of my fondest memories of childhood. And when my own kids were younger, I read to them — which was always great fun. So much fun, actually, that even now that they are much older, we still read to one another on occasion.

Q. You seem to know a lot about how birds fly and the way they use the air currents to help them. How did you discover this? Have you ever been up in a small plane or glider?

A. I spent a lot of time outdoors when I was a child, hiking, camping and the like. That was a great education for me. I watched animals of all sorts and was always pestering naturalists in national parks with questions about why birds or bears did this or that. In fact, one of the very first books I purchased with my very own money — earned by delivering flyers from home to home at a quarter of a penny per flyer — was a Peterson Field Guide to animal tracks.

I have been in some small planes. Back in my university days, when I briefly held a summer job gathering rock samples for a geological company, I buzzed about in the mountains in a teeny weeny helicopter. It was in that helicopter that I became acquainted with some of the very strong winds that can suddenly blow up off of cliff faces.

Q. Humans and crows have many things in common. Could you tell us about a few of them?

A. Crows and humans do have many things in common. They're both omnivores and adapt quickly to changing environments. Both are intelligent. Crows have a complicated vocabulary of sounds and signals that they use to communicate with one another. They're both highly social. Crows seem to hang out with one another, not just for utilitarian reasons like chasing predators away, but because they seem to like the company of other crows. Crows, like humans, tend to mate for life. Crow youngsters don't just fly off as soon as they are capable, but linger near their parents to visit, and will often assist the parents in building the next season's nest. Like humans, crows enjoy playing and there have been many sightings of crows playing tag or snatch the twig.

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CHARACTER TRAIT CHART

While reading the book, choose three major characters and list, in point form, as many character traits as you can think of for each character. Make sure to fill in each of the headings with the appropriate information. At the end of each chapter, or every few chapters, compare your trait charts with other classmates who chose the same characters as you. Discuss the similarities and differences between your trait chart and others. Include any traits that you may have missed on your own charts.

Character's Name

Chapter and Page Reference

CHARACTER TRAITS

Character's Name

Chapter and Page Reference

CHARACTER TRAITS

Character's Name

Chapter and Page Reference

CHARACTER TRAITS

