

This guide is aligned with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) for Literature, Writing, Language, and Speaking and Listening. The broad CCR standards are the foundation for the grade level–specific Common Core State Standards.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION BOOKS

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

Note: The standards used in this guide are examples from the fifth grade. If you teach another grade, you may want to visit the Common Core State Standards website (corestandards.org) to locate the equivalent standards for your grade.

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

• *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2:* Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text. • *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3:* Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes. • *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.5:* Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem. • *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6:* Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1.a: Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1.c: Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Xander Miyamoto would rather do almost anything than listen to his sixth-grade social studies teacher, Mr. Stedman, drone on about weather disasters happening around the globe. If Xander could do stuff he's good at instead, like draw comics and create computer programs, and if Lovey would stop harassing him for being half Asian, he might not be counting the minutes until the dismissal bell.

When spring break begins at last, Xander plans to spend it playing computer games with his best friend, Peyton. Xander's father briefly distracts him with a comic book about some samurai warrior who pops out of a peach pit. Xander tosses it aside, but Peyton finds it more interesting.

Little does either boy know that the comic is a warning. They are about to be thrust into the biggest adventure of their lives—a journey wilder than any Xander has ever imagined, full of weird monsters even worse than Lovey. To win at this deadly serious game, they will have to rely on their wits, courage and faith, and especially each other. Maybe Xander should have listened to Mr. Stedman about the weather after all. . . .



PRE-READING

Read the first sentences of five random chapters in the first half of the novel (but not the last chapter!). Then fill out the following chart. Remember that your predictions don't need to be right! Predicting just primes your brain for reading.

The genre of the novel will be:	
The main character's problem will be:	
The setting will be important because:	
In the end the main character will learn this about himself:	



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe your first impression of Xander.
- 2 Summarize the story Xander tells about when he ran away when he was four years old.
- 3 Illustrate what you think Xander's monster looks like.
- 4 What is Xander's attitude toward Mr. Stedman, and how does this characterize Xander?
- 5 Xander can't stop laughing at the image he drew of Lovey even though the timing is inappropriate and unhelpful. Have you ever done something similar? Explain.
- 6 Describe Xander's grandmother, (Obāchan). How does she compare to your own grandmother(s)?
- 7 Briefly summarize the Momotaro comic. What kind of person is Momotaro?
- 8 Explain a few events that help Xander start to realize in that something is wrong.
- 9 Predict why Xander's father sacrifices himself to the tsunami.
- 10 What is revealed about Xander's father in chapter six? Describe Xander's response.
- 11 Explain the Momotaro legacy. What sets Xander apart from past Momotaros?
- 12 Describe where Xander is headed and why.
- 13 What two qualities does Obāchan tell Xander to have? Predict why these might be important.
- 14 Describe how Xander feels about the Momotaro comic. What about Peyton?

- 15 Give at least three examples of bird imagery used to describe Peyton. Why do you think the author made this choice?
- 16 Describe how Xander is adjusting to his role as Momotaro. What would be the most difficult aspect for you?
- 17 Evaluate what happened to Peyton. Why did it happen? Who is to blame?
- 18 Literature often references other, famous works. Give at least two examples in Momotaro of this kind of reference.
- 19 Describe the girl Xander and Peyton rescue from the monster's den. What does this first impression tell us about her character?
- 20 How does chapter thirteen change or reinforce your opinion of the rescued girl?
- 21 How does Jinx prove useful? How would you be able to contribute, if at all?
- 22 Describe some of the questions Xander has and how he expects to find answers.
- 23 What does Xander learn about himself after the tree incident?
- 24 Compare and contrast what Jinx says about her family with what we know about Xander's family and Peyton's.
- 25 Summarize the events that lead to Xander and Jinx's falling down the waterfall. What could be the effect of this event?
- 26 How does Xander manage to defeat the kappa? What does this suggest about his possible talents as a Momotaro?
- 27 Describe how Xander can access his Momotaro talents. Explain why this requires "faith and imagination."
- 28 Describe what happens to Jinx after her injury. How does Xander help?

- 29 What does Xander learn about the itsumade? Explain how this makes Xander feel.
- 30 Xander encounters a daidarabotchi. Research these creatures from Japanese folklore and give at least two facts that you have found.
- 31 Describe a few of the friendly yōkai that Xander, Peyton, and Jinx encounter. Include Tanuki and at least one sukumogami.
- 32 Xander and Jinx get into an argument before falling asleep. Explain the context of the fight.
- 33 Analyze why Xander forgives Jinx's betrayal. Why is it important? Would you be able to do so?
- 34 Describe Xander's dream after he jumps in after his father. What does it explain?
- 35 How does Xander escape Gozu? Explain how he draws on his grandmother's advice to have faith and imagination.
- 36 Discuss the author's characterization of Xander's father. Compare and contrast father and son.
- 37 Should Xander be considered a hero? What are the qualities of a hero? Explain your opinion with examples from the text.
- 38 Evaluate any changes that Xander will face as he returns to the mortal world. What are the risks? The rewards?
- 39 What does the word *yumenushi*, in the Sword of Yumenushi, mean? How is this relevant to Xander and his adventure?
- 40 With the return of Xander's mother, the ending of the book could be interpreted as good or bad. Explain your opinion on his mother's return and why you feel that way. What do you think will happen next?

VOCABULARY

sluices	plastered	topples	omen
caricature	aquiline	upended	indignation
perish	neglected	oni	sinuous
contemplations	sustain	enlightenment	tsunami
gape	grimace	netsuke	notion
vessel	mast	galley	sconces
lacquered	torqued	falter	scabbard
iridescent	kimonos	trance	frigid
craggy	vanquished	undulating	starboard
prow	cobalt	grotesque	guano
sympathetically	stalagmites	stalactites	unfurl
trill	scampers	inanimate	composure
succulent	gnarled	obscured	consulted
kodama	pierce	impertinent	garnet
remnant	stark	copse	embankment
grout	intensifies	diluted	civil
tributary	eddy	tinge	rasping
debris	trajectory	dunes	bulbous
fraternity	kappa	incoherently	cavity
enameled	grudgingly	oblige	yōkai
daidarabotchi	lurches	lances	infiltrates
celestial	aurora borealis	contingent	hysterically
terrain	tanuki	tumbler	matcha posset
scowl	humanoid	carrion	guttural
galumphing	crevice	stern	involuntarily
trussed	coagulate	onslaught	plummet
animatronic	figment	fluorescent	larynx
void	harmony	plumed	phalanx
chastise	bitter	exertion	tremendously

VOCABULARY ACTIVITIES

Choose fifteen words that you'd like to learn from the novel. Then do at least three of the activities below:

GAME

Create a game that helps players remember the definitions. Your game should be engaging and have clear rules and great design.

ILLUSTRATE

Our brains remember pictures better than words. For each of your words, draw a picture meaningful to you that helps you remember the definition.

SIMILE/METAPHOR

For each of your words, create a simile or metaphor that not only makes sense but also helps you remember the meaning.

CROSSWORD

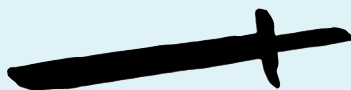
Create a crossword puzzle with clues to your chosen words. Make sure to provide an answer key.

NURSERY RHYME

Using traditional nursery rhymes as inspiration, create an original rhyme that connects the vocabulary to its meaning.

CONTEXT

Most words are learned in the context in which they appear. Practice writing sentences that show understanding and reveal meanings of the key vocabulary.



COMMON CORE PROJECTS

CHARACTERIZATION

It's important to understand that characters have both internal and external qualities, which together create an author's characterization. Fill out the following chart as you read the novel to explore this important literary element. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL 5.1)

Character's name	External: Physical description	Internal: Personality	Text support
Xander			
Peyton			
Jinx			
Obāchan			

POINT OF VIEW: THE CHARACTER'S SIDE OF THE STORY

In reading pairs, discuss how the story would be different if told from the point of view of one of these other characters.

How do you think authors choose their point-of-view character? How does an author influence what we think or feel by choosing the character who gets to tell the story? (*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL 5.6*)

Peyton	
Jinx	
Xander's father	
One of the Monsters	

THEME

At the end of each chapter do one of the following on a sticky note:
(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL 5.2)

KEY QUOTE

Find a single sentence that best represents the action of this chapter.

SUMMARIZE

Write a one-sentence summary of the challenges the main character faced and the choices they made.

LETTER

Write a letter from one character to another about what just happened.

NEWS NOTES

Write down the answer to the five Ws that a journalist tries to answer: who, what, when, where, and why. Don't forget to also answer how.



THEME: WHAT STICKS FROM A STORY

After reading the entire novel and completing the theme task choices on the opposite page, provide small groups with the following definition of theme, and complete the graphic organizer. Then have a discussion as a class about the theme of the novel.

Theme: What an author is trying to say about life by closely studying a character's choices and actions rather than telling readers directly. A theme is a lesson about life.

- 1 Sort through your sticky notes and put them into two piles: one for important choices the main character made, and one for everything else.
- 2 List three topics or big ideas shown by the main character's important choices: *Example:* love, danger, hope

- 3 Themes are written as sentences with lessons about life and how to live it. A theme can never be stated as a single word. Ask yourself: What is the author trying to say about this topic? What lessons is she trying to show rather than just tell? *Example:* Danger and fear are necessary to reach goals.

FOR FUN

MONSTER TRADING CARDS

Using index cards, create illustrations for at least six of the monsters from the novel. On the side with lines, write a brief description or pull a key quote from the text that inspired you.

COMIC

Turn your favorite scene into a comic, either old-school with paper and pencil or with a free online comic maker.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARGARET DILLOWAY has been a writer ever since she learned how to write. In high school she was a California Arts Scholar in creative writing and she won a National Council of Teachers of English writing award. She practiced writing in a variety of forms, such as being a theater critic and a contributing editor for two weekly newspapers, doing technical writing, and writing plays, before publishing three critically acclaimed books for adults: *How to Be an American Housewife*, *The Care and Handling of Roses with Thorns*, and *Sisters of Heart and Snow*. Her research for this book included a trip to Japan and a samurai sword-fighting class. Margaret lives in southern California with her husband, three children, and a goldendoodle named Gatsby. For more information, visit margaretdilloway.com. You can also follow her on Twitter [@mdilloway](https://twitter.com/mdilloway).



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

CHOONG YOON grew up in Seoul, South Korea. As a kid, he loved drawing animated characters and copying comic book panels. His passion for art grew until eventually he studied fine arts at Seoul National University. His fascination with narrative storytelling led him to transfer to the School of Visual Arts in New York, where he learned illustration. After graduating, Choong began working as a freelance illustrator of books and comic books. He lives in New York City. More of his work can be seen at choongyoon.com.



Tracie Vaughn, English teacher and author of *The Second Guard* from Disney created this guide.

Many more guides can be found on the Disney • Hyperion website at disneybooks.com.



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