



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

HYPERION BOOKS

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Katarina Bishop has worn a lot of labels in her short life. Friend. Niece. Daughter. Thief. But for the last two months she's simply been known as the girl who ran the crew that robbed the greatest museum in the world. That's why Kat isn't surprised when she's asked to steal the infamous Cleopatra Emerald so it can be returned to its rightful owners.

There are only three problems. First, the gem hasn't been seen in public in thirty years. Second, since the fall of the Egyptian empire and the suicide of Cleopatra, no one who holds the emerald keeps it for long, and in Kat's world, history almost always repeats itself. But it's the third problem that makes Kat's crew the most nervous, and that is simply . . . the emerald is cursed.

Kat might be in way over her head, but she's not going down without a fight. After all, she has her best friend—the gorgeous Hale—and the rest of her crew with her as they chase the Cleopatra around the globe, dodging curses, realizing that the same tricks and cons her family has used for centuries are useless this time.

Which means, this time, Katarina Bishop is making up her own rules.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 After successfully recovering the missing art and securing her father's safety in *Heist Society*, Kat retreats from her crew and begins working independently to assist Mr. Stein in retrieving art stolen from its rightful owners by the Nazis. In your opinion, why does Kat feel a need to continue with this endeavor? Do you agree with her decision to work alone? Why or why not?
- 2 Explain the significance of Visily Romani's name. What role does Romani play in getting Kat to accept the request Constance Miller makes of her? Why does Kat take the use of Visily Romani's name so seriously?
- 3 Who are your favorite or least favorite secondary characters in the novel? What is it about these characters that you find endearing or disturbing?
- 4 Given that Kat no longer sees herself as a thief but rather "more of a return artist, a repossession specialist . . . a highly uncommon criminal," she could be perceived as more vulnerable. Do you agree? Using textual evidence as support, make a case for your position.
- 5 Consider the variety of settings for *Uncommon Criminals*; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.
- 6 How would you describe Kat's family? With whom does she seem closest? To what extent are the relationships of these characters shaped by the world around them? To what extent do their relationships shape that world?
- 7 Explain the significance of the title, *Uncommon Criminals*. Beyond Kat, in what ways does the title accurately describe her team?
- 8 While discussing stealing the Cleopatra Emerald with Gabrielle, Hale tells Kat, "Of course you're going to do it. I mean, it's what you do now, isn't it? Travel the world, righting wrongs. A one-woman recovery crew." Explain Hale's attitude toward Kat's actions. Do you believe he is justified for feeling this way? Why or why not?

- 9 Describe Kat. What makes her a dynamic character? Is she the type of person you would want to befriend? Why or why not? Does she remind you of anyone you know? Does anything about her remind you of yourself?
- 10 Maggie tells Kat, “There is no honor among thieves, Katarina. No matter what you might have read in storybooks.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 11 *Uncommon Criminals* is told in the third person; how would the story be different if Kat or another secondary character were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?
- 12 How would you characterize the relationship between Kat and Hale? Do you feel it that it changes over the course of the novel? If so, in what ways?
- 13 Uncle Eddie tells Kat, “We are very much alike Katarina . . . I was once a brilliant young thief. . . who wasn’t nearly as brilliant as I thought . . . It is a shame to see history repeat itself.” What can you infer about Uncle Eddie’s assessment of Kat? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- 14 In what ways are Kat and Maggie similar? How are they different? What does Kat ultimately learn from Maggie?

## CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

### READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING

- 1 The history created for the Cleopatra and Antony Emeralds in *Uncommon Criminals* was inspired by the many legendary jewels believed to be cursed. Working in small groups, have students research other legendary gems and their cursed histories and create a digital report about their findings. Have them consider the following:
- What is the physical description of the gem?
  - What is the gem’s origin?

- Who has owned the gem?
  - What unusual/tragic events have transpired to the owner(s) of the gem?
- 2 The city of Monte Carlo is the backdrop for the setting for Kat and her crew to execute the final job in *Uncommon Criminals*. Have students research this exotic setting to learn more about its rich history, being sure to consider the following:
- Location
  - Population
  - Government
  - Religion
  - Industry
  - History

After gathering information, have them create an informative presentation to be shared with their classmates.

- 3 Music is often used to connect people to each other and the world at large. Select a favorite character from *Uncommon Criminals* and create an original playlist that is representative of the experiences that character undergoes throughout the novel. Create original album art that also signifies their experience, include appropriate artist information, and offer an explanation for the selection of each song.
- 4 One of Carter's greatest strengths as a writer is her ability to offer richly descriptive scenes. In small groups, have students select a favorite scene from *Uncommon Criminals* and create either a digitally or manually illustrated graphic novel for that scene. Using a digital comic strip creator (<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix> or <http://infinitecomic.com>, for example), have students begin by using the strips to create storyboards for their scene. Have students select original art, images, and graphics. Alternatively, students could assume the roles of two of the characters with each one's personality and voice and have them interact with each other by creating an extension of a scene from the novel. As part of the evaluation component, consider panel size and number of panels, transitions and layouts, artwork, writing, and lettering.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

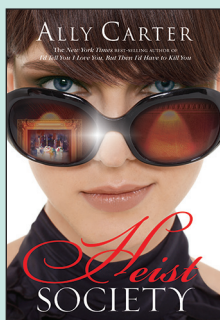
ALLY CARTER is a writer living and working in the Midwest. She loved school so much she kept going . . . and going . . . and going . . . until finally she had to graduate. Now she has degrees from Oklahoma State University and Cornell University and a house and a job and other very grown-up things. Her life is either very ordinary or the best deep-cover legend ever. She'd tell you more, but . . . well . . . you know . . .

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Shevaun Williams

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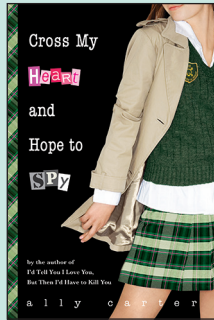
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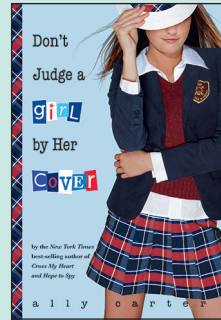
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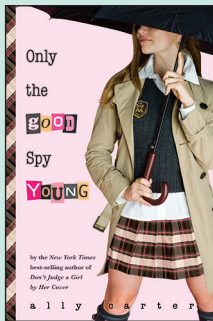
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This guide was created by Rose Brock, a teacher, school librarian, and doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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