

THE UNDEAD TRUTH OF US

BRITNEY S. LEWIS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION

ABOUT THE BOOK

Zharie's world is turned upside down following the devastating death of her mother. As she grieves the loss, Zharie sees gruesome zombies everywhere. She is also convinced that her mother morphed into a zombie days before her death. She constantly grapples with what aspects of her life are reality and which are figments of her imagination. To make matters more complicated, she experiences ongoing challenges living with her aunt, who seems distant and disengaged. Despite the difficulties, the themes of hope, loss, love, and friendship take readers on a magical journey to find a cure for much more than zombies.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Britney S. Lewis was born and raised in Kansas City, Kansas, where she fell in love with storytelling and the idea that magic moved and breathed in our world. After getting her Bachelor of Arts and Science, she worked in the world of marketing and communications for a few years before accepting a position as an editor for greeting cards, where her job is to make sure to get the best words on paper. When she isn't daydreaming about new stories, Britney can be found binge-watching TV shows with her husband and pup or practicing West Coast Swing in one of her local dance studios. *The Undead Truth of Us* is her debut novel. For more information, you can follow her on social media @britneyslewis or visit her website at britneyslewis.com.



COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

The novel *The Undead Truth of Us* provides a great opportunity to apply complex literacy skills such as inferencing, deconstructing vocabulary, author's purpose, and textual connections. This discussion guide provides suggestions aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Reading: Literature, Writing and Speaking and Listening. During each exchange, please encourage participants to support their claims with evidence from the novel to ensure that responses are text dependent. To obtain additional information visit the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) website: corestandards.org.






DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In chapter 1, how does Zharie describe her mother? Why do you think the author started the novel with this description? What tone does the chapter set for the story? In your opinion, do the zombie events seem real or imagined by Zharie? Make a prediction: What do you think will happen with the zombies throughout the novel? Support your opinion with textual evidence. (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.1)
2. Several chapters, such as chapters 2 and 5, are written in a blog format. What effect (e.g., tension, surprise) does this chapter structure add to the novel? Upon completion of the novel, review the blog format chapters. Explain how the sequence of blogs progresses and aligns with the events of the story. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.5)
3. How does the art of Vincent van Gogh connect to Zharie’s feelings and experiences? For example, in chapter 1, Zharie states, “When Mama died, I think her soul shattered into a Postimpressionist painting filled with yellows and blues” (p. 4). In chapter 3, she says, “I imagined painting myself with the same artistic expression. Small and big. Yellow and blue. Yellow and blue” (p. 9). How does the powerful imagery of color impact the tone of the novel? Provide examples from the novel. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.4)
4. Although the story begins with Mama’s death, she is a significant character through memories and thoughts that Zharie shares. For example, Zharie says, “I would have stayed with Grandma, but since she didn’t live in the city, I would’ve had to leave Sumner Academy. Mama wouldn’t have wanted that” (p. 18). How is Mama’s voice evident throughout the story? How does the author’s use of flashbacks support the progression of the novel? Use the graphic organizer below to record information about Mama and explain how the details help develop the plot. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.5)

Mama’s “opinions” or memories	How does this information support the development of the plot?

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5. In chapter 4, Zharie discusses her experience living with Auntie E. Why is it difficult to live with Auntie E? What interactions cause the most conflict between Auntie E and Zharie? How does conflict push Auntie E and Zharie toward resolution? If Auntie E was the narrator, what details might be shared differently? Cite specifics from the text in your response. (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.3)
 6. After Mama dies, how do Zharie’s relationships change? What new friendships does she develop? What is the intention of each friend? Do any of the intentions conflict with what Zharie wants? Can you relate to any of Zharie’s positive and/or challenging friendship dynamics? How? (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.3)
 7. In chapter 7, Zharie states that Bo is an “anomaly” (p. 30). Why does she consider him an “anomaly”? Consider the following quote: “In all truth, even though I sat beside this monster, I didn’t feel afraid anymore. Just curious. If he wanted to kill me, he would have by now—right?” (p. 58) What does this quote suggest about Bo? Is Bo changing Zharie’s view of zombies? Why or why not? Incorporate details from the text in your answer. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.4)
 8. What is the relevance of the dead fish at Rico’s house? Consider Zharie’s reflection at the end of chapter 9, when she says, “And I wondered if his death was only an illusion like everything else” (p. 61). In your opinion, is the dead fish real or imagined? Why might the image of the fish change from the beginning to end of the chapter? What events are parallel to the fish? Cite evidence from the novel. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.4)
 9. Chapter 14, how is Zharie coping with the loss of her mother? She says, “And if it rained hard enough, I’d run to my twin-sized bed and wrap the covers around me. I’d pretend that Mama was beside me asking me if the sound of rain was beautiful, so I could finally say yes. Because she was rain, and she was beautiful, and I loved her so damn much” (p. 106). What does this quote suggest about her grieving process? Can you think of a time you lost someone important? If yes, what steps did you take to grieve and move forward? (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.1)
 10. Compare the discussion of love and death in chapters 10 and 11. How are Zharie’s views of love and death similar? How does Bo’s opinion differ? How does the ongoing discussion of love and death help develop important themes in the text? Cite textual evidence. (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.2).
 11. Why are people surprised when Zharie mentions West Coast Swing? Why does Zharie love West Coast Swing? How did her mom support her dance aspirations? Do you think Zharie should continue to pursue West Coast Swing? Why or why not? (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.1)
 12. Like West Coast Swing, can you think of another field or industry that lacks diverse representation? In your opinion, why is limited representation problematic? Why is it important for people from different backgrounds to have access to a variety of industries? (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.1)
 13. Consider the theme of friendship in the novel. How is Mini able to be a supportive friend from afar? Do you think close friendships can be long-distance? Why or why not? Why is the outdoor camping trip important to Zharie’s perspective of friendship? What does Zharie enjoy about the trip? How does the trip change her relationship with Bo and new friends? Cite textual evidence. (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.2)

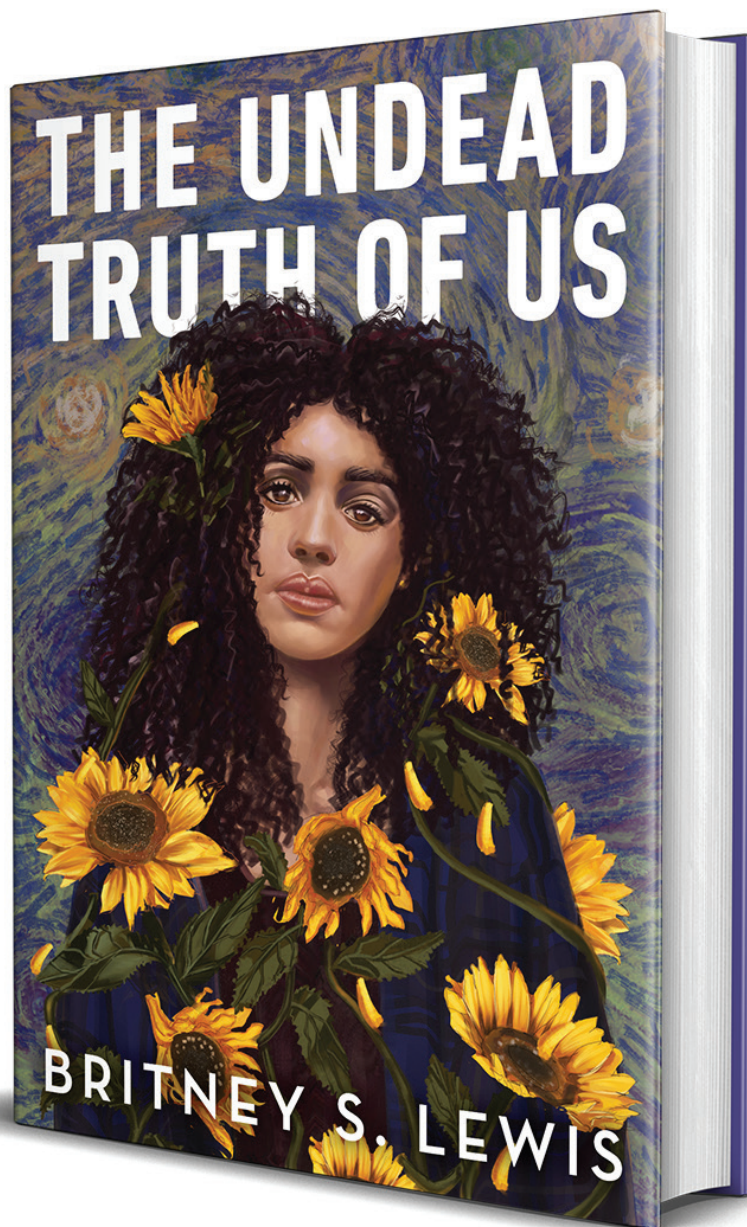
14. Consider this quote from chapter 31 during the camping trip, “This undeath was the undoing of an old story I used to tell myself” (p. 213). What does this quote suggest? How does the idea of undeath connect to the title of the novel? How might Zharie’s perspective be different at the end of the trip following the fallout? Provide text-based details. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.4)
15. In chapter 42, is it surprising that Zharie turns into a zombie? Why or why not? What cure does she suggest? Do you think the possible cure will be effective? Explain. How does this quote align with her next steps? She says, “I didn’t know if I could forgive. But I was going to. I’d figure it out somehow because no one person could simply defeat a zombie apocalypse—you had to survive it” (p. 302). (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.1)
16. In chapter 43, word bubbles and vivid colors are used to emphasize key aspects of Bo and Zharie’s conversation. How does this imagery help set the tone of the chapter? What tone is conveyed? If you could pick word bubbles for another chapter, what interaction would you select, and which words would you choose? Why? Be specific. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.5)
17. Describe Zharie’s interaction with her biological father in chapter 46. What details does Devin share during the conversation? How does the information expand what she already knew? Describe the relationship between Devin and Mama from each person’s perspective. Why is the meeting with her father important for resolution? Support your response with evidence. (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.1)
18. The very brief chapter 47 includes only the quote “And in the end, we were all just humans . . . drunk on the idea that love, only love, could heal our brokenness. —Christopher Poindexter” (p. 346). How does this quote align with the theme or central idea of the novel? In your opinion, why did the author structure the chapter in this format? Explain. (Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.5)
19. How is water incorporated throughout the story? Why is it fitting that the final chapter takes place at a beach? Did you find the ending surprising? Why or why not? Support your response with details. (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.1)
20. In your own words, summarize the text by analyzing specific events from the novel. Be sure to cite the central themes, complexities of characters (e.g., conflict, varying motives), plot, and resolution. (Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.2)



This guide was written by **Dawn Jacobs Martin, PhD**, an assistant clinical professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. She has spent her career supporting students with disabilities through various roles as a practitioner, researcher, special education director, and teacher educator. She continues to improve the academic outcomes for students with disabilities through teacher development, instructional design, and research in the areas of literacy intervention, social support, and parent involvement.

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