



RICK RIORDAN PRESENTS



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

HYPERION

ABOUT THE BOOK

Selina DaSilva always dreamed of leaving St. Virgil, a small Caribbean island where many of the residents fear her family. Her aspirations included attending university, applying her love for botany, and making a new life with her then boyfriend. Selina's goals came to a sudden halt when a terrible attack left her mother in a coma and her father dead. It is unclear who is responsible for the brutal crime since many citizens on the island called her mother a witch and threatened her life.

Following the traumatic loss of her family, Selina begins conning tourists into paying her for magic in the form of fake charms, spells, and protections. Selina has little belief in real magic—until a strange visitor, Lennard Bisson, begs for help while under investigation for several murders. The interaction reveals new truths about Selina, St. Virgil, and the residents as she investigates the crimes. With the help of her now ex-boyfriend, Gabriel, she must bravely uncover a terrible past and face an evil force that *waits in the forest*.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Dass is a young adult fiction author who is best known for her debut work of fiction, *Where the Rhythm Takes You*. While she was born in Trinidad, her family moved to Tobago when she was two years old. Dass has been telling stories since she was a young child. At the age of eight, when she ran out of Nancy Drew novels to read, she tried to pen her own. She would later go on to attend the University of the West Indies and University College London.



COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

The novel *It Waits in the Forest* provides a great opportunity to apply complex literacy skills such as inferencing as well as deconstructing vocabulary, an author’s purpose, and textual connections. This discussion guide contains suggestions aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Reading: Literature, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. Each activity in this guide includes a reference for the CCSS strand, domain, and standard that is addressed. During the activities and questions, educators should encourage students to support their claims with textual evidence. To obtain additional information, visit the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) website at www.corestandards.org.

ACTIVATING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Explore Important Connections Before Reading


1. Have you ever traveled to, read about, or watched a movie set in a Caribbean location? What are specific geographic features of a Caribbean island? Describe the habitat, climate, wildlife, etc.
(Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details, R.L. 5.1, 6.1)
2. The term *Afro-Caribbean* refers to individuals of African descent living in the Caribbean. What aspects of Afro-Caribbean history and culture have you learned about in the past? Consider the following in your discussion:
 - a. What rich music, customs, dress, folklore, and languages are part of Afro-Caribbean history and culture? How does Afro-Caribbean culture differ within and across islands? As you read, discuss aspects of Afro-Caribbean culture and history referenced by the characters.
 - b. How did many people of African descent arrive in the Caribbean? Selina states, “A line of ancestors unfurled to the very first, who was brought to St. Virgil against their will, and had since come to call it home” (p. 313). What do you know about the transatlantic slave trade and Caribbean Islands?
3. Have you read a text that provides multiple accounts of the same story? How did it deepen your understanding of the character perspectives, motives, and actions? In the novel, some sections are highlighted in dark gray to reveal new information. Be prepared to discuss how this text feature expands the timeline and influences the tone of the novel.
4. Brainstorm a list of news stories (local, national, or international) that are grounded in conflict based upon visible or invisible differences. In your opinion, are any of the conflicts motivated by fear? How do the actions impact society? As you read, consider how fear drives many residents in the St. Virgil community.




DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Explore the Questions Individually and in Small Groups While Reading

1. Selina has a difficult past with several of the “friends” she describes at the beginning of the novel, specifically Allison, Edward, Janice, and Gabriel. How is each character privileged in a way that Selina is not? How might these different levels of privilege and varied backgrounds cause tension during the story? Be specific.
2. How does Selina and Allison’s shop appear to someone walking past? How is Selina and Allison’s shop different from others in the community? What are the steps that Selina takes to convince people that her magic is *real* (Answer: 1. Establish an antagonist (p. 8), 2. Establish an ally (p. 8), 3. Build trust (p. 9), and 4. Research)? In your opinion, is their business problematic? Why or why not?
3. Define *guilt* in your own words. Can you think of a time you felt guilty about something? How did it impact your actions? In chapter one, Selina says, “My mother used to talk about guilt as if it were a real living entity” (p. 12). What does this quote suggest? Why might the feeling of guilt be so powerful and difficult to address?
4. Describe the *Gloriosa superba* plant (p. 18–19). What might the plant symbolize in the novel? As you read, consider what other important plants—for example, the silk cotton (p. 205)—are mentioned. How are these plants in the novel useful, and what do they symbolize?
5. Telling a story from one side or perspective can result in a false narrative. When discussing resident rumors, Selina says, “Rewriting my mother’s past. Changing the history of our island’s celebrated psychic into the legend of a witch who’d made a deal with the devil and gotten exactly what was coming to her” (p. 20). Based on this quote, how can people change the way history is told? Whose history might be left out if it is only told from the perspective of the majority or those in power? Why is this problematic?
6. Selina’s parents are an important part of the story. Why is their relationship significant to the events in the novel? How do Selina and the residents of the island describe their personalities? How might the St. Virgil residents’ perspective of Selina’s parents compare or contrast with her own? Cite textual evidence.
7. Describe Gabriel, his past with Selina, and his family history. What challenging events have impacted his relationship with his mom, Muriel, and his sister, Janice? What is causing tension in Gabriel’s relationships with his family?
 - a. **MURIEL EXTENSION QUESTION:** How does Muriel support Selina and her family? How does Muriel influence the St. Virgil community? Based upon textual evidence, is her influence positive or negative? How do Gabriel and Selina’s perspectives of Muriel differ? For example, Gabriel says, “She thinks love and loyalty can be bought” (p. 195), and Selina says, “Muriel has never once implied that I owed her anything” (p. 195). Do you agree with Selina or Gabriel? Why?

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8. The author introduces a new text structure in chapter four (i.e., gray pages describing an individual’s story). How do these sections show changes in time (e.g., flashback or flash-forward)? How do the sections impact the tone and mood of the book (e.g., the mystery or tension)? What additional and important information do these sections provide? Be specific.
 9. In chapter five, Selina says, “It reminded me of the feeling of fear I’d had upon hallucinating my father in the cottage the day before” (p. 41). What happened during Selina’s hallucination (Answer: in chapter two)? Do you think Selina’s conclusion that her vision was a hallucination is correct? Why or why not?
 10. Following the encounter with Lennard Bisson at the shop, how do Allison’s motivations conflict with Selina’s motivations? In your opinion, what should Allison and Selina do? Is there a moral obligation? Why or why not?
 11. Selina states, “But I wondered how much of the version of Gabriel who returned was the same as the one who left” (p. 102). What events have changed Gabriel? How? Can you think of another novel where someone changed after a major traumatic event? Be specific.
 12. How do the labels assigned to people in the book differ from their actual character? For example, when thinking about Lennard, Selina says, “It was strange, I’d been in two altercations that night and the one with the suspected murderer felt less threatening” (p. 107). What does this quote suggest about Lennard? Why is it important to go beyond labels assigned by a community or society?
 13. During the hotel investigation, Gabriel and Selina have a disagreement about her *fake magic*. Selina says, “All I did was play into the expectations he already had” (p. 145). Why might doing what people expect be dangerous in this instance? What other times does Selina play into people’s expectations? Why doesn’t Gabriel approve?
 14. Throughout the novel, Selina is often faced with angry people from the community. Why are people so angry at Selina and her family? In chapter nineteen, she says, “A rage scorched through him, the relentless kind of anger. . . . And I realized with sudden, burning clarity—he did not attack my parents. If he did, he wouldn’t still be this angry” (p. 176). How is anger possibly *derailing* the investigation? Do you agree with Selina’s response to the attack, “At least when they’re afraid, I know they’re less likely to try to hurt me” (p. 180)? Is this self-destructive behavior? Why or why not?
 15. Based upon the text, which friendships in the story seem the most genuine? How do the relationships between the characters change throughout the story? What events shift the friendship dynamics between Allison, Selina, Edward, and Janice? In chapter twenty, Selina states, “They faced me, this impenetrable wall of friendship that predated my inclusion. There was never any space for me. I was a fool to think otherwise” (p. 189). What does this moment suggest? Do you agree with Selina’s conclusion? Why or why not? Can you think of a time you encountered difficulties in a friendship? How were the issues resolved?

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16. Based upon Selina and Gabriel’s investigation, how are Kyle Gordo, Chord Grayson, and Lennard Bisson connected? What clues help them get closer to solving the mystery? What obstacles do they face as they search for answers? Cite textual evidence.
 17. In chapter twenty-nine, Selina says, “Our ancestors knew what they were doing. They held on to their beliefs and used them to find strength, power, and comfort in difficult times. It’s that strength that fought wars and won rebellions. It can be used for good or bad. As always, it depends on the person practicing it” (p. 246). Why is it important to know our history? How does Selina’s connection to her ancestors help her throughout the story and in the forest? Cite textual evidence.
 18. When reflecting on development, Selina mentions, “While we’d driven across the island, I’d seen the new developments slowly but surely consuming St. Virgil.” (p. 261). What is the impact of development from corporations and enterprises on St. Virgil island? What dangers of the development does Gabriel describe? Can you think of an example when development was negative in your community or another location?
 19. Based upon the textual evidence, how do Selina’s perspectives shift from the beginning to the end of the novel? Discuss the two examples below:
 - a. **MIRRORS:** How does Selina’s reaction to seeing her father in a mirror the first time (p. 129) differ from her response at the end of the novel (p. 322)? Why is this shift important? What does it suggest about Selina?
 - b. **HOPE:** On page 24, Selina says, “Hope was dangerous; I didn’t want it.” At the end of the novel, she states, “Because, if seemingly impossible things could happen, that meant hope wasn’t such a useless thing after all” (p. 327). What events shifted her perspective?

POST–READING QUESTIONS

1. Novels have a central theme that the author conveys through the events, problems, solutions, and character interactions. Objectively summarize the events in the novel. What are two central themes in this novel that readers should reflect upon? Is this theme similar to another you’ve read in a folklore text?
2. The text has sections in dark gray that reveal information about the victims of the crimes. Which story did you find most interesting? How did this text structure deepen your understanding of the events and characters? What new information was revealed? Have you read other books with a similar structure to show changes in time?
3. What hidden facts did they have to uncover to solve the mystery (for example, the existence of the hidden passageway in chapter seventeen)? Which of your questions were addressed at the conclusion of the novel? What questions do you still have after reading the novel?

STANDARDS ALIGNED TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9–10.1, 9–10.2, 9–10.3

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.9–10.4, 9–10.5, 9–10.6



POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Creative Projects and Writing Extensions

- 1. RAISE AWARENESS: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.** In chapter twenty-four of the story, readers learn about the story of Lennard Bisson and Isabelle. With the support of an adult, research the different types of actions that are considered domestic violence. Based on your research, why are Lennard’s actions toward Isabelle concerning? Create a poster or media presentation that explains a specific type of domestic violence that people may not recognize (e.g., emotional abuse, economic abuse, etc.). The presentation should include a definition, examples, ways to help a friend, and a list of support resources for teens and adults. Be prepared to present the information to a small group of peers for up to ten minutes.
(Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL 9–10.2)
- 2. DIGGING DEEPER: SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND FOLKLORE.** In the novel, there are many references to beliefs grounded in African-derived practices like Obeah. Using online and text resources, research either the practice of Obeah in a specific Caribbean location or an aspect of Caribbean folklore mentioned such as douens, echoes (p. 236), and jumbie spirits (p. 303). Provide information about your selected topic in 4–5 paragraphs that include (1) an introduction organizing the ideas, (2) relevant and concise research findings, (3) quotations, (4) a conclusion highlighting the significance of the information, and (5) a list of citations.
(Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.9–10.2, Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: W.9–10.7)
 - a. EXTENSION QUESTION.** On page 172, Selina refers to her mother and says many St. Virgil residents believe “that she was paying the price for consorting with the supernatural.” What is the history of persecution against those practicing Obeah in the Caribbean? How has it changed over the years? Explain.
- 3. HAUNTED HISTORICAL LOCATIONS.** Consider stories that you’ve heard about haunted historical buildings or locations. In the novel, the St. Virgil hotel is often referred to as a haunted site. Based upon your interest, research a local, national, or international location that is considered haunted. Use your research findings to create a brochure with detailed information and photographs about the haunted location. Your brochure should include 1) the address, 2) when the site was first considered haunted, 3) what makes people believe it is haunted, and 4) how the site is used today.
(Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: W.9–10.7)
- 4. CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION.** Corporations and enterprises often engage in new development of businesses, homes, roads, etc. Through development, what positive contributions can corporations make? What are potential negative impacts of development? In your opinion, does privatizing locations (p. 282) have a positive or negative influence? Pose solutions: What is a reasonable balance between preservation and development? During the discussion, come prepared to be specific about your ideas, summarize key points that are agreed upon and that differ, consider diverse perspectives, and articulate new insights supported by evidence from peers.
(Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.9–10.1, 9–10.1)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE GUIDE

Dawn Jacobs Martin has spent her career supporting students with disabilities through various roles as a practitioner, researcher, Special Education Director, and currently Associate Clinical Professor at University of Maryland, College Park.

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