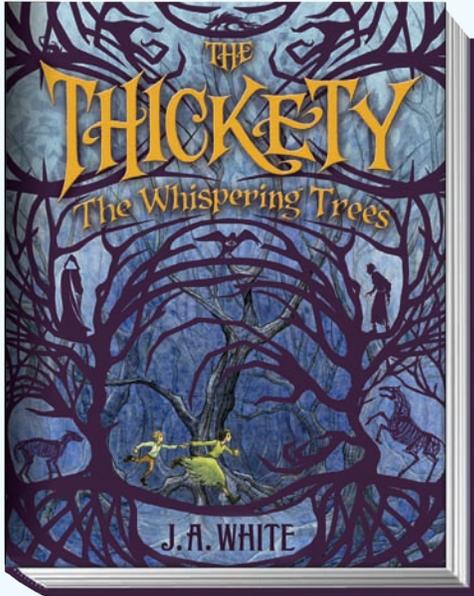


THE THICKETY

THE WHISPERING TREES

by
J. A. White

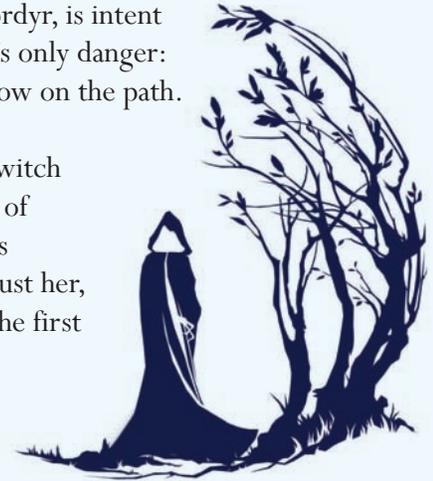
DISCUSSION GUIDE



About the Book

After Kara Westfall's village turns on her for practicing witchcraft, she and her brother, Taff, flee to the one place they know they won't be followed: the Thickety. Only this time the Forest Demon, Sordyr, is intent on keeping them there. Sordyr is not the Thickety's only danger: unknown magic lurks behind every twist and shadow on the path.

And then they discover Mary Kettle, an infamous witch with a horrifying past. She offers to lead them out of the Thickety while teaching Kara how to cast spells without a grimoire. The children are hesitant to trust her, but this could be their only chance to escape. Or the first step down a dark and wicked path . . .



Discussion Questions

1. The prologue introduces new characters who don't appear again until chapter sixteen. Why does the author open the book with the prologue? What does it foreshadow? Describe Safi's vision and the role it plays later in the story. Discuss the final line of the prologue and how it affects the reader. *RL.5-6.5; RL.9-10.5*
2. In his acknowledgments, the author compliments the illustrator, Andrea Offermann, and writes, "I actually *want* people to judge my books by their covers" (p. 516). Analyze the impact of the cover and the book's other illustrations, including the one on the title page. How do each of the illustrations that open the three books relate to the books' content? *RL.5-6.7; RL.9-10.7*
3. Most of this story takes place in the Thickety. Using details from the text, describe some of its features and its atmosphere, and obstacles that Kara and Taff have to overcome in the woods. How and why is the Thickety changing as the story ends? *RL.5-8.1; RL.9-10.1*
4. Trust is a theme throughout the book. When she gets conflicting stories from Mary Kettle and Watcher, "Kara had no idea who to trust" (p. 237). How does she resolve that situation? What role does trust play in her relationship with the animals around her? Give specific examples. *RL.5-8.2; RL.9-10.2*
5. The one person Kara is sure about is Taff. Describe him, his personality, and his talents. How does Kara treat him? How does he treat her? Give a detailed description of a scene in which Taff makes a big difference. *RL.6-8.3; RL.9-10.3*
6. In the course of the novel, Kara grows up a lot and her magic increases in power. Using details from the text, describe how she changes and what she learns about herself. Discuss her powers as a *wexari*, how her magic gets stronger, and why she worries about it. *RL.6-8.3; RL.9-10.3*
7. "Memories—especially bad ones—make us who we are," says Mary Kettle (p. 131). Discuss why Kara is concerned about memories. What is the connection between Imogen and memories? Where else in the book are memories important, and why? *RL.5-8.2; RL.9-10.2*
8. Mary also tells Kara, "Believe you have the power to change the world, and you will" (p. 108). In the epilogue, Kara wonders if "she had done any good at all" (p. 499). Discuss Mary's statement and why she says it to Kara. Do you think Kara did any good? If so, what? If not, what went wrong for her? *RL.5-8.2; RL.9-10.2*
9. Mary Kettle is a lively, multifaceted character. Draw on specifics to convey her personality and how she changes emotionally. In what ways is she important in the story? Discuss places in the plot where Mary's varying age affects the action. *RL.6-8.3; RL.9-10.3*
10. Describe Sordyr and Rygoth in terms of their appearance and character, and their interactions with Kara. What is their relationship with each other? What changes Kara's understanding of them near the end of the story? *RL.5.1; RL.6-8.3; RL.9-10.3*

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Aligns with Common Core State Standards for Grades 4–10

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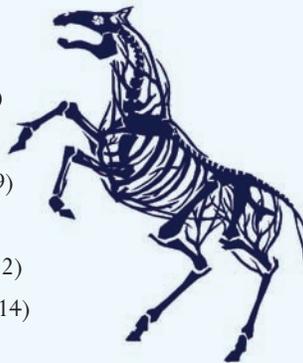
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Discussion Questions (Continued)

11. As you read, jot down figures of speech you like. Discuss them and the examples below in terms of what is compared and what the images add. *RL.5-8.4; RL.9-10.4*

- sleep tugging at her like a fishing line (p. 3)
- a dagger driven deep in her heart (p. 15)
- the stitch in her side growing fearsome teeth (p. 37)
- like children learning how to ice skate (p. 46)
- as threatening as a boy toasting marshmallows (p. 59)
- like sinking into a secret world (p. 111)
- like a child who did not want to share her toy (p. 152)
- its mind a bleak landscape of death and violence (p. 214)
- like an enchanted baton (p. 256)



12. Keep a list of unfamiliar words as you read, trying to define them in context and looking them up as needed. Below are some possibilities. *RL.5-8.4; RL.9-10.4*

- shackled (p. 4)
- exodus (p. 33)
- crescendo (p. 36)
- encroaching (p. 73)
- meager (p. 105)
- blighted (p. 140)
- simulacrum (p. 147)
- shards (p. 233)
- unfathomable (p. 255)
- labyrinth (p. 245)
- slack (p. 350)
- charred (p. 368)
- imprint (p. 427)
- hobbled (p. 460)

Extension Activities by J. A. White

1. **Creature Creation.** Part of the fun of writing fantasy novels is imagining your own fantastic/gruesome/magical monsters! Create a creature that's different from the other ones you've read about in stories or seen in the movies. Draw a picture of it and describe its characteristics. What does it eat? What special powers does it have? Is it good or bad? *W.4-7.3*

2. **Map of the Thickety.** Using details from *The Whispering Trees*, create an illustrated map of the Thickety that traces Kara's path from the beginning to the end of the story. Be sure to include important locations such as the Draye'varg, Imogen's lair, Kala Malta, etc. *W.4-7.8; RL.4-7.3*

3. **Stories within Stories.** Novels are made up of interesting characters and settings, but they are also populated by other stories as well! (For example, *The Whispering Trees* begins with Breem telling his daughter a story about Sordyr.) Write a story or myth that takes place in a make-believe world as told by a character who lives in that world. *W.4-7.3*

4. **Magical Toys.** Mary Kettle's sack holds enchanted toys with all sorts of unusual powers. If *your* toys had magical powers, what would they be? Create an illustrated toy catalog with descriptions of your toys' more fantastic properties. *W.4-7.3*

5. **The Perfect Age.** Mary Kettle's age changes every day. If you could be only one age for the rest of your life, which age would you choose? Write a persuasive paragraph or essay in which you defend your choice with at least three concrete reasons. *W.4-7.1*



Photo by Jack Pacione, Jr.

J. A. White is the author of *The Thickety: A Path Begins*. He lives in New Jersey with his wife, three sons, and the ghost of their hamster, Ophelia. When he's not making up stories, he teaches a bunch of kids how to make up stories (along with math and science and other important stuff). He wishes dragons were real because it would be a much cooler way to get to work.

Discussion questions prepared by Kathleen Odean, librarian, author, and Common Core workshop presenter. Extension activities prepared by J. A. White. Permission to reproduce and distribute these pages has been granted by the copyright holder, HarperCollins Publishers. All rights reserved. Illustrations copyright © 2015 by Andrea Offermann.