



THE THICKETY

A PATH BEGINS

BY J. A. WHITE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Life has been lonely for twelve-year-old Kara and her younger brother since their neighbors have shunned them after Kara's mother was executed as a witch. The only thing more evil than witchcraft is the forbidden forest that surrounds their village: the Thickety. One night a mysterious bird lures Kara into the Thickety, where she finds a book that awakens her magical powers. But the sly village bully, Grace, learns of the book and will stop at nothing to get it, threatening all that Kara holds dear. Suspense builds to an explosive, unexpected ending in this gripping fantasy novel about good and evil.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The prologue takes place when Kara is five years old, while in chapter one she's twelve. Why do you think the author created the prologue? Discuss what you learn in it and how it foreshadows the rest of the book. Come up with adjectives to describe its emotional tone (happy, sad, dark, light, etc.). In what ways does the Prologue set the tone for the book? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.5., RL.6.5., RL.9-10.5.*
2. In addition to the prologue, *The Thickety: A Path Begins* is divided into three books—"Signs"; "The Shadow Festival"; and "The Last Spell"—followed by the epilogue. Analyze why the author structures it like this. Discuss the pictures and quotes that begin each book and how they relate to what follows. Describe what happens in the epilogue and how it is connected to the novel's title and especially its subtitle, "A Path Begins." *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.5., RL.6.5., RL.9-10.5.*
3. Describe life on the island and in the village using details from the text. What are some of the different jobs that people do? Which adults have more prestige and power than others? Who are the Clearers and what is their status? Do males and females have different roles? What do children do in school and elsewhere? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.1., RL.6.1., RL.7.1., RL.8.1., RL.9-10.1.*
4. Religion is central to life on the island. Use passages from the novel to describe the religion and its history. What are the religious teachings about magic, wishing, and witches? Who are the leaders? What sorts of ceremonies are described? How else does religion affect daily life on the island? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.1., RL.6.1., RL.7.1., RL.8.1., RL.9-10.1.*
5. Reread the story (starting on page 97) that Kara and her brother have created together in a small book. What does it tell you about their relationship? How does it reflect Kara's quest in the novel? What role does their book play later in the novel? On page 101, Kara thinks, "Happy endings . . . could only be earned through some sort of sacrifice." What does this mean, and how does it foreshadow future events? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.1., RL.6.1., RL.7.1., RL.8.1., RL.9-10.1.*
6. Discuss the role that books—other than the one Kara and Taff create—play in the novel. What do you know about the book called *The Path*? Why does Lucas think that someone smuggled Kara a book (p. 144)? What is a grimoire and what is the importance of grimoires in the plot? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.1., RL.6.1., RL.7.1., RL.8.1., RL.9-10.1.*

(Continued on next page . . .)

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7. One theme is that even evil people have some good in them. Give examples of this from the text. At the same time, most good people in the story have negative qualities or behavior. Describe such characters and their traits. How does Kara show that she understands these two sides of people and forgives some of their negative aspects? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.2., RL.6.2., RL.7.2., RL.8.2., RL.9-10.2.*
8. During the course of this story, Kara explores her magical powers. Describe what she can do that's unusual. How does her ability to help heal animals relate to her magical powers? What struggles does she have with the powers? How do she and her powers change in the story? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.1., RL.6.1., RL.7.1., RL.8.1., RL.9-10.1.*
9. Kara's mother is dead, but she plays an important role in the narrative. Describe what Kara knows about her mother at the beginning and how her understanding of her mother changes. What do the two of them have in common? How does Kara's mother help her? What mistakes did her mother make, and how did she show courage? *CCSS (Reading): RL.6.3., RL.7.3., RL.8.3., RL.9-10.3.*
10. Lucas is Kara's best friend. What is his history and what kind of work does he do? Describe the kind of person he is. Give examples of how he and Kara interact with each other and try to protect each other. Why is Lucas eager to leave the island? *CCSS (Reading): RL.6.3., RL.7.3., RL.8.3., RL.9-10.3.*
11. Describe the physical characteristics of Sordyr, also known as the Forest Demon, referring to details in the text. Why is Kara frightened of him? Describe the Thickety and why Kara is afraid of it. What role does Sordyr play in that fear? Why do you think the book is titled *The Thickety*? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.1., RL.6.1., RL.7.1., RL.8.1., RL.9-10.1. RL.6.3., RL.7.3., RL.8.3., RL.9-10.3.*
12. The author brings the setting and story alive with skillful use of figurative language, including similes and metaphors. Below are some examples. Find other examples and compile a list. Categorize these figures of speech into broad categories, such as weather or nature, and discuss why the author draws on these categories. How does the figurative language affect you as a reader and enrich the story? *CCSS (Reading): RL.5.4., RL.6.4., RL.7.4., RL.8.4., RL.9-10.4.*
- Like an ill-fitting mask (p.7)
 - A poorly harrowed field of scars (p. 30)
 - Like rabid wolves (p. 53)
 - As bright as a miniature sun (p. 99)
 - Like a marionette on a string (p. 183)
 - Like a hound picking up a scent (p. 222)
 - Like an angel's shroud (p. 309)



(Continued on next page . . .)

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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES by J. A. White

- 1. DEADLY PLANTS.** The Fringe is filled with deadly flora. Research two types of dangerous plants that really exist in nature. Sketch the plants into a journal and write descriptions of their properties. Add a third dangerous plant of your own creation. Share your flora with another student and see if he or she can pick out the imaginary plant. *CCSS (Writing and Science): W.4-7.7., RST.6-8.7.*
- 2. WORD PICTURES.** When the essence of a creature is captured by Kara's grimoire, it appears on the page as a drawing constructed of words. Make a simple sketch of a person, animal, or object. Next, gradually erase your lines and replace them with concrete words and phrases that "capture" your subject. Be sure to use sensory language! *CCSS (Writing): W.4-7.3d.*
- 3. SYSTEM OF MAGIC.** The grimoire can give its user great power, but there is also a very specific set of rules and consequences to using it. Create your own imaginative "system of magic." You can use a book, wand, or magical talisman of your choice. Make up at least three rules about how this power can be used. Write a short story that reveals these rules through the actions of your protagonist. *CCSS (Writing): W.4-7.3.*
- 4. CHANGING PERSPECTIVE.** *The Thickety* is written in the third-person limited voice, which means that readers are restricted to only Kara's perspective. Why do you think the author chose to write the book this way? Take a scene from the book and rewrite it from the perspective of a different character. For example, rewrite the general store scene from Grace's perspective or the prologue from Fen'de Stone's perspective. How does this change the story? *CCSS (Reading and Writing): RL.4-7.6., W.4-7.3.*
- 5. UNFAIR EXPECTATIONS.** The villagers of De'Noran believe that Kara is evil because her mother was accused of witchcraft. What preconceived notions, positive or negative, do people have of you due to other members of your family? For example, are you expected to do well in school because your older sibling did? Does a parent possess a certain quality or talent that others look for in you? Write an essay about how you either meet—or don't meet—the expectations raised by the other people in your family. *CCSS (Writing): W.4-7.2.*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J.A. White is the writer for the book trailer production company Escape Goat, as well as an elementary school teacher. This is his first novel. He lives in New Jersey with his wife and three sons.

Photo by Jack Paccione Jr.



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Discussion questions prepared by Kathleen Odean, librarian, author, and Common Core workshop presenter. Extension activities prepared by J. A. White.