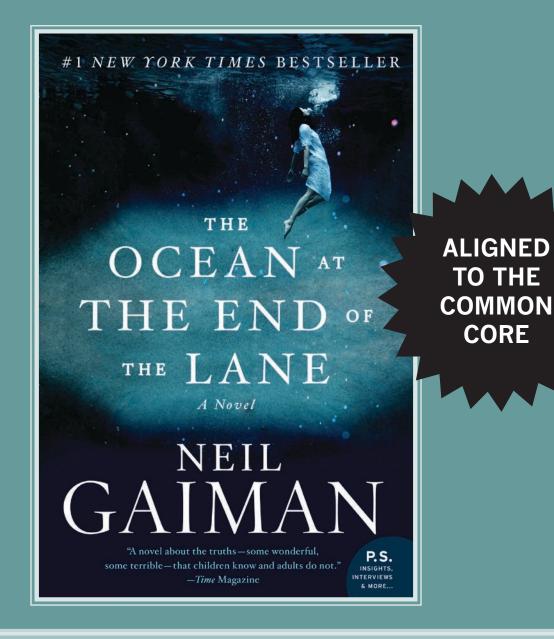
# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



"A novel about the truths—some wonderful, some terrible—that children know and adults do not."

—Time Magazine



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### **Note to Teachers**

The questions and activities in this teaching guide were written to support standards-based instruction. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* meets the standard for **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity** for grades 9-10. Its connections to folklore, mythology, and the hero journey make it an excellent anchor text for survey courses of world literature. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10** 

A complete list of the Common Core State Standards can be found at http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards

This Teacher's Guide is divided into three sections. The first, "Guided Reading Questions," will help students with reading comprehension and appreciation. These questions can be used as a guide for annotating the text, journal responses, or discussion. A focus on analysis of Gaiman's use of figurative language is embedded within the questions. This section also includes a mentor passage from each chapter. Teachers are encouraged to use these passages to discuss the grammar and style of Gaiman's prose. The second section, "Writing and Discussion Prompts," consists of analytical writing and discussion prompts and is subdivided into genres based on the writing standards. The third section, "Research Topics," requires students to conduct and synthesize significant outside research on topics related to the novel.

## **Guided Reading Questions**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

#### **PROLOGUE**

**Mentor Text:** "I thought of turning around, then, as I drove down a wide street that had once been a flint lane beside a barley field, of turning back and leaving the past undisturbed" (3). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B** 

- 1. Find descriptive and narrative details in the opening pages of the novel that reveal that the narrator has returned home to attend a funeral. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 2. Paraphrase the narrator's description of his life found on page 4. What does he do for a living? Does he seem to be satisfied with the way his life has turned out? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 3. On page 5, the narrator uses the phrase "unlikely people" to describe the Hempstocks. What do you think this phrase implies or suggests? How is the effect of the description "unlikely" different from other synonyms that have a similar denotation? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 4. What does the narrator's memory of his father suggest about his father's personality?(6) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 5. On page seven the narrator uses the image of cobwebs to describe his experience of the day's events. What does this image suggest about the narrator's past? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 6. What triggers the narrator's memory of the events of the year he was seven? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 7. What is the difference between a sea and an ocean? Explain why it might be more logical to compare a pond to a sea. Why do you think Lettie insisted on calling her pond an ocean instead? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

### **CHAPTER ONE**

Mentor Text: "The kitten was affectionate and interested and a good companion for someone whose seventh birthday had consisted of a table with iced biscuits and a blancmange and cake and fifteen empty folding chairs" (10). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3

- 1. What was traumatic about the narrator's seventh birthday party? What does the decoration of his birthday cake suggest about his personality? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 2. What details suggest that the narrator's mother is sensitive to him? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 3. What do you think the narrator means when he says, "Books were safer than other people anyway"(9)? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 4. What gifts did the narrator receive for his seventh birthday? What do these gifts suggest about the narrator's personality and interests? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 5. Describe the relationship between the narrator and Fluffy. What happened to Fluffy? How did the narrator's parents respond to the death of the kitten? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 6. What do you think the opal miner means when he gives the narrator a new cat and says, "Always pay my debts" (11)? What details in the description of the replacement cat suggest that the opal miner did not buy the new cat?
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 7. In what specific ways is the new cat a foil for the narrator's kitten? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

#### **CHAPTER TWO**

Mentor Text: "Nothing I had drunk had ever tasted like that before: rich and warm and perfectly happy in my mouth" (20). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.B

- Explain the narrator's statement that "I was not happy as a child, although from time to time I was content. I lived in books more than I lived anywhere else" (13). How does this statement help develop his character? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 2. Why did the narrator have to move into his sister's bedroom? What did he like about his new living arrangement? What did he dislike about it? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 3. Explain how Gaiman's decision to include a flashback about the narrator visiting the Chamber of Horrors at the wax museum before revealing the suicide of the opal miner impacts a reader's experience of the text. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5
- 4. What specific descriptive details does Gaiman use to show the reader that the opal miner committed suicide? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 5. Who takes the narrator to the Hempstock Farm? Contrast the breakfast he receives from the Hempstocks with the breakfast his father made him. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 6. What details suggest that the Hempstocks have supernatural abilities? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 7. Research the Domesday Book. Why would the fact that Hempstock Farm was mentioned in the book be significant? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4
- 8. What does Lettie find when she takes the narrator down to the pond? Why do you think she is troubled by this discovery? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 9. What does Lettie suggest will happen if the narrator puts the sixpence she gives him in his piggy bank? What details about her suggestion could be an example of foreshadowing? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

#### **CHAPTER THREE**

Mentor Text: "I was sad not to have won thousands of pounds (I already knew what I would buy with it. I would buy a place to go and be alone, like a Batcave, with a hidden entrance), but I was delighted to be in possession of a fortune beyond my previous imaginings" (26). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2

- 1. What events suggest that Lettie was correct in her suggestion that the sixpence would bring the narrator luck? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 2. Paraphrase the narrator's nightmare. Why does he describe the silver shilling as "a bridge between my dream and the waking world" (28)? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 3. Who does the narrator tell about finding the shilling? How does she respond? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 4. What knowledge does Lettie have about the people that live on the lane? What do their struggles have in common? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 5. What does the narrator begin to suspect about Lettie? What question does he ask her in an attempt to confirm his suspicion? How does Lettie respond? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 6. What does Old Mrs. Hempstock notice after she examines the narrator's shilling? What does the narrator think is causing money to suddenly appear? How do the Hempstocks respond to his suggestion? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 7. Explain the details in this chapter that seem to provide further evidence that the Hempstocks have supernatural abilities. What specific "powers" do they seem to have? Quote the passages from the text that support your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 8. Based on the dialogue between Lettie, her mother, and her grandmother, what does Lettie want to do? Why do you think she wants to take the narrator with her? Who warns her against taking him? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

Mentor Text: "I saw the spring flowers; the omnipresent white and yellow daisies, the golden dandelions and do-you-like-butter buttercups, and, late in the season, a lone bluebell in the shadows beneath the milk-churn table, still glistening with dew..." (36) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.A

- 1. Explain the steps that Lettie takes to lead the narrator into the magical dimension. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 2. What creature do Lettie and the narrator first encounter when they enter the magical part of the world? How do the details in its physical description match its name? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 3. What does the term "fleas" suggest about the creatures that Lettie and the narrator encounter on the borders of the Hempstock Farm? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 4. Analyze the imagery that Gaiman uses to describe the flapping creature. Based on the way it is described, what can you infer about the creature's personality? How does Lettie change when she encounters the flapping creature?
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 5. According to the creature, why is she giving the people on the lane money? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 6. What is significant about the creature's description of money as being "little tokens-of-work"? What do her comments suggest about the values of human beings? (42) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 7. What do you think Lettie means when she tells the creature she is there to bind it? Why would the creature resist being bound? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 8. What causes the narrator to let go of Lettie's hand? What happens as a result of his letting go? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 9. What creature does the narrator pull out of the ground? Explain how this creature is connected to the death of the opal miner and the trauma of his unattended birthday party. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

#### **CHAPTER FIVE**

**Mentor Text:** "I wondered, as I wondered so often when I was that age, who I was, and what exactly was looking at the face in the mirror. If the face I was looking at wasn't me, and I knew it wasn't, because I would still be me whatever happened to my face, then what was me? And what was watching?" (50) **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B** 

- 1. Describe the relationship between the narrator and his sister. What specific details suggest that the two were not close? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 2. Why does the narrator say he did not tell anyone about the hole in his foot? Do you find his explanation believable? Explain your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 3. Consider the narrator's description of trying to pull the worm out of his foot. What details make the description particularly effective? What did he do to make the worm loosen its hold inside his foot? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5
- 4. Why didn't the narrator kill the worm? What did he do to it instead? What do you predict will happen as a result of his decision? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

#### **CHAPTER SIX**

Mentor Text: "An admission about myself: as a very small boy, perhaps three or four years old, I could be a monster" (51). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.B

- 1. In the first chapters of the book, the narrator frequently describes himself as being scared of things. Why do you think the worm in his foot did not scare him? (51) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 2. What do you think the narrator means when he says myths "weren't adult stories and weren't children's stories. They just were" (53). How do myths bridge both genres (adult and children's literature)? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 3. What specific descriptive details connect Ursula Monkton to both the worm and the flapping creature? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 4. Why does the narrator refuse to eat food prepared by Ursula? How does this connect to traditional superstitions and folklore about the role of breaking bread with enemies? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6
- 5. What do you think Gaiman means when he writes: "Adults follow paths. Children explore" (56). Do you agree with his statement? Explain your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 6. How does Ursula threaten the narrator? What details in her threat confirm that she is the flapping creature? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 7. Cite specific textual evidence that suggests that there is a flirtatious tone to the conversation between Ursula and the narrator's father. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

#### **CHAPTER SEVEN**

**Mentor Text:** "Now he pushed me down again, but fear of death gives us strength: my hands and teeth were clamped to his tie, and he could not break his grip without hitting me" (73). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.B** 

- 1. Explain the possible connection between the book the narrator reads, *Sandie Sees It Through*, and the situation with Ursula Monkton. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5**
- 2. Cite specific details that suggest that Ursula and the narrator's father are becoming romantically involved with each other.

  Does the narrator seem to realize what is actually going on between Ursula and his father? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 3. On pages 66-67, the narrator gives details about his relationship with his father. Cite specific textual evidence that suggests that the relationship was abusive. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3**
- 4. Examine the argument between the narrator and his father. What is the narrator's motivation for refusing to eat? What is the father's motivation for punishing his son? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 5. Explain how the narrator's punishment mirrors what he did to the worm from his foot. What does this parallel suggest about Ursula's influence over the narrator's father? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

#### CHAPTER EIGHT

**Mentor Text:** "She was the storm, she was the lightning, she was the adult world with all its power and all its secrets and all its foolish casual cruelty" (86). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.A** 

- 1. What purpose does the narrative break on page 74 serve? Does it cast doubt on the narrator's reliability or does it give him credibility? Explain your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5
- 2. What comment does Ursula make that seems to confirm that she was responsible for the narrator's punishment in the bath-tub? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 3. Explain the narrator's plan to escape. Why does he believe it is necessary to control his thoughts? What does he witness as he is leaving his house? Why is this disturbing? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 4. What do you think Ursula means when she says that the narrator is a door? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 5. Explain how the shift in Lettie's diction as she interacts with Ursula helps emphasize the contrast between the children and the adult world. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 6. Explain how this chapter is an example of magical realism. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9

#### **CHAPTER NINE**

**Mentor Text:** "There was still a monster in my house, and, in a fragment of time that had, perhaps, been snipped out of reality, my father had pushed me down into the water of the bath and tried, perhaps, to drown me" (106). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B** 

- 1. According to the Hempstocks, why aren't any men living with them? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 2. What options do the Hempstocks come up with as a way to protect the narrator from his parents? What do these options suggest about the extent of their supernatural powers? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 3. How do the Hempstocks end up dealing with the narrator's parents? What could be symbolic about their "snipping and stitching"? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 4. Examine Gaiman's use of imagery in the passages dealing with the extraction of the foreign object in the narrator's foot. Which sections do you find particularly effective or evocative? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 5. Old Mrs. Hempstock alludes to the historical figures of Oliver Cromwell and William II (Red Rufus) in her discussion of fleas and varmints. Research these two historical figures. Why do you think Gaiman chooses them to connect to the flapping creature/Ursula? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9
- 6. Do all of the narrator's responses to the events in this section of the book seem believable? Explain your answer. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3**

#### **CHAPTER TEN**

**Mentor Text:** "I believed in her, and that meant I would come to no harm while I was with her. I knew it in the way I knew that grass was green, that roses had sharp, woody thorns, that breakfast cereal was sweet" (115). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B** 

- 1. What memory is the narrator reminded of when he sees Old Mrs. Hempstock in the moonlight? Why is this memory comforting? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5
- 2. Based on the way that it is used in this section of the book, what do you think it means to "put a glamour" on something? (109) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.A
- Do the Hempstocks view Ursula as an enemy? Cite specific textual evidence to support your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 4. What objects does Lettie bring home from the bazaar? Do these objects seem particularly magical? What is she planning to do with them? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- According to Lettie, what are the three types of monsters? Do you agree with her categories?CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 6. What secret about grow-ups does Lettie tell the narrator? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 7. What are the connotations of the word "varmint"? What do you think "varmints" are in the context of Gaiman's story? Why would Lettie be scared of them? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 8. Analyze the objects that Lettie places on the steps of the narrator's house. Why do you think Gaiman includes these specific objects? Do any of them seem particularly magical or symbolic? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5
- 9. Analyze the interaction between Lettie and Ursula. What does Lettie want? What does Ursula want? How does Ursula reveal that she is dangerous? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 10. Based on context clues, what do you think "hunger birds" are? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.A

### **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

**Mentor Text:** "Her face was wrong, somehow: an accidental assemblage of features that simply put me in mind of a human face, like the knobbly gray whorls and lumps on the side of my beech tree, or the patterns in the wooden headboard of the bed at my grandmother's house, which, if I looked at them wrongly in the moonlight, showed me an old man with his mouth open wide, as if he were screaming" (124). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.B** 

- 1. Research the theory of wormholes and explain what a wormhole is. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9
- 2. Why does Gaiman switch Ursula's dialogue into all capital letters? What emotion is he conveying? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 3. Why can't Ursula use the wormhole to return to her home? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 4. Analyze the imagery used to describe the descent of the hunger birds. Which descriptions do you find particularly evocative or effective? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 5. Why do the hunger birds refuse to leave? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 6. Research the folklore surrounding fairy rings. Based on your findings, why does Lettie tell the narrator to stay inside the fairy ring? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

#### **CHAPTER TWELVE**

**Mentor Text:** "The sky was going gray and the world was losing depth and flattening into twilight. If the shadows were still there I could no longer perceive them; or rather, the whole world had become shadows" (133). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.A** 

- 1. Describe the various temptations and tricks that are sent to lure the narrator out of the fairy ring. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 2. Read the "Pool of Tears" poem that the narrator quotes (the poem can be found in chapter three of *Alice in Wonderland*). How does the content of poem connect to the narrator's experience? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9**
- 3. Explain the purpose of Gaiman's use of italics in this sentence: "She was ripped to shreds by alien vulture-monsters and honestly I think you're one of them or being controlled by them or something" (134). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 4. On page 135, the narrator quotes the song "A Nightmare" from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*. Look up the lyrics to this song. Can you find any elements of the song that could connect to the narrator's memories and/or experiences? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9
- 5. What gives the narrator the courage to stand up to his father? What does he say in response to his father's threats? How does his father respond? Do you think that this was his "real" father or another trick? Explain your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 6. How does the narrator test Lettie to make sure that she's real? What is the result of his test? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 7. How does the voice in the dark attempt to lure the narrator? How does he respond to the voice? What do you think is the source of the voice in the dark? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

#### **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

Mentor Text: "I saw the world I had walked since my birth and I understood how fragile it was, that the reality I knew was a thin layer of icing on a great dark birthday cake writing with grubs and nightmares and hunger" (143). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5

- 1. Explain the epiphany that the narrator has when he steps into Lettie's ocean. What do you think the saying, "from Egg to Rose" means? (143) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 2. When the narrator looks at Lettie, what does her true form look like? How do the connotations of images used to describe her substance (silk, ice, candles) differ from the connotations of the images used to describe Ursula's true form? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 3. Explain the metaphor that the narrator uses to illustrate the concept of Dark Matter. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 4. What do you think the narrator means when he says: "if I looked inward I would see only infinite mirrors staring into myself for eternity" (144)? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 5. Why do you think Lettie apologizes to the narrator? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 6. According to the narrator, what is Lettie's ocean? (145) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 7. Why does Lettie say we have to give up the knowledge that we have before we are born? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 8. Explain the difference between the German words *fressen* and *essen*. What does this suggest about what the hunger birds do to creatures? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4**
- 9. Explain the simile that Ginnie Hempstock uses to describe "fleas" like Ursula. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 10. Why does the narrator think he might have to die? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

#### **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

**Mentor Text:** "Soon enough, there would be no world. My mother, my father, my sister, my house, my school friends, my town, my grandparents, London, the Natural History Museum, France, television, books, ancient Egypt—because of me, all these things would be gone, and there would be nothing in their place" (156). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B** 

- 1. On page 152, the narrator lists all the things that are his fault. How is what happened "in the cold bath" different from the other things in his list? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 2. Why do the hunger birds want the narrator? Why can't they take him from the Hempstocks? What do they begin to do as a result of not being given the boy? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 3. Why does the narrator let go of Lettie's hand? What happens as a result of his actions? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 4. Examine Gaiman's use of italics on page 157. Why is this passage italicized? What added meaning does the use of italics convey? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 5. Who do you think the voice that speaks to the hunger birds belongs to? Explain your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 6. Look up the lyrics to the nursery song "Girls and Boys Come Out to Play." Why do you think the narrator begins humming this particular tune? How does the song connect to the events in the book? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9
- 7. What does the narrator realize about Lettie's actions? What do the Hempstocks do with her injured body? What is symbolic about their actions? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 8. Read Ariel's Song ("Full Fathom Five") from Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*. Explain how and speculate as to why the narrator echoes some of Shakespeare's imagery when he talks about Lettie. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9**

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

**Mentor Text:** "It's hard enough being alive, trying to survive in the world and find your place in it, to do the things you need to do to get by, without wondering if the thing you just did, whatever it was, was worth someone having...if not died, then having given up her life"(167). **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B** 

- 1. On page 166, the narrator observes: "Ginnie looked like she was going to say something about the nature of truth." If she had spoken about truth, what do you think she would have said? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
- 2. Where does Ginnie Hempstock tell the narrator's mother that Lettie has gone? What does the narrator say he remembers about Lettie's going away party? What explanation can you give for the narrator's faint memory of an "alternate pattern of events" (168)? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 3. What does the narrator's mother tell the children about Ursula Monkton? What does the narrator's sister say she thought regarding the reason that Ursula left? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 4. What do the kitten-cat's eyes suggest about its origins? Explain your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

#### **EPILOGUE**

**Mentor Text:** "I thought about my heart, then; wondered if there was a cold fragment of a doorway inside it still, and if it was a gift or a curse if there was" (174). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.A

- 1. What do you think the narrator means when he responds to the old woman's comment "I thought you'd probably fallen in," by saying, "I sort of did" (172). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 2. What does the narrator find odd about the appearance of Ginnie and Old Mrs. Hempstock? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 3. According to Ginnie Hempstock, why does the narrator feel compelled to return to the pond from time to time? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
- 4. Explain the connotative and denotative meanings of Ginnie Hempstock's observation that the narrator is "growing a new heart" (175). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
- 5. At the end of the book, what comment does the narrator make to Mrs. Hempstock that seems to indicate that he has already forgotten everything he remembered while sitting by the pond? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

## **Writing and Discussion Prompts**

#### TOPICS FOR ARGUMENTATION ESSAYS OR DEBATE

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1a-e Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1a-d Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- 1. Participate in a Socratic seminar that explores the following questions: Do you believe that the supernatural events actually happened, or were they a part of the narrator's imagination? Do you believe that it is possible to reliably narrate events from one's own childhood? Are there times when storytelling captures the emotional truth of an event more accurately than a realistic narration of facts? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1a-d.
- 2. On page 112, Lettie tells the narrator, "Sometimes monsters are things people should be scared of, but they aren't." What is something that you think people should be more afraid of than they are? Compose a persuasive speech to convince your classmates that something or someone is more dangerous than they believe it to be. Using the flapping creature/Ursula Monkton as your guide, include a description of what the thing you are describing would look like if it were an actual monster. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4
- 3. When the Hempstocks snip out the narrator's memory of being abused by his father, he pauses before destroying the scrap containing the memory and says, "I want to remember. Because it happened to me. And I'm still me"(100). If you had the ability to "snip out" a painful memory from your own life, would you do it? Should we try to forget bad memories, or try to remember them? Explain your answer using both emotional and logical appeals. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
- 4. At the end of the novel, the narrator reflects: "A story only matters, I suspect, to the extent that the people in the story change. But I was seven when all these things happened, and I was the same person at the end of it that I was at the beginning, wasn't I?" (170) Is the narrator a static or dynamic character? Defend your answer using specific textual evidence. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

- 5. After the hunger birds leave, the narrator reflects: "I thought about my heart, then; wondered if there was a cold fragment of a doorway inside it still, and if it was a gift or a curse if there was" (174). In your opinion, would having a piece of a doorway inside of his heart be a blessing or a curse? Explain your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
- 6. On page 175, Ginnie Hempstock tells the narrator: "You don't pass or fail at being a person." Participate in a Socratic seminar that explores these questions: Do you agree with Ginnie's statement? What do you think someone must do to "pass at being a person"? Has the narrator done these things? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1a-d.
- 7. Early in the novel, the narrator reflects: "I was not happy as a child, although from time to time I was content" (13). What is the difference between happiness and contentment? Have you ever been content without being happy (or vice versa)? If you had to choose between happiness and contentment, which would you choose? Defend your answer with both logical and emotional appeals. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
- 8. When the narrator tries to call Ursula Monkton a witch, the Hempstocks correct him. Later, in the book they even refer to her as "harmless" (120). Do you think Ursula is an evil character? Is she sympathetic in any way? Defend your answer using correctly cited evidence from the text. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5

### **TOPICS FOR INFORMATIVE WRITING**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

- Examine the novel as an archetypal hero journey. Explain each of the steps in the narrator's monomyth cycle. In what ways
  does he fit the archetype of the hero? In what ways does he differ from an archetypal hero? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9
- 2. Analyze the structure of the novel, paying close attention to Gaiman's decision to include both a prologue and an epilogue. How do these chapters help frame the rest of the novel? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9
- 3. Early in the novel, the narrator notes that, "Books were safer than other people anyway" (9). Throughout the novel, the narrator turns to books or passages from books as a source of comfort or way to process what is happening around him. Analyze the role that books play in the novel. In what specific ways do they shape the narrator's experience?

  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9
- 4. Create a multimedia book trailer for this novel that introduces the characters, setting, conflict, and major themes in the novel. Include a song that captures the mood of the novel. Avoid simply summarizing the text or spoiling the ending. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6
- 5. Analyze the role that family plays in the novel. How do the narrator's relationships with his mother, father, and sister shape him? Examine the relationships between Lettie, Ginnie, and Old Mrs. Hempstock. How is their family unit different from the narrator's family? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9
- 6. One of the main sources of conflict in the novel is the tension between the adult world and the world of children. How does Gaiman develop this conflict? Is it ever resolved? Use correctly cited evidence from the text to support your analysis. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9
- 7. Lettie tells the narrator, "Nobody actually looks like what they really are on the inside. You don't. I don't. People are much more complicated that that" (112). Compose a descriptive essay that captures what you believe you or someone you know well looks like "on the inside". Use figurative language to capture the essence of their personality.
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5
- 8. Compare *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* to a film that also deals with the theme of supernatural events as a mirror for real life trial or tragedy (*Life of Pi, Pan's Labyrinth*). In both stories, what is the relationship between the supernatural world and creatures that inhabit it and the real world? How do the protagonists experiences in the supernatural world help them face

#### their real world trauma? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

- 9. Lettie tells the narrator: "Grown-ups don't look like grown-ups on the inside either. Outside, they're big and thoughtless and they always know what they're doing. Inside, they look just like they always have. Like they did when they were your age. The truth is, there aren't any grown-ups" (112). Interview an adult you know about their response to this quote. In what specific ways do they feel like an adult? In what ways do they feel like a child? What experiences have changed the way they feel about themselves? Summarize their responses and use technology to publish your summary to a shared space where you and your classmates explore the question of what makes people feel like they become adults. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6
- 10. Explain how Gaiman's book reflects the cultural experiences and traditions of British literature (especially British children's literature). You may want to use *Alice in Wonderland* as a starting point for your comparison.
  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6

#### **TOPICS FOR NARRATIVE WRITING**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3a-e Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

- 1. Reflecting on the role that books have played in his life, the narrator states: "Growing up, I took so many cues from books. They taught me most of what I knew about what people did, about how to behave. They were my teachers and advisors. In books, boys climbed trees, so I climbed trees, sometimes very high, always scared of falling"(77). Reflect on the lessons that you have learned from reading books and compose a narrative essay that examines the way that books have shaped your understanding of yourself and the world around you. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
- 2. Consider the Maurice Sendak quote that Gaiman placed at the beginning of his novel: "I remember my own childhood vividly...I knew terrible things. But I knew I mustn't let adults know I knew. It would scare them." Thinking back on your own childhood, compose a narrative essay about something that you knew that you felt you needed to keep a secret from adults. It could be something simple, like a hiding place or imaginary game, or something more serious. Use figurative language and imagery to describe the event in the way that you experienced it. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5
- 3. Part of growing up is reconciling self-determination with parental expectations. On page 170, the narrator notes that his relationship with his father evolved over time: "I finally made friends with my father when I entered my twenties. We had so little in common when I was a boy, and I am certain I had been a disappointment to him. He did not ask for a child with a book, off in his own world. He wanted a son that did what he had done: swam and boxed and played rugby, and drove cars at speed with abandon and joy, but that was not what he had wound up with." Compose a narrative essay in which you reflect on your relationship with your parents. How do you navigate the space between their expectations and your own? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
- 4. Gaiman's novel deals largely with the theme of memory. At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator notes: "Childhood memories are sometimes covered and obscure beneath the things that come later, like childhood toys forgotten at the bottom of a crammed adult closet, but they are never lost for good" (5). Using this quote as inspiration, compose a narrative essay about a specific childhood object that sparks a distinct memory for you. Describe both the object and the memory connected to it. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
- 5. There are moments in each of our lives when we realize that something we believed to be true is not. In Gaiman's novel, the narrator describes this moment on page 18: "At home, my father ate all the most burnt pieces of toast... When I was much older he confessed to me that he had not ever liked burnt toast, and had only eaten it to prevent it from going to waste, and, for a fraction of a moment, my entire childhood felt like a lie: it was as if one of the pillars of belief that my world had been built on had crumbled into dry sand." Compose a narrative essay about your own experience finding out that something you believed was a lie. How did it impact your relationship with the person you had believed? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4
- 6. When the narrator asks Old Mrs. Hempstock whether his memories are true, she tells him "Probably. More or less. Different people remember things differently, and you'll not get any two people to remember anything the same, whether they were

- there or not"(173). Write a 1-2 page a narrative about a significant day in your life, then interview a friend or family member that experienced the same event and ask them to recount their memories. Compose a second narrative from their point of view. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C
- 7. On pages 138-9, the narrator is tempted to leave the fairy ring by an unidentified voice that speaks aloud many of the narrator's own doubts and fears. Write a fictional scene or short script where you imagine what it would be like to face a creature that verbalized your internal doubts and fears. Include your response to and defeat of this negative voice.

  CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L-9-10.3
- 8. While Gaiman hints at the Hempstocks' history, he does not provide a detailed backstory for the three women. Drawing on the tradition of myths, create an origin story for the three women. In your story, include and explanation of how and why they ended up living on the narrator's lane. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
- 9. On page 17, the narrator includes a particularly evocative flashback of his visit to the Chamber of Horrors and his subsequent fear of the word anatomy. Because of a bad experience, children often develop fears of seemingly innocuous things. Compose a narrative essay that explores the source of one of your childhood fears (or a sibling's fears). You may need to interview your parents to get more details about what happened to trigger the fear. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C
- 10. The narrator writes: "I do not miss childhood, but I miss the way I took pleasure in small things, even as greater things crumbled. I could not control the world I was in, could not walk away from things or people or moments that hurt, but I found joy in the things that made me happy" (149). Using vivid imagery and specific details, describe a small thing that makes you happy and reflect on the ways that it helps you deal with difficult situations or pain. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3

## **Research Topics**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

1. Gaiman references the writer and artist Maurice Sendak at the beginning of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. Research the work of Sendak. What similarities can you see between the style, tone, and thematic content of Sendak and Gaiman's works? You may also want to look at Gaiman's picture books (ex: *The Wolves in the Wall, The Dangerous Alphabet*). Create a multimedia presentation that features images and excerpts from Sendak and clearly links them to Gaiman's work.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.5

2. Explore the work of Neil Gaiman, paying particular attention to his novels for all ages (*Coraline, The Graveyard Book*) and his 2005 film *MirrorMask*. What common stylistic and thematic elements do you notice? Prepare a research paper or presentation that includes information on Gaiman's biography, a critical analysis of one of his other works, and a piece of your own creative writing that captures the stylistic and thematic elements that you identified in Gaiman's work.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7

- 3. Very early in the novel, the narrator receives a set of the *Chronicles of Narnia* as a birthday gift. Read the first book in the series, *The Magician's Nephew*, and consider the parallels between Lewis's book and the story the narrator tells. How could the books he was reading at the time have influenced the narrator's experience? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9**
- 4. Chapter twelve centers on the narrator's temptation while inside the protective space of a fairy ring. Explore this chapter in the context of other myths and folktales that contain temptation motifs (ex. Tam Lin). How is Gaiman's interpretation of this motif similar to other archetypal stories? What elements does Gaiman change or reinterpret? Prepare a multimedia presentation that explores the motif of temptation and transformation in world literature. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.5
- 5. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* contains many elements of Buddhist philosophy. Explore the influence of Buddhism in the novel. Pay particular attention to chapters thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen as you begin your research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

- 6. The three Hempstock women (Lettie, Ginnie and Old Mrs. Hempstock) share common characteristics with triple goddesses, especially the Maiden, Mother, and Crone archetypes. Research triple goddesses and analyze the characters of the three Hempstock women in light of these archetypes. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6
- 7. Gaiman draws on many different world mythology and folktales in his writing. Research the wide variety of myths and folktales that may have influenced Gaiman's work. Pay particular attention to the world traditions that connect to the supernatural creatures (Ursula Monkton, hunger birds) in the novel. You may find it helpful to watch Miyazaki's 2001 film Spirited Away as a starting point for your exploration. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6

### **More About Neil Gaiman**

#### Mouse Circus

Neil Gaiman's Official Website

Official Neil Gaiman Online Bookstore

Neil Gaiman on Tumblr

Neil Gaiman's Blog

Neil Gaiman on Twitter

Neil Gaiman on Facebook

## **Books by Neil Gaiman**

American Gods: A Novel

Anansi Boys: A Novel

**Beowulf** 

Blueberry Girl

Chu's Day

Chu's First Day of School

Cinnamon

Coraline

Coraline Graphic Novel

Crazy Hair

The Dangerous Alphabet

The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish

Fortunately, the Milk

**Fragile Things:** Short Fiction and Wonders

**Good Omens:** The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of

Agnes Nutter, Witch

The Graveyard Book

The Graveyard Book Graphic Novel V1

The Graveyard Book Graphic Novel V2

**Instructions** 

<u>InterWorld</u>

M is for Magic

Make Good Art

**MirrorMask** 

Neil Gaiman Young Readers' Collection

**Neverwhere** 

The Ocean at the End of the Lane: A Novel

Odd and the Frost Giants

The Sandman: Book of Dreams

<u>Selections from Fragile Things V1</u>

Selections from Fragile Things V2

Selections from Fragile Things V3

Selections from Fragile Things V4

Selections from Fragile Things V5

Selections from Fragile Things V6

The Silver Dream: An InterWorld Novel

Smoke and Mirrors: Short Fictions and Illusions

Stardust

**Stories:** All-New Tales

A Study in Emerald

The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains: A Tale of

Travel and Darkness with Pictures of All Kinds

Two Plays for Voices

<u>Unnatural Creatures:</u> Stories Selected by Neil Gaiman

The Wolves in the Walls

## **About This Guide's Author**

Amy Jurskis is the author of a number of teaching guides, including *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot and *American Tapestry* by Rachel Swarns. She holds a B.A. in English from the University of Georgia and a MAT from Agnes Scott College. A former department chair for language arts in a title one public school in Atlanta, she currently serves as a chairperson of curriculum and English teacher at Oxbridge Academy of the Palm Beaches.