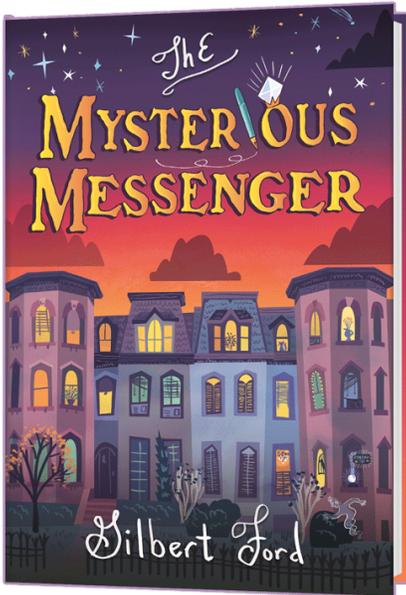


The MYSTERIOUS MESSENGER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK:

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSENGER is a rich middle-grade urban fantasy debut starring young psychic Maria de la Cruz, by the award-winning artist Gilbert Ford.

Eleven-year-old Maria de la Cruz is trapped under the thumb of Madame Destine, her pseudo-psychic mother. Destine is a bona fide con artist who will stop at nothing to swindle her customers into believing she can communicate with the dead. But Maria, unlike her mother, has a big secret—she really can communicate with the dead, most frequently with a ghost named Edward who has been her only friend since she was a child.

It's not long before this clairvoyant young sleuth gets wrapped up in an epic journey that combines bookish mystery with the literary movement of the Beat poets and art and jazz history. Maria may have the power to unlock extraordinary secrets, but can she find the treasure Edward sends her clues about? More importantly, can she find true friendship?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Gilbert Ford holds a BFA in illustration from Pratt Institute and an MFA in writing for children and young adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts. He is the author-illustrator of *How the Cookie Crumbled* and *The Marvelous Thing That Came from a Spring*, which is a Best STEM Book of the Year, and has illustrated many *New York Times*-bestselling middle grade jackets, as well as the award-winning picture book *Mr. Ferris and His Wheel*. He lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Throughout *The Mysterious Messenger*, Maria keeps it a secret that she can talk to ghosts. Would you have confided in someone else if you were Maria? When you keep secrets, how does that make you feel?
2. Why does Mrs. Fisher go see Madame Destine? Do you think she finds what she's looking for by the end of the story?
3. After Maria visits Mrs. Fisher's apartment for the first time, she "sensed she was leaving something strange and wonderful behind." Do you also have friends or places that make you feel at home?
4. Maria learns to read and write when Edward starts sending her messages. How does her love of books help in her quest? How would her life be different if she didn't have the library or stories to read?
5. When Edward asks Maria what she wants to be when she grows up, Maria answers, "I want to be rich." Do you think Maria was telling the truth?
6. Even though Maria tries to avoid them, Ms. Madigan and Officer O'Malley do everything they can to find out the truth about Maria's family. Why do you think they work so hard to help Maria? Was there a time in your life when you helped someone, even when they didn't ask for it?
7. When Maria finally tells Sebastian about Edward, he doesn't believe her. How would you have reacted if your friend didn't believe your secret? Why do you think Maria stays friends with Sebastian?
8. Maria decides to leave the apartment and follow Mrs. Fisher when Edward tells her about a hidden treasure. What do you think is the most precious treasure Maria ends up discovering?
9. Interpret the following passage: "She knew where she belonged: downstairs, hidden in the shadows with con artists and stale air." Why does Maria feel this way when she meets Sebastian's parents and sees his apartment? How does Maria begin to realize that she deserves something better, and what role does Sebastian play in helping?
10. In explaining her work as a con artist, Madame Destine says, "People are so very gullible. Everyone feels pain. Everyone looks for answers. That's all anybody wants: answers to ease their pain." Do you agree with her? Do you think tricking her customers really eased their pain?
11. Who is the "mysterious messenger" in the book? Why do you think Maria was chosen to carry out the messages?