



1. How are the dual narratives—the present-day story and the one from the 1790s—set apart? In what ways are they connected? How do the characters and events in one narrative play off of those in the other?
2. What part do various languages play in both narratives? Why do you think the author chose to make Amos mute?
3. Simon has vivid memories of his childhood, whereas Amos has little recollection of his. What part does the fragile nature of memory play in each of their lives?
4. Enola and Simon have dramatically different reactions to their shared childhood. Why do you think Enola flees and Simon stays? How does their relationship influence their choices in both the past and in the present?
5. Different types of magic are woven throughout the story and individual characters are drawn to specific kinds—water magic, tarot cards, book magic, etc. Which characters resonate with which kinds of magic? Are you drawn to a particular type of magic? Do you have to believe in magic to appreciate this novel?
6. How does Simon’s concept of home change over the course of the story? How does it compare with other characters’ ideas about home? What does home mean to you?
7. “Haven’t you ever felt connected to a book?” Churchwarry asks Simon. What do books mean to him and to Simon? Do you have a book that you feel is uniquely yours?
8. “You can’t find family in a book,” Alice warns Simon early on. What does he find in the book that Churchwarry sends him, and what does he learn in other ways?
9. What is the significance of various forms of water (including the ocean, flooding, etc.) throughout the story? What is the role of the horseshoe crabs?

Discussion Questions



10. What do you think about illustrated novels in general or this one in particular? How did the author's drawings influence your view of the characters and events?
11. How much do you know about curses, and do you believe in them? At the end, do you think the curse is broken or does the reappearance of the cards mean that it still lives on?
12. Near the end of the book, Simon observes, "We carry our families like anchors, rooting us in storms, making sure we never drift from where and who we are. We carry our families within us the way we carry our breath underwater, keeping us afloat, keeping us alive. I've been lifting anchors since I was eighteen. I've been holding my breath since before I was born." What meaning does this passage have for you?