

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. *A Spindle Splintered* begins with the declaration that *Sleeping Beauty* is the worst fairy tale—“aimless and amoral and chauvinist as shit. It’s the fairy tale that feminist scholars cite when they want to talk about women’s passivity in historical narratives.” Do you agree or disagree with this assertion? How would you rank fairy tales and what criteria would you use?
2. Zinnia Gray has a degree in folklore and is uniquely qualified for her journey. She identifies with *Sleeping Beauty* because of her illness and claims that “even among the other nerds who majored in folklore, *Sleeping Beauty* is nobody’s favorite. Romantic girls like *Beauty and the Beast*; vanilla girls like *Cinderella*; goth girls like *Snow White*. Only dying girls like *Sleeping Beauty*.” What is your favorite fairy tale? If you could enter another fairy tale, which would you choose and why? What qualifications would you need to step into that role?
3. The names in *A Spindle Splintered* are more modern versions of those used in the fairy tale—Zinnia Gray and Princess Primrose for Briar Rose, and Charmaine “Charm” Baldwin for Prince Charming. What names would you use in your adventure? What similarities do you see in naming conventions among fairy tales? How would you rename modern characters using those conventions?
4. Zinnia Gray has “rules for dying girls” like herself and *Sleeping Beauty*—“if you like something, like it hard, because you don’t have a lot of time to waste.” What intention do you think the author had by creating Zinnia’s rules? How do these rules help Zinnia navigate the world?
5. Princess Primrose seems to conform to Zinnia’s preconception of *Sleeping Beauty*, but as they embark on their journey Zinnia notes that “I suppose I should stop being surprised when the princess is more than a doe-eyed maiden.” What are the most memorable surprises during their journey? In what ways does Primrose defy the stereotypical fairy tale princess?
6. Upon discovering the wicked fairy’s name, Zinnia tells Primrose that Zellandine was “one of us” but that her story was “far worse than ours.” Zellandine’s story was considered a “courtly romance” when it was published. In discovering the ugliness of the very first *Sleeping Beauty*, Zinnia reveals that the story is relevant today: “I used to see *Sleeping Beauty* as my wildest, most aspirational fantasy—a dying girl who didn’t die, a tragedy turned into a romance. But suddenly I saw her as my mere reflection: a girl with a shitty story. A girl whose choices were stolen from her.” In what other ways is the story still relevant or outdated? How does *A Spindle Splintered* update the story? How were other versions of *Sleeping Beauty* altered to fit their time and/or audience?
7. *A Spindle Splintered* is not only a *Sleeping Beauty* retelling, but also a retelling of retellings—like *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, it is aware of all the variations of itself knowingly. Zinnia mentions versions from the medieval “romance” Perceforest’s *Zellandine*, Giambattista Basile’s *Talia*, Grimms’s *Briar Rose*, Disney’s *Aurora* to an episode of *Alvin & the Chipmunks* based on the fairy tale—“The Legend of Sleeping Brittany.” What versions of *Sleeping Beauty* are you familiar with? Which version introduced you to the story? What is the most unusual variation you’ve encountered?
8. Zinnia wonders “how many tiny variations there are of the same story, how many different beauties are sleeping in how many different worlds.” Similarly, fanfiction uses well-known characters, settings, and tropes to create endless variations from the original work. The top fanfiction site, AO3, lists Alternate Universe, Fluff, LGBTQ themes, and Fix-it among its top tags. What are some of the fairy tale tropes that have been altered in *A Spindle Splintered*? How would you tag the changes from the most familiar versions?

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