

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE WORKS OF MARCUS SEDGWICK

FOR  
USE WITH  
COMMON CORE  
STATE  
STANDARDS

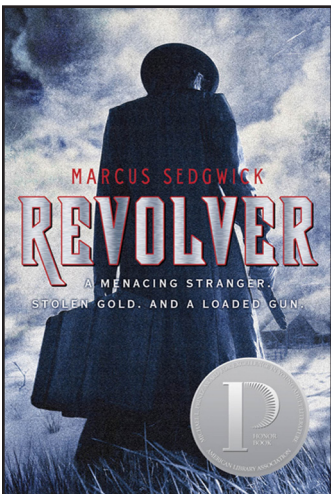


## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MARCUS SEDGWICK** was born and raised in Kent in South East England, but now lives in the French Alps. His books have won and been shortlisted for many awards; most notably, he has been shortlisted for Britain's Carnegie Medal six times, has received two Printz Honors, for *Revolver* and *Ghosts of Heaven*, and in 2013 won the Printz Award for *Midwinterblood*.

## ABOUT THE GUIDE

This guide is aligned with Common Core Standards for ninth and tenth grade but can be applied to multiple grade levels. To attain specific Common Core Standards for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!



Ages 12–18 • PB 9780312547974 • e-book 9781429987004

## ABOUT THE BOOK

A LOADED GUN, STOLEN GOLD, and a menacing stranger. A taut frontier survivor story, set at the time of the Alaska gold rush.

In an isolated cabin, fourteen-year-old Sig is alone with a corpse: his father, who has fallen through the ice and frozen to death only hours earlier. Then comes a stranger claiming that Sig's father owes him a share of a horde of stolen gold. Sig's only protection is a loaded Colt revolver hidden in the cabin's storeroom. The question is, will Sig use the gun?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book opens with the line, "Even the dead tell stories," (p.1) which is repeated at other times throughout the story, once by Wolff. Discuss what the saying means and the different ways it's true in this novel. What parts of Einar's story does Sig learn after his father's death?
2. The narrative explains about Sig and Anna that "There were enough years between them that they'd never been rivals, only friends." (p. 10) What else do you learn about their relationship? How does their past help them work together against Wolff? What does the epilogue show about the two of them?



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3. Einar tells Sig he’s going to show his son the “most beautiful thing in the world” and then shows him the Colt revolver. (p. 89) What is Anna’s reaction to Einar’s description? How does Einar justify calling the gun beautiful? What is Sig’s reaction to the gun and his one time firing it?
4. What was Maria like? How did she treat her children and others around her? Explain how and why she died. What effect did her death have on her husband and children?
5. Einar and Maria tried to teach Sig the “same message,” but went about it in different ways. (p. 51) What did they try to teach him? What ways did each of them go about it? How did their teachings affect Sig’s decisions about how to deal with Wolff?
6. Describe how Einar stole gold from the miners. Whose trust did he betray when he did it? Were you surprised that he would do so? How did Wolff figure it out, and why did he think he should get half of the gold? Do you agree or disagree with his claim, and why?
7. When Sig is pointing the revolver at Wolff, Wolff tells him, “Once you pull that trigger, your life will never be the same again. It won’t just be my life you’re ending, boy.” (p. 186) What does Wolff mean? Do you think Sig would have been justified in killing Wolff? How might it have changed his life?
8. During the night that Sig and Anna spend in the cabin with Wolff, Sig realizes that the thing he has always been looking for was home. What do you think he means by that? What factors have made him feel like he was missing something? Why does he figure it out in this situation?
9. Describe the book’s structure. What are the effects of alternating between the two places and time periods? Why label some chapters with date, day, and time, and other chapters with titles? Why include latitudes? What does the epilogue add, and why do you think the author chose to include it?
10. A quote from an anonymous source says that Samuel Colt, manufacturer of the Colt revolver, “made all men equal.” (p. 21) What does the quote mean? Explain why someone might believe it, and express your own opinion about the idea. How does the quote relate to the novel?

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### UP FOR DEBATE

As a class, brainstorm a list of debate topics about guns and gun control. Draw in part from the Author’s Note. Topics could include background checks, age of ownership, required training, banning assault weapons, and so on. Have pairs of students prepare arguments for and against the topics and formally debate the questions in front of the class.

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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.

CCSS.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.

### GOLD!

Sig’s father talks to him about “the gold days” and “the gold lust.” (p. 8) Have students each choose a topic related to gold, its history, its uses, gold mining, and more. They should research the topic using print and online resources and prepare a multimedia presentation to share their findings with the class.

CCSS.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.



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## SIG'S LIFE

*Revolver* gives a vivid picture of how Sig and his family live in Giron, including details about their cabin, their surroundings, and the weather. Have students write essays in which they compare and contrast their own living situations with Sig's. How do their homes, communities, and environments compare? How about transportation? Food? Families? The essays should reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of their life compared to Sig's.

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CCSS.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.

## IN THE MIND'S EYE

The author uses striking figurative language to paint pictures in the reader's imagination. Have students find ten similes or metaphors that they like and write a few sentences about each, discussing what comparisons are being made, the effect the imagery has on the reader, and other reactions to the language.

CCSS.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.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.

## BOOK TRAILERS

Have students use video software or a website like Animoto to create a book trailer that promotes the book the way a movie trailer does for a movie. The trailer should combine text and images, and possibly music and voice-over. Post the book trailers online so others in the class can see them.

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Ages 12–18 • PB 9781250010292 • e-book 9781429976343

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Some secrets are better left buried; some secrets are so frightening they might make angels weep and the devil crow.

Thought-provoking, as well as intensely scary, Marcus Sedgwick's *White Crow* unfolds in three voices. There's Rebecca, who has come to a small seaside village to spend the summer, and there's Ferelith, who offers to show Rebecca the secrets of the town . . . but at a price. Finally, there's a priest whose descent into darkness illuminates the girls' frightening story. *White Crow* is as beautifully written as it is horrifically gripping.



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Ferelith's feelings about, and attitude toward, Rebecca, and if it changes in the course of the novel. Analyze her declaration that, "I loved her. But I hated her, too." (p. 139)
2. Talk about Rebecca's relationship with her father. How does she treat him at the beginning of the novel? How does she feel about him at the end? Explain why her feelings change. What has he been accused of? How does Rebecca feel about it?
3. Ferelith describes her mother's suicide as the result of cause and effect. Why does she come to this conclusion? She says that the suicide was the result of a "long chain of reasons." (p. 146) Applying this idea to Ferelith's own suicide, what are some of the reasons that she kills herself?
4. After putting Rebecca in shackles and leaving her, Ferelith claims, "Look, it was just a laugh." (p. 192) Why does she say that? Why did she put Rebecca in shackles? What is Rebecca's reaction to being shackled?
5. Describe the priest, his personality, and his feelings about himself. What are his activities with the new doctor in town? What is their goal? Why is the doctor doing it? Why does the priest participate in the bloody enterprise?
6. What parallels are there between the priest's account and Ferelith's? How is she influenced by what she knows about the priest and doctor? Identify places where Ferelith and the priest each show an obsession with the afterlife. How does each of them talk about angels and devils? What else do the two of them have in common?
7. Describe the book's structure and narrative voices, and discuss why the author chose to present it this way. Why use first person voice for Ferelith and the priest, and third person in the chapters focused on Rebecca? What else distinguishes the three types of chapters from each other?
8. How does the author use foreshadowing to build suspense? How does the pacing, such as switching from past to present and back, add to the buildup of suspense? Discuss other elements of the writing that make the story suspenseful.
9. Compare the pages headed "Resurrection." (pp. 1, 230) From whose viewpoint are these pages written? What is the difference between the two pages? Discuss the overall meaning of the two sections, including the title and the word *apocalypse*. Talk about the difference between the two sections and what it means. Relate your discussion to the rest of the book.
10. Read the William James quotation in the Author's Note about the phrase "white crow," and find references to it in the novel. Why is the phrase used as the book's title? What does it mean to Ferelith, and why is it important to her? What do the last two lines of the novel mean?

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### GOTHIC AND GOTH

Have students research the elements of a Gothic novel and, in small groups, compile a list. The groups should then hold a discussion about which of the elements appear in *White Crow*, giving specific examples, and talking about what those Gothic elements add to the story. Students could also expand the research and discussion to include Goth subculture, mentioned a few times in the novel, and how it's related to Gothic literature.



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## THE POWER OF SETTINGS

The novel has two main stories, with settings that overlap. Have students make charts to show the ways in which the settings are similar and different in terms of times and places, including buildings, the town, the geography, the weather, and other elements. Students should then compare their charts and discuss how the settings add to the atmosphere of the two stories.

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## WHITE CROW PLAYLIST

Rebecca and Ferelith both refer to music and together listen to a song with the lyrics, "If you fall, I will catch you. I'll be waiting. Time after time." (p. 112) Have students create a playlist with ten songs that reflect the themes of *White Crow*. They should list the song titles and performers and, if possible, play the recordings. They should write a few sentences explaining each choice and share their choices with the class.

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## SWITCHING VIEWPOINTS

What would Rebecca say if she were narrating the story about Ferelith and her? Have students choose an emotional scene from one of the third-person chapters and retell it in Rebecca's first person voice. The retelling should elaborate on what she feels and thinks during the scene.

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

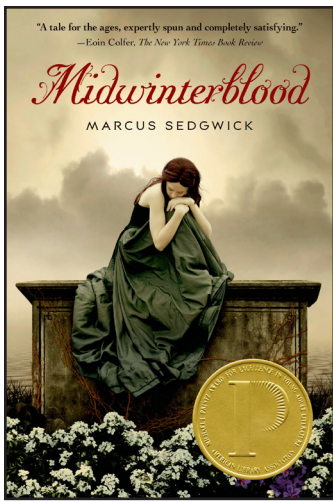
## STORY ARTIFACTS

Have students choose five objects or artifacts from the book that encompass in some way the meaning of the stories. Have students meet in small groups with their lists of objects and explain why they choose each one.

CCSS.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

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Ages 12–18 • PB 9781250040077 • HC 9781596438002  
e-book 9781596438026

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Seven stories of passion and love separated by centuries but mysteriously intertwined—this is a tale of horror and beauty, tenderness and sacrifice. An archaeologist who unearths a mysterious artifact, an airman who finds himself far from home, a painter, a ghost, a vampire, and a Viking: the seven stories in this compelling novel all take place on the remote Scandinavian island of Blessed where a curiously powerful plant that resembles a dragon grows. What binds these stories together? What secrets lurk beneath the surface of this idyllic countryside? And what might be powerful enough to break the cycle of midwinterblood? From award-winning author Marcus Sedgwick comes a book about passion and preservation and ultimately an exploration of the bounds of love.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Trace the characters named with some variation of “Eric” through the book. What do they have in common? What elements connect them? How are they and their fates different? Why is the Eric in Part Two the only one who doesn’t die?
2. Similarly, trace the characters named with some variation of “Merle.” What do they have in common? What elements connect them? How are they different? Why do the Eric characters die rather than the Merle ones?
3. Describe and compare the relationships between the Eric and Merle characters. What forms of love do they take? Which pairs are most similar to each other?
4. Talk about the different types of sacrifice, if any, in each of the parts. What is the point of sacrificing the king in Part Seven? How is that related to setting up Eric to be sacrificed in Part One? How are those two parts related to the painting in Part Four?
5. Discuss the book’s setting, including the meaning of the island’s name and the changes to its name throughout the book. What is the effect of the island being so far north? How is its isolation from the rest of the world important to the setting?
6. What are the attributes of the dragon orchid, and what are its various effects on those who consume it? What role does it play in each of the seven parts? How is it related to the choice to sacrifice Eric in Part One?
7. Why does the author choose to structure the book in a reverse chronological order? What’s the impact of the order on the stories and on the reader?
8. Review the opening and closing lines of each part. How do the opening lines set the scene? What is the impact of the closing lines? How do the lines in each part relate to other parts and to the book as a whole? Why does the book end with the lines, “And their journey begins. So, it is.” (p. 262)
9. In Part Five, the children respond to Laura’s storytelling: “There was something about the words she used to tell the story that made them realize something bad was going to happen.” (p. 180) Find specific examples of this in the story that Laura tells and also examples throughout the novel that foreshadow “something bad” that’s going to happen.



10. Discuss Merle’s thought on the last page and relate it to the rest of the novel: “They both believe the same thing, that if a life can be ruined in a single moment, a moment of betrayal, or violence, or ill luck, then why can a life not also be saved, be worth living, be made, by just a few pure moments of perfection?” (p. 262)

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### TELL IT BACKWARD

Have students outline a short story that uses a reverse chronological structure. They should divide the story into at least four parts that are related to each other. Have them discuss the challenges of the structure before writing the story itself.

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

### MOON SYMBOLISM

The parts of the book are identified by a type of moon. Have students choose one aspect of the moon from a world culture in areas like mythology, religion, or the arts, and research it. They should use print and online resources and present their findings in a multimedia presentation.

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### MIDVINTERBLOT

The painting *Midwinterblot* or *Midwinter Sacrifice* by Swedish painter Carl Larsson can be viewed on the internet including a series of photographs at the Swedish National Museum that give a sense of its size. ([www.nationalmuseum.se/sv/English-startpage](http://www.nationalmuseum.se/sv/English-startpage); search for “Midwinter Sacrifice”) Have students view the painting and discuss it in small groups, relating it to the novel.

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CCSS.RL.9-10.7 Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*).

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### WANT TO LIVE FOREVER?

*Midwinterblood* explores issues of unusually long life, immortality, and multiple lives. Have students write essays about these topics in reference to themselves. Would they like to live an extended life? Under what conditions? How about living forever or living seven related lives like Eric does?

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

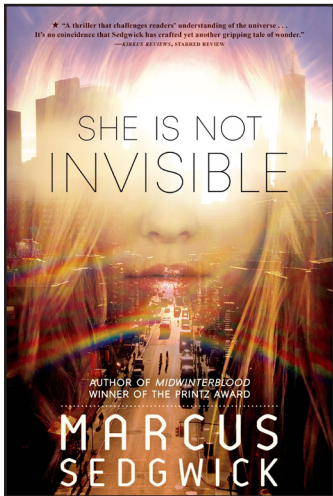
### SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

In Part One, Eric uses an app called OneDegree “based on the principle of six degrees of separation.” (p. 4) Have students read at least the first four parts of Malcolm Gladwell’s *New Yorker* article titled “Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg” to learn more about this principle. (<http://gladwell.com/six-degrees-of-lois-weisberg/>) In discussions, they should relate the article and principle to the novel and its theme of connection.



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Ages 12–18 • PB 9781250056986 • HC 9781596438019  
e-book 9781596438033

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Laureth Peak's father has taught her to look for recurring events, patterns, and numbers—a skill at which she's remarkably talented. Her secret: She is blind. But when her father goes missing, Laureth and her seven-year-old brother, Benjamin, are thrust into a mystery that takes them to New York City, where surviving will take all her skill at spotting the amazing, shocking, and sometimes dangerous connections in a world full of darkness. Marcus Sedgwick's *She Is Not Invisible* is an intricate puzzle of a novel that sheds a light on the delicate ties that bind people to each other.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Laureth's personality and her strengths. When in the story do you know for certain that Laureth is blind? What clues are given before actually stating that fact? Why do you think the author, or Laureth as the narrator, doesn't tell the reader sooner?
2. Laureth writes that she doesn't mind being blind but, "What I mind is people treating me as if I'm stupid." (p. 59) When do people treat her like that? Why do you think they do so? What are some drawbacks or potential drawbacks to Laureth of being blind, and how does she deal with them?
3. After explaining that she's often scared, Laureth says, "I have to go on pretending I'm this confident person, because if I don't, if I'm quiet, I become invisible." (p. 139) Give examples of when people have treated her as invisible. Discuss why some people don't seem to be able to see her. Relate the discussion to the book's title. When in the story does she act confident even though she isn't?
4. Analyze in detail how Benjamin proves helpful to Laureth on her journey. Describe his personality and what aspects of it make him a good companion for her. When does he act in ways that surprise her? Why does Laureth worry about having him with her?
5. Talk about the Benjamin Effect and why the family calls it that. When does it occur? How is it important in the plot? Discuss whether or not you think it could be a real phenomenon.
6. Describe Laureth's mother and her attitude toward Laureth's father during most of the novel. Give specific examples of how Laureth knows her mother's feelings about her father. How do her mother's feelings change, and what makes them change?
7. Laureth's narrative is supplemented by pages from her father's notebook. What purpose does it serve in the story's development to include the pages instead of just summing them up? Discuss what you learn about her father and his personality from the notebook pages.
8. Laureth's father is obsessed with the idea of coincidence and related topics. Describe some of his research and beliefs. What role does Carl Jung play in her father's exploration of the topics? Who else informs the subject for him?



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8

TEACHER'S GUIDE  
THE WORKS OF  
MARCUS SEDGWICK



9. List some of the clues Laureth finds about where her father might be. Which of the clues prove useful? Which don't? Explain how Mr. Walker fits into the mystery and how he helps Laureth figure it out.
10. As the narrator, Laureth conveys a sense of surroundings to the reader. How does her blindness affect the ways she does so? How do you think the narrative might have been different if she could see? What are her thoughts about not being able to see things such as colors?

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### A HIDDEN MESSAGE

At the end, Laureth mentions how weird it would be to read a book in which the first letter of each chapter creates a hidden message. Go through the book and write down the hidden message that's created this way. In small groups, compare the message you discerned, how you punctuated it, and what it means. Relate it to Laureth's final comment about such a message: "Something to make you think, yes. Yes, that's what we all need." (p. 216)

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### EXPLORING IDEAS

The novel is full of references to people like Jung and Einstein and concepts like synchronicity and apophenia. As a class, make a list of as many of these references as possible. Then have individual students or pairs of students choose one and do research on it, using print and online sources. Have them report back to the class in a presentation that shares what they learned and relates it to the story.

CCSS.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.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.

### TECH TOPICS

Laureth uses a computer as well as her smart phone. Explore what assistive technology for the visually impaired is built into regular computers and smart phones. What can be added to make them more useful? What other technology is available? Have students explore these topics using their phones, sharing if necessary, and school computers. Compile a classroom list of the findings and discuss how they'd be helpful to someone like Laureth.

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## NAME THAT ITEM

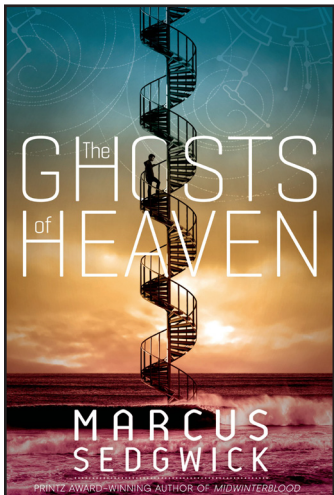
Putting on a blindfold and walking around gives the wrong impression of being blind, say experts. Instead, have students try an exercise in identifying objects by touch and smell. Have them bring in small everyday objects, including coins and currency, and gather others from the classroom. Mix up the objects and put them in bags. Have students close their eyes, take out an object, and try to identify it. Which ones are easiest to identify? Which are most confusing? For which objects might Braille labels be useful to the visually impaired?

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## NOT A SUPERHERO

Ask students to write a short story about a blind character, incorporating what they learned from the previous exercises and from the novel. The story should have a focus other than the character's blindness. As per Laureth's complaints, the protagonist should not be a superhero and should not be pathetic. The setting can be contemporary, historical, or a fantasy world.

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



Ages 12-18 • PB 9781250073679 • HC 9781626721258  
e-book 9781626721265

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In prehistory, a girl picks up a charred stick and makes the first written signs. Tens of centuries later, the treacherous waters of Golden Beck take Anna, who people call a witch. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the halls of a Long Island hospital, a mad poet watches the ocean and knows the horrors it hides. And there in the far future, an astronaut faces his destiny on the first spaceship sent from Earth to colonize another world.

Each of the characters in these mysterious linked stories embarks on a journey of discovery and survival; carried forward through the spiral of time, none will return to the same place.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the novel's structure, including the introduction. What is the effect of having it divided into four quarters? Compare the headings of chapters in each quarter and explain the differences. What is the source of the numbering sequence of the Quarter Four chapters? Talk about the idea in the introduction that the four quarters "can be read in any order and the story will work." (p. 4)
2. Explore references to spirals throughout the novel, including the illustrated definitions at the beginning. What are some examples of spirals that the characters encounter? What aspects of life, such as nature and art, are the spirals related to? Talk about the symbolism or meaning of the spirals in the novel.
3. Where in the novel is poetry important and how does it matter? How is the idea of the spiral related to writing in general?
4. How is death important in each of the quarters? Which deaths would you characterize as violent? What differences do the deaths make?



5. Identify the parent-child relationships in each of the quarters. In what ways are they significant, if at all? What other family relationships play an important part in the stories, and how?
6. Why is Father Escrove so intent on finding witchcraft? In what ways has he benefited from accusing women of being witches? Explain why specific people in Welden testify against Anna. In what ways does the priest pressure them to do so? What was your reaction to the references to Anna's story in Quarter Three on pages 245–246?
7. Anna and her mother had “the same desire—to find out what was to be found out. To uncover things covered, to explain the mysterious.” (p. 98) How does Anna show this desire? What are the consequences for her? Describe how the protagonists in the other three quarters show a similar impulse to “find out what was to be found out.”
8. Describe Charles Dexter, his background, his psychological problems, and his relationship with Doctor James. Why is Dexter afraid of spirals? How does he know about the death of the doctor's wife and his adoption of Verity? What does the doctor learn from Dexter and how does it help him?
9. Deceit occurs more than once in the novel. Identify important lies in the last three quarters. What impact do they have on the major characters? How are the lies important to the plot? In what ways are the lies betrayals? How are they abuses of power?
10. Discuss the two pages of verse at the very end of Quarter Four (pp. 358–359). What connections does the verse have with Quarter One? What does it suggest might happen in Sentinel Bowman's future?

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### SPIRALS EVERYWHERE

Have students research spirals in different fields and share their findings with the class. This could entail a multimedia presentation of spirals in art or nature or an explanation of spirals in math or science. Religion and history also offer rich areas for research and reporting.

CCSS.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.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.

### A WEB OF CONNECTIONS

*The Ghosts of Heaven* is full of connections among the different quarters. Have students use a web graphic organizer to illustrate some of the connections, choosing one quarter to put in the middle circle and connecting it to circles with related elements from other quarters. Have students share these in small groups and explain their choices.

CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

### CIPHER CHALLENGE

The last page of the book contains a cipher with no explanation. Have students study it, discuss why it's there, and see if they can come up with any clues to solving it. On his blog, Sedgwick explains that everything needed to decipher it is contained in the book. Find more information about the cipher here: <https://marcussedgwick.me>.

CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.



CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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.

## WORDS FROM THE PAST

Quarter Two, "The Witch in the Water," is particularly rich in unfamiliar vocabulary because of its time setting. Have students each make a list of ten unfamiliar words and try to define them in context. They should then check a dictionary for the meaning. Have students write the words and definitions on index cards and post them on a bulletin board.

CCSS.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

## CREATE A VILLAIN

Father Escrove is a well-developed villain, as are Doctor Phillip and Doctor Delgado. Hold a discussion about what makes them effective villains. Then have students each write a short story with an emphasis on the villain, using some techniques from the novel.

CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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.

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



Ages 12–18 • PB 9781250129635 • HC 9781626725478  
e-book 9781626725485

## ABOUT THE BOOK

When writer Arthur Ransome leaves his unhappy marriage in England and moves to Russia to work as a journalist, he has little idea of the violent revolution about to erupt. Unwittingly, he finds himself at its center, tapped by the British to report back on the Bolsheviks even as he becomes dangerously, romantically entangled with Trotsky's personal secretary.

Both sides seek to use Arthur to gather and relay information for their own purposes . . . and both grow to suspect him of being a double agent. Arthur wants only to elope far from conflict with his beloved, but her Russian ties make leaving the country nearly impossible. And the more Arthur resists becoming a pawn, the more entrenched in the game he seems to become.

*Blood Red Snow White*, a Soviet-era thriller from renowned author Marcus Sedgwick, is sure to keep readers on the edge of their seats.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When does Arthur Ransome first appear in the novel? Why do you think he first appears without being named? When is he introduced by name? Discuss why you think Parts I and II are third person point of view and Part III is told in Ransome's first person voice. What effect does the change have on the reader?
2. They all want something from him, something of him," Ransome thinks in Part II when he finally meets with Lockhart (p. 171). What do different people want from him? What, if anything, does he hope to get in exchange?



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12

TEACHER'S GUIDE  
THE WORKS OF  
MARCUS SEDGWICK

3. Describe Ransome's relationships with Ivy and his daughter and how those relationships change. How does Ransome feel about being a father? What's his assessment of his success as a father?
4. Discuss problems with trust that Ransome has in his relationships, including with Evgenia, Trotsky and Lenin, Lockhart, and Tabitha. Why is trust such a big issue for him? Is it due to his circumstances, his personality, or both?
5. In looking back on the time he wrote *Old Peter's Russian Tales*, Ransome remembers, "I was in love again, not with a woman, but with Russia." (p. 201) What does Ransome love about Russia? Why does he keep returning there? Describe some attributes of Russia and its people, as conveyed in the novel, citing specific passages.
6. Identify hints which the author drops that Ransome is a spy. When does the reader know for sure that he's an agent? What are his activities as a spy? Why does he do it? To what extent does he help England and to what extent does he help Russia, if at all? Analyze how the author uses the idea of games, including chess, as a metaphor for spying.
7. In Part II, it says of Ransome, "Like the hero in a fairy tale or romance, he finally knows what his quest is. His purpose." (p. 137) In what ways is he like a hero in a fairy tale or a romance? What is his purpose at this point, and does he ultimately fulfill it? Would you call this story a romance? Why or why not?
8. Analyze the use of flashbacks in Part II. What do you learn from them? Why do you think the author goes back and forth between the flashbacks and the build-up to meeting Lockhart?
9. Discuss the structure, describing the three parts and what distinguishes them. Relate the title of each part to its contents. Talk about the differences in the chapter titles within each of the three parts and why the chapter title formats vary from part to part. Why are the chapters in Part II labeled with the time of day?
10. Talk about elements in the novel that relate to fairy tales, including Ransome's *Old Peter's Russian Tales*. How do the fairy tale-type characters of the grandfather, grandchildren, and bear serve as metaphors? Relate the book's title to fairy tales. Analyze why Part III is titled "A Fairy Tale, Ending," and discuss the significance of the comma before the word *ending*.

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### THE 5 Ws

World War I figures into much of the novel. Have students do basic research on the war and then choose a battle, treaty, military leader, or other narrow aspect of the war related to Russia. After doing research, the student should write an article as if they were an American newspaper correspondent explaining it to readers back home. The article should incorporate the 5 Ws of journalism: who, what, where, when, and why.

CCSS.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.

CCSS.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.



## TIMELINE ELSEWHERE

The timeline that starts on p. 289 focuses mainly on Russia. Have students choose another major country around the world and create a timeline about important events in that country during the same years. They can create it with text and images at NCTE's ReadWriteThink ([bitly.com/1ym46nY](http://bitly.com/1ym46nY)) and print it out as a PDF to share with the class. Hold a discussion about world events at the time.

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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.

CCSS.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.

## A GAME AS A METAPHOR

*Blood Red Snow White* compares spying and some of Ransome's other interactions to a game, sometimes specifically to chess. Have students write a short story using a game as a metaphor, drawing from board games, card games, or sports. Share the stories in small groups and talk about how they used a game as a metaphor.

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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

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

## OLD PETER'S RUSSIAN TALES

The Gutenberg Project has a free recording of Arthur Ransome's *Old Peter's Russian Tales* ([self.gutenberg.org/eBooks/WPLBN0002954049.aspx](http://self.gutenberg.org/eBooks/WPLBN0002954049.aspx)). Have students listen to the first ten-minute recording, which includes Ransome's introduction and the beginning of the book. Then students should meet in small groups to discuss which parts of the recording are reflected in *Blood Red Snow White* and which aren't.

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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

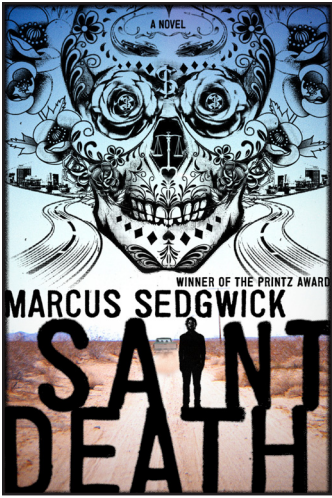
## RUSSIA'S REVOLUTION

As a class, compile a list of research topics related to Russia, other than World War I, that appear in the novel, such as Tsar Nicholas and his family, Rasputin, Trotsky, Lenin, the Bloody Sunday massacre, the October Revolution, and so on. The students should each choose a topic, research it online and in print, and prepare a multimedia presentation for the class that includes text, images, and possibly music or videos, tied together by the student's spoken remarks.

CCSS.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.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. About the Book





## ABOUT THE BOOK

On the outskirts of Juárez, Arturo scrapes together a living working odd jobs and staying out of sight. But his friend Faustino is in trouble: he's stolen money from the narcos to smuggle his girlfriend and her baby into the U.S. and needs Arturo's help to get it back. To help his friend, Arturo must face the remorseless world of drug and human traffickers that surrounds him and contend with a murky past.

Hovering over his story is the unsparing divinity Santa Muerte, Saint Death—and the relentless economic and social inequalities that haunt the border between Mexico and its rich northern neighbor. Crafted with poetry and cinematic pace and narrated with cold fury, *Saint Death* is a provocative tour de force from three-time Printz Honoree Marcus Sedgwick.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Arturo, his background, and his personality. Discuss his relationship with his parents and what has happened to them. What is Arturo's life like when the story opens? What are his hopes?
2. What is Arturo's history with Faustino and Eva? Describe what you learn about Faustino and Eva, their childhoods, and the past year in their lives. Why does Faustino turn to Arturo for help? What does Arturo remember on the last page about Eva, and what does it suggest about her fate?
3. "When you cross a bridge there is always something to pay," Arturo thinks when Faustino first asks him for help. (p. 60) What does he mean? How does it apply to Arturo and his choices? Relate the statement to his choice to help Faustino and Eva. How does his past with each of them affect his choices? How does the statement relate to his choice not to work for El Carnero?
4. Arturo has several chances to leave the card game he's playing with El Carnero. Describe those points and why he doesn't leave. What happens to his skill in playing? Why does he end up owing El Carnero money? Why does Raul have it in for Arturo?
5. What are Siggy and Carlos like? What does Arturo's friendship with them reveal about his character and about how others perceive him? Describe his time with them on his last day and how it affects him.
6. Siggy says that "people only serve themselves" while Carlos believes in community, togetherness, and the idea that "we can help each other." (p. 150) Talk about these ideas and the extent to which you agree with them. Who in the novel exemplifies Siggy's belief? Who acts in ways that reflects what Carlos believes?
7. When he's with Margarita, Arturo thinks about Carlos's words that "Everyone is scared." (p. 208) How is fear a motivating force in the book for Arturo, Margarita, and others? How do El Carnero and those like him use fear to wield power? Discuss some scenes where fear is a major factor.
8. Talk about the narrative voice and its impact on the story. What effect does telling most of it in third person present tense have on the reader? Why is the voice occasionally first person plural, as on page 77? Discuss the author's use of Spanish punctuation for dialogue and frequent use of Spanish words.
9. Describe the setting, including Juárez, Anapra, Arturo's shack, and the border. In what ways does the U.S. border's proximity affect Juárez and its surroundings? How important is the setting to the novel? Could it easily have been set elsewhere without altering the novel's meaning? Why or why not?



10. What are some of the names for Santa Muerte given in the novel? How and why do people worship her? What are her powers? Explain Faustino’s statements, “I believe in God. But I trust in Santa Muerte.” (p. 56) Who is Catrina and how does she compare to Santa Muerte?

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

### DEATH DEITIES

Santa Muerte is one of many religious or mythological figures around the world associated with death. Have students each find a different figure from religion or mythology that’s specifically associated with death. They should gather information and images and create a poster that includes text and pictures to share with the class.

CCSS.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.

### THE MAQUILADORAS

The author refers to *maquiladoras* throughout the novel, including a section of Frequently Asked Questions. (p. 120) Have students do further research into the topic with the option of expanding it to American-owned factories elsewhere in the world. Then have them write a paper on the problems with such factories and what changes could be made to improve conditions for their workers and surrounding communities.

CCSS.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.

CCSS.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.

### IMMIGRANTS GIVING BACK

“Almost everyone in America is a migrant, or their families were,” observes Siggy. (p. 155) While the emphasis in discussing immigrants is often about what they want from the U.S., immigrants also contribute enormously to our country. Have students identify a first-generation immigrant who has made a contribution and report back to the class about that person and what they’ve done. It could be someone well-known, someone local, or someone they know personally.

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### MAKE THE CONNECTIONS

Some chapters in *Saint Death* are preceded by italicized sections. Have students choose one and write an essay discussing the italicized section and connecting it to both the following chapter and the book as a whole.

CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.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.





## BLOG MUSINGS

Marcus Sedgwick has several long entries on his blog about *Saint Death*, discussing walls, unhappy endings, names in the book, why it's set in Mexico, and more. Have students read one blog entry of their choice. They should then meet in small groups with others who read the same entry and discuss it, relating its content to the novel. (<https://marcussedgwick.me/>)

CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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.

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES ACROSS BOOKS

### DEATH DIALOGUE

Death is a theme in many of Sedgwick's books, including characters who face death and some who cope with others' deaths. Have students work in pairs to explore this theme by creating dialogues about death between characters from two different books. The students should write and perform the dialogue.

CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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.

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

### IT'S LIKE . . .

All of Sedgwick's novels draw power from their use of figurative language. Have students find five or more examples of figurative language in each novel and sort them into categories. Are the comparisons drawn from nature? If so, animals? Plants? Are they drawn from machinery? Weapons? The supernatural world? Have students share and compare their findings in small groups and discuss the impact of the language.

CCSS.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 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.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSEVERANCE

The importance of perseverance is emphasized in several of the novels; in fact, the first name of Doctor James in *The Ghosts of Heaven* is Perseverance. Have students choose two or three examples of perseverance from different novels and explore the topic in an essay, discussing its importance as an attribute, and comparing and contrasting how it figures in the different novels.

CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.



CCSS.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.

## VISUAL IMAGERY

Visual images and symbols are also central in some of the books, such as the white crow, the spiral, the moon, and so on. Have each student choose one symbol and collect images that reflect it from the internet and elsewhere. They should create a slide show that integrates quotes from the books, visual images, and music.

CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

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CCSS.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

Kathleen Odean was a school librarian for 17 years and now gives workshops for educators on new young adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Newbery and Caldecott committees.

