

THE MERMAID THE WITCH AND THE SEA

MAGGIE TOKUDA-HALL

ABOUT THE BOOK

The pirate Florian, born Flora, has always done whatever it takes to survive—including sailing under false flag on the *Dove* as a marauder, thief, and worse. Lady Evelyn Hasegawa, a highborn Imperial daughter, is on board as well—accompanied by her own casket. But Evelyn's one-way voyage to an arranged marriage in the Floating Islands is interrupted when the captain and crew show their true colors and enslave their wealthy passengers.

Both Florian and Evelyn have lived their lives by the rules, and whims, of others. But when they fall in love, they decide to take fate into their own hands—no matter the cost.

Maggie Tokuda-Hall's sweeping fantasy debut, full of stolen memories, illicit mermaid's blood, double agents, and haunting mythical creatures, conjures an extraordinary cast of characters and the unforgettable story of a couple striving to stay together in the face of myriad forces wishing to control their identities and destinies.

In a world divided by colonialism and threaded with magic, a desperate orphan turned pirate and a rebellious Imperial lady find a connection on the high seas.



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Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* is told in alternating points of view. List the characters who tell the story in order of who tells the most to who tells the least. Why do you think the author structured the book this way? Do you think it makes the story better? Why or why not?
2. Make a list of the following characters: Flora, Evelyn, Rake, Alfie, the Nameless Captain, the Pirate Supreme, Fawkes, Xenobia, Lady Ayer, and Genevieve. Then next to each one describe both their physical and emotional characteristics.
3. Why did the Nameless Captain think that Flora would make a good pirate? Why did he believe that Alfie would not? Explain how he was right and wrong on both counts.
4. There are a few times when characters in *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* face choices where the lines between right and wrong are blurred. Pick one of these scenes from the book, describe it in your own words, and state why the choice the character made could be seen as both right and wrong. What do you think would have happened if the character had made the other choice? Why do you agree or disagree with the choice they made?
5. Flora questions her gender identity throughout the book. Why and how does she struggle with this? In what ways are Flora and Florian alike? In what ways are they different? How does Flora and Florian's duality of gender aid her? How does it hinder him?
6. Symbolism is when an object, person, or place represents an abstract idea beyond its literal meaning. An example of this in *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* is how the Pirate Supreme's ship is named the *Leviathan*. Look up the definition of the word leviathan and explain how the ship's name is used as a symbol throughout the book. Then choose another example of symbolism and explain its significance.
7. Why does Evelyn take a casket with her aboard the Dove? How is it both a literal and a figurative representation of the journey she's about to embark on?
8. What is more powerful, power or love? Cite examples from the book to back up your claims.
9. The only law of the pirates is to not capture mermaids. Why is this a law? What happens when a person drinks mermaid's blood? What happens to the sea?
10. Most of the men in *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* neither treat women as their equals nor believe that women are as smart as men. Why do you think most of the men think this way? Describe three times a woman proves these men wrong.
11. Reread the lyrics to the pirate anthem Flora first sings on page 22. Then explain how the song foreshadows events of her own life.
12. Using examples from *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*, describe how destiny and duty are different. Are they ever similar? Why or why not?



13. Who do you consider to be the biggest villain in *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*? Why? Use evidence from the book to make your claims.
14. While deciding she must save the mermaid, Evelyn says, “Just because it’s never been done doesn’t mean it can’t be done” (page 91). What does she mean by this? Describe another event in the book that Evelyn could be talking about when she says that line.
15. More than once, Lord and Lady Hasegawa refer to Evelyn as “crooked” meaning *queer*. How do they feel about her being queer? How can you tell? How do their feelings shape their actions regarding their daughter’s future?
16. Do you think Rake is an admirable character? Why or why not? Back up your thoughts with evidence from the book.
17. Describe the role of the sea in *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*. Which characters truly respect the sea? Which do not? Use examples from the book to back up your answers.
18. Who is the witch? Why does she tell Flora stories? How do the stories relate to both the witch and Flora? Why did the witch want Flora to talk to stones? How did Flora get the stone to talk back to her? Why was the witch angry at Flora for telling the stone to go back to the sea?
19. There are many themes found in *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*. Some central ones are right vs. wrong, betrayal, familial bonds, and gender identity. Choose one of these themes or identify one of your own and trace its development throughout the novel.
20. Explain the ending of *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*. What roles do the mermaid, the witch, and the sea each have in Flora and Evelyn’s reunion?

These questions were prepared by Mary Kate Doman, a children’s and young adult book consultant, author, and professor.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maggie Tokuda-Hall has an MFA in creative writing from the University of San Francisco and a strong cake-decorating game. She is the author of the Parents’ Choice Gold Award–winning picture book *Also an Octopus*, illustrated by Benji Davies. *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* is her debut novel, which she started when working as a children’s bookseller. She lives in Oakland, California, with her son, husband, and dog. Her dog is objectively perfect; thank you for asking.

