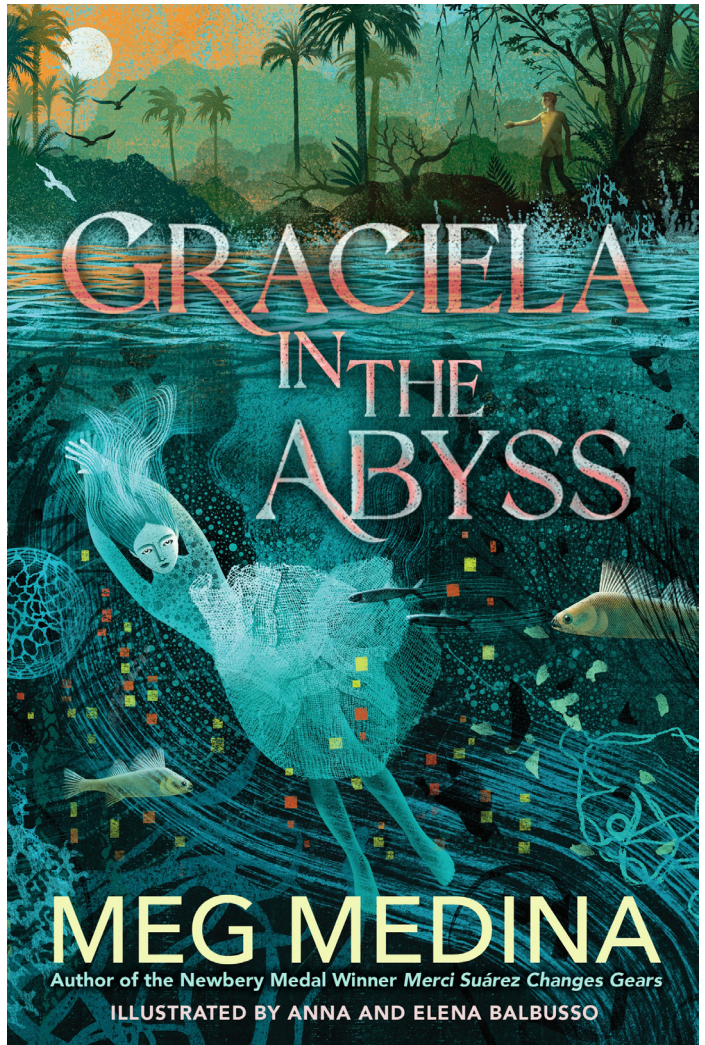


About the Book

In the deepest recesses of the ocean, Graciela—once an ordinary girl—now makes sea glass and assists her friend, Amina, as she welcomes newly awakened sea ghosts from their death sleep. Though Graciela’s spirit is young, she has lived at the bottom of the ocean for more than a hundred years. Meanwhile, in the mortal world on land, twelve-year-old Jorge Leon works in his family’s forge. He’s heard of the supernatural spirits living beneath the ocean’s waves—tales that do nothing to quell his fear of the water. But when Jorge discovers a hand-wrought harpoon with the power to spear a sea ghost, he knows he must destroy it any way he can.

When the harpoon is accidentally reunited with its vengeful creator, unlikely allies Graciela and Jorge have no choice but to work together to keep evil spirits from wreaking havoc on both the living and the dead. If only the answer to saving what they care about didn’t lie within the depths of the abyss.



HC: 9781536219456

Ebook: 9781536244960

Also available in audio

Instructional Standards

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the instructional standards 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.



Discussion Questions

1. What do we learn about Graciela and her family in the prologue? How does her relationship with her family impact how she feels about herself and others in the spirit world?
2. Why does Graciela believe that being dead is hard work? Describe the many jobs available to sea spirits. What are some other jobs you imagine that spirits could have in the sea?
3. Amina believes that Graciela is suited to the job of a glazier because the work involves transformations. What are some of the things that Graciela transforms into sea glass? How do those transformations help her feel seen? What other transformations does Graciela make as the novel unfolds?
4. Graciela describes several opposing counterparts that exist in the world, such as sun and moon, and air and water. What are some other counterparts that she mentions? Can you think of other opposites that exist as counterparts?
5. The sea spirits keep their world in a “delicate balance” (page 9). How does Fernando Gonzalo disrupt this balance? Beyond the harpoon, what does he insert into their world? At what point in the novel do you think Graciela fully understands why this balance is important?
6. What is the significance of color in the novel? How is color especially important to Graciela and Amina?
7. Some sea spirits remember their living days. Why is Graciela conflicted about remembering life with her parents and sister? She has a memory of her sister’s hands. What do the hands symbolize in Graciela’s living and spirit worlds?
8. Discuss the promises on pages 23–24. Why does Graciela think some of the promises are nothing but “white lies”? Which of the promises is most challenging for Graciela to keep?
9. Explain why an awakening is considered “a sacred passage” (page 27). Why is Graciela jealous when Amina attends awakenings?
10. In what way is the sea both a “cradle and grave” (page 30)?
11. Discuss Jorge Leon’s story. How do his parents behave toward him? How are his parents greedy like Fernando? Discuss why Fernando was believed to be “a man of two realms” (page 55).
12. Discuss fear as an important theme in the book. Explain why the spirits fear “Hard Death.” Why do awakenings instill fear in Graciela? What is the fear that Jorge experiences in the living world? What do Graciela and Jorge learn about fear from each other?



13. Trust and trustworthiness are mentioned throughout the novel. Why do you think Jorge finds it a bad idea to trust people? How do Jorge and Graciela come to trust each other? Which other characters must learn to trust?
14. Jorge finds the harpoon that Fernando made. Why is he reluctant to share his discovery? Discuss the power of the harpoon. Why is Jorge adamant about destroying it? How would destroying it change his life in the living world?
15. Read about the power of words on page 95. Discuss the effects of name calling on Jorge in the living world. How did he deal with the bullies who taunted him? What are some words that you feel might describe Jorge? Discuss whether his brief time in the spirit world, led by Graciela, helped shape him as a man when he returned to the living world. What was his contribution?
16. What is the symbolism of the piece of amber that Graciela finds? Why does she hide it from Amina? Describe her feelings of guilt about her secret object. How would revealing the amber to Amina change their relationship?
17. Identify the good and evil characters in the novel. Discuss the parallels between these characters in the living and spirit worlds. Which characters change?
18. Amina tells Graciela, “Think bigger than yourself” (page 145). Why does Graciela need this advice? What happens when she begins to heed Amina’s advice?
19. The climax of a novel is the turning point. What is the climax of this novel? Cite specific passages to support your thoughts.
20. Graciela contemplates what causes blindness among the seeing. How is this “blindness” about being closed-minded? Which of the characters are among the “blind”? At what point does Graciela begin to “see”? How does an open mind help Jorge? In what way might this type of blindness apply in our society? Why is it important to open your eyes and mind to the world around you?



About Meg Medina

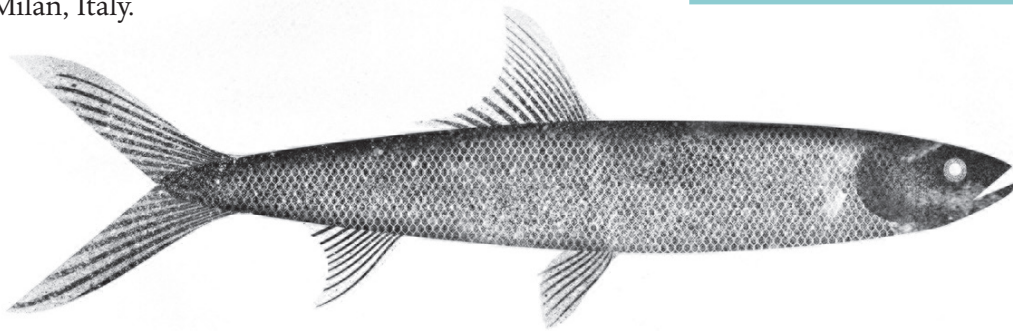
Meg Medina is a former National Ambassador for Young People's Literature and the author of the Newbery Medal–winning book *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*, which was also a Kirkus Prize finalist, and its sequels, *Merci Suárez Can't Dance* and *Merci Suárez Plays It Cool*, as well as several award-winning young adult novels and picture books. About *Graciela in the Abyss*, she says, "To survive in the darkest depths of the sea, creatures must learn to make their own spectacular light."

In so many ways, that ability mirrors what young people need on their journey of growing up." The daughter of Cuban immigrants, Meg Medina lives in Richmond, Virginia.



About Anna Balbusso and Elena Balbusso

Anna and Elena Balbusso, also known as the Balbusso Twins, are an award-winning sister artist team. Their illustrations have been published throughout the world in various media, including more than fifty books. Their artwork has received more than ninety international honors and awards, including the Stevan Dohanos Award from the Society of Illustrators. They live in Milan, Italy.



These questions were prepared by Pat Scales, a retired school librarian and independent consultant in Greenville, South Carolina.

