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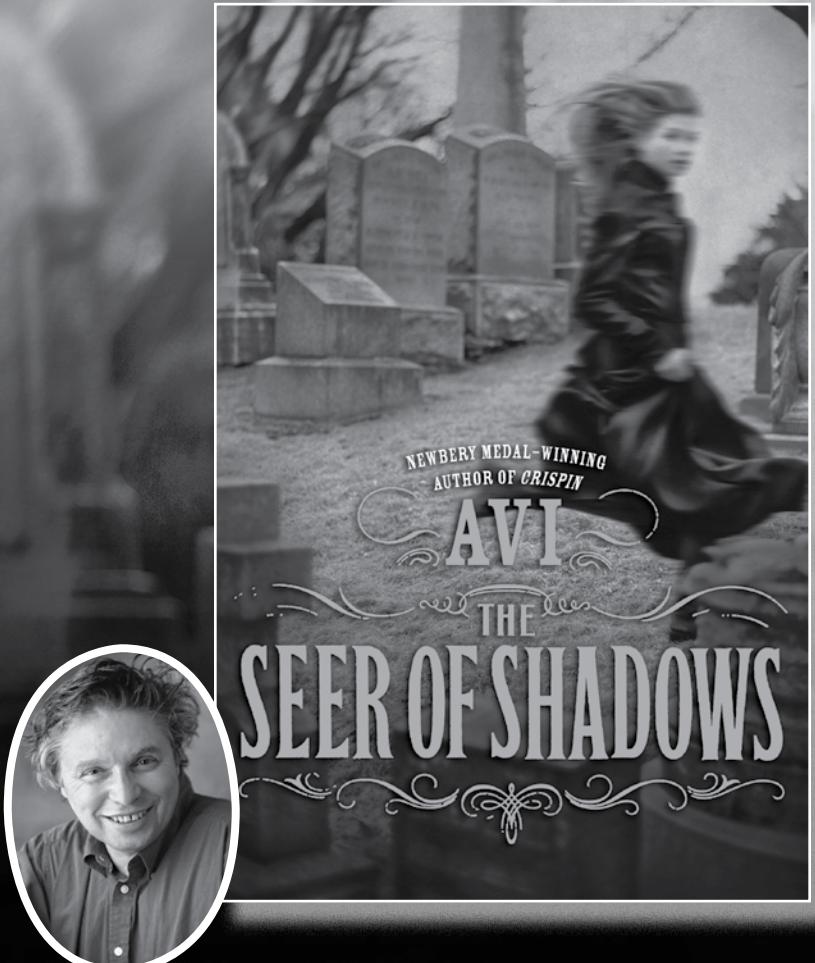
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# A Reading Guide to THE SEER OF SHADOWS



# THE SEER OF SHADOWS

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In the New York City of 1872, society was adjusting to the aftermath of the Civil War, the growth of science and industry, and the development of spirit photography. Raised by abolitionist parents who believe in rational thinking above all, fourteen-year-old Horace Carptene rides the waves of these social changes when he becomes a photographer's apprentice. Little does he know that the influences of his upbringing will be challenged by events that unfold when a socialite mourning the loss of her daughter hires Horace's employer to take her photographic portrait. How can Horace admit to himself—or anyone else—that he can see ghosts through his photography? Could his camera work really have released an angry ghost bent on murderous revenge? Avi's story raises questions about race, class, rationality, and what shadows linger over us after the ones we love pass on.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Before reading the book, take a look at the cover. What do you think the book is about? What do you think its title means?
2. Do you believe in ghosts? Do you think there are people who can see ghosts? Horace's initial disbelief in ghosts comes from his parents. Explain where your beliefs come from.
3. Horace and his father consider photography to be a science. They see photographs as factual. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. What is the difference between science and religion? Can a person believe in both?
5. Horace decides he has to take the secret pictures Mr. Middleditch asks him to take. Why? How do you think you would handle a situation like this one?
6. Horace has a very different relationship with Pegg than the Von Machts or Mr. Middleditch do. Why? What makes people think differently about the same person?
7. What happens to Mr. Von Macht? How do you know?
8. Consider the idea of revenge. Do you think what happens to the Von Machts is just? Explain.
9. Throughout the novel the author uses foreshadowing—he suggests that something is going to happen before it happens. How did this make you feel as you read?
10. What do you imagine happens to Eleanora after the end of the story?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### 1. Photography.

Provide an opportunity for young readers to explore photography. Invite them to bring cameras to share with a partner or give pairs of students cameras (disposable ones are fine). Have them take pictures in different lighting conditions, such as bright, dim, direct, and shadowed. Develop or print the images for the group to view and discuss. Alternatively, invite a local photographer to be a guest to demonstrate and answer questions about his or her profession. Another possibility is to bring your group to view a local photography exhibit.

### 2. Storytelling.

Ghosts! Bring in a selection of short ghost stories or have your group search for some in the library. Turn down the lights to set a spooky mood while everyone shares their ghost stories.

### 3. Debate.

Divide readers into two groups to debate a topic based on *The Seer of Shadows*, such as "Every occurrence has a rational explanation" or "Ghosts exist." One group is the proponent of the topic and the other group is the opponent. Establish the procedure and rules for the debate and give the groups time to research and prepare before beginning the debate.

### 4. History.

Guide readers in learning about Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. Research can include the cemetery's website, [www.green-wood.com](http://www.green-wood.com). Or lead your group in learning about well-known or long-established cemeteries in your area.

### 5. History.

Assign small groups to choose a historical research topic from the novel. They might focus on Horace Greeley, Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Brown, John Ericsson, spirit photography, the Tammany Democrats, the radical Republicans of the nineteenth century, or Edwin Booth. Charge them with presenting their topic to the group in a way that helps depict the time period of the novel.