



# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## ABOUT THE BOOK

On the eve of both the Longest Night and the fourteenth birthday celebration for Princess Jenna and Senior Apprentice Septimus Heap, Septimus begins the Darke Week phase of his apprentice training with the goal of rescuing the banished ghost of Alther Mella from the Darke Halls. Before he can do so, however, a Darke Domaine envelops the palace and castle thanks to the evil of Merrin Meredith, and saving the Wizard Tower from the Darkenese becomes everyone's primary focus. The combined efforts of all the Heaps, Beetle, Marcellus Pye, Spit Fyre, Marcia Overstrand, the Ordinary Wizards, and residents of the castle are necessary to save the Wizard Tower from evil and restore the Magyk.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author uses colors to distinguish rank and profession in her stories. To what do the colors purple, gold, green, blue, red, gray, navy blue, black, and brilliant indigo refer? Which color and profession would you choose if you lived in the Castle?
2. What does the word "Darke" mean in the story? Mentioned are Darke Week, Darke Halls, Darke Domaine, Darke Fog, Darkenese, and Darke Disguise. What is each of these and how do they drive the action? Does Darke have a smell? Who or what thrives in the Darke? What are Things and what do they do? On page 429, Stanley the Message Rat says he finally began to "appreciate the human love of light." Why do humans love light?
3. The story begins on the eve of the fourteenth birthdays of Septimus and Jenna, the day they "come of age." Do you think fourteen-year-olds are mature enough to make major life decisions? At what age do we consider a child to be an adult in the United States? Explain how Septimus, Jenna, Spit Fyre, and Beetle all come of age in the story. For Jenna, what is the Day of Recognition (p. 382)?
4. How are Sarah Heap and Marcellus Pye wise and how do they become peacemakers? Explain how their words and deeds save desperate situations.
5. What are witches? What is a coven? How do witches act in the Darke? How does Princess Jenna become a Witch Princess? Do you think she was wise to wear the witch cloak? Should she continue to save it in the Palace?
6. What does the word "gothic" mean? Would you visit Gothyk Grotto?
7. Three rings are mentioned in the story: a Dragon Ring, a Two-Faced Ring, and a Cirlet. To whom does each belong? What are their powers? Which ring would you like to own and why? What does it mean to be "two-faced"? Were you surprised by Marcellus's actions to retrieve the Two-Faced ring? What do you think should happen to it?
8. Is Merrin Meredith responsible for the evil that descends on the Castle, Palace, and Wizard Tower? Do you feel sorry for him? Do you think he received a just end or not? Do you think he will cause trouble in a subsequent book?
9. Books play an important role in *Darke*. What are *The Queen Rules*, *The Darke Index*, *The Undoing of the Darkenese*, and apprentice textbooks? What roles do they play in the story? Are books important in your life? What can you learn from them?
10. What is the Manuscriptorium? Who works there and what do they do? Can you think of a comparable modern-day profession?
11. Although Beetle and Septimus are good friends, Beetle sometimes gets upset about Septimus and feels he comes second to his friend. Why? Do you think he is right? What heroic actions do both perform in the story? Do you think Beetle and Septimus receive the recognition and awards they deserve? Which one would you like for a best friend? Who do you think is the hero of *Darke*?
12. Trust is an issue in *Darke*: Simon asks Septimus to trust him; Jenna has to decide whether to trust Marissa; Septimus has to decide whether to trust the Little Girl Ghost in the Darke Halls. What would you have done in each situation? Do you think Simon proves himself trustworthy and should be forgiven for his mistakes in the past? Discuss trust and forgiveness with your friends.
13. What is in the Tinderbox? What is in the Silver Box? How are the contents important to the solution of the problems in *Darke*? What is a tinderbox? What are rushlights?
14. Historically, what is alchemy? Alchemie and Magyk play major roles in dealing with the Darke. What are they and how are both important? Do you believe in magic?
15. ExtraOrdinary Wizard Marcia Overstrand believes that the lowest form of Magyk is when it is performed behind someone's back (p. 344). Do you think the same is true for actions in general? Have you ever done something behind someone's back and later felt guilty or regretted your action?
16. Simon is forced to make a choice between two wrongs. His comment is, "And what choice was that?" (p. 310). What was Simon's choice and do you think he made the correct decision? Have you ever had to make such a choice? On what did you base your decision?

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## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- 1. Spells and Charms Abound.** As you read *Darke*, keep a record of all the Spells and Charms used in the story. Which one would you choose for your very own and how would you use it? Write about three stanzas in verse form that will invoke your spell or charm. Be careful what you wish for! Remember both Merrin and Marcia created trouble when uttering words of a spell.
- 2. Rat Stew to Pink Cakes.** Many diverse food items are mentioned in *Darke*, from tasty to repulsive—including Mrs. Gringe’s stew, witches’ morsels, Sarah Heap’s cooking, Sally Mullin’s Tea and Ale House goodies, food stored in the room behind the Big Red Door, and celebration food for the Longest Night and Midwinter feasts. Plan and prepare a celebratory meal with your family and friends based on the selections in the story. Do we have holidays comparable to the Longest Night or Midwinter feasts? What does your family serve on these occasions?
- 3. Sixes and Sevens: Good and Evil.** What is numerology? What does the phrase “at sixes and sevens” mean? Research these two numbers and learn their historical references and meanings. While you read *Darke*, tabulate all the references to six and seven as well as multiples and additives of these numbers. What do you conclude? Where else in literature and history do the numbers six and seven appear? Do you believe in lucky or unlucky numbers?
- 4. Expanding your vocabulary.** The following words are used in *Darke*. Make sure you know the meanings and parts of speech of each one. Then write a coherent paragraph, attempting to use as many of these words as possible.  
pockmarked, lapis lazuli, hermetic, obsession, propitious, Almanac, tetchily, indentures, glitches, flummoxed, denizens, decrepit, oblivious, fumigated, renege, cordon, quarantine, emissary, adversarial, twaddle, teetering, djinn [jinn], immured, fuggy, arcane, claustrophobic, portal, fusty, conciliatory, marooned, officious, imprinter, dastardly, pivotal, gesticulating, demented, domestics, ululating, salubrious, encroaching, beguiling, viscosity, trepidation, pervading, déjà vu, flotsam, maw, synchronicity, taunted, scimitar, pontoon, invocations, camouflage, suspension, and pernicious
- 5. Deep thoughts.** Think about the following four quotes from *Darke*. Choose one and defend or dismiss the wisdom expressed in the thought based on either research or your personal experiences. Share your wise thoughts with your classmates or family.  
“Wizards are replaceable. The Queen is not.” (p. 93)  
“Just think good thoughts and it will be all right.” (p. 237)  
“A deed named was a deed claimed.” (p. 419)  
“The thought is the seed for deed.” (p. 546)



Photo by Gorsefield Photography

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angie Sage loves the sea, spooky old houses, and medieval England, the inspiration for the Magykal world of Septimus Heap. She was born in London and grew up in the Thames Valley, London, and Kent. The mother of two grown daughters, she now lives in Somerset in the west of England in a very old house in the middle of a village. When not writing, she likes to sail her boat, *Muriel*. Angie Sage is also the author-illustrator of many picture books, as well as the author of the *Araminta Spookie* series.



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