

Reading Group Guide to

Ghoulish Song

By William Alexander

About the Book

The last day of Kaile's life does not start well.

It's Inspection Day at the family bakery, and between her mother's temper, her little brother's antics, and her job serving breakfast to the demanding citizens of Zombay, she could use a break. Then a goblin theatre troupe offers to put on a play for the customers. Kaile treasures the gift they give her—an innocuous little flute made of bone—and plays its haunting song without hesitation. That's when her life officially ends, and her adventures begin.

Set alongside the National Book Award-winning *Goblin Secrets*, *Ghoulish Song* weaves a story of music and mystery through the charmed, cursed world of Zombay.

Prereading Activities

Guide the class in analyzing a popular lullaby or nursery rhyme. It may be helpful to use an overhead projector, wipe board, or Smart Board, so student responses can be recorded in a chart or diagram format. Have students answer some of the following questions: What is the rhythm of the song? What are the lyrics? Does the lullaby teach a lesson or moral? What is the tone? What is the theme? What is the background information for the song? Where and when did it originate? After students have participated in this guided discussion, have students work with a partner to evaluate another popular lullaby or nursery rhyme and answer the same questions.

Hold a class discussion to find out if students have ever felt their parents were too hard on them. How did it make them feel? What responsibilities at home seem unfair? What parental expectations are overwhelming? How would they feel if one day they were not considered part of the family anymore?

Discussion Questions

Please use examples from the text to support your answers.

1. Foreshadowing is a literary device in which the author hints what may happen later in the story. How does the first line of the novel foreshadow what may happen later on in the plot? What do you think the novel might be about?
2. What was Kaile's relationship with her grandfather like? What instrument did her grandfather give Kaile and what did she do with it? What eventually became of the instrument?

3. Although *Ghoulish Song* is not a sequel to *Goblin Secrets*, both novels are set in the town of Zombay. In addition to the setting, what other similarities can be found in *Ghoulish Song* and *Goblin Secrets*? How are the characters, cultures, and society the same in both novels?
4. How does the setting influence the plot in the story? Analyze how the setting shapes the characters and the plot of the novel.
5. The Fourth Verse shows a parallel plot from *Goblin Secrets*. What scenario in the Fourth Verse was also a part of the plot from *Goblin Secrets*? What is the overall impact of the parallel plots on the novel *Ghoulish Song*?
6. Kaile made a song for her mom. What does the song signify about their relationship? How does she feel about her mom? Use quotations from the text to support your answer.
7. What is meant by the sentence, “She wondered why Mother had sent for old Chicken Legs”? Who does the author mean by “Chicken Legs”? How do you know? What literary device is the author using?
8. Why does Kaile allow the goblin troupe to perform? What are the consequences of her decision?
9. How does Kaile respond to her family’s reaction about losing her shadow? How does Kaile respond at her own funeral?
10. How does Kaile’s mom’s reaction to Kaile’s funeral add to the drama of the story? What does being a ghoul mean?
11. The names of Mother and Father are not given in the story. What is most likely the reason the author chose not to give them names?
12. What does Kaile name her shadow? Why do you think she does this?
13. How does the author show the conversation between Shade and Kaile? What textual element did the author use to portray Shade’s voice? Why did he choose to structure the dialogue this way?
14. What is the most likely reason the author chose to organize the text in song format?
15. How does the structure of each novel, *Goblin Secrets* and *Ghoulish Song*, contribute to the overall effect of its style?
16. What is Kaile’s flute made of? From whom did the Goblin get it?
17. What happens to Shade and Kaile after meeting Fidlum? How does meeting Fidlum advance the plot?

18. Who is Luce Strumgut? Who is Cymbat? How are Luce Strumgut's and Cymbat's reactions to Kaile different? How are their reactions to Shade different?

19. Explain what literary devices are used in "Counting Song" in Verse Nine. Provide the literary device and definition along with an example from the text to support your answer.

20. How are superstitions woven into the story? What impact do the superstitions have on the major characters?

21. What is so special about the flute? How does background knowledge of the flute help Kaile to progress towards a resolution?

22. Who is the Reliquarian? How does the Reliquarian add to the tone of the novel?

23. Analyze how the Fourteenth Verse contributes to the development of the theme of the novel. What is the theme? How do you know? Use specific quotes and phrases from the Fourteenth Verse to support your analysis.

24. How will a new nameday for Kaile help her to move forward? How does Snotfish's wave from under the table portray that Kaile has found closure?

Postreading Activities

After reading the novel, put the students in groups of four. Have the students pick one of the songs from the novel and create a rhythm or beat to it. Refresh students' memory by having the class hum or sing popular lullabies or nursery rhyme tunes. Students can create their own rhythm or use one from a popular lullaby or nursery rhyme. Compare and contrast the experience of reading the song versus hearing the song. Compare and contrast different tunes to the same song or lyrics. How does it change?

In groups of three or four, guide the students to write out a script in a screenplay format, reenacting a scene from *Ghoulish Song*. Each student in the group must have a part in the production. Ensure roles are provided to each member of the group. The roles don't necessarily have to be vocal, they can also be part of the background of the production. Then have the students act out their scripts in front of the class.

This guide was written by Michelle Carson, Reading Teacher, Reading Endorsed, Palm Beach Central High School.

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