

## A Curriculum Guide to

### **Flashback**

By Shannon Messenger

### **About the Book**

Will Sophie and her friends ever defeat the Neverseen? At first, the teens seem as vulnerable as ever to the forces of darkness they're fighting. But when Sophie decides to intensify her training with weapons and telepathy, her friends do too, and they start to believe they have a chance of defeating their opponents. Sophie's and Fitz's feelings for each other finally come to light, but there's little time for romance. Once again Sophie, her elf friends, and their bodyguards—goblin, ogre, troll, gnome, and dwarf—find themselves facing clever, vicious enemies from the beginning to the end of this gripping, fast-paced fantasy.

### **Discussion Questions**

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.1, 2, 3) (RL.5-6.5)

1. What does the prologue foreshadow? Talk about the role of illusions in the plot, including who produces them. When are illusions a challenge for Sophie and her friends? When do they create illusions themselves, and why?
2. What are some of the barriers keeping Sophie and Fitz from getting romantically involved? How does their relationship deepen during the story? What do you think the last line implies about their future together? What qualities do you value in a relationship or a friendship? Do you see any of these in Sophie and Fitz?
3. Early on, a decision is made about Alvar staying with his parents. Discuss the pros and cons of this decision. Why do his parents agree to it? How do Fitz and Biana feel about it? Describe how Fitz expresses his feelings about it to his parents. What choice would you have made for Alvar?
4. Describe the extended Vacker family. How can you tell that they are an important family? What do you learn about their history? Why does Sophie sometimes feel intimidated by them? Do her feelings affect how she acts around them?
5. Who is Luzia, and how does she fit into the Vacker family? What does Sophie learn about her over the course of the story? Describe Luzia's personality and powers. Why did she leave Everglen? What kind of alliance has she made with the trolls? Do you think Luzia is an easy person to trust? Explain your answer.
6. In chapter two, Sophie remembers what Alvar once told Biana: ““You'll understand, someday, when you see the Vacker legacy for what it is.”” What does Sophie think about the legacy at that point? What does it turn out to be in the end? Are there other plot elements or characters that appear to be one thing and are revealed as another by the end of the story?

7. When Grizel starts teaching Sophie to use a throwing star, how does Sophie feel about it? What makes her think that Project Moonlark may have made her a “natural killer”? What do you think separates Sophie from her enemies, if both are willing to use violence? When does she use her new skills in action?

8. How do Sophie and Fitz end up in the infirmary? What are their injuries, and what caused them? What kind of treatment do they get, and from whom? Talk about the differences between elf medicine and human medicine.

9. Why does Sophie decide to intensify her training? What areas does she work hardest on? Who else increases their training? Who are their teachers, and what do they teach? How does the training end up feeding into Vespera’s scheme?

10. Why does Tarina join Sophie’s group of bodyguards? What are some of her strengths and abilities? What does she teach Sophie? Describe times that Tarina is important in protecting Sophie. Are there sacrifices in agreeing to protect someone? Think about the degree of loyalty and trust required, and whether developing an emotional bond is a help or a hindrance.

11. What kind of alliance does Tarina want to forge with Sophie? What does Tarina offer in return for the promise of Sophie’s help in the future? How does Sophie react to the idea of an alliance? Why does she end up agreeing to it? Is there a line between a partnership and a parasitic relationship, and is it crossed here? What would you have decided to do if you were in Sophie’s place?

12. Describe Tinker’s home and workshop, and some of her inventions. Why does Mr. Forkle bring Dex to Tinker? How does Dex react to her and her workshop?

13. Who is Marella? Describe her relationship with Sophie. Why is Marella’s talent with fire a problem? What does Fintan offer to do for Marella? Explain why Sophie and her friends are skeptical of Fintan’s offer, and what they decide to do about it.

14. When Fitz and Sophie are talking about the Winnowing Gala and matches, he says to her, “I want it to be you.” What does he mean? What is Sophie’s reaction? Why do you think it’s challenging for them to navigate romance? Does developing a friendship first change the stakes when moving into a relationship? Explain your answer.

15. When Sophie later expresses her lack of confidence about their possible romance, Fitz tells her that she’s “the most powerful elf our world has ever seen.” What makes her powerful? Why doesn’t Sophie see herself that way? Why do you think she lacks self-confidence? Can you relate to Sophie? Why can it be harder to convince yourself of your worth than it is to convince others? Explain your answer.

16. How does Keefe react to Sophie and Fitz’s changing relationship? Find examples that show how Keefe feels about Sophie. When Keefe says to Fitz, “It’s not exactly easy being your

friend,” what does he mean? Can you relate to Keefe in this situation? How would you have handled things if you were in his shoes?

17. Mr. Forkle tells Sophie, “Life is a series of hard choices, Miss Foster. The most you can do is face them one at a time.” What are some of the hard choices Sophie has to make during the story? What makes those choices hard? Do you think there are right and wrong choices? What advice would you give to Sophie?

18. Mr. Forkle cautions Fitz against harming Alvar by saying, “Punishing someone because you expect them to commit a crime will always be unjust.” To do so, he explains, would make Fitz “as bad as our enemies.” Discuss these statements and whether you agree with them. Can you relate them to other situations you’ve seen in your community or in the news? Sophie points out the difference between “fighting back” and “preemptive murder.” What does she mean? Why is that distinction important?

19. What is the role of memory in the plot? Describe memories in conjunction with Alvar, Keefe, and Sophie. What is the significance of the title? How does it relate to memories?

## **Extension Activities**

### **Hang In There**

Sophie, Fitz, Keefe, and others face serious danger and setbacks over the course of the novel. Have students choose a character that they like and write him or her an encouraging letter to help the character keep their spirits up despite challenges. The letter should refer to specifics in the plot, and give reasons the student believes the character can prevail.

### **Game Time**

*Flashback* is packed with characters, places, and other details that make it perfect for a quiz game. Have pairs of students use the free website, JeopardyLabs.com, to create a game with questions and answers using facts in the novel. The class can play individually or in teams to see who remembers the most about the book!

### **Wanted! A Neverseen Villain**

Some of the most vivid characters in the series are the villains. Have each student choose one of the characters who opposes Sophie and her friends, and create a wanted poster for that character. It should have a drawing of the character, along with a description that makes it clear why he or she could be called a villain. Have students put up the posters and compare and contrast the characters.

### **Speed Round**

When Fitz and Sophie try to decide whether or not to meet with Fintan, she proposes they try a speed round in which they trade off stating reasons why they should or shouldn’t meet. As a class, make a list of important decisions or disagreements in the novel. Then have students meet in small groups and have speed rounds about the pros and cons of each topic.

### **Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Make Me a Match**

Sophie is disconcerted by the elves' custom of making marriage matches through the use of a list and the Winnowing Gala. In our world, arranged marriages and matchmaking have been part of many cultures historically, and still exist today. Have each student do brief research on the topic and then write an essay about the advantages and disadvantages of such arrangements. The essay should refer to Sophie's situation and also consider the topic more broadly.

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