

Ink Slingers

STORIES SET FREE

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Black Spring

by Alison Croggon

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Lina is enchanting, vibrant but wilful. And her eyes betray her for what she truly is – a witch. With her childhood companion, Damek, she has grown up privileged and spoiled and the pair are devoted to each other to the point of obsession. But times are changing. Vendetta is coming. And tragedy is stalking the halls of the Red House. A stunning new novel by Alison Croggon, inspired by the Gothic classic *Wuthering Heights*.

DISCUSS...

1. Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end?
2. *Black Spring* is told through the eyes of several different narrators: Hammel, Anna and Lina. Why has the author used different narrators to tell the story?
3. *In media res* is a Latin term used for when a story starts at a mid-point or at the conclusion rather than at the beginning. Why do you think the author has used this technique with *Black Spring*? How would the novel be different if it were told in chronological order (starting at part II: Anna)?
4. What are the themes of this novel? Assess how *Black Spring*'s treatment of these themes makes you feel.
5. What is the significance of the title of *Black Spring*? Does it have more than one meaning?
6. Compare witches and wizards from contemporary books and movies (such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Golden Compass/His Dark Materials* series, *Harry Potter* series, *The Lord of the Rings* series etc) with the witches and wizards in *Black Spring*. How do they differ? How are they the same?
7. "...it was also acknowledged that Lina was the most beautiful girl that had ever been seen in Elbasa..." (page 168) How does Lina's appearance affect the way she is treated in *Black Spring*? How might this have been different if she resembled a stereotypically ugly witch?
8. Read Part I: Hammel. After reading this section, discuss the setting of the novel. Where and when is it set? Is this a real or fictional location? What are the differences and parallels to our world?
9. Witches in *Black Spring* are born seemingly at random, with the tell-tale sign of violet eyes. Discuss the pros and cons of being a witch in the world of *Black Spring*. Conversely, discuss the pros and cons of being born a wizard.
10. Lina is forced to hide her true nature as a witch as she grows up. Why is she forced to do so? What would the repercussions be if she were to show her true nature? Which is more important: being true to one's self, or hiding one's true nature for fear of persecution?

11. Each main character in *Black Spring* spends a period of time away from where they feel they belong, both from locations and other characters. List the characters and situations where a character has been displaced from his/her physical or emotional “home”. (For example: Hammel visiting The Plateau, Anna being sent to work for the King, Lina and Damek being separated etc.) How do these situations affect the story?
12. Describe the process of vendetta. Why do the residents of the Northern Plateau abide by the rules of vendetta? The true nature of vendetta is revealed on page 146. How would the residents react if that news were to become public knowledge?
13. “Yet it’s easy to understand why Masko’s shameful crime against Lina would have been kept secret by any who cared for her. If it had become known, Lina likely would have been shot: although she was the innocent victim of his wicked lusts, she would have been held to be as much, or perhaps even more, at fault than the criminal himself. Such is the way of justice in the Plateau.” (page 153)
Discuss the notion of justice in this context. What are the reasons that men and women have different civil rights in *Black Spring*? Can there ever be true justice in this situation? Discuss how this situation would lead to personal revenge and vendetta.
14. “Nothing happened all winter. Fatima died of a putrid lung –it was bitter cold this year and she was old.” (page 139)
A death in the household, even a servant, is usually a noteworthy occasion. What does Lina’s dismissal of it say about her character, particularly her selfishness? How would this event have been described differently if Anna were narrating it?
15. Is Lina’s personality an inherent part of her or a product of her upbringing? What factors might have led to Lina’s demeanor?
16. How does the author make the reader feel empathy for Lina in Part III: Lina? At this point in the story, Lina is a fairly unlikeable character due to her moods, selfishness and treatment of Anna. How does the author make the reader empathise with Lina in this section?
17. Read *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Discuss the similarities and differences between the plot, themes and main characters of this book and *Black Spring*.
18. Why do you think Alison Croggon has used this piece of literature as an inspiration for *Black Spring*?

ABOUT ALISON CROGGON

Alison Croggon is an award-winning poet whose work has been published extensively in anthologies and magazines internationally. She has written widely for theatre, and her plays and opera libretti have been produced all around Australia. Alison is also an editor and critic. She lives in Melbourne with her husband Daniel Keene, the playwright, and their three children.

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This discussion guide was written by Steve Spargo, Walker Books Australia.