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Black Spring

ALISON CROGGON

About the Book

Lina is enchanting but willful, with violet eyes that betray her for 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*.

About the Author

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

How to use this guide

Because this story works on many levels, the suggested activities can be tailored for a range of ages and abilities.



COMMON CORE

This teachers' guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help your students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL**), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL**). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.



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Discussion Questions and Activities

- Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin and end?
- *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?
- *In media res* is a Latin term used when a story starts at a midpoint 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)?
- Write character assessments for Hammel, Anna, Lina, and Damek. What are the key traits of each character? What purpose does each one serve in the story?
- What are the themes of this novel? Describe each theme, then assess how *Black Spring's* treatment of these themes makes you feel.
- What is the significance of the title of *Black Spring*? Does it have more than one meaning?
- Witches in *Black Spring* are born seemingly at random. 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.
- Lina is forced to conceal that she is a witch. Why must she do so? What would the repercussions be if she were to show her true nature? Which is more important: being true to oneself, or avoiding persecution?
- Each of the main characters in *Black Spring* spends a period of time away from where they feel they belong, whether it be from a specific location or proximity to other characters. List the incidences in which a character has been displaced from his or her physical or emotional "home" (such as 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?
- 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 139. How would the residents react if that news were to become public knowledge?
- "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." (p. 147). Discuss the notion of justice in this context. What are the reasons that men and women have different rights in *Black Spring*? Can justice truly exist in such circumstances? Discuss how this situation would lead to personal revenge and vendetta.

Language

- Identify several passages from the novel written in old-fashioned language. Rewrite these passages using modern grammar and words.
- Keep a vocabulary journal while reading the novel. Make a note of any words you come across that are unfamiliar and look up their meaning. Also keep track of any words or phrases that you particularly like and explain why you like each word or phrase.

Literature

- Write a book review of *Black Spring*. What did you like or dislike about it, and why? Who would you recommend this book to? Is it similar to any other books you have read?
- Rewrite the end of the novel as if the Wizard Ezra won the battle with Lina in Chapter XXXVIII. Write in the style of *Black Spring*, using the same language and voice.
- Compare witches and wizards from other books and movies (such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *His Dark Materials* series, the *Harry Potter* series, *The Lord of the Rings* series, etc.) to the witches and wizards in *Black Spring*. How do they differ? How are they the same?
- “*It was also acknowledged that Lina was the most beautiful girl that had ever been seen in Elbasa.*” (p. 162). How does Lina’s appearance affect the way she is treated? How might this have been different if she resembled a stereotypically ugly witch?
- Read *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Discuss the similarities and differences between the plot, themes, and main characters of *Wuthering Heights* and those of *Black Spring*.
- Why do you think Alison Croggon used *Wuthering Heights* as the inspiration for *Black Spring*?

Setting

- 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?

Characters

- “*Nothing happened all winter. Fatima died of a putrid lung—it was bitter cold this year and she was old . . .*” (p. 132) A death in the household, even that of 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?
- Is Lina’s personality an inherent part of her or a product of her upbringing? What factors might have led to Lina’s demeanor?
- Read Part III: Lina. Up to this point, Lina has been depicted as a fairly unlikeable character due to her moods, selfishness, and treatment of Anna. How does the author make the reader empathize with Lina in this section?
- What does the writing style of Lina’s diary entry on page 137 say about her mood and state of mind? How does it affect the way this page is read? How would it seem different if it were written in properly formed sentences?
- Class debate: Form even groups and hold a debate on the following statements:
 - Lina was inherently evil and her fate was unavoidable.
 - Masko deserved to be humiliated and ruined by Damek.

Discussion notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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These materials were developed for Educators in Australia. They have been revised from the original but may not directly correlate to U.S. curriculum.