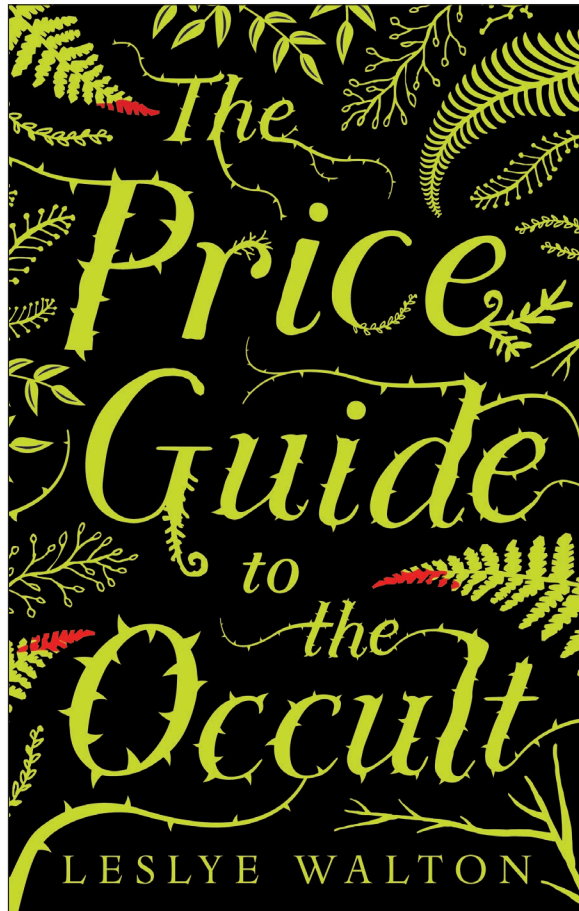


The Price Guide to the Occult by LESLYE WALTON



HC: 978-0-7636-9110-3 • Also available as an e-book and in audio

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help 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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About the Author

Leslye Walton was named a William C. Morris YA Debut Award finalist for the publication of her debut novel, *The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender*. Born in the Pacific Northwest, she has an MA in writing. She lives in Seattle, Washington.

About the Book

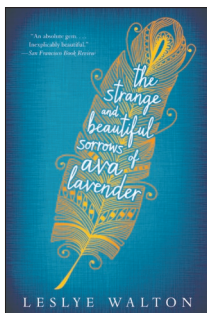
From the author of *The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender* comes a haunting maelstrom of magic and murder in the lush, moody Pacific Northwest.

When Rona Blackburn landed on Anathema Island more than a century ago, her otherworldly skills might have benefited friendlier neighbors. Guilt and fear instead led the island's original eight settlers to burn "the witch" out of her home. So Rona cursed them. Fast-forward one hundred—some years: All Nor Blackburn wants is to live an unremarkable teenage life. She has reason to hope: First, her supernatural powers, if they can be called that, are unexceptional. Second, her love life is nonexistent, which means she might escape the other perverse side effect of the matriarch's backfiring curse, too. But then a mysterious book comes out, promising to cast any spell for the right price. Nor senses a storm coming and is pretty sure she'll be smack in the eye of it. In her second novel, Leslye Walton spins a dark, mesmerizing tale of a girl stumbling along the path toward self-acceptance and first love, even as the Price Guide's malevolent author—Nor's own mother—looms and threatens to strangle any hope for happiness.

Discussion Questions

1. The prologue of the novel lays out the history of Anathema Island and the curse that has lain heavy on each Blackburn daughter's shoulders. Why do you think the splintering and separation of gifts—or “burdens”—was a side effect of Rona's binding curse?
2. We learn immediately that Nor has a history of self-harm and fights to keep herself safe every day. What does Nor's struggle reveal about healing processes?
3. Nor first makes the choice to keep the true range of her gifts secret when she's only eleven, even then not wanting to be mistaken for Fern. How much of Nor's secrecy stems from fear of her mother, and how much from fear of herself and her own potential power?
4. Nor is desperate to prove to herself that she's nothing like her mother, but she “never had the heart to tell anyone that all she wanted was to make the slightest mark as humanly possible on the world” (page 24). Why would she keep such a clear distinction to herself? What does she risk by saying it aloud?
5. Why do you think Nor spends so much time working at the Witching Hour when she knows the “witchcraft” practiced by Madge and sold to tourists is so unlike actual magic?
6. Charlie, Gage, and the rest of the Coldwaters have watched over the Blackburn witches for generations, but there's an obvious difference in the way some of them feel about their roles as protectors: Gage is resentful, Dauphine is matter-of-fact, Charlie is almost eager. Why are their reactions so varied? Why might the Coldwater men feel differently than the women?
7. Fern fell in love with Quinn Sweeney, and he remained the only thing she ever actually wanted—and never got. Does her ability to fall in love and suffer from a broken heart make her a more empathetic character?
8. Nor reads the warning signs on the island: the frantic, fleeing wildlife; the creeping vines; the strange fog. Why doesn't she speak to Judd about the ominous changes that spread over all of Anathema?
9. Do you think some part of Nor always knew she had to stay on the island to face—and stop—her mother at some point? What might have happened if Nor had left?
10. Fern was the only Blackburn daughter ever actually conceived in love, which Nor considers ironic. How do you think Judd might view it?

11. Even after trying to heal Madge, Nor doesn't tell Judd about her abilities. Judd can see the evidence right there on Nor's hands, but he doesn't pry. Why can't Nor put words to her abilities, even with the person she trusts the most?
12. Quinn Sweeney makes a surprise appearance in the ruins on Halcyon Island. How was he different from Nor's ideas of him? How do you feel about his final act—trying to save Nor, her friends, and himself by drowning?
13. After the incident at the dinner table when Nor cuts through one of her mother's choking vines, Fern can no longer hurt Nor. Why not?
14. As Fern's power weakened, the hold she had on Quinn broke and he regained control over his own actions. Why didn't the same thing happen to the other followers?
15. Nor's fear is a through line from the start of the book to the end, at times holding her back and at times strengthening her. How do her fears change throughout the story? Does she still carry any at the end of the book that she had at the beginning? Has she grown somewhat fearless? Or have new fears just taken hold?
16. Speaking about Fern, Judd says, "Some hearts can't do anything with love except turn it rotten" (page 259). Nor is probably the only thing Fern ever touched that didn't turn rotten. Do you think any part of Fern ever loved her daughter?
17. If Rona had known that in binding her blood to that of the island's founding families she was cursing her descendants to heartbreak, would she have made the same choice? She was gifted with prophetic dreams; do you really think she was unaware of the true price of her magic? Or were her anger and desire for revenge simply stronger?
18. Is Judd correct in saying Nor is her own person, unlike Fern or Rona? How do you predict the Blackburn family history might continue to affect Nor and her choices?



ALSO BY LESLYE WALTON

The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender

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★ *Publishers Weekly*

★ *School Library Journal*



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