

HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again!
All you need is a little bit of organization and some
friends who are as excited about the books they read as you are.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

The best way to find people to be in your reading group is to ask your friends.
Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with 6–8 people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your reading group, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

Figure out when and where you want to meet.

Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "wheres" and "whens" right now, don't worry! It's YOUR group and so YOU get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

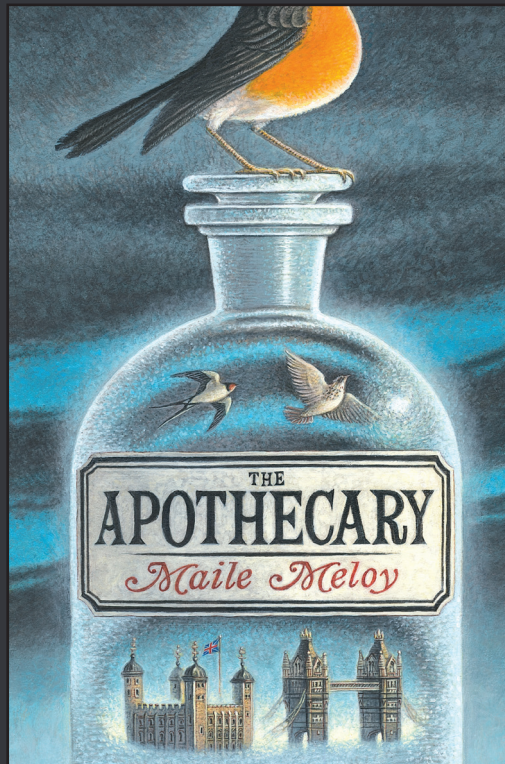
Decide how you will choose books, and how the discussions will be run.

This is another one that sounds a little scary but totally isn't. Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's website) or at your local library or bookstore.

The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a reading group. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!

For more discussion guides to get your group going, visit
www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians

A dose of magic can save the world.



The Apothecary

by Maile Meloy

978-0-399-25627-1 (HC) • \$16.99

Ages 10 up • Grades 4 up



G.P. Putnam's Sons

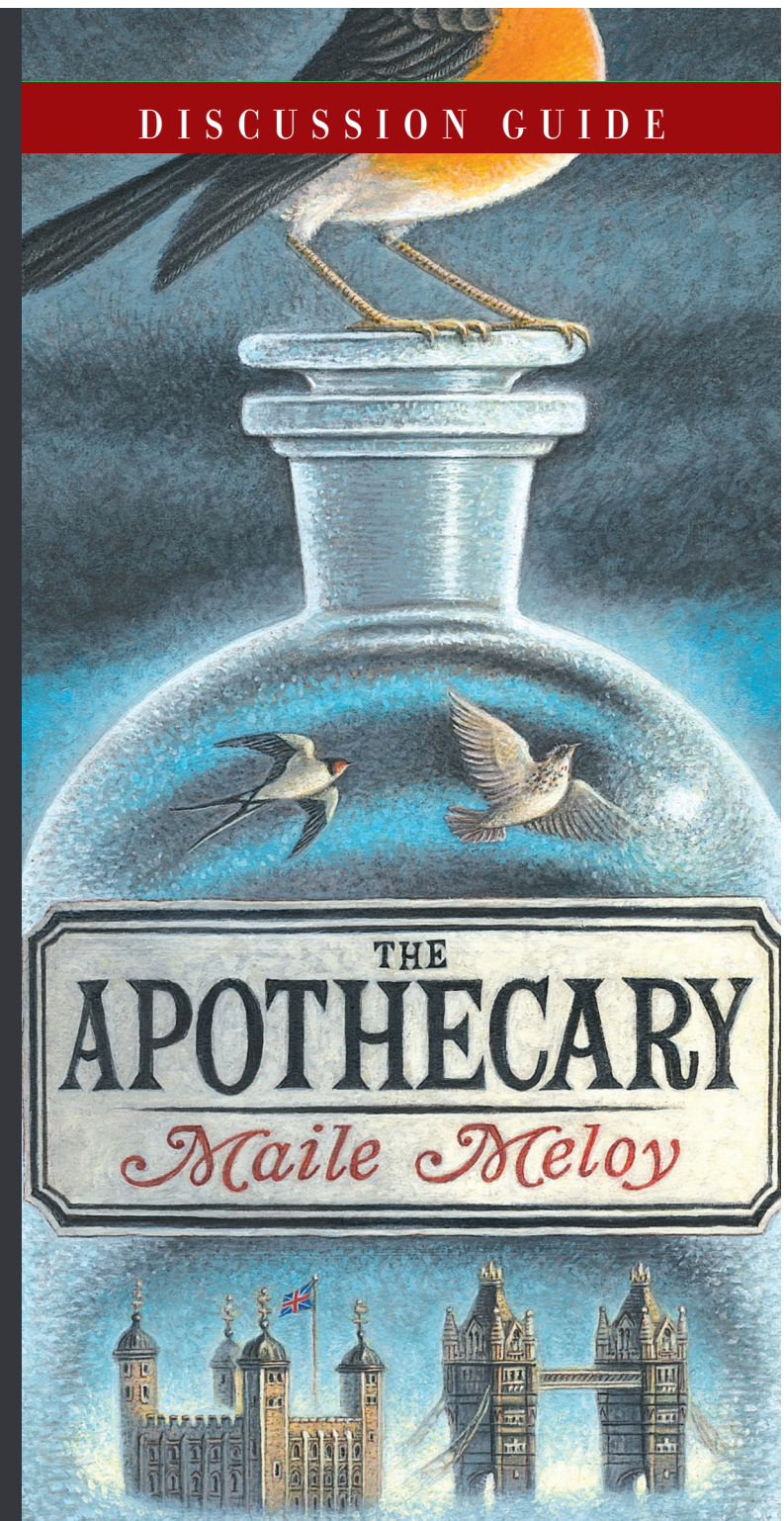
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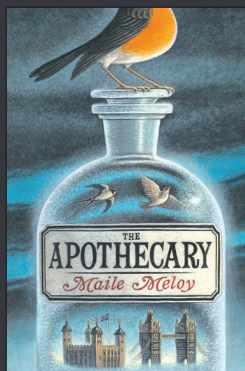
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DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK



It is 1952, and the Scott family has just moved from Los Angeles to London. There, fourteen-year-old Janie meets a mysterious apothecary and becomes fascinated by his son, Benjamin Burrows—a boy who isn't afraid to stand up to authority and who dreams of becoming a spy. When Benjamin's father disappears, Janie and Benjamin must uncover the secrets of the apothecary's ancient book, the *Pharmacopoeia*, in order to find him, all while keeping those secrets out of the hands of Russian spies. Discovering transformative elixirs they never believed could exist, Janie and Benjamin embark on a dangerous race to save the apothecary and prevent impending nuclear disaster.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Maile Meloy is the award-winning author of the story collections *Both Ways Is the Only Way I Want It* and *Half in Love*, and the novels *Liars and Saints* and *A Family Daughter*. This is her first novel for young readers. Visit her at www.mailemeloy.com.

DISCUSSION AND COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- Consider the novel's cover. In what ways is the image portrayed there symbolic of the events that transpire throughout the course of the book?
- *The Apothecary* opens with a note to the reader from Janie explaining how she remembers the events of 1952; in your opinion, what purpose does this serve? In what way does it foreshadow the events of the story?
- At the beginning of the novel, Janie learns that her parents are suspected of being Communist sympathizers and are placed on a targeted list by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. How does she react to this news? Given her knowledge of their innocence, why does she seem angry with her family?
- Upon arrival, Janie learns that life in postwar London is very difficult. What are some of the ways in which day-to-day living is more challenging than it was in Los Angeles?
- Describe Janie's new school, St. Beden's. In what ways is the structure of this school different than a traditional American high school? In what ways is it similar?

- After meeting her classmate, Sarah Pennington, for the first time, Janie thinks, "There are Sarah Penningtons in the United States—you probably know one" (page 20). Consider this statement. What is Janie implying about Sarah Pennington and girls who are similar to her? Do you agree with her assessment? Why or why not?
- Consider Janie's initial impression of Mr. Danby. How does her opinion of him change throughout the course of the novel?
- When ordered to hide under a cafeteria table during a bomb drill, Benjamin Burrows refuses. What can be inferred about his unwillingness to follow orders? Do you agree with his behavior? Why or why not?
- Before she officially meets Benjamin, Janie witnesses an argument between Benjamin and his father, the apothecary, in the apothecary's shop. What does the argument tell you about Benjamin's own expectations for his future? How does this shape the way we view Benjamin when we meet him later on? How does it shape the way Janie views him?
- How would you characterize the relationship between Janie and Benjamin? Do you feel that it changes over the course of the novel? If so, in what ways?
- Explain the significance of the title of the book, *The Apothecary*. Did knowing the title of the book change the way you read the book in any way? Did it create expectations? If so, what were they?
- Consider the variety of settings for *The Apothecary*; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.
- Compare the parent/child relationships in the story: Janie and her parents and Benjamin and his father. To what extent are the relationships of these characters shaped by the world around them? To what extent do their relationships shape that world?
- Describe Janie. What makes her a dynamic character? Is she the type of person you would want to befriend? Why or why not? Who are your favorite or least favorite secondary characters in the novel? What is it about these characters that you find endearing or disturbing?
- Though the novel is grounded in history, there are many fantastical elements interwoven in the story. Which (if any) magical occurrences were your favorites?
- Throughout the course of the novel, Janie and Benjamin learn that the world as they know it might never be the same. In what ways will it be better or worse for them? Have you had an experience that reshaped your life? In what ways have you changed due to this incident?
- Consider Benjamin's manipulation of Janie's memories of the events which transpired. What is his motivation for doing so? In your opinion, was it appropriate for him to erase her memories?

- *The Apothecary* is told in first person; how would the story be different if someone besides Janie were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?
- Using the phrase, "This is a story about..." supply five different words to describe *The Apothecary*. Explain your choices.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research on Post-War London (1945-1955): Through Janie's eyes, readers get a glimpse of conditions in London, post-World War II. Using information from library resources and the Internet, have student research and prepare a Glogster poster (www.glogster.com) which details the following:
 - What were some specific ways London was impacted by the war?
 - How many houses were destroyed or damaged during the bombing of London, known as the Blitz?
 - What were some of the creative ways families got around the limitations imposed on them by rationing?
- Writing Prompt: As the novel closes, Janie has just gotten her diary returned to her from Benjamin, and she will begin the process of trying to understand the incredible events that transpired. Using Janie's voice, write a letter to Benjamin sharing your reaction to the discovery of their fantastical experiences and make a case for your potential participation in the adventures in the future.
- Research on McCarthyism and the House Committee on Un-American Activities: *The Apothecary* introduces readers to American government and corporate practices in the late 1940's-1950's which targeted thousands of innocent Americans and falsely accused them of disloyalty and treason. Using the digital software of their choice, have students research McCarthyism and present their findings. Their information should include:
 - Key government officials and their roles
 - Types of government propaganda
 - Blacklist information
 - Senate and Congressional hearings
 - Victims
- Create a Character Tee: One of the strengths of *The Apothecary* is the number of fully realized characters. Have students select a favorite character and create a character analysis t-shirt. Have them identify the literary elements used by the author to describe the character, and then create a visual representation of the character traits.

Use the worksheet found at:

<http://printables.scholastic.com/printables/detail?id=38948>