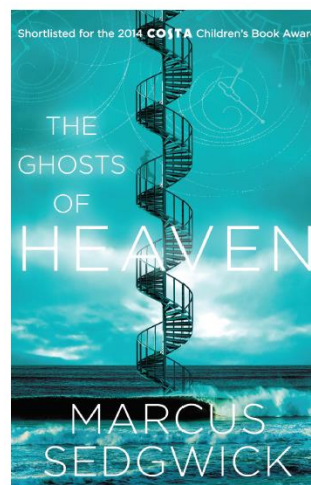


2016 Carnegie Medal shortlist reading resources

Title: The Ghosts Of Heaven

Author: Marcus Sedgwick

Publisher: Indigo



TALKING POINTS

What does Sedgwick's introduction (about the birth of the Solar System, among other things) add to the reader's experience of the stories?

Structure

What order did you read the four quarters in? Do you think you would have enjoyed the book differently in a different order? (Which would be the best?)

Can you describe how you feel the four stories are connected? (It's not as easy as you might think...)

The book has been described as "much more than the sum of its parts" – in other words, not just four separate great stories, but they benefit even more from being together. If you agree, how so?

Characters

The leading characters of each of the stories (the cave girl, Anna, Dr James and Keir Bowman) are quite different – but what do their experiences have in common?

Are there secondary characters you remember particularly vividly? (What about Father Escrove, or Dexter, the mad poet?)

The lives of the main characters span thousands of years – how does Sedgwick manage to make you understand and feel close to people who are so different? (Unless you think he doesn't?)

Titles

Who are the Ghosts of the title?

Each of the quarter titles is evocative, but they can also be abstract – how effective do you think they are?

- "Whispers in the Dark"
- "The Witch in the Water"
- "The Easiest Room in Hell"
- "The Song of Destiny"



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Themes

How does Sedgwick use the naturally occurring image of the spiral recurring in the book?

Did you notice other images that recur?

Big questions about exploration, survival, salvation and madness are threaded right the way through the book. Do you think Sedgwick's presentation of each of these big themes is positive and hopeful, or pessimistic?

Writing

The first story is written in free verse – what effect does this authorial decision have?

How does the writing style vary between each story and the next?

The book has often been described as “atmospheric”, but what atmosphere is Sedgwick trying to create? Is it consistent across the four quarters?

And finally...

Have you read other books by Sedgwick that experiment with form? Give his *Midwinterblood* a try, if not.

Did you notice that sequence of numbers and letters on the last page? What do you think they mean?

TALKING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights themes in this story

Right to life; to live in freedom and safety; women's rights; healthcare; disability rights; freedom from torture; right to a fair trial; right to participate in culture, science

Human rights questions

We have the right to the full development of our personalities and to contribute to and enjoy the cultural lives of our communities

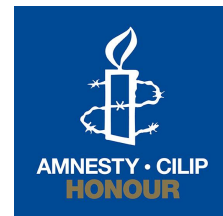
In all four stories we see extraordinary potential cut short by ignorance, prejudice, cruelty and violence. Discuss.

We have the right to a fair trial, and to be free from torture

In *The Witch in the Water*, why does the village turn on Anna?



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We have the right to education and healthcare

In *The Easiest Room in Hell*, why does Dr Phillips treat Charles Dexter in that way?

Have you ever felt like an outsider? If so, how were you treated? (Or how have you treated outsiders?)

We have the right to freedom and equality

In *The Song of Destiny*, Bowman concludes that the repetitious symbol of the spiral symbolises life and makes him free. Why is this important?

Even in 2016, many girls and women today are subject to human rights abuses because their communities or governments consider them inferior to boys and men. How does that make you feel?

How could we create a rights-respecting society in a new world?

- For a full version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights go to www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr

For more free teaching resources from Amnesty International go to www.amnesty.org.uk/education



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