

Reading Group Guide for

Thirteen Witches, Book 1:

The Memory Thief

By Jodi Lynn Anderson

About the Book

Why doesn't Rosie's mother remember her own daughter? Why doesn't she hug Rosie or laugh with her? After years of being sad about it, twelve-year-old Rosie learns that a witch called the Memory Thief cursed her mother long ago. Rosie and her best friend, Germ, can suddenly see ghosts in Rosie's house and around their small Maine town. With the help of Ebb, a fourteen-year-old ghost, the girls scheme to remove the curse. But the Memory Thief and her powerful companion witches hate humans. How can Rosie and her friends defeat them? Rosie, who loves to write stories of magic, must turn to her greatest strength to save herself and her mother from total destruction.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the prologue and how it foreshadows important parts of the story, citing specific connections. What main characters does the prologue introduce? How does it create atmosphere? Why do you think the author chose to include it instead of just starting with chapter one?
2. "I'm very short and quiet, and I'm stubborn and good at making things up." Rosie describes herself this way early in the story. How accurate do you think this is? Which of her actions support the description? Does she change over the course of the book? What else would you add to her character description?
3. Why is Germ so important to Rosie? Describe their relationship. What are Germ's strengths and talents? What is her family like? Why do the other kids at school want to be around her? Describe what's going on with Germ and Bibi, and how Rosie feels about it.
4. Why is Rosie worried that Germ is "losing that strange, wild, fighting-spirit piece of herself that makes us fit together so perfectly"? When does the story reveal that "strange, wild" part of Germ? Give examples of when the two of them fit together so well. What are signs that Germ is changing? Do you ever feel this way with any of your friends?
5. Discuss Rosie's mother. How does she treat Rosie for most of the story? Why does she do this? What does Rosie learn about her mother's background and her earlier adventures? How has Rosie's mother changed by the end of the book, and how is she still the same? Compare and contrast Rosie's mother and Germ's mother.
6. Discuss the scene where Rosie burns her stories. Why has she written these stories? Why does she burn them? How does her decision relate to Germ? What are the consequences of

burning them? Do you agree or disagree with her choice?

7. Rosie says that one thing her stories do is to “fill in a half of me that’s missing.” Find other places in the novel where she talks about feeling like something is missing. How does that feeling turn out to be related to the hospital and the day she was born? How is it related to her mother gazing out to sea?

8. Who is Ebb, and what is his history? How do Rosie and Germ get to know him? How does he help Rosie? What motivates him to assist, and how does it put him in danger? Describe his role in going with Rosie to find the Memory Witch’s home.

9. Who is the Murderer, and what is his history? What is his connection to Rosie’s house and to St. Ignatius Hospital? Why is Rosie afraid of him? Why does Rosie think that doing a good deed might help the Murderer? Do you agree or disagree with her?

10. Where is the novel set, and how is it important? Do you think the story could have been set in a different place or time and still have felt the same? Explain your answer. Where do the witches live? Describe the Memory Witch’s home. Describe the Moon Goddess’s home and how to get there.

11. Identify ghosts other than Ebb and the Murderer. Who else lives at Rosie’s house? Who is Homer, and what does he look like? What is Rosie’s initial reaction to him, and how does that change? What is the story of his past? Describe the cemetery and the other ghosts there.

12. Discuss the Memory Witch and the Time Witch, and what you learn about them in the prologue. What does Rosie find out from Ebb and Homer about the other witches? Describe the Moon Goddess. What are the witches’ relationships to the Moon Goddess? How does Rosie interact with the goddess?

13. Describe Rosie’s journey to reach the Memory Witch’s home. What role does Ebb play in the journey? Why doesn’t Germ go down the tunnel with Rosie and Ebb? Give details about how Rosie defeats the Memory Witch. What kind of skills or character traits does she rely on that are helpful to her?

14. The spider, Fred, turns out to be vital to Rosie’s success. Describe Fred, his past, and how he ends up with Rosie when she enters the Memory Witch’s home. What does he do to help her? How do his skills make a difference? If you’re familiar with the book *Charlotte’s Web*, draw a comparison between Charlotte and Fred.

15. Books matter a lot to Rosie. How have they helped her and made her life better? What kind of books does she particularly love? Name the books that her mother takes back from Rosie’s room, and explain why her mother removes them.

16. Describe *The Witch-Hunter’s Guide to the Universe*. How does Rosie learn about it? Who wrote and illustrated it? Talk about the “hidden and invisible fabric that permeates the world” that is discussed in the guide. Why does the guide say, “Imagination is a piece of the hidden

fabric that only humans can wield”? How is the topic of imagination explored throughout the novel?

17. How does the novel end? Did the ending surprise you? What role do Ebb and Wolf have in motivating Rosie? What do Rosie and Germ intend to do as the book closes? How do you think their mothers will react? How has each of them changed since the book opened? How has their friendship changed?

18. What does Germ mean when she says, “It’s my world, too, Rosie . . . And I want to fix it.” Why does Rosie then think, “I’m not the only one who’s been trying to choose between doing nothing and doing *something*.” Find indications earlier in the book that Germ is worried about the world. What are her concerns?

Extension Activities

1. *The Witch-Hunter’s Guide to the Universe* describes thirteen witches. Invite each student to create a fourteenth witch to add to the guide. They should write a description based on the guide’s format that includes a curse, skills, familiars, and victims. Students should also draw a picture of the witch. Create a classroom book of these witches.

2. The novel is filled with figurative language that paints vivid pictures in the reader’s mind. Below are some examples. Have students discuss their imagery and then find five more examples that they like from the book. They should write a sentence or two about each example, commenting on the imagery, the comparison that’s being drawn, and why they like it.

“like spinning grass into gold” (chapter two)

“Germ is bottled lightning.” (chapter three)

“a strange, sea-urchin feeling prickling in my chest” (chapter six)

3. Gather copies of *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Rapunzel*, and *Hansel and Gretel*. Have students meet in small groups to read the stories and discuss how the stories relate to *The Memory Thief*. Ask students to think of other stories about lost children, and then talk about why the theme of lost children is common in fairy tales.

4. Ask students to write an essay reflecting on the conversation Rosie has with her mother about art. Rosie’s mother says, “like poetry and stories—art is a way of looking for something true.” She continues, “A great man once said, “An artist is here to disturb the peace.”” Students should address how the conversation relates to the novel, and explore the role of poetry, stories, and art in their own lives.

5. BookSnaps are ways for students to respond to a page of text by photographing or writing down the selection and annotating it. Have students choose a page from *The Memory Thief* and create a BookSnap to share with classmates. Annotations can be made by circling, underlining, or adding words, or by adding emojis. Students should note imagery, vocabulary,

tone, or other ways the author conveys the story. Find how-to videos using different online tools here: tarammartin.com/resources/booksnaps-how-to-videos/.

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