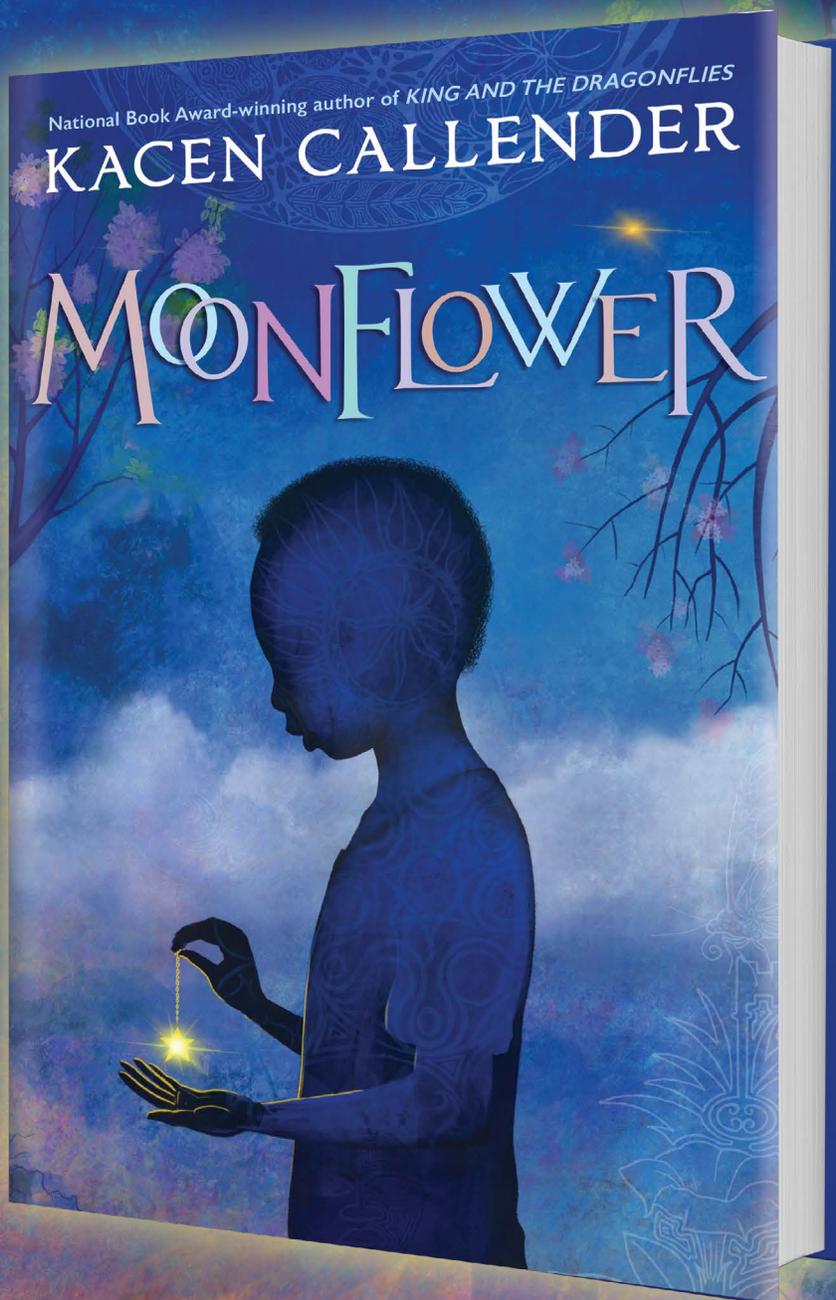


# DISCUSSION GUIDE

# MOONFLOWER

BY KACEN CALLENDER

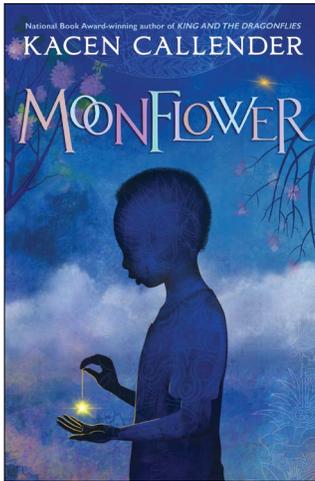
AGES 8–12  
GRADES 3–7



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## About the Book

Moon's depression is overwhelming. Therapy doesn't help, and Moon is afraid that their mom hates them because they're sad. Moon's only escape is traveling to the spirit realm every night, where they hope they'll never return to the world of the living again. The spirit realm is where they have their one and only friend, Wolf, and where they're excited to experience an infinite number of adventures. But when the realm is threatened, it's up to Moon to save the spirit world. With the help of celestial beings and guardians, Moon battles monsters and shadows, and through their journey, they begin to learn that a magical adventure of love and acceptance awaits them in the world of the living, too.

## Reading Questions

1. Who is Blue? Why does the book begin with her story? Who is telling her story?
2. Who is Moon? What information does Moon first share about themselves? How does the way Moon thinks about themselves change throughout the book?
3. What is the Pyramid, and why is Moon determined to reach it?
4. When Moon is in the spirit realm, a gold chain is visible on their ankle. How does Moon feel about this chain? What might the chain represent?
5. How does Moon describe themselves? How does Moon describe their mother? What does Moon's mother mean when she says dark skin like theirs "has its own kind of power" (p. 21)?
6. Moon chooses to not speak aloud. What are other ways through which Moon expresses themselves?
7. Moon has a tenuous relationship with their mother. They say she "doesn't meet my eye very much anymore" (p. 19). What explanation is given for their mother's behavior?
8. What task does The Keeper propose to Moon? Why does she ask them to do this task? Why does Moon accept?
9. How and why did Moon choose their name?
10. What does Dragon think about the world of the living? What do they tell Moon about their experiences there?
11. Why is Dragon afraid of The Keeper?
12. After Moon's classmates Lilah and Wiley acknowledge Moon's silence, the two have a conversation about shyness, strangers, and being different. What effect does this moment have on Moon? (p. 178–180)
13. What happens when Moon speaks for the first time in the pod and again, later, when they are at home? (p. 184–185)
14. Who is Mr. Richmond? Who is Ms. Stella? How and why does Moon's relationship with these adults change throughout the book?
15. Who are Moon's guardians? What connections might there be between the physical form each guardian takes and their respective roles in Moon's journey?

## Group Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the author's decision to write as though Moon is speaking directly to the reader? How did that choice impact your experience as a reader?
2. What are pronouns? Why is it important to respect an individual's pronouns? How might you respond to the comments about Moon's pronouns on p. 53?

- Describe the “Long Hot Summer” (p. 57). Do any elements of that time period sound familiar? What parallels might you draw between the Long Hot Summer and our own recent past?
- Moon says, “with my stories, I know I’m safe” (p. 88). What does safety mean to Moon? Under what circumstances does Moon feel safe? Under what circumstances does Moon feel unsafe? How might you help create a safe environment for yourself or a classmate?
- When Moon asks Wolf, “Why would anyone want to live? What’s the point of being alive?” Wolf responds, “I’m excited for the moment you discover the answer to that yourself” (p. 31). What do you think that moment might feel, look, taste, smell, or sound like?
- What do you think are the major themes of this book? Cite examples from the text to support your position.

## Reflect and Respond

Read and reflect on the quotes listed below. Choose at least one to respond to through journaling, creative writing, 2-D or 3-D art, or another creative format. You can choose to share your responses or keep them private.

- “The universe is a giant layered rainbow cake. I’ve only gotten to the first layer.” (p. 23)
- “[Wolf] doesn’t know what it’s like to be me. He doesn’t feel everything that I feel. He doesn’t know how much it hurts when I cry myself to sleep. It’s a physical pain, right there in the center of my chest: all the years of hate built up, hate I’ve ever received from everyone around and sometimes even from me.” (p. 8–9)
- “I like gray days instead: fog drifting through the air and light drizzle tickling my skin. Those are the days when I think it’s okay to feel however I want to feel, no matter what anyone else thinks.” (p. 21)
- “Many of us here in the spirit world dream of the moment we will have the chance to live again. There are so many lives I could experience still.” (p. 31)
- “Memories aren’t real, but they live inside my body anyway. I can feel the ache of them beneath my skin.” (p. 53)
- “Does there have to be a reason for someone to be sad? Can it be everything and nothing?” (p. 57)
- “Because we’re actually made of love, in the end, and anything that returns us to the purest form of our original state gives us power. Even more power than a star.” (p. 165)
- “Love is its own power, Moon. It’s an energy, too. Loving yourself can always give you the energy you need.” (p. 174)
- “And even though these words don’t make everything better, I think I’m recognizing the beginnings of that feeling called hope.” (p. 238)

## Educator Resources

Suicide Prevention Resource Center [sprc.org/populations/children](https://sprc.org/populations/children)

The It Gets Better Project [itgetsbetter.org](https://itgetsbetter.org)

The Trevor Project [thetrevorproject.org](https://thetrevorproject.org)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network | About Child Trauma [nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/about-child-trauma](https://nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/about-child-trauma)

Learning for Justice | Being There for Nonbinary Youth [learningforjustice.org/magazine/summer-2016/being-there-for-nonbinary-youth](https://learningforjustice.org/magazine/summer-2016/being-there-for-nonbinary-youth)

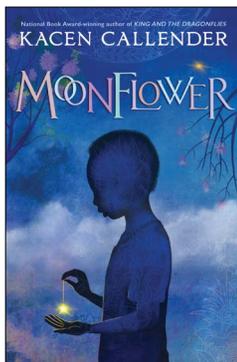
National Queer & Trans Therapists of Color Network [nqttcn.com/en](https://nqttcn.com/en)

Psychology Today | 12 Ways Parents Can Show Support for Their Nonbinary Kids [psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-the-wild-things-are/202106/12-ways-parents-can-show-support-their-nonbinary-kids](https://psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-the-wild-things-are/202106/12-ways-parents-can-show-support-their-nonbinary-kids)

The Trevor Project | Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth [thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Guide-to-Being-an-Ally-to-Transgender-and-Nonbinary-Youth.pdf](https://thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Guide-to-Being-an-Ally-to-Transgender-and-Nonbinary-Youth.pdf)

Thesaurus.com | Does Traditional Grammar Matter When It Comes to Singular “They” and “Themselves”? [thesaurus.com/e/grammar/they-is-a-singular-pronoun](https://thesaurus.com/e/grammar/they-is-a-singular-pronoun)

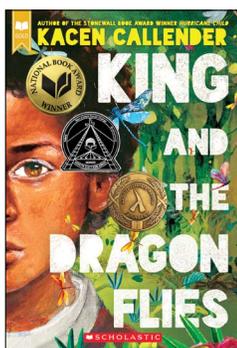
## Books by Kacen Callender



HC: 9781338636598 • \$17.99  
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7  
Also available in ebook and audio

“While depression can’t be cured, I hope that Moon’s journey may resonate for some as I gift this story to my younger self, and that, above all else, readers will feel how worthy of unconditional love and acceptance they are, as I hope they’ll see when reading any of my stories.” —Kacen Callender, author of *Moonflower*

“Drawn from Kacen Callender’s own experience through depression as a young person, this carefully orchestrated, unique novel addresses the inner lives and growth of children in ways that look at mental illness and its impact head-on. It challenges readers to think beyond traditional storytelling—to reach. To weep. To discover. To cheer this feat of nuanced writing that speaks directly to the heart.” —Andrea Davis Pinkney, editor of *Moonflower*

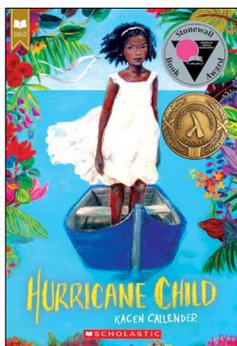


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- ★ “[A] dynamic tale that will resonate with children struggling to reconcile who they are with what they think society wants them to be.” —*Booklist*, starred review
- ★ “An intense, gripping tale of love, loss, and friendship featuring a black youth grappling with his dreams and his identity.” —*School Library Journal*, starred review
- ★ “Callender masterfully balances resonant themes of grief, love, family, friendship, racism, sexuality, and coming-of-age . . . deeply affecting, memorable.” —*The Horn Book*, starred review

★ “[A] powerful tale of grief, intersectional identity, and love.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review



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- ★ “Lush descriptions bring the Caribbean environment to vivid life . . . An excellent and nuanced coming-of-age tale.” —*School Library Journal*, starred review
- ★ “Set against the richly evoked backdrop of the Caribbean, Callender’s novel captures the exquisite agony and pain that accompanies rejection and abandonment. Caroline’s search for answers provides a steady through line for the story, but it’s the deeper questioning and reflection that set this book apart . . . Visceral, pensive, and memorable.” —*Booklist*, starred review



Photo © Gemini Photography

## About the Author

Kacen Callender is the bestselling and award-winning author of multiple novels for children, teens, and adults, including the National Book Award–winning and Coretta Scott King Author Honor–winning *King and the Dragonflies*, which also won the Lambda Literary Award; *Hurricane Child*, winner of the Stonewall Book Award and the Lambda Literary Award; and the bestselling novel *Felix Ever After*. Kacen enjoys playing RPG video games, practicing their art, and focusing on healing and growth in their free time. They currently reside in St. Thomas of the US Virgin Islands, where they were born and raised.

About the writer of this guide: Shanetia P. Clark, Ph.D., is an associate professor of literacy in the Department of Early and Elementary Education at Salisbury University. Her research and teaching interests include young adult and children’s literature and literacy methods.

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