

Curriculum/Discussion Guide: *Jack Death* by M.L. Windsor

Structure

1. Who is the story's narrator? When and how do you find out the narrator's identity? Is the narrator reliable or does knowing who the narrator is change your opinion of the story?
2. What tone does the narrator set for the novel? How does this tone reflect what is happening in the story?

Major Themes

Prejudice

1. What is the point of separating the Golden Bloods from the Black Bloods? Is this kind of division a good thing, as Crusty suggests, or a bad thing, as Jack fears? Why?
2. How does the story use Bloodlines to describe and value people? Are some people considered better than others based on their Blood? Is there a contemporary term you could use instead of Bloodlines?
3. Do people look at family, friends and neighbors differently after certain labels are attached to them? Are these labels useful, accurate, or distorting?
4. Do you know of events in the real world where people were judged or sorted according to their "bloodlines"? Give examples of how this story acts as a parable for actual historical events. For example, the Japanese-American Internment camps in WWII.

Bullying/Manipulation

1. The book opens with bullying. Would you consider bullies and bullying a theme of the book? Cite evidence in the plot to support your argument.
2. How does Crusty manipulate people into doing what he says? What kinds of fears does he play on? Does he use people's prejudices? How?
3. What is the villain's evil plot? What is Crusty trying to do? How does he use people's own weaknesses to accomplish his goal? Give examples from the story to prove your point.

Secrets/Knowledge

1. There are a lot of Secrets throughout the story. Are Secrets a good or bad thing? Why or why not? Explain your reasons with specific Secrets.
2. Characters often know some things, but not others. Make a chart of the main characters and list the Secrets they know and the ones they don't, including information about Crusty's evil plan. Which character knows the most? Does any one character know everything?

Friendship/Enemies

1. Friendship is another important element in the book. In the beginning, Jack loses his best friend, Booger. At the end, he's gained a new best friend. Are there other friendships in the story? How are they developed? How do these relationships affect Jack and his journey?

2. Taking sides, being enemies is another major theme. What are the sides? Who is an enemy of whom? Are there any characters who are neutral, taking no sides?

Listed above are only a few of the many themes present in *Jack Death*. What are some other themes?

What Do You Think?

1. Problem solving vs. blaming: are Crusty and the other adults trying to fix the problem or figure out whom to blame? Which is more important to them? Give examples from the story to prove your point.
2. A lot of things are hinted at in the book but aren't fully explained, asking the readers to figure things out themselves. How would you answer these open-ended questions?
 - a. Is it good for Jack and Nadine to be friends? Why would their parents not approve of their friendship? Does that approval matter?
 - b. What kind of powers does Jack have as the Son of Death? Some of these powers are suggested during the ending fight scene. What does the Narrator worry Jack will be able to do?
 - c. What kind of powers does Nadine have as the Daughter of Mother Earth? Are there hints about what kind of magical race she'll be?
 - d. Why is Nadine's father so protective? Is he right to be so worried?

Get Creative!

1. The book has a lot of fun with a wide range of magical creatures. Write your own short story featuring an ogre, a fairy, a giant, a troll, or some other magical creature.
2. The Narrator has such an appealing voice, allowing the reader to get a strong sense of the Reaper's personality. Can you imagine him as a young, trainee Reaper? How do you think the Reaper got the assignment to watch over Jack? Write a short scene where Death gives the Reaper his new job. Is he happy, upset, worried, afraid?
 - a. How would a Reaper handle a baby? Write a short story describing how the Reaper protected baby Jack.
3. Imagine what kind of magical creature Nadine will grow into. Draw her picture.
4. The book suggests that Jack has many other adventures as a grown-up. What do you think he does as an adult? Is he a superhero? A spy? A door-to-door salesman?
5. The book ends with a hint of another story to come in Jack and Nadine's new school. Write a descriptive paragraph describing what you imagine the students and teachers will be like. What do you think is going to happen to Jack and Nadine next?