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THE SIREN, THE SONG, AND THE SPY

Maggie Tokuda-Hall

About the Book

In this vibrant fantasy from Maggie Tokuda-Hall, the companion book to her best-selling debut, *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*, a diverse resistance force fights to topple an empire in a story about freedom, identity, and decolonization.

By sinking a fleet of Imperial warships, the Pirate Supreme and their Resistance fighters have struck a massive blow against the Emperor. Now allies from across the Empire are readying themselves, hoping against hope to bring about the end of the conquerors' rule and the rebirth of the Sea. But trust and truth are hard to come by in this complex world of mermaids, spies, warriors, and aristocrats. Who will Genevieve—washed up on the Wariuta island shore, lavishly dressed but half dead—turn out to be? Is warrior Koa's kindness toward her admirable, or is his sister Kaia's sharp suspicion wiser? And back in the capital, will pirate-spy Alfie really betray the Imperials who have shown him affection, especially when a duplicitous senator reveals he would like nothing better?

Meanwhile, the Sea is losing more and more of herself as her daughters continue to be brutally hunted and the Empire continues to expand through profits made from their blood. The threads of time, a web of schemes, shifting loyalties, and blossoming identities converge in Maggie Tokuda-Hall's remarkable companion to *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* as unlikely young allies work to forge a new and better world.

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Siren, the Song, and the Spy* is considered a companion novel to *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*. What makes this book a companion novel? How are the books alike? How are they different?
2. Thistle and her mother have a complicated relationship throughout *The Siren, the Song, and the Spy*. Trace their relationship from the beginning of the story to the end.
3. The book is told from alternating points of view. List the characters who narrate the story in order of who tells the most to who tells the least. Why do you think the author structured the book this way? Do you think it makes the story better? Why or why not?
4. In what ways do each of the things mentioned in the title of the book help the Resistance succeed in bringing down the Empire?
5. Explain the significance of the First Dragon and her song. What is her relationship to the Sea?
6. Make a list of the following characters: Thistle, Koa, Kaia, the Fist, Alfie, and Keiko. Then, next to each one, describe both their physical and emotional characteristics. Compare your list with another reader's and see where you agree and differ.
7. There are many references to characters acting foolish in *The Siren, the Song, and the Spy*. Choose three of these instances, and explain how each character's foolishness affects their life.
8. Mermaids and dragons are important creatures in *The Siren, the Song, and the Spy*. How are they different from each other? How are they similar?
9. Many characters in the book deal with internal struggles and insecurities. Choose two of these characters, explain these hardships, and describe how they eventually overcome them.
10. How are Koa, Kaia, and Thistle alike? In what ways are they different?
11. Using examples from the book, explain how the Wariuta's respect for life both helps and challenges them as a people.
12. Why does the Lady Ayer change Thistle's name? What does this action symbolize? For Koa, how does Thistle's name change parallel the reasons his people, the Wariuta, often change their names?
13. Who is Lilith? In what ways is she a monster? In what ways is she not? Use evidence from the book to back up your claims.
14. How do the Imperials view power? How does this ultimately lead to the downfall of the Empire? Citing instances from the book, explain how at least two other groups regard power.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

15. Some central themes found in *The Siren, the Song, and the Spy* include betrayal, uncertainty, hypocrisy, and loyalty. Choose one of these themes or identify one of your own, and trace its development throughout the novel.
16. After realizing he knows the Pirate Supreme, Koa states: “People call themselves all kinds of things. I don’t verify; I just call them what they call themselves” (page 200). What does he mean by this? How does this statement show Koa’s true nature? How does it relate to the story as a whole?
17. How did you feel when Alfie kills the Pirate Supreme? Are his actions justified? Why or why not? Cite examples from the book to back up your claims. If you were Alfie, would you have done the same?
18. Describe what each of the following characters experiences when the First Dragon sings her song: Keiko, Xenobia, Rake, Kaia, Senator Tsujima, the Fist, Koa, Evelyn, Flora, Thistle, Alfie, the Lord Hasegawa, Jung Hoon, and Callum. How does what they see and feel define each of them?
19. What happens to Kwizera and Xenobia at the end of the story? What role does the Sea play in their fates? Use examples from the book to back up your answers.
20. Why do you think the epilogue is told from Alfie’s point of view? List three important things we learn in the epilogue. Do you think it’s a fitting ending to the book? Why or why not?



Photo by Red Scott

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maggie Tokuda-Hall has an MFA in creative writing from the University of San Francisco and a strong cake-decorating game. She is the author of the young adult novel *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*, an indie bestseller and winner of the Northern California Book Award in Children’s Literature, as well as the graphic novel *Squad*, illustrated by Lisa Sterle, which was a finalist for both the Ignyte and Locus Awards. Maggie Tokuda-Hall lives in Oakland, California, with her children, husband, and dog.

These questions were prepared by Mary Kate Doman, children’s and young adult book consultant, author, and professor.