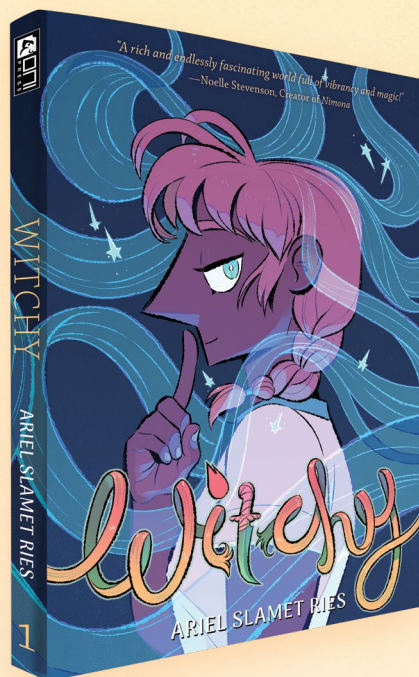


# Witchy

Written and Illustrated by Ariel Slamet Ries

## Discussion Guide



ISBN: 978-1-5493-0481-1

### About the Book

Though divided by clan wars in its early history, the land of Hyalin is now a melting pot of cultures unified by the Witch Guard, warriors who use magic to keep the peace. The strength of a witch's power is based on the length of his or her hair, and those deemed too powerful are apt to be named enemies of the state and eliminated. Such was the fate of the father of young witch Nyneve Ahmadzai, who now keeps the extraordinary length of her own hair hidden despite being bullied for her apparent magical shortcomings. As she approaches the age of conscription, she must decide whether to join the very group that killed her father or try to escape. The novel is beautifully illustrated and features cultural settings and diverse characters (gender, age, race, body types) that are generally underrepresented in media. It features themes of acceptance and ostracism, assumptions vs. reality, secrets, loyalties, and personal struggles.



## Learning Standards

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Witchy is a YA novel that can be used to address many of the Reading Literature Common Core standards for grades 7-12:

**RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.4, RL.7.5, RL.7.6, RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, RL.8.6, RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.5, RL.9-10.7, RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.2, RL.11-12.3, RL.11-12.5, RL.11-12.6**

The novel and activities in this teaching guide may also be used as a springboard for addressing numerous Common Core standards for Writing, Speaking, and additional related ELA-Literacy standards.

## Introducing the Book

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Witchy fits well within the genre of fantasy where the fictional settings and character development are often inspired by myths and folklore, in this case witches and the cultures of Asia and Oceania.

**ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF PLACE** The opening pages of *Witchy* include a map of Hyalin that will provide students with a geographical orientation to the world that they are about to enter via the novel. Moreover, additional details about the history and cultures of Hyalin are included in the “Making of *Witchy*” bonus material at the end of the book.

**FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS** Teachers and librarians should be advised that *Witchy* contains mild swearing, features a transgender character, and includes scenes of parental death, bullying, and implied suicidal ideation and violence. These topics may be brand new or potential triggers for some readers, depending on their backgrounds and experiences. Readers from certain cultural or religious traditions may also be sensitive to the depiction of hair-based persecution. Therefore, it would be prudent to establish ground rules or guidelines to ensure inclusive and respectful classroom discussions and activities. Helpful suggestions to consider may be found at the following link:

Guidelines for Discussing Difficult or Controversial Topics

[crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines](http://crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines)

# Questions for Discussion and Reflection

## CHAPTER ONE

1. Chapter one introduces the main character, Nyneve (pronounced Nin-eev) Ahmadzai. **What is revealed about her childhood?**

## CHAPTER TWO

1. What happens in the wordless panels on page 14? **Why is this significant?**
2. Page 21 contains a single illustration. In comics and graphic novels, this is called a "splash page." They can be used to introduce or focus special attention on particular places, characters, or events. **Why do you believe that the author/artist chose to make this event a splash page?**
3. On page 23, teacher Idra advises "Everything about spell casting has to do with intention and focus! There are no magic words to guide you." **What are some real life applications for this quote?**
4. Nyneve and teacher Idra have a conversation on pages 32-36 where Nyneve describes why she feels like a misfit. **Have you ever felt misunderstood? When and why?**
5. Why does Nyneve run into the woods? **What does the reader know that the other characters do not?** Have you ever been bullied? Have you ever judged someone without knowing all the facts?
6. On pages 41 and 42, Prill makes some assumptions based on her own experiences and desires. Does everyone want the same goals in life? Should they? **Have you ever felt pressured to like or want something because others did?** What did you do?
7. How do Batu and Prill react to learning Nyneve's secret?
8. What is revealed about Nyneve's mother Veda on pages 51-52?
9. On page 54, Veda tells Nyneve "...once you are out of school, being different doesn't matter so much." Do you believe that this is true for most people? In Nyneve's case, being different could mean death. **Can you think of real life examples of when differences are dangerous?**

10. What differences have made life dangerous for some people in the past?

## CHAPTER THREE

1. Describe Veda's pep talk to Nyneve on pages 62-64. **Who is someone in your life that you can count on for support?**
2. What is revealed about Prill on pages 68-71? **Discuss the themes of ostracism and acceptance depicted in the novel so far.**
3. Explain the significance of the conversation between Nyneve and Prill on pages 71-76. **Have you ever become friends with someone you disliked at first?** If so, what happened to change your relationship?
4. **What are your first impressions of Viceroy Jinheung Nyoto Jung?** Cite specific examples (direct and indirect) from the text and the artwork to support your opinions.
5. Discuss the results of the big test and the implications for the main characters.
6. On pages 100 to 101, Nyneve's secret is publicly revealed and she is conscripted. **Explain her reaction.**
7. Describe the artistic style and explain the use of the splash illustration on page 107.
8. Can you think of a time when you acted out in anger or other strong emotion? **What were the consequences?**
9. On pages 117-126 the artist uses many wordless panels to illustrate Veda and Nyneve's escape. **What does the art convey through color, perspective, panel shape, etc.?**
10. **What is revealed about the history between Viceroy Jung and Veda?** What questions do you still have?
11. Who saves Nyneve from Viceroy Jung's pet vulture, Chibma? **Where have they appeared before in the novel?**
12. Carefully examine the artwork on page 147. **What mood and meaning does it convey?**





## Questions for Discussion and Reflection Cont'd

### CHAPTER FOUR

1. Explain Nyneve's dream as well as the wordless panels on pages 155-156.
2. A new character, Banana the raven, is introduced on page 157. **What does he reveal about what happened while Nyneve was unconscious?** What else is revealed about Hyalin?
3. In your own words, explain what is happening in the wordless panels on pages 166-169.
4. Another new character, Mongke lo, is introduced on page 170. The subsequent pages highlight a common set of themes in the novel centered on mistaken identity, assumptions, and the reality that things are not always as they seem. **Cite previous examples from earlier in the novel and throughout chapter four.**
5. What is lo's secret?
6. **What were your first impressions of lo?** Consider the first panel on page 189. Were you surprised to learn that lo is Batu's sister?
7. In addition to being an orphanage, **what other purpose does lo's hidden compound serve?**
8. While Nyneve is at dinner, **what does she learn about the raven symbol on her pen and on the wall?**
9. On page 208, Nyneve explains her skepticism about the library to Banana saying, "Just because it's in a book doesn't mean it's true." **How might this explanation apply to other sources of information, such as television, the Internet, podcasts, etc.?**
10. On page 214, Nyneve meets Eyang. **What does she reveal about the history of Hyalin and her role in creating the library at the orphanage?**
11. When Eyang is explaining her transformation to Nyneve, she states, "I think, as with all magic, it came back to intent." **Where else has the idea of intent been evident in the novel?**
12. On page 221, Eyang advises Nyneve about the importance of accepting help and support from others. A short time later, lo offers Nyneve sanctuary at the orphanage. **How does she react?** Why?
13. Describe the final conversation between Nyneve and Eyang. **Was anything said that resonates with you?** Why or why not?
14. Describe the agreement/deal between Banana and Nyneve.
15. How does the novel end? **What questions do you have?** Speculate about what will happen in the sequel.

### BONUS MATERIALS

1. **What additional insights does *The Making of Witchy* provide about the creative process?** The main characters? The setting and development of the story? The author?



## Extension Activities

**FAN FICTION** At the end of the novel, the author/artist includes a section of fan art where readers offer their interpretation of characters or scenes from the book that resonate with them. Along those lines, many novels have inspired fan fiction, where readers reimagine stories using different media or invent prequels, alternative endings, create missing scenes, or retell parts of the story from another character's perspective. Fan fiction can help students demonstrate their understanding of the text, voice, themes, as well as character and plot development. Any of these fan fiction projects may also be accompanied by fan art. (W.6-8.7, W.6-8.9, W.9-10.7, W.9-10.9, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.9)

Assign students in pairs or small groups and have them complete one of the following fan fiction activities:

- A. Brainstorm about the traits and personalities of one of the main young characters in *Witchy* (e.g. Nyneve, Prill, Batu). Ask them to imagine how they might interact with that character if they were in the Hyalin school together and then write a short dialogue that might have taken place between them during the week of the Witch Guard conscription.
- B. Closely examine a specific chapter of the novel and either write a plausible missing scene or rewrite a key scene from the perspective of a different character. This could be completed in the form of a traditional text, script, storyboard, song, or other approved media.
- C. Create a piece of fan fiction based on the novel, such as a prequel (e.g. about Nyneve's parents), an alternative ending, or missing scenes told from different perspectives (e.g. Prill's home life). These could be completed in the form of a traditional text, script, storyboard, song, or other approved media.

**BANNED BOOKS** While hiding at the orphanage, Nyneve discovers that the library contains many books that were destroyed or banned by the rulers of Hyalin because they were considered somehow dangerous or heretical. Ask students if they know of similar objections to books, both historically and currently, in the United States. Based on their knowledge, ask them to explain why certain books have been considered controversial, leading them to be challenged or banned from schools and libraries. Such discussions can lead to research projects on the topics of censorship and the first amendment; debates; persuasive writing assignments; and independent reading and critique of banned book titles. See Additional Reference Material and Resources section below.

**HAIR IN STORIES, CULTURAL TRADITIONS, AND CURRENT EVENTS** In *Witchy*, discrimination is not based on race or gender, but on hair length, which is also a source of power. This association is evident in other well-known stories, such as the biblical tale of Samson and Delilah, as well as the fairy tale, "Rapunzel." Ancient Greek and Roman gods were often depicted with long hair to denote their power and divinity. Many cultures and religions, including Native Americans, Hindus, Sikhs, Evangelical Christians, Rastafarians, Amish and Mennonites, as well as Buddhists and other orders of monks and nuns, consider hair (and sometimes facial hair) as being imbued with a spiritual (or sometimes erotic) meaning and their traditions and rituals dictate how it should be styled and if it should be covered. In the United States, hair has been controversial in the workplace and in educational settings, especially as it pertains to people (primarily women) of color. As a result laws have been enacted recently in some states to prevent discrimination based on "traits historically attached with race, including but not limited to hair texture and protective hairstyles." Any of the above-mentioned topics are fruitful areas for additional research, cross-curricular connections, important classroom discussions, and personal reflection.





## Additional Reference Material and Resources

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### COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

Eisner, W. (1985). *Comics & Sequential Art*. Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press.

Eisner, W. (2008). *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

McCloud, S. (1994). *Understanding Comics*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

McCloud, S. (2000). *Reinventing Comics*. New York, NY: Paradox Press.

### STORYBOARDS

Education World: [educationworld.com/tools\\_templates/template\\_storybrd\\_8panels.doc](http://educationworld.com/tools_templates/template_storybrd_8panels.doc)

Template Lab: [templatelab.com/storyboard-templates/](http://templatelab.com/storyboard-templates/)

### BANNED BOOKS

National Council of Teachers of English: [ncte.org/statement/righttoreadguideline/](http://ncte.org/statement/righttoreadguideline/)

[ncte.org/resources/ncte-intellectual-freedom-center/banned-books-week/](http://ncte.org/resources/ncte-intellectual-freedom-center/banned-books-week/)

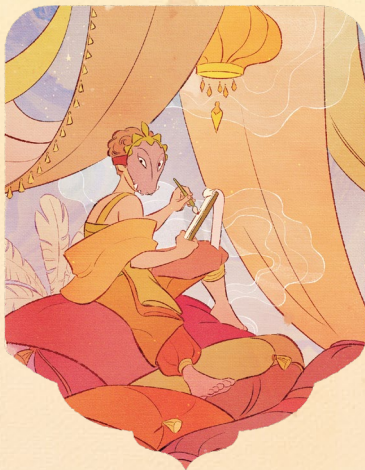
ReadWriteThink: [readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/ready-celebrate-banned-books-20295.html](http://readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/ready-celebrate-banned-books-20295.html)

Teacher Hub: [teachhub.com/banned-book-week-activities](http://teachhub.com/banned-book-week-activities)



Comics Alliance: [comicsalliance.com/ariel-ries-witchy-interview/](http://comicsalliance.com/ariel-ries-witchy-interview/)

Women Write About Comics: [womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2015/02/interview-with-ariel-ries-creator-of-witchy/](http://womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2015/02/interview-with-ariel-ries-creator-of-witchy/)

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Ariel Slamet Ries is an Australian writer and artist who left a career in animation to be a full-time comics creator. Her webcomic *Witchy* was nominated for the 2015 Ignatz award for Outstanding Online Comic, the 2016 DINKy for Outstanding Web Comic and the Danish Pingprisen for Best Online Series in 2017 and 2018.

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