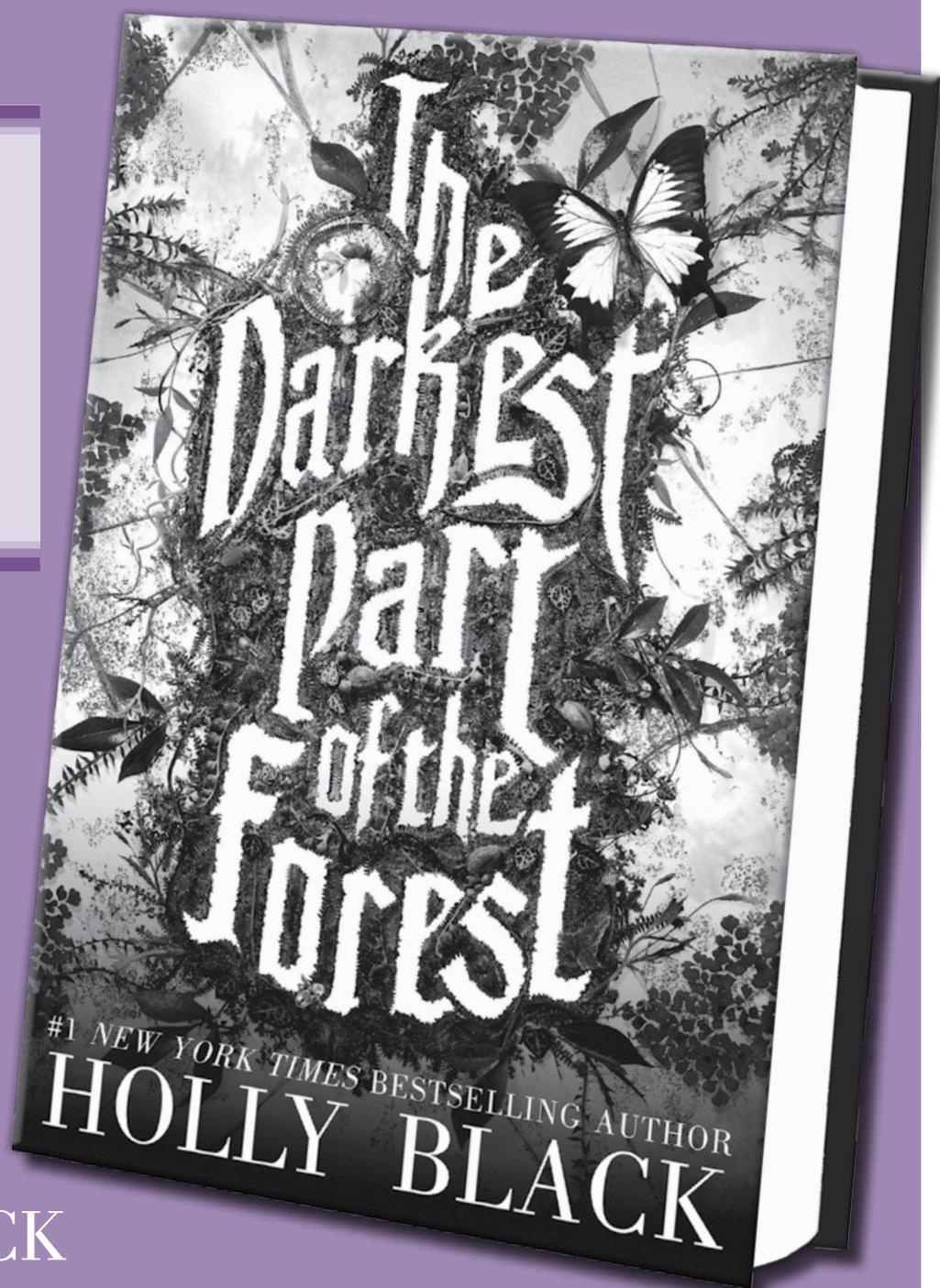


The Darkest Part of the Forest

Curriculum connections

- ❖ Fantasy
- ❖ Folklore
- ❖ Multiple Perspectives

Ages: 12 & Up



by
HOLLY BLACK

The Darkest Part of the Forest

EXPLORING *THE DARKEST PART OF THE FOREST* THROUGH DISCUSSION, WRITING, AND RESEARCH

The following questions may be utilized throughout the novel study as reflective writing prompts or alternatively, they can be used to as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

1. As *The Darkest Part of the Forest* opens, readers learn that life around the boy coffin has gone on for generations. What is it about him that sparks such interest in tourists as well as teens and the rest of the community from Fairfold? What does his presence symbolize for each of these groups?
2. How does *The Darkest Part of the Forest* compare with other fairy tale books you've read in the past? Did you like the modern setting? In what ways does Black's novel offer a spin on tales such *Snow White*?
3. When Hazel and Ben Evans were little, they promised to "save everyone who needed saving in Fairfold" and rescue the horned boy from his coffin. Early in the story, Hazel indicates that she believes they have failed at their mission. How do you believe this shapes her past behavior as a teen?
4. If you were able to choose, would you want to be a part of the Folk of the Air or the human world? Explain your choice.
5. Hazel shares that she kissed boys for all kinds of reasons—"because they were cute, because she was a little drunk, because she was bored, because they looked lonely, because it blotted out her fears for a while, because she wasn't sure how many kisses she had left." Hazel also offers that there were "plenty of friends. Too many, really, considering that she was likely to disappear one of these days, leaving them all behind. It was probably better if she didn't get too close to anyone." In your opinion, why does she feel this way? What does it indicate about her personality and state of mind?
6. As children, Hazel and Ben decide that the horned boy must be a prince, "like the ones in fairy tales, with curses that could be broken by their true loves." What is about him that made them feel this way? In what ways are their assessments of him accurate?
7. Who is your favorite character from *The Darkest Part of the Forest*? Why? What qualities does this character possess that make him/her most interesting to you?
8. Consider the ominous message Hazel finds inside a walnut in her pocket: "Seven years to pay your debts. Much too late for regrets." Why did Jack and Ben initially dismiss it? How does waking up with feet caked in mud, heavy limbs, and abrasions on her hands make Hazel begin to recognize that there is more happening to her than she realizes?
9. Consider the role of music in the lives of Ben and Hazel. In what ways does music impact their relationship? How does it affect their relationships with others?
10. At the age of 10, Hazel makes a deal with the Folk to secure her brother's desires. Although she is unaware of how her promised time will be taken, she realizes that "she was no different from anyone who'd ever gone to wish at the tree. The Folk had gotten the better of her." Even before she learns fully what she has given away, how does this bargain impact the way she chooses to live day to day?
11. Though it's stated that Fairfold is a "strange place" and townsfolk learn to fear the monster coiled in the heart of the forest (as well as other Folk), why are humans still so drawn to it? Cite specific examples from the text that support this.
12. Hazel describes her parents as raising her and Ben with "benign neglect" which allowed them to see themselves as children of the forest. Though it seems that they took full advantage of their freedom, in what ways does finding the remains of Adam Hicks serve as a catalyst for the change in how the siblings "played" as forest children from that point forward?

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13. After the loss of her beloved dog, young Hazel and Ben chose to believe they are a knight and a bard and together, they can make sure no one else was lost. Hazel wholly “believed she’d found the sword for a reason.” Do you think she’s right? What role does her sword play throughout Black’s tale?
14. Why does the knowledge that she is the one who has freed Severin cause Hazel so much concern? How does learning this complicate matters for her?
15. After the Alderking reveals that Hazel Evans serves him by night, he states, “You are my knight to command and your own daylight life is unaffected. You always had potential and I have guided that potential. I have made you into one of my number.” How did this knowledge impact Hazel? In what ways does she choose to fight to gain control of herself?
16. In describing his sister, Ben reflects, “Hazel was bigger than life; she always had been...Ben told stories. Hazel became those stories.” Do you think Ben’s description is on target? Why or why not?
17. Severin states, “Pain is the Alderking’s meat, and suffering, his drink.” How does the Alderking use the pain and suffering of his daughter Sorrel, turned into a monster, to harness her power and for what purpose?
18. Jack tells Hazel, “You talk about your childhood like it was just wild, bohemian fun, but I remember how much it wasn’t fun for you.” In what ways do the memories of the neglect she and Ben suffered affect Hazel? How has she coped?
19. The setting for *The Darkest Part of the Forest* is a critical component of the novel; name the places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.

EXTENDED WRITING AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Black’s Alderking was inspired by German and Dutch folklore that offered stories of the Erlking, king of the fairies. Using library resources and the Internet, research the Erlking to learn more about:

- What are the origins of these European folktales?
- What role does the Erlking play in these tales?
- How is he depicted?
- In which European tales is there an inclusion of the Erlking’s daughter?

Take your findings and using a digital tool of your choice, create a presentation that examines the similarities and differences between Black’s Alderking and the Erlking from literature.

In *The Darkest Part of the Forest*, the fantastical faerie world is juxtaposed with the very ordinary one inhabited, and where the main characters are far more at home in a world surrounded by the magic of the fae than in their homes where families and people keep secrets from each other and sometimes, even from themselves. Select a favorite character from the novel and write a short essay examining how secrets changed your selected character’s relationships with others and himself or herself.

The theme of courage is an essential part of the novel. Though personalities of the brother and sister duo are so different, both Hazel and Ben exhibit courage and bravery in their own ways. Compose an essay that analyzes the dynamics of Hazel and Ben’s bravery and uses textual examples to support how the siblings demonstrate courage throughout the novel.

Because of the rich tradition of fairy and folk tales throughout the world, some of the characters referenced in *The Darkest Part of the Forest* may be familiar to students from prior reading or study. Have students create a Character Comparative Analysis by using the library and Internet as resources to research a character featured in Black’s novel that is similar to a fairy or folktale character in stories elsewhere in the world. Have students find at least two different sources where the



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character is found, and have them create a Venn diagram which details the similarities and differences between the way the character is portrayed in these different versions. Next, have students summarize their findings by creating a Glogster digital poster (www.glogster.com) to share with classmates.

Jack shares that “Fairfold was full of protections. People wore them around their necks, smeared them on their doors...some amulets made his head hurt, other made his head swim. None of it was deadly, not just from being close by, but the constant discomfort was a reminder of how little he belonged among the people of the town.” Put yourself in Jack’s shoes—what makes living this way so difficult? Despite what the people of Fairfold think, he shares that, “You wouldn’t be able to keep me from the revel—no one could. That’s the problem.” Though he’s repeatedly drawn to return to the Folk, he chooses to live with his human family. Given these obstacles, do you believe his choice is the right one? Why or why not? Write a note to Jack detailing how you feel about his decision.

The Darkest Part of the Forest is rife with villainous characters and creatures. Have students select the one they find most terrifying and craft a short essay explaining what it is about this individual that strikes a chord of fear in them. Be sure to consider and offer specific details from the novel that makes them so vile. Alternatively, have students create a “Wanted” poster detailing the individual or creature most deserving of punishment for his transgressions in the novel. The poster should include the following features:

- **Original “mug shot” (this can be original art or computer generated as long as the image accurately portrays the character’s description in the novel.**
- **Detailed list of offenses**
- **Reward information, if applicable**

Hazel’s sword Heartsworn and the Alderking’s sword Heartseeker were crafted by the powerful blacksmith Grimsen and his brothers. What makes these weapons so important and powerful? Investigate and consider

other folktales and legends. What role does magical weaponry play in those tales? Share your findings with your class.

Readers discover that tourists make a pilgrimage from far and wide to see the horned boy encased in his glass coffin. Whether traveling to see the world’s largest rocking horse or ball of twine, tourists gravitate toward roadside attractions or destinations that are seemingly interesting. Research to learn more about what the most popular and unique tourist attractions are in your area. After a discussion with your classmates, continue your investigation of these “treasures” and find an attraction you think is worthy of a visit. Draft a persuasive letter to a friend or a parent to make a case for why this attraction deserves to be seen.

Severin serves as both a character and a catalyst for the community of Fairfold. For years, Hazel and Ben’s “prince in the woods” has offered them a character they can imagine themselves to love much like the way children and teens “love” a favorite singer or movie star. After his waking, Hazel states, “He wasn’t their prince anymore.” Analyze the role Severin plays in the lives of Hazel and Ben both before and after his waking. How does his knowledge of the secrets they’ve shared with him completely change the dynamics of their relationships with him and with each other?



The Darkest Part of the Forest

about the book



The Darkest Part of the Forest
HC 978-0-316-21307-3
Also available in downloadable
audio and eBook format

*In the woods is a glass coffin.
It rests right on the ground, and in it
sleeps a boy with horns on his head
and ears as pointed as knives...*

Hazel lives with her brother, Ben, in the strange town of Fairfold where humans and fae exist side by side. The faeries' seemingly harmless magic attracts tourists, but Hazel knows how dangerous they can be, and she knows how to stop them. Or she did, once.

At the center of it all, there is a glass coffin in the woods. It rests right on the ground and in it sleeps a boy with horns on his head and ears as pointy as knives. Hazel and Ben were both in love with him as children. The boy has slept there for generations, never waking.

Until one day, he does...

As the world turns upside down and a hero is needed to save them all, Hazel tries to remember her years spent pretending to be a knight. But swept up in new love, shifting loyalties, and the fresh sting of betrayal, will it be enough?

- ★ "Terrific... Black is in fine form here."—*Voices of Youth Advocates*
- ★ "Black returns here to the dark faery realm that spurred her initial success, and if anything, she's only gotten better, writing with an elegant, economical precision and wringing searing emotional resonance from the simplest of sentences."

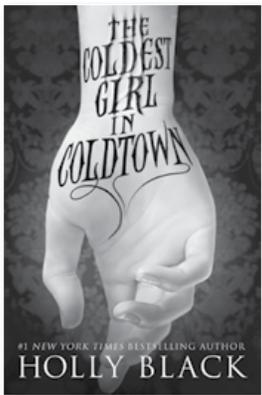
—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

about the author



Holly Black is the author of bestselling contemporary fantasy books for kids and teens. Some of her titles include *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, the *Modern Faerie Tale* series, the *Curse Workers* series, *Doll Bones*, and *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*. She was a finalist for the Mythopoeic Award, a finalist for an Eisner Award, and the recipient of both the Andre Norton Award and a Newbery Honor. She currently lives in New England with her husband and son, in a house with a secret door. Her website is blackholly.com.

also by HOLLY BLACK



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Also available in downloadable
audio and eBook format

- ★ "You may be ready to put a stake in vampire lit, but read this first: It's dark and dangerous, bloody and brilliant." —*Kirkus Reviews*
- ★ "Teens with a yen for dark, futuristic novels, and maybe even a few Anne Rice readers, will find this a refreshing take on vampire lit. As always, Black's writing is quick paced and thought-provoking. A must-have for any teen collection." —*School Library Journal*
- ★ "With rapid-fire dialogue, lavish details, and a wildly imagined world, this will enthrall Black's fans from start to finish and leave them hoping for another bone-chilling vicarious tour of Coldtown." —*Booklist*
- ★ "Replete with grisly violence, an intriguingly complex take on the mechanics of vampirism, and well-developed and memorable characters, this superior, dread-soaked tale will satisfy vampire addicts of all ages." —*Publishers Weekly*