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ABOUT THE BOOK

Watch out! Darleen Darling's hanging on a cliff, dangling from a rope—and a villain's cutting it with a knife. But don't panic—the cameras are rolling, filming her in a silent movie, *The Dangers of Darleen*. The villain's only acting . . . or is he? The rope breaks and Darleen, twelve years old, must save herself, the first of many close calls and breathtaking moments in this fast-paced tale. And when a publicity stunt to kidnap Darleen turns real, she befriends another kidnapped girl, wealthy orphan Victorine. Their courage and quick wits repeatedly save them while their escapes cement their friendship. Readers will plunge into the fascinating world of early movie-making in this historical adventure starring two daring girls.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Nesbet is the author of the historical middle-grade novels *The Orphan Band of Springdale* and *Cloud and Wallfish*, as well as three fantasy novels for middle-graders. A professor of Slavic languages and literature as well as film and media at the University of California, Berkeley, she lives with her family in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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. Describe Darleen, her background, and her personality using details and incidents from the novel. What is her work in the movies like? How does she feel about it? How has it changed over the years?
2. What is Darleen's father like? How do his actions reveal his values and personality? What is his work, and why is he good at it? How does he feel about Darleen's work in the movies? How does he treat Victorine?
3. Explain what happened to Darleen's mother and how she is still a presence in the novel. What does Darleen remember about her mother? How does the girl feel similar to her? What is the connection between Madame Blaché and Darleen's mother? If possible, watch the short film *Annabelle, Butterfly Dance*, mentioned in the Author's Note (page 354) and relate it to Darleen's mother.
4. How did Darleen's extended family end up making movies? Describe their business and the Matchless studio. What role does each member of the family, including Darleen's uncles and aunt, play in the movie business? How does the financial situation of their business figure in the plot?
5. What's your impression of Jasper from the opening scene of the story? Why do you think he's so mean to Darleen? Why don't Darleen's aunt and uncles notice how Jasper treats Darleen? What is his family background? What role does he play in the kidnapping?
6. Why is Victorine living with the Brownstones, and how do they treat her? What was her life like growing up? She once told her grandmother she'd like to grow up to be a "World-Wandering Librarian" (page 74). What does she mean by that? How would that role suit her?
7. Describe how Darleen meets Victorine. Why do the two become good friends so quickly? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? How does their friendship change Victorine's life in the long run? Do you think their friendship may change Darleen's life, too? How?
8. Together Darleen and Victorine face a series of dangers. How do the girls survive each peril? What does each girl fear most? How do they handle their fears? Victorine says that her grandmother respected fear (as "an instinct meant to save



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us”) but warned Victorine that “when our rational brains are telling us one thing, and irrational fear is shouting something else, it is usually best to listen to the quieter voice of reason” (page 120). Is that wise advice, do you think? When is fear helpful, and when is it dangerous?

9. Throughout the book, the girls are involved in the filming of Episode Nine of *The Dangers of Darleen*. Are the scenes filmed in chronological order? Why might filmmakers shoot scenes out of order? Make a list of the moments (and pages in the book) where work on the film is described (index cards might be helpful). Then look over that list and see if you can put the scenes of the film in order, as if *you* were the editor of the film.
10. According to Victorine, “lying always matters” (page 68). Why does she have such strong feelings about telling the truth? Does Darleen agree with Victorine’s belief? Give examples of when this becomes a problem in the story and how the girls deal with it.
11. Throughout the story, Darleen experiences what she calls “the feeling.” Identify scenes where she feels this way. What causes it? Why does it worry her? Why does her father want her to keep her “feet on the ground” (page 3)?
12. The epilogue recounts Episode Nine of the Daring Darleen photoplay. It also highlights how much of the book’s plot is similar to the plot of the photoplay. Go through the epilogue and draw comparisons between what happens to Darleen and Victorine in the novel and what happens in Episode Nine.
13. When Darleen and Victorine are trying to board the ferry, Darleen mentions the story of “that wily hero Odysseus” and how he fooled the Cyclops (page 107). What is that story, and how do the girls do something similar? What does the word *odyssey* mean? Could you describe Darleen and Victorine’s adventures as an odyssey?
14. Who is Madame Blaché in the novel, and how is she important to the story? What is going on when the girls first meet her? When does she appear again? Why do you think she is so willing to help them? What does the Author’s Note tell you about the real-life Madame Alice Guy Blaché?



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15. Describe the Brownstones and the kidnappers, who along with Jasper are the villains in the story. What are their motivations? How do the Brownstones fool Mr. Ridge?
16. Victorine's grandmother described her as "an onion sort of person" (page 160). What did her grandmother mean by that? What kind of vegetable or fruit does Victorine compare Darleen to, and how does Darleen react? What vegetable or fruit are you like, and why?
17. What does Fort Lee look like to Darleen when she takes Victorine there? What makes it different from other small towns? What does the Author's Note add to your knowledge about Fort Lee? Describe the different sections of the Matchless studio and what goes on in each section. How does Victorine respond to the studio and to Darleen's home?
18. Compare what you know about today's movies with what you learn about early movies in this novel. What are some major differences? In what ways are they similar? How does Aunt Shirley try to generate publicity for the photoplays? How is publicity created now for movies and movie stars?

These questions were prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years, who now gives professional development workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.

