

Discussion Guide

Green Angel AND *Green Witch*

ALICE HOFFMAN

Green Angel



Alice Hoffman introduces us to Green just a few weeks before her sixteenth birthday, a time when *“as far as [she] was concerned, the future was a book [she] could write to suit [herself]. . . . All was right with the world, and [her] place in it was assured.”* Then suddenly, Green’s gentle mother, strong father, and wild, beautiful younger sister perish in a catastrophic fire in the nearby city. Green is left alone. This novel chronicles her grieving and others’ responses to the disaster. At the center of the novel is Green’s emotional journey—true, powerful, and unforgettable.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *GREEN ANGEL*

Style/Voice

1. Alice Hoffman uses figurative language throughout the book, for example: to set mood (“*At twilight, dusk wove across the meadows like a dream of the next day to come.*”); to describe the setting (“*We lived within sight of the city which glowed like a diamond at night and shone like silver in the afternoon.*”); to define character (“*Aurora was made of laughter and moonlight.*”). Find and discuss examples of similes, metaphors, and other phrases that inspire the ways you imagine the story.
2. The novel is told in the first person. In order for us, as readers, to believe in this story, we must trust Green’s narrative. How honest do you think she is? Why do you trust her?

The Story

1. As Green’s family leaves to go to the city to sell their produce, Green’s mother says: “*We are leaving you behind because you are the one who’s needed most of all.*” Green accepts this to mean that she has to tend to the garden, but is there a deeper meaning to these words? Why didn’t the entire family go to the city that day? Do you think Green’s mother fears something might happen?
2. Green lives miles from the city yet the devastation reaches the town and countryside where she lives. Trees lose their leaves, crops are destroyed, and layers of ash cover the ground. What kind of catastrophic event could have had such a widespread effect?
3. After the fire, Green goes through a grieving process that takes her from disbelief, to hope that her family has survived, to anger, guilt, sadness, loneliness, deep depression, and finally to a change that allows her to cry, accept, and start anew. Look for examples in Green’s behavior that depict these various stages of grief.
4. What importance does the building of the three stone memorials play in Green’s life after the fire?
5. Before the fire, Green had a normal family: her mom, dad, and sister. After the fire, Ash has to create a family in order to get past her anger and sadness. Who are the members of Ash’s new family, and how does she care for them?

Character

1. “*Aurora slept without blankets or pillows, her pale hair streaming. . . . I couldn’t get a good night’s sleep unless I had three feather pillows under my head, and two down quilts covering me.*” Aurora and Green are different in many ways. Does that often happen in families? Describe their relationship. How do they feel about each other?
2. Green understates her own accomplishments and qualities and seems to over-praise those of Aurora. “*I was the least among them, nothing special,*” she says. “*Aurora,*” she tells us, “*was as wild as she was beautiful.*” Green loves and adores her sister, yet it is clear she feels of lesser value. Do people in families often have set beliefs about their place in the family?
3. Green seems somehow magical. “*The shopkeeper and his wife tested my abilities to distinguish by touch. If I could identify silver and gold, what else might I know? Sure enough I could tell green tea from black, navy beans from kidney beans, earth from ashes, honesty from deceit.*” Can seeing emotional truths seem like magic?

4. In the course of her grieving, Green changes in many ways. At some point, she is so different from the girl she once was that she gives herself a new name: Ash. Follow the steps in her transition from Green to Ash. How does Green's neighbor help Green to find her way back—to let go of Ash and be herself once more? Compare Green with Ash physically, emotionally, and psychologically. What do the two names mean to you?
5. What is the metaphor of Green losing her sight? Why didn't she protect her eyes or go to her mother's medicine cabinet to use the medicines and salves to soothe and cure her eyes?
6. If a sparrow is not a sparrow if it cannot fly, and a hawk is not a hawk if it cannot hunt, and a greyhound has to run, and Diamond has to look for his mother, then what is it that defines Green/Ash? What does she have to do to become whole?

Theme

1. *"It made sense for me to work in the garden, for me to be the one who stayed home, but I was angry all the same. When my family set out to leave, they called good-bye, but I didn't answer."* Later Green will regret the fact that she did not say good-bye to her family. Have you ever behaved this way? Did you regret it? After the events of September 11, 2001, have you changed the way you act in such situations?
2. How are the kids at the Forgetting Shack dealing with their losses? How is this the same as Green's way of coping? How is it different? Compare their use of alcohol and drugs, and their frenzied dancing with Ash's self-tattooing, sewing thorns into her clothing, chopping off her hair, and isolating herself in her home.
3. Green is eventually able to come through the crisis, but Heather Jones doesn't. What is the difference between them? Would you be able to survive the physical and emotional challenges of Green's situation?
4. *"There were good people in town who were helping out their neighbors, and others who saw an opportunity for greed... Some people were busy cleaning the ashes out of the schoolhouse, while others were selling overpriced lanterns and oil and counting their profits. Honorable or not, most people were desperate for good fortune."* After a tragedy of the magnitude of the one in *Green Angel*, people respond differently. Discuss the many stories that we heard after the events of September 11, 2001. Acts of heroism—large and small—filled the newspapers. Miracles became daily events. What actions did you, your family, and your community take?
5. At the end of the novel, Green once more begins to believe that her future is a book she can write for herself. But first she has to tell this story. Why is it important for us all to share our personal stories, in good times and in bad times?



Green Witch



Green Witch is set just one year after the events in *Green Angel*, but Alice Hoffman waited six years to write it. She says, “Whenever I talked to teen readers there were many who felt that Green’s story wasn’t over—they wanted to know what happened next, what was the next step she took in her healing, what happened to her community, and what happened to the boy she had loved. As time went on, I began to agree with them. I had never written a sequel before, or considered doing so. I had always thought when a book was done, the page was turned, the story was over, but that’s not the way it turned out, and *Green Witch* was born out of the questions and comments of my readers.”

Green, not yet seventeen years old, still grieves for her losses but has found a way to cope. She fell apart, then rebuilt herself and her life as a protection from the outside world. Green lives in the present. “*I am no longer caught in the past, the future seems like a ridiculous thing to me.*” Yet she still pines for the boy she met, loved, and lost in *Green Angel*, and awaits the time when they will be reunited. It is this desire that sends her on a quest to find him and find the life and future she was denied.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *GREEN WITCH*

Style/Voice

1. Many of Alice Hoffman's books are in the genre of magical realism. Here happenings or circumstances straddle a line between things that are explainable as natural and things that are fantastical. In *Green Witch* there are many instances where we as readers are caught wondering if what has occurred really happened. An example is Green's description of the way her garden grows. "*It had turned to chalk and ashes after the city across the river burned down. . . Now whatever I plant grows overnight.*" Do you think the author means for us to take this literally or figuratively? Or is it simply an expression of Green's perception of her garden? Is the way her garden flourishes real or magical? Find other examples of magical realism in the book and debate whether they are real or magical.
2. *Green Witch* is told in five chapters, each named for one of the witches in the novel. Four of the chapters have a two-part introductory line that offers a principle that guides Green's actions. The last chapter has only half of a line—"This is what I believe. . ." Finish the line. What does Green believe now about the nature of love, her place in the world, and the future? What do you believe?

The Story

1. After Green's old neighbor tells her to believe in dreams, she can't stop thinking about the future. She wonders whether she had had a spell cast on her. What do you think? Is Green bewitched, or was what her neighbor said just good sound advice? What advice does Green get from each of the other witches? How does that advice guide her? How can you apply their advice to your own life?
2. Each of the witches Green visits gives her a small gift for her journey. What are they? Discuss the significance of each and how each helps her to accomplish her quest.
3. "*Heather disappeared into the meadow. . . pushing at the cannon in the field, She lights the fuse. . .*" Heather Jones, not Green, is the one who destroys the Horde. Why does Alice Hoffman have Heather defeat them instead of having Green or Diamond do it?

Character

1. Green has begun the process of forging a new life for herself, but she is still grieving and bitter. Chronicle the stages of her grief, beginning when she became Ash in *Green Angel*, and follow through the events in *Green Witch*.
2. "*I am the first to make paper again. . . I add elements depending on the person whose story needs telling.*" Green captures what is important to the teller in making paper for their story. If Green was going to write your story, what would she put into the paper to catch the essence of you?
3. Green is conflicted about her feelings for Diamond. "*Is he a prisoner or a guard? Is he my worst enemy or still my beloved?*" From bitterness to hope, Green sets out on her quest to find Diamond. How has she prepared herself emotionally for the possibility of being disappointed by the outcome?
4. Whether Green acknowledges it or not, she is also searching for the future that was denied to her. When does she come to the realization that her life cannot be complete without a belief in the future?

5. The Finder is thirteen years old. Green herself is not yet seventeen. They are your age and the ages of your friends. Yet they are facing very adult challenges; they are self-sufficient; they have great responsibilities. How would you behave in their circumstances? How about your friends? What character traits were needed to face what they were up against?
6. *“Lately, there has been talk of witches in our midst, women they call the Enchanted. People have suspicious minds, especially in difficult times.”* Throughout literature and history, such suspicions have often led to blaming women for bad happenings—and labeling these women as witches. This is true of the “witches” in *Green Witch*. If they were to go on trial and you were their lawyer, how would you defend them? What actions and character traits would you present in their defense?

Theme

1. The love of books and reading is exemplified in the story Green’s teacher dictated to her. *“It was a list of all the novels she had loved, along with a description of exactly where she’d been when she read each one.”* We all are profoundly affected by the books we read. Do what Green’s teacher did. Make a list of your favorite novels and the circumstances you were in when you read each one. Share the list with your group. Then pick a book that is on another’s list to read.
2. Survivors of catastrophes are often plagued with guilt. They ask, “Why did I survive while my loved ones perished?” All of the survivors in *Green Witch* have survivor guilt. How do they express these feelings?
3. Because they know she is a writer, people in the village come to Green to tell her the stories of their lives. *“I felt it was my duty to collect these stories as if they had grown in my garden.”* We see from reading *Green Witch* that stories affect both the teller and the listener. All people have stories. Pair up with someone in your group and tell *your* story. Your partner should take notes. Then reverse roles. You become the listener. What did you learn about each other? How did it feel to tell your story? How did listening to your partner’s story affect you?
4. Throughout *Green Witch*, Alice Hoffman reminds us of the importance of story and of literature in our lives. She does this by showing how people value Green’s listening and recording their stories. She underlines this value by setting book burning as a tenet of the Horde’s beliefs. Find other instances of how Alice Hoffman articulates this theme in the novel. Is it a value you share?
5. We learn in *Green Witch* that the disaster that destroyed the city and killed Green’s family as well as countless others in the novel *Green Angel* was the result of a terror attack by a group called the Horde. What do you know about the Horde? What was their motivation for the attack? What are their views about modern machinery, free thought, books, and women? What parallels can you find between the Horde and present-day terrorist groups?
6. It has been a year since the Horde’s attack on the city. The village community lives in constant fear of another terror attack. Discuss with your group how the fear of a terror attack can be just as devastating as the attack itself.
7. Finding Diamond was not enough to sufficiently complete Green’s healing and her story. She had to regain the promise of the future. Living in the present was not enough. How do you feel about this? Talk about living for the moment and looking to the future.
8. *“Once I’d feared that when I finally wrote about the day my family left for the city, it would be the end of the story, the very last page. But that isn’t the way it turned out.”* Look back to the start of this discussion guide. Alice Hoffman also thought that her story had ended, but discovered—through her readers—that there was more to tell. Both author and protagonist have found out the same truth. What is that truth?

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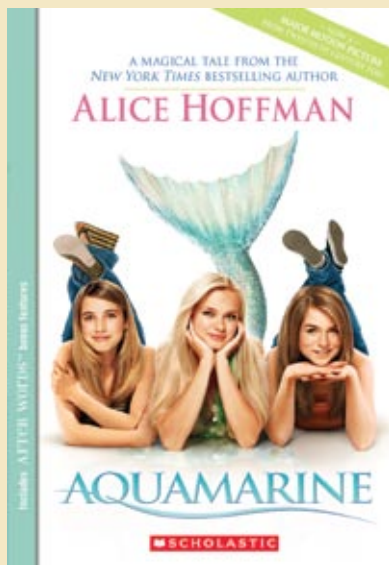
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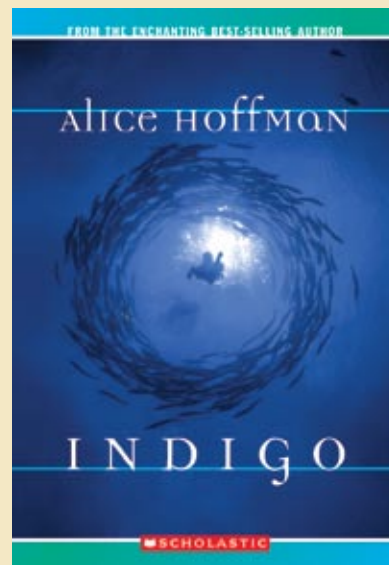
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