



VANISHING GIRLS

BY LAUREN OLIVER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Nick and Dara used to be inseparable, but that was before the accident that left Dara's beautiful face scarred and the two sisters totally estranged. When Dara vanishes on her birthday, Nick thinks Dara is just playing around. But another girl, nine-year-old Madeline Snow, has vanished, too, and Nick becomes increasingly convinced that the two disappearances are linked. Now Nick has to find her sister, before it's too late.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast Nick and Dara. Discuss how each sister views the other. How does their relationship change as they grow up? What contributes to this change? What events and character behaviors support your interpretation?
2. What accident occurs at the beginning of the story, and how does it impact Nick and Dara? What does the author reveal about the accident at the beginning of the story? Discuss how the reader's perceptions of the accident change in the end.
3. Identify two or more themes in the story and discuss how these themes evolve over time. What events does the author use to develop these themes? How do the characters respond to and/or how are they impacted by these themes? In what way do these themes interact and build on one another? Use evidence from the text to support your response.
4. Who is Parker, and what role does he play in the story? How does his relationship with Nick and Dara evolve with time, and what tension does he create between the two sisters? Is Parker a likeable character? Why or why not?
5. Why does Nick take a summer job working at an amusement park? Why do her parents not insist that her sister take a summer job?
6. Describe Nick and Dara's parents. Are they supportive of their daughters? What evidence from the story illustrates their support (or lack thereof)? How do the sisters perceive their parents?
7. What is the Gateway, and what does it symbolize? Why does the author reference it throughout the story? In what way does it provide closure to the story?
8. The disappearance of Madeline Snow is a subplot in the story. In what way does this subplot contribute to the main plot? What parallels can you draw between the disappearance of Madeline and the disappearance of Dara?
9. Discuss the author's use of point of view in the story. How might the story be different, for example, if it were told from Parker's point of view? How does the author's choice to alternate points of view contribute to the reader's understanding of each character? How does it contribute to the suspense? Use evidence from the story to support your answer.
10. The author delivers the story by alternating between the past and present. In what way does this structure build suspense and/or pique the reader's interest? Identify one or more events and discuss how the event unfolds. How does this literary style contribute to the overall story?
11. How does learning that Nick suffers from a major dissociative disorder change your understanding of the story? Analyze the scene at the lighthouse. How does the author use this scene to reveal that Nick suffers from a medical condition?
12. Define the literary term "unreliable narrator." In what way does Nick prove to be an unreliable narrator? Use evidence from the text to support your response. How does this literary technique contribute to the plot?

Aligns with the English Language Arts Common Core Reading Literature & Speaking and Listening Standards: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.11-12.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3, RL.9-10.5, RL.11-12.5, RL.9-10.6, RL.11-12.6, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1

Aligns with Common Core State Standards for Grades 9–12

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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

ROOM FOR INTERPRETATION. Assume the role of Parker and write a series of three to five emails (fictitious) to an unidentified confidant immediately following the car accident. Given your understanding of his relationship with both Nick and Dara, what might these emails reveal about his emotions? Share your emails with a classmate. In what ways are your responses similar? Different? Discuss what accounts for these similarities and differences. Use evidence from the story to support your interpretation of Parker's character.

SIMILAR SISTERS? Using a Venn diagram, list ways in which Dara and Nick are alike and different. Draft a few sentences to support each point, using evidence from the text to support your claims, and share your draft in a small group. Then write a brief essay comparing and contrasting the two sisters, using transitional words to connect ideas (*similarly, furthermore, in addition, on the other hand, in contrast, likewise, etc.*).

STORY STRUCTURE: BEFORE AND AFTER. The impact of a car accident on one family is a central focus of the story. The author organizes chapters around events that occurred before and after the accident. Working with a partner, identify three to five events that occurred before the accident. Discuss how these events contribute to the reader's knowledge of the characters. How does this knowledge aid readers in understanding the aftermath?

TRUE OR FALSE? As the climax of the story unfolds, events earlier in the story are not as they seem. Skim the events that occur AFTER the accident and that precede Nick's trip to the lighthouse. Discuss in small groups how learning the truth adds clarity to these events.

Aligns with the English Language Arts Common Core Reading Literature, Speaking and Listening, and Writing Standards: SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3, RL.9-10.4, RL.11-12.4, RL.9-10.5, RL.11-12.5, W.9-10.1, W.11-12.1, W.9-10.3, W.11-12.3



Photo by Charles Grantham

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Oliver is the author of the YA novels *Before I Fall* and *Panic*, and the Delirium trilogy: *Delirium*, *Pandemonium*, and *Requiem*, which have been translated into more than thirty languages and are *New York Times* and international bestselling novels. She is also the author of two novels for middle-grade readers, *The Spindlers* and *Liesl & Po*, which was a 2012 E. B. White Read-Aloud Award nominee, and a novel for adults, *Rooms*. Lauren's novel *Panic* has been optioned for film by Universal Studios. A graduate of the University of Chicago and NYU's MFA program, Lauren Oliver is also the cofounder of the boutique literary development company Paper Lantern Lit. You can visit her online at www.laurenoliverbooks.com.

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