

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR **AN UNKINDNESS OF GHOSTS**

1. Aboard *Matilda*, different peoples occupy different wings and decks, with few opportunities for interaction between them. In what ways does this organization mirror places in the real world and in what ways does it differ?
2. Who or what are the “ghosts” referred to in the title? Are they literal? In what ways can artifacts of the past, wisdom from elders, and extraordinary events triggered by people of the past be seen as ghosts?
3. Why do Tarlanders speak so frequently of the Ancestors, and how does this affect Aster personally as someone who’s an orphan with little knowledge of her heritage?
4. How does Flick’s conversation with Aster paired with Flick’s great-grandmother’s speech shortly after affect Aster? Would Aster have gone on to do all she did without her interactions with them?
5. How do the challenges of life in space, cut off from the land, reflect the struggles of real-life diasporic peoples?
6. Aster speaks many different languages. How does she relate to each of them differently, and how does knowing many different languages set her apart as an outsider while also allowing her to act as a liaison between members of different decks?
7. How do the rulers of *Matilda* use religion to subjugate lowdeckers? How old do you think mythology about the Gulf of Sin is in their universe?
8. Why is Lieutenant so obsessed with destroying Aster when she’s only one fairly powerless woman?
9. How is Aster’s relationship with Giselle different from her relationship with Theo? What are the reasons for these differences?
10. Aster’s mother, Lune, wrote her discoveries in code. Do you think she ever intended for Aster to decipher them? Given there are already language barriers between upperdeckers and lowdeckers, why did she feel the need to use code?
11. What are the significance of stories and folktales in the book? How does Aster use her Aint Melusine’s tales in particular to navigate life aboard *Matilda* when so many of the stories involve a world she’s never known?
12. Who could “Little Silver” represent? Is she Flick? Aster? Giselle? How does what happen in that fairytale mirror the events of the book?
13. Are Giselle’s actions justifiable given her trauma? How do the conditions of lowdeck life damage a person’s ability to love, connect, and thrive?
14. Aster is central to upending the order of the ship *Matilda*, but how are her actions bolstered by others? Could revolt have been successful without Giselle, Theo, Lune, the T-deckers, and others?
15. Does Aster put the “ghosts” to rest at the end of the book? How? What significance, if any, is there to how she deals with the remains of both Lune and Giselle?

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