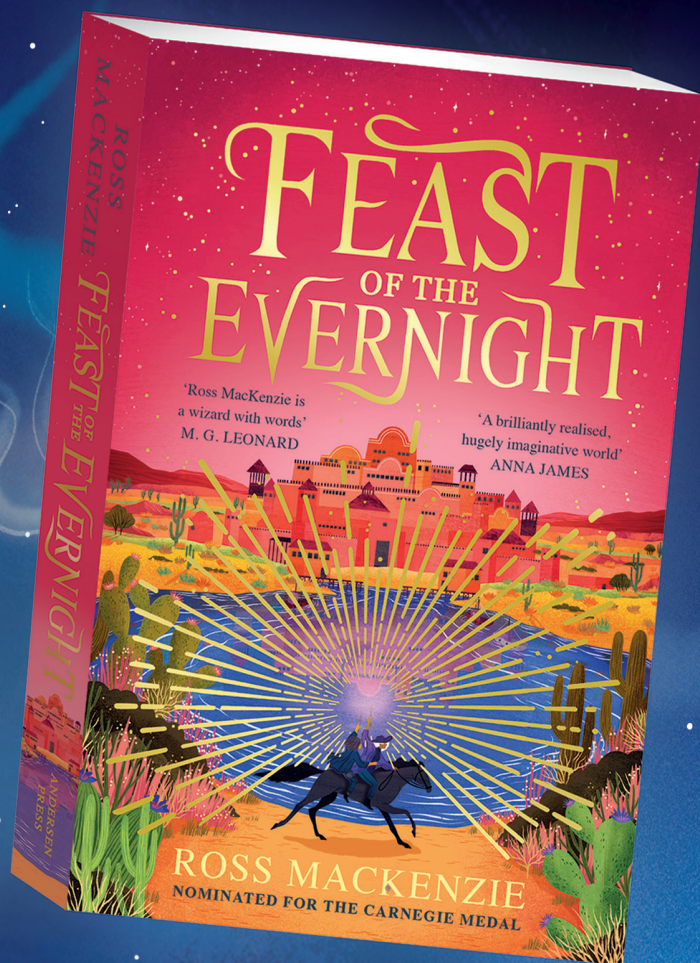


EVERNIGHT

DISCUSSION GUIDE



'Perfect for fans of
Nevermoor'
ANNA JAMES

'A vivid
imaginative world'
DAILY MAIL

'Darkly brilliant'
ABI ELPHINSTONE

'Alive with thrilling
darkness and vivid magic'
KIRAN MILLWOOD
HARGRAVE

EVERNIGHT: 9781783448319

FEAST OF THE EVERNIGHT: 9781839130472

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EVERNIGHT

FEAST OF THE EVERNIGHT

Ross McKenzie

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOKS:

The Evernight books, steeped in magic and danger, are a riotous, unflinching adventure packed with all the hallmarks of great fantasy. From humble beginnings as a 'tosher', scavenging for treasures in the sewers, Larabelle Fox discovers a far greater calling in life. With her fellow tosher, Joe, and meeting a host of extraordinary characters along the way, she must navigate a terrifying new world of white witches and hag magic, murderous djinni, and plots and schemes that will carry her far from home to places she has only ever imagined. Across both novels McKenzie's lightning-fast storytelling tumbles characters from one peril to the next in breathless excitement, as Lara discovers the irresistibly brilliant world of magic all around her, and the part in it that she was born to play.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Ross MacKenzie has been writing stories since he was seven years old, when he created an illustrated short story about a hungry crocodile named Crunchy Colin in a smuggled school jotter. His novel *The Nowhere Emporium* won the Blue Peter Best Story Award and the Scottish Children's Book Award. He now splits his time between writing, his day job as a graphic designer and his wife, daughters and cocker spaniel, with whom he lives near Glasgow.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

Throughout, the Evernight books are littered with wonderful ideas and brilliant flares of imagination to explore, from grand concepts of good vs evil, to tiny, incidental details of magic and world-building. There are many elements to discuss, but equally there are strong and emotive themes running through the books; controlling others, manipulation, loss and heartbreak, and death. Violence, too, is very present in the novels, and while in keeping with the fantasy world in which it is housed, care should be taken that any group members in the discussion feel comfortable, and that adequate support is in place should any of the themes, particularly around parental loss or violence, reflect any lived experience.

This guide is applicable to both the first and second Evernight books. First it offers a series of discussion points that relate to the wider world within the novels – elements that are equally applicable to both books. It then goes on to offer more specific discussion points to each book separately, to allow for groups who have read, or wish to focus more on, one book or the other. If the group you are working with have only read the first book in the series, then avoid the questions specific to *Feast of the Evernight*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Ask what group members thought of the book/s. Did everyone enjoy it? What, in particular, did anyone enjoy? Would anyone like to expand on their answer, and tell the group a bit more about their thoughts? How did the book/s make anyone feel? Did anyone find any passages especially exciting? Scary? Thought-provoking?

1. Evernight

Start with word 'Evernight'. Is it a real word? What ideas does this conjure in the minds of the group? What words spring to mind when you think about it? What would 'ever night' be like? Now look at the cover of the book/s you're discussing. Do those ideas chime with the cover of the book? What does the cover art suggest about the worlds within?

2. Identity

'To be a tosher took guts, and smarts, and bravery . . .'-- *Evernight*, p.10

The idea of identity runs through the books. Why are Lara and Joe so proud of being toshers? Talk about why they might be so suspicious of the 'toffs' and the 'Hags' and the 'white witches'? What about Double Eight? Why is this the character's name? What might the author be saying by giving him a number, not a name? Do the identities of characters change? Or do they just feel differently about themselves and others? Does identity feel important to any members of the group? Why?

3. Witches and hags

'As for Hags . . . well, a more feared and despised race you would be hard pressed to find.' – *Evernight*, p.35

What does the word 'hag' mean? (You might like to have a definition ready, for clarity.) Do the 'hags' in the book match this description? If not, why have they been branded in this way? What about the white witches? What does anyone associate with the idea of a white witch? Does this match the book? Talk about how the language we use can shape our opinion of someone or something.

4. Language

"Hell's teeth, don't be so glum, Joe!" – *Evernight*, p.35

Did anyone in the group notice anything about the language the author uses in the book/s? Do characters sound like people in this world? If not, how is their speech different? How does the language of the book/s help to create a whole world? You might like to consider specific examples, and where they come from, for example, 'Lady light save us!' or 'hagging' or 'Westerly Witch' or other place names are all inventions specific to the book; some, like 'tosher', 'Hell's teeth', or 'cove' are real words or expressions but are very Victorian in nature. What effect does this have on the reader?

5. Building suspense

' "Look at this. The High Witch wants to see me. It's urgent!" - *Feast of the Evernight*, p.31

What do we mean when we talk about building suspense? What is 'suspense'? How does the author, Ross McKenzie, build suspense in the novel? You might like to consider the way the reader learns new information – is it all in one go, or do they discover things along with the characters? What about the way different chapters end? Discuss the idea of a 'cliffhanger'. Why do different chapters, often the next ones after a cliffhanger, deal with different characters and different storylines?

6. Worlds of magic

“Writing a spell isn’t about how many text books you’ve read. It’s about feeling, Lara. It’s about listening to what’s inside you. But only a true witch can do it.” - *Evernight* p.201

What are some of the magical elements of the books that readers most enjoyed? How did they know that this isn’t the world that we live in? Creating a whole new fantasy world is called ‘world-building’ – can anyone think of different ways that the author achieves this? You might like to think about how spells are created and cast, about the names of different places and characters, the way people travel, the power structures, the very existence of magic, etc. What about the stories within the book of the Old Gods and another time within the fantasy world created? Did anything in the book remind any readers of other worlds or other fantasy stories that know? How does magic in the world of *Evernight* compare to magic in other stories group members are familiar with?

BOOK-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

EVERNIGHT

7. Shadow Jack

‘There was a man made of midnight, and his name was Shadow Jack.’ – *Evernight*, p.1

Read the first page of the book again, together as a group. What do members think of this introduction? What does the author mean when he says, ‘his intentions were darkest of all’? Why does the book start with Shadow Jack? Can members think of any other stories that involve djinni, or ‘genies’? How does Shadow Jack compare?

8. Expectation and realisation

“How else would you describe a woman who takes away the souls of her people and locks ‘em in cages?” – *Evernight*, p.174

Think about the different expectations characters have in the book. At first, what does Lara think about Hags? White witches? The King? Even Old Hans? What happens to change her opinions? Do any members of the group think that this can happen in our world? Has anyone ever had a preconception – an idea of something – that turned out to be wrong when they learnt more?

9. The soul

‘At first glance Double Eight thought it a winged creature made of warm golden light.’ – *Evernight*, p.88

The idea of a soul is key to the whole book. In *Evernight* the soul is a thing all to itself, that has power and can be taken, or used to fight the Evernight. Discuss the idea of the soul in the book – what did readers think of the Painted, who lose their souls? Or the white witches, whose souls are stolen and caged? What might it be like if your soul was taken away from you? To help discussion, read the description from Double Eight on page 212 together, or the depiction of the Painted on page 127.

10. Authority and power

‘... if things had worked out, if I had taken the throne in Westerly Witch all those hundreds of years ago ...?’ – *Evernight*, p.27

Who has power in the Silver Kingdom? Is it the King? Or Mrs. Hester? Or the Westerly Witches? Or the people? Discuss how members of the group think the kingdom keeps going. Is power and authority important? Now consider who in the novel wants to have power. Does Bernie want to be the High Witch? Does Lara want to be a witch herself? What about Mrs. Hester? Is her power enough? What about the King, Old Hans, or even Joe and Granny? What might the author be suggesting about the nature of characters who do or do not want power?

FEAST OF THE EVERNIGHT

11. New horizons

“But it’s the Veil,” said Sam. “I’ve heard . . .”

“You’ve heard the same stories every recruit’s heard,” said Annalise.’ – *Feast of the Evernight*, p.2

Feast of the Evernight includes the worlds met in the first book, but also expands to new places. How does the author introduce these new worlds, to keep the reader interested, without saying too much all at once? How do you learn about the Veil or Lakes End, or the places the characters encounter as they travel?

12. The truth

‘The boy she thought she knew.’ – *Feast of the Evernight*, p.216

What did readers think of the suspicions about Double Eight? Who thought he was the killer? Who thought something else might be going on? Read the chapter ‘A Familiar Face’ (page 199) again together. Does the author give any hints that not all is as it seems? What language does he use to sow doubt, or mislead the reader? Consider the chapter title and the sentence, ‘An unpleasant smile crept across Double Eight’s face as the killer brought out a wand and pulled the trigger.’ (p.201) Discuss ways in which the reader is following the investigation along with the characters in the book.

13. Loss, gain and bargaining

“A Witch who uses a reaper spell to kill doesn’t just end their victim’s life. They steal it. . . . But there’s a terrible price to pay.” – *Feast of the Evernight*, p.170

Throughout both books there are themes of loss and gain; loss of life, parents, family, loved ones, loss of power, control, authority; gaining power, understanding, new friends and family, gaining new life. What do readers think of the sacrifices and trade offs that take place. Is the price of ‘stealing’ life worth it (see quotation and p.170) to stay alive? Is the bargain Ginny strikes with Younger worth it? What about the willingness of characters throughout the book to sacrifice themselves for what they believe in? What do readers think of the characters who aren’t willing to make sacrifices, like the King, or Karl Younger?

14. Home

‘This is where I’m happy, and content, and free. You understand?’” – *Feast of the Evernight*, p.320

What does the idea of home mean in the book? Think about the quotation here from page 320. Why does Joe leave Westerly Witch to go back to being a tosher? What about Lara? Where is her home by the end of the book? What about the other people who live in the Slums? Or those in Lakes End? Reread the passage on page 317, when Ginny is leaving, all together. What does home mean to her? What do members of the group understand by the word ‘home’? What does ‘home’ mean to them?