

Discussion Guide

About the Book



An instant *New York Times* bestseller!

The first in a gripping fantasy duology inspired by West African folklore in which a grieving crown princess and a desperate refugee find themselves on a collision course to murder each other despite their growing attraction—from debut author Roseanne A. Brown. This *New York Times* bestseller is perfect for fans of Tomi Adeyemi, Renée Ahdieh, and Sabaa Tahir.

Don't miss the second book in this epic duology, *A Psalm of Storms and Silence*!

About the Author

Roseanne A. Brown is an immigrant from the West African nation of Ghana and a graduate of the University of Maryland, where she completed the Jimenez-Porter Writers' House program. Her work has been featured by *Voice of America*, among other outlets. Her debut novel *A Song of Wraiths and Ruin* was an instant *New York Times* Bestseller, an Indie Bestseller, and received six starred reviews. You can visit her online at roseanneabrown.com or on Instagram or Twitter at @rosiesrambles.



Praise for *A Song of Wraiths and Ruin*

"An explosive, stunning fantasy debut."
—ALA *Booklist* (**starred review**)

"Revitalizing and exciting, Brown's debut breathes life into ancient but still relevant folk stories."
—Kirkus Reviews (**starred review**)

"Magic creates a centuries-long divide between peoples in this stunning debut novel inspired by North African and West African folklore. An action-packed tale of injustice, magic, and romance, this novel immerses readers in a thrilling world and narrative reminiscent of *Children of Blood and Bone*."
(*Publishers Weekly*, "An Anti-Racist Children's and YA Reading List")

Pre-Reading Activity

Before reading, reflect on the statements listed below. Do you agree with them? Why or why not? Write your thoughts down or discuss them in small groups.



A person's intentions or belief that they are doing the right thing is more important than their actions and impact.



If beliefs or perspectives are in conflict, one must be right and the others wrong.



If you bear responsibility to others, you must set your needs aside and step up whenever and in whatever way they need you.



Hurting individuals (even those you care about, even yourself) is sometimes necessary if it serves a greater good.



Magic is a corruptive force and will cause more harm than good regardless of who wields it.



Choosing kindness (to others, to yourself) is always the best policy, no matter the situation.


Discussion Questions (15)

1. What is the significance of the text alternating between Malik and Karina's points of view? How does following both protagonists' perspectives shape your understanding of the story and the characters?
2. Take a moment to compare and contrast the two protagonists. What do Malik and Karina have in common? In what ways do they differ? What motivations do they share in their individual quests to commit murder?



3. Discuss the significance of home in the novel. What does home mean to Malik? To Karina? Is home always a physical dwelling? How does home relate to other concepts like safety, love, and identity for each of the protagonists?
4. Consider the panic attacks and migraines endured by Malik and Karina respectively. How do these maladies relate to loss, connection, and fear for each character?
5. Should Malik have made his deal with Idir? Why or why not? What does his agreement to the deal tell you about Malik as a character and about what Nadia represents for him?
6. While talking at the Dancing Seal, Tunde says that "the real competition will begin the moment the Closing Ceremony [of Solstasia] is over" [207]. What does he mean by this? What grants an individual or a family power in Ziran? How does the "real competition" relate to Karina's conflict with the council?
7. When the Dancing Seal is raided, Malik quickly panics and suggests he and the other champions run. Driss replies "Only someone with something to hide runs from soldiers" [222]. What do you think of this claim? Are Ziran's soldiers only a threat to those hiding secrets or guilty of wrongdoing? How do you know?
8. Eshra is being exploited by Ziran for its resources, while Eshran people are treated as second class citizens and Eshran refugees are even turned away at the city gates. How does Ziran's occupation directly connect to the violence in Eshra that families like Malik's are forced to flee? Why do Karina and others in power not question the way Eshrans are treated in their city? What real-world parallels can you draw between Eshra, how Eshrans' are treated, and Ziran as an occupying power?





9. The power of storytelling is a significant theme in the novel. What role does storytelling play in Malik and Karina's narratives and their development as characters? What role does it play in the history and governing of Ziran? What connections can you make to the impact of stories (including books like *A Song of Wraiths and Ruin*) in the real world? What other themes can you identify?

10. Consider the different versions of the story of Bahia Alahari's rebellion and victory over the Kennouan pharaohs. Consider the source of each version and why the popular Zirani ballads and history passed down over a millennia are so different from the witness accounts. Do you consider Bahia Alahari to be a hero? A villain? Something else? As Grandmother Bahia gets reframed, how does your understanding of Karina, her choices, and Ziran as a whole also shift?


11. Discuss the nature of magic in the novel. Afua tells Karina that magic is the manipulation of nkra, humans' connection to one another. Consider some of the uses of magic in the novel and how they relate to this concept of connection. What does magic as manipulation and connection mean to Karina and Malik at the start of the novel vs. the end?

12. Consider the tests that Malik faces in the labyrinth of the Final Challenge. How do they impact your understanding of Malik and his motivations? What might Karina have been tested with or forced to relive if she had participated in the challenge? What would you face if you were to enter the labyrinth?

13. Nyeni tells Malik that "to aid even one person is to save an entire world" [414]. What does she mean by this? How have Karina and Malik each aided a person and saved an entire world?

14. Who or what is the novel's antagonist? Is there more than one? Is the antagonist bad or evil? Why or why not? Use the text to support your answer.

15. Look back at the statements you considered in the pre-reading activity and pick one. Now that you've read the novel, do you still agree or disagree with the statement? Use evidence from the text and the real world to support your position.



Extension Activities (5)

PICTURE YOUR PATRON

Like many real-world cultures and languages, in Zirani culture, each day of the week is ruled by a different element and a deity that represents it. Based on the day of the week you were born, figure out who your patron deity is and draw them. Try drawing them as they are described in the text and what you think they might look like in a real-world and 21st-century context. Consider the deity's associated element and qualities—how will you incorporate them in both drawings?

CAPTURE A CHARACTER

Collage is a technique where bits of paper, photographs and other images, fabrics, and other kinds of materials are arranged to make a new, composed art piece. Different colors, shapes, textures, words, and images tell a visual story and evoke particular emotions. Choose one of the characters from the story and make a collage that represents them. You can cut up and glue items on paper or cardboard, or you can make a digital collage on a computer. Consider more than what the character looks like or wears. What color captures the sound of their voice; what shape might represent their elemental alignment or their personality; what texture or pattern could represent their greatest strength or weakness?

THE HEROES' TOUR

Using details from the text, craft a travel brochure for Ziran, and create an accompanying map of the city for potential visitors. You can design a print brochure or a travel website online. Likewise, you can draw the city on paper, create a digital map, or build something more 3-dimensional with Legos or on a platform like Minecraft. Label key destinations like Ksar Alahari, the Dancing Seal, and the Alignment Temples, and don't forget attractions like the Solstasia festivities, secret subterranean mosaics, and certain vengeful spirit creatures.

A BALLAD OF RUIN

Some of Ziran's most important histories are shared in songs like the Ballad of Bahia Alahari. Write a song about Malik and Karina and how their journey's intertwine. You can write your own music or put your lyrics to an existing song. If you'd rather keep your bard skills to yourself, you can create a playlist for the novel instead. For both options, consider which scenes and story details are the most important for your ballad or playlist, and what feelings each part of the story, and therefore the music, should evoke.

A PROPHECY OF SEQUELS

As Malik and Karina head in different directions at the novel's conclusion, the possibilities for where their paths will take them next and how they might intersect again are endless. Now is your chance to think about what is coming next! Think about what questions the story has left you asking and what you want (or fear) the answers to be. Consider also the influence of West African folklore and mythology within the novel (research the lore if you're unfamiliar). What challenges and enemies might Malik and Karina face next? What of their friends and families? What new creatures will they encounter? What deities might be pulling the strings? Record a brief video of your predictions, and save it to watch until after you've read *A Psalm of Storms* and *Silence* to see if your predictions come true.



GUIDE CREDIT

This guide was written by Anastasia M. Collins. Stacy (she/they) is a librarian, youth literature reviewer and scholar, and an anti-oppression educator. Stacy is the author of the Simmons Library Anti-Oppression Guide, and her work centers the dismantling of systemic oppression in the intertwining fields of youth literature publishing, scholarship, and librarianship. You can follow her at @DarkLiterata.