

# BOOKNOTES

READERS GUIDE

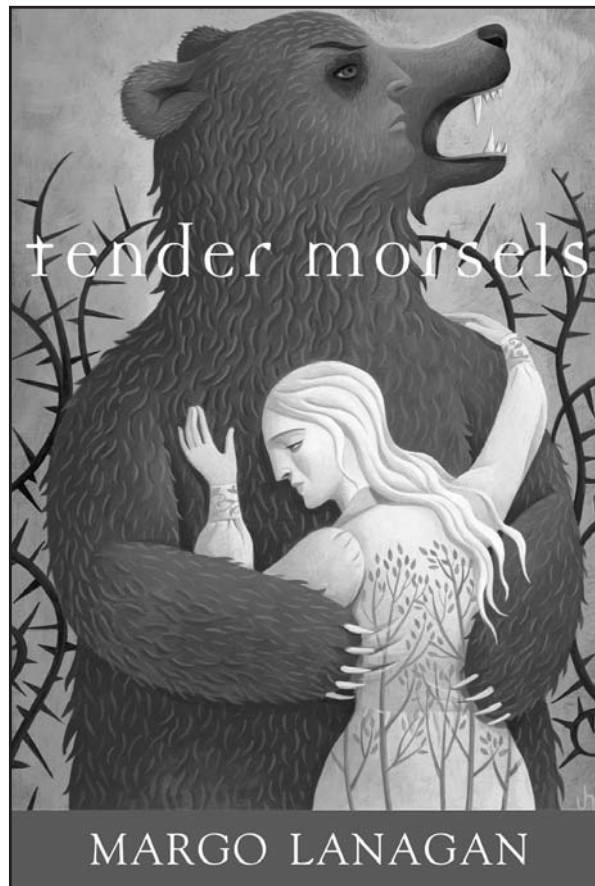
## thematic connections

Hope • Despair  
Illusion • Identity • Courage

Grades 9 Up

## about the book

Liga Longfield knows little about life except for what she has been forced to endure: the death of her mother, abuse at the hands of her father, neglect, and loneliness. After her father is killed in a mysterious accident, Liga experiences the freedom that she never had living like a prisoner in her family cottage, and gives birth to a beautiful baby girl. But her peace is shattered when a gang of village toughs break through her door and violently rape and beat her, driving Liga to the brink of despair. Having decided to end both her daughter's and her own life, Liga is magically saved by a benevolent force that transports her to a place of her heart's desire: a world in which Liga is safe from harm and judgment. While there, she gives birth to a second daughter, and the family of three live out their days in guarded happiness. As the sisters grow older, the real world from which they come begins to push itself into Liga's heaven on earth, in ways both benign and sinister, forcing Liga to face her past. Living in the real world, mother and daughters must learn to accept life for all that it is if they are to become their true selves.



Alfred A. Knopf HC • 978-0-375-84811-7  
GLB • 978-0-375-94811-4

**"It is quite like here,  
only simpler, with all the cruel  
people taken out, all the  
rudeness and suddenness, and  
much of the noise and bustle."**

—Urdda Longfield

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RANDOM HOUSE  
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Alfred A. Knopf

## pre-reading activity

In this story, the main character is magically transported to a world of comfort and safety after having endured a life in the real world marked by loss, abuse, rape, and loneliness. Her new world is the manifestation of her heart's desire; a world where she can live without fear of harm coming to her, or her children, in any way. Discuss with students the meaning of the phrase *heart's desire*. Ask students to write a short essay describing what the phrase means to them.

*Tender Morsels* takes place in two worlds: one in a place of comfort and safety; the other in reality. Challenge students to think of titles that they've read that bridge two worlds, such as *Alice in Wonderland*, or *The Wizard of Oz*. Discuss how the main characters in these stories navigate through the fantasy worlds they find themselves in, and what lessons they discover by being removed from their real lives.



# questions

Begin a discussion regarding the major themes in the story, such as motherhood, renewal, denial, safety, desire, and risk. Challenge students to describe passages from the book which present these themes. Discuss how particular characters are associated with the themes.

Reread pages 47–49. Why does Liga decide to kill her baby and herself? Discuss what Liga thought as she decided upon suicide: “It seemed like the answer to her; it seemed fated, a kindness.” What type of life do you think Liga would have experienced had the moon baby not protected her and the not-yet-named Branza?

Discuss the significance of Bear Day and what it means to the villagers. How does the true character of each man (Davit Ramstrong, Teasel Wurlledge, Bullock Oxman) emerge while in bear form? When Davit first stumbles through the portal while in his bear suit, he sees his small village, everything he knows, from an entirely new perspective. At this moment he has a realization: “The pattern is bigger than my whole body, certainly bigger than the manhood of me; ‘tis seasonal and circular; births and deaths happen, and lives, so many lives, overlap each other, full of lessons and habits and accidents.” (p.120) Discuss Davit’s realization and how it relates to the major themes of the book: life, death, birth, renewal.

The moon baby presents Liga with two gems and instructs her to plant them at opposite ends of her cottage. What do you think these gems symbolize? When Liga awakens the day after the rape, she enters her cottage to find it transformed and says, “I do not deserve this!” (p. 55) After all that Liga had endured, why do you think she feels undeserving of a clean, comfortable place to live and raise her baby? Why does Liga feel that what had been given to her was by “a grain of purest luck”? (p. 55)

Discuss the differences between Branza and Urdda. Read the passage on pages 69–71. How does this passage illustrate the basic differences between the sisters and foreshadow future events?

# for group discussion

Discuss the characters of Collaby Dought and Muddy Annie Bywell. What do their names signify? What do you think their characters represent? Muddy Annie appears in the opening of the book in a hay stack, again in the opening chapters as a hedge-witch who sells potions to induce miscarriage, as Dought's business partner, and finally, as a mentor to Urdda. Discuss Muddy Annie's evolution throughout the story. Challenge students to describe how their impressions of her changed while reading the story? Do students consider her a sympathetic character? Why or why not?

When the second Bear arrives at the cottage, Liga experiences uneasiness at his presence: "A piece of other-world knowledge rose from Liga's bones: they were too old for such games, her girls now. . . . Improper it was. She remembered women scolding, and talking about girls in scolding voices. . . . She could feel the inclination for it." (p. 174) What does the author mean by "other-world knowledge"? How has the life that Liga has built for her girls left them vulnerable and unprepared for life in the real world?

In chapter seven, a lonely Liga tries to start a relationship with a village woodworker, only to realize that this man, the people of the village, and everything in it is a construction of her heart's desire: "None of it is real, she thought . . . not these houses, that wife hurrying, that carter leading his soaking horse. She must run away from him hard . . . and find as soon as possible her little daughters, the only true people in this world besides herself." (p. 156) After this realization, Liga is frightened, but chooses to go on in this place as before. Why does Liga toil "every day to make it so, to keep it, to deserve it"? (p. 156) Why was she willing to "pretend it was all true"? (p.157) Why after all the time she has spent in her heaven does she still feel undeserving of it?

Why is Branza plagued by nightmares? Why are the girls ultimately foreigners in Liga's wished-for world, and why must they return to the real world in order to have meaning in their lives? Why is it dangerous

to live one's life for another's desires? In trying so desperately to keep her daughters safe, how did Liga fail them?

Discuss the aspect of denial in the story. Which characters live in denial? How does this state help and hurt them? How did living in denial both benefit and damage Liga and her daughters? What is Liga's greatest fear? How is she eventually healed, and what heals her?

Discuss Bullock's comment on page 278: "Home is home, no?—whatever layabouts you live with, whatever tempers and timidities." Do you agree or disagree with his description of "home"?

Discuss the character Miss Dance. What does she represent in the story? Do you think her surname, Dance, has any special significance? From where does Miss Dance draw her powers? Why is Urdda so fascinated with her?

Reread the passage on pages 280–285. Discuss how Liga experiences her re-entry into the real world, her remembrances, and how this event was necessary for Liga to experience.

Lanagan incorporates elements from the Brothers Grimm tale "Snow White and Red Rose" in her story. In what ways does *Tender Morsels* feel like a fairy tale?

Discuss the revenge scene on pages 396–401, which would illustrate the old saying, "An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth." Do you think this punishment was just? Why or why not?

Why do you think the book is titled *Tender Morsels*?

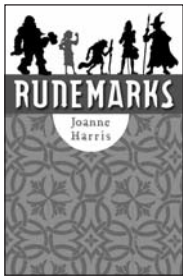


## vocabulary/ use of language

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should try to define unfamiliar words using clues from the context of the story. Such words may include: *harangued* (p. 42), *remonstrating* (p. 57), *disheveled* (p. 107), *prostrated* (p. 127), *disemboweling* (162), *poignant* (p. 184), *predicament* (p. 264), *impeding* (p. 280), *malodorous* (p. 304), *imperil* (p. 313), *wizened* (p. 315), *facsimiles* (p. 344), *delineate* (p. 370).

## related titles

### by theme



### Runemarks

Joanne Harris

Grades 5 up

Secrets • Revenge • Trust • Destiny • Acceptance

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-84444-7

GLB: 978-0-375-94444-4

### The Navigator

Eoin McNamee

Grades 4–7

Friendship • Courage • Fear

Self-Discovery • Forgiveness

Wendy Lamb Books HC: 978-0-375-83910-8

GLB: 978-0-375-83910-8

Yearling PB: 978-0-385-73554-4



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## about the author

**Margo Lanagan** is a highly acclaimed writer of novels, short stories, and poetry. Her original story collections are *White Time* (2000), *Black Juice* (2004), and *Red Spikes* (2007). *Black Juice* won a Michael L. Printz Honor Award as well as the World Fantasy Award for Best Collection.

## internet resources

### Locus Magazine Online Interview: Margo Lanagan

[www.locusmag.com/](http://www.locusmag.com/)

2005/Issues/06Lanagan.html

## on the web

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