Spectacle

WRITTEN AND ILLLUSTRATED BY
- MEGAN ROSE GEDRIS -



VOLUME 1
978-1-62010-492-7

VOLUME 2
978-1-62010-599-3

VOLUME 3
978-1-62010-770-6

| VOL. 1-3 DISCUSSION GUIDE |

ONI PRESS

About the Series

THE FIRST BOOK of the *Spectacle* series opens in the middle of a desert, in a time and place that resembles post Civil War America. A circus train has broken down and Anna, a fortune teller who trusts her scientific prediction machine more than the tarot cards she employs in her act, is hours from finding her twin sister, Kat, murdered. Her grief turns to relief and confusion when Kat reappears as a ghost who is able to inhabit and even possess Anna's body. Unfortunately, since Kat was stabbed in the back with her own throwing knives, she is unable to identify her killer. So, together the sisters embark on an investigation to solve the crime. As they look for clues, a series of paranormal occurrences challenge Anna's previous rejection of the supernatural and further complicate the mystery surrounding Kat's death.

THE SECOND BOOK sees an increase in the supernatural phenomena, including the physical transformations of many of the performers. Meanwhile, mounting tensions between the "freaks" and "normies", secrets, suspicions, and more deaths leave the circus fractured.

By the beginning of **THE THIRD BOOK**, the circus is enjoying some newfound prosperity, but a demonic presence is growing in power and destruction. Relationships are tested and Anna and Kat face their biggest threat to date as it becomes clear that Kat's murder and the many peculiar happenings are all somehow inextricably linked.



About the Author



Chicago-based author, artist, and publisher Megan Rose Gedris has been creating comics since they were ten years old. When they are not writing and drawing, they work as a traveling burlesque performer.

See more of their work at rosalarian.com

Twitter/Instagram: @rosalarian
onipress.com

Common Themes

The works of Megan Rose Gedris often feature **strong and diverse female characters** and **multi-layered worlds**, such as the traveling Samson Brothers Circus in the *Spectacle* series. They explore the **broad theme of family** through the assorted members of the circus troupe whose outsider status helps to create strong bonds between them, though not always without conflict. Gedris reveals that they love to present a **broad range of relationships** in their stories, noting: *"I think platonic love and self-love and familial love are all just as important as romantic and sexual love."* The contrast between the circus folk and the people in the towns where they perform allows for **rich discussions about what it means to be on the fringes of society**, what it means to be "normal" or a "monster", and the fear and mistrust that both groups have for the other. Additional themes in the *Spectacle* books include **science vs. magic** and **superstition**, **loyalty**, and **secrets**.

Learning Standards

The *Spectacle* series is appropriate for Young Adult readers (YA) and can be used to address many of the Reading Literature Common Core standards for grades 9-12:

RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.5, RL.9-10.7, RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.2, RL.11-12.3, RL.11-12.5, RL.11-12.6

The novel and activities in this teaching guide may also be used as a springboard for addressing numerous Common Core standards for Writing, Speaking, and additional related ELA-Literacy standards.

Pre-Reading

Spectacle recounts a murder mystery set in a close-knit community. There are dozens of major and minor characters whose importance is not always immediately obvious. Prepare a graphic organizer to help keep track of important names, relationships, and information that might help to solve the mystery. Named characters in the series include: Anna, Kat, Flora, Jebediah, Isabel, Carl, Claude, Gideon, Lucy, Eve/Lynn, Ike, Nettie, Archie, Bob, Millie, Casey, Gus, Elbert, Doc Herman, Michael, Daisy, Rosie, Violet, Lilian, Alva, Frank, and Tom.



Book One

1. Review the cover and opening pages of the book though page 11. What clues are offered to answer questions about the "who", "what", and "where" of the action? What else can you infer by exploring the illustrations? Speculate on what you think the book will be about.

2. Who is Anna? What do her first interactions with Ike, Nettie, and Kat tell about her? Explain what happens to Anna soon after she discovers her sister's body.

3. Page 11 contains a single illustration. In comics and graphic novels, this is called a "splash page." They can be used to introduce or focus special attention on particular places, characters, or events. Why is a splash page used here? Where else are splash pages used and why?

4. The first two chapters set the stage for a murder mystery. What clues are revealed? Who are some of the likely suspects? What are their secrets? What would they have to gain? What is Kat's relationship with Flora? Do you trust her? Why or why not?

5. Describe the circus and its members. What are some of the different groups? Explain the hierarchy of the circus. Who has the most prestige? Who are considered of lesser rank or importance? Why?

6. What are Anna's initial attitudes about the supernatural? How and why do those beliefs begin to change in chapters three and four? Explain how Anna's powers help her to rescue Jebediah Tetanus from the crooked sheriff.

7. What secrets is Kat hiding? Speculate about her motivations.

8. How do the themes of friendship, loyalty, acceptance, love, and family correspond to the various characters and their relationships? Be sure to give examples from the text.

9. Analyze the ways the book's illustrations help to convey actions, moods, and emotions. Consider the use of colors, splash pages, facial expressions, focus on particular details, and other devices. Use specific examples to support your interpretations.

10. Explain what happens at the end of Book One. Speculate about what you think will happen in Book Two.



Book Two

1. When Book Two begins, additional members of the circus develop strange physical anomalies and more supernatural events occur. Describe the demon on page 35. What is the significance of its physical appearance and the changes happening to the circus people throughout the book? What do you think the demon is? What does it want?

2. What secrets are partially revealed on pages 21-28? Are Lynn and Eve involved? Why or why not?

3. As the book progresses, what happens to the balance of power between "freaks" and "normies"? Why? What happens at the end of Book Two to bring some resolution to the conflicts?

4. Consider the theme of professional jealousy. How does it affect the way characters interact? What effect does it have on the entire circus community?

5. Compare and contrast the love relationships seen in Book Two: Kat and Isabel, Gus and Lottie, Carl and Lucy, Flora and Michael, Gideon and Lilian, etc. What are some of the similarities and differences?

6. Throughout Book Two, what progress does Anna make on her murder investigation? Is she able to rule out any of the suspects? Does anyone come under greater suspicion? Why?

7. Discuss Anna's relationship with her sister, Kat, as they continue to inhabit one physical body. In what ways do they get along and comfort one another? What are sources of conflict?

8. Consider the theme of friendship. Why does Anna seem to have so much difficulty being around people other than her sister? Discuss Anna's interpersonal growth after she is forced to develop relationships with others in the wake of Kat's death.

9. Examine and discuss the use of panels, their size, shape, and arrangement. How do they influence the way the story progresses and the pace of different scenes? How do they impact the reader's experience with the visual information the artwork provides?

10. Explain what happens at the end of Book Two. Who do you think was murdered? What effect do you think it will have on the circus troupe?



Book Three

1. Book Three begins with a wedding and a glimpse into the newfound prosperity of the Samson Brothers circus. However, Anna and Isabel are struggling. Compare and contrast their states of mind.

2. Ike's death highlights the dangers posed by the recent physical transformations of some of the characters. Anna is now working to solve Kat's murder, as well as the mystery surrounding the supernatural happenings at the circus. Are they related? Defend your answer.

3. The splash page on p. 28 is a chilling portrait of the demon. How does it stand in contrast to Anna's new powers of fire? Which physical characteristics of the demon have manifested among those in the circus troupe?

4. The first book of the series opens with the circus train stuck on the tracks in a desert. Chapter Two of Book Three begins with the train stuck on a snowbound mountain track. Compare and contrast the conditions and actions surrounding these two predicaments. Be sure to consider Anna's reaction on page 38.

5. What happens to Anna when Kat takes over her body to be with Isabel? What more do we learn about their past relationship? What is Anna's reaction the next day? Why?

6. Several of the relationships in the book take a tragic turn, including Anna and Kat, Kat and Isabel, and Gus and Lottie. Reflect on the idea of desiring more time with a lost loved one. Is there anyone that you are grieving? Is there anyone in your life that you might be taking for granted?

7. Suspicion for Anna's murder falls on Gideon. Do you think he is the murderer? Why or why not? What information does Jebediah provide? Who are Jebediah's ghosts?

8. Discuss Jebediah's short speech in the second panel on page 92. How does it fit with the theme of "freaks" and "normies" woven throughout the series? What is normal? What events can you cite from history and/or current events that echo the fear and scapegoating of people whose appearance or lifestyles are different?

9. Explain what you think happens to Anna and Kat in Chapter Five. How do their experiences relate to the various mysteries of the series?

10. How does Book Three end? Are readers left with more answers or more questions? What clues can be found in the tarot card character portraits at the end of the book that might shed light on what may be revealed in Book Four?

Extension Activities

CIRCUS CIRCUS

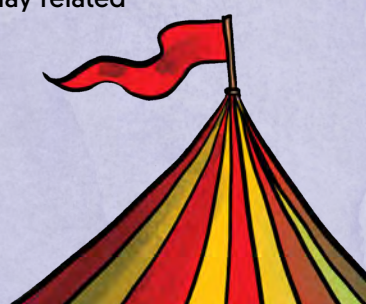
The word “circus” comes from the Latin word for circle, a description of the arenas where spectacles were held starting in Roman times. The modern circus can be traced to the end of the 18th century. Engage students in a discussion about circuses using a KWL chart to discover what they already know, as well as what they would like to know. Then, individually, in pairs, or in teams, assign them to research different aspects of circuses or circus acts, such as the use of animals, acrobats, high wire and trapeze acts, clowns, and sideshows, using available print and electronic resources. Students might also explore the circus circuit at various times in history, especially in the United States, as well as controversies surrounding circuses over the years. As the research is shared with the entire class, the KWL chart can be completed.

COME ONE, COME ALL!

At the end of Book One, author and artist Megan Rose Gedris includes renditions of posters featuring the various attractions of the Samson Brothers Circus. Similar colorful posters were widely used over the years to advertise the various circuses that traveled throughout the United States. Assign students to conduct an Internet image search to view vintage circus posters from various decades in the 1800s and 1900s and to analyze the changes they observe in the kinds of attractions, descriptions, prices, and styles of artwork that they feature. Assign students to choose a poster that they find interesting or appealing and use it as inspiration for a creative writing assignment.

IT’S IN THE CARDS

Tarot cards are a major thematic and visual device used throughout the Spectacle series. Originally created as playing cards, they are now more commonly associated with divination. Tarot decks typically contain 78 cards, divided into 22 Major Arcana (e.g. The Priestess, The Magician, etc.) and 56 Minor Arcana, which are then divided into 4 equal suits (Swords, Wands, Cups, and Pentacles). Each card has a corresponding meaning or interpretation, which will vary according to whether it is dealt upright or reversed. A rudimentary understanding of fortune telling using tarot cards will provide readers with a greater understanding of Anna’s inner conflict between science and the supernatural, as well as the related symbolism used throughout the series. Ask students to examine the tarot card portraits of the characters included at the end of the first and second volumes and use them as inspiration to draw their own interpretation of one of the Major Arcana. The portraits may then be used to create a classroom display related to the Spectacle series.

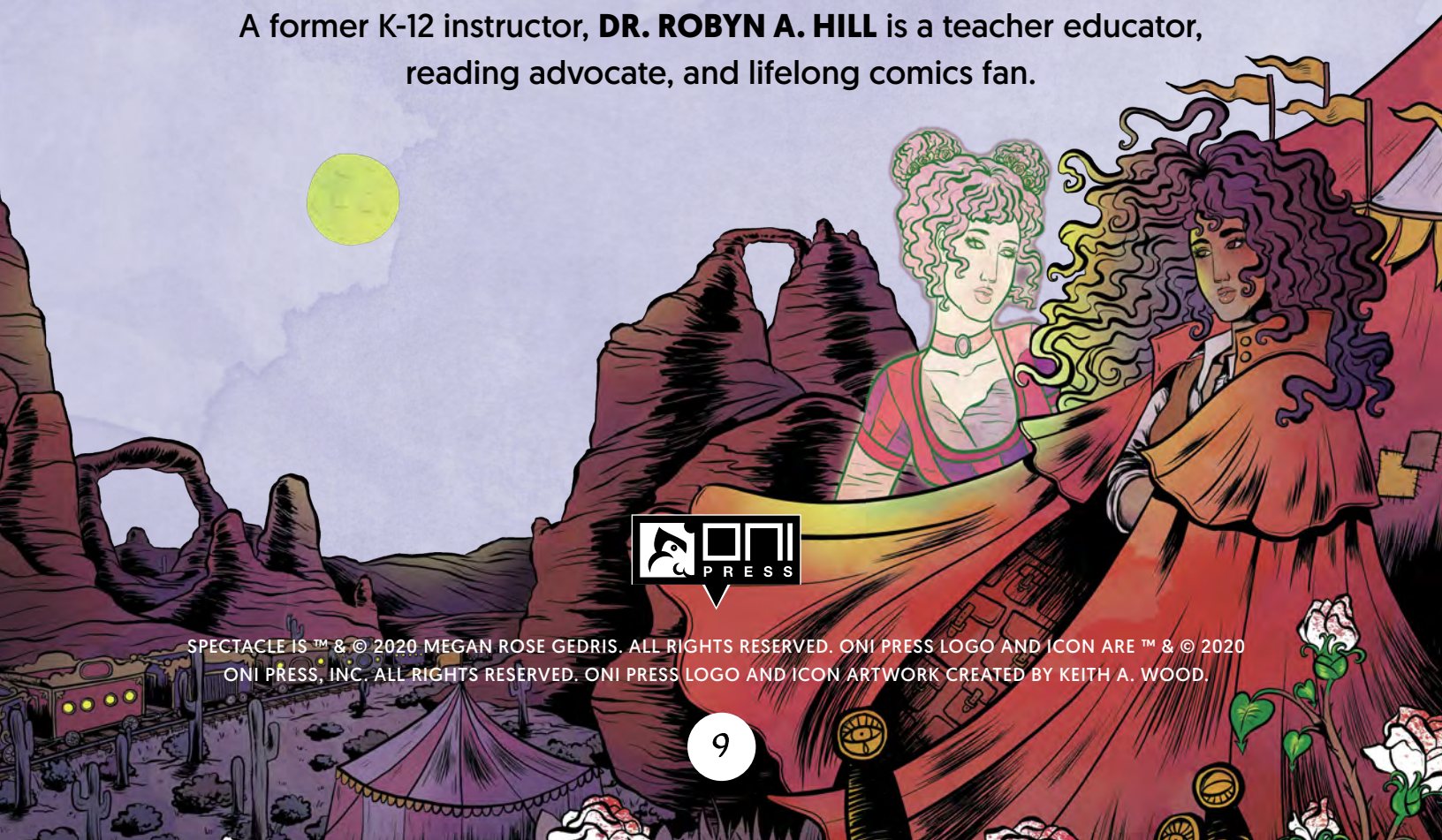


SPOTLIGHT ON THE ADA

As the title of the series implies, many of the characters were forced to earn a living by being put on display. For centuries, people with disabilities—whether from birth or through injury or disease—were considered objects of pity, scorn, or amusement. Ask students to reflect on their own ability to navigate the world. How would it be different if they were sick? Injured? Elderly? Permanently disabled? Then, engage students in a brainstorming activity about accommodations that they have noticed in their daily lives, such as ramps, designated parking spaces, wheelchair-accessible bathrooms, Braille signs, closed captioning, etc. What purpose do they serve? The year 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which presents the perfect opportunity for students to further engage in research and discussion about the effects of this landmark legislation and the lesser known civil rights movement that engendered it. The website **adaanniversary.org** houses numerous videos, publications, and resources. It further describes the continuing fight of disabled persons for equal access to public spaces, jobs, transportation, schools, telecommunications, etc. What progress have people with disabilities made since 1990? What might and should the future hold?

Discussion guide author

A former K-12 instructor, **DR. ROBYN A. HILL** is a teacher educator, reading advocate, and lifelong comics fan.



SPECTACLE IS ™ & © 2020 MEGAN ROSE GEDRIS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ONI PRESS LOGO AND ICON ARE ™ & © 2020 ONI PRESS, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ONI PRESS LOGO AND ICON ARTWORK CREATED BY KEITH A. WOOD.