

ABOUT PHOENIX

Nastasia Rugani

Genre: Fiction

Themes: family; abuse; sisters; self-esteem

Suitable for: Grades 8–12

Common Core standards : RL.9-12.1,2,3,4,5,6,10
L.9-12.4,4a,4c,4d,5,5a,6
SL.9-12.1,1a,1c,1d,3,4,6
W.9-12.4,9,10

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Setting

Describe the details of place and time. What is the atmosphere and mood during the course of action, including during the conflict and at the climax?

Plot structure and devices

Describe one important event in the book and explain why it is significant to the story.

Use evidence from the text to answer the questions below:

- **Exposition:** What background information is given about the characters, setting, and initial situation in the book?
- **Complication:** When does the first problem arise and develop? What other problems occur, and how do they progress as the plot advances?
- **Crisis:** What is the moment of decision for Phoenix? When is she faced with her internal conflict and realizes she must make a decision?
- **Climax:** When does Phoenix make her decision and act on it? What is the highest point of interest? When is the suspense over?
- **Resolution:** How does the author tie up loose ends?

- Foreshadowing: Looking back to the beginning of the story, what is Nastasia Rugani's purpose for telling us when Mr. Smith stops the car and takes Sasha's boots off her feet (p. 9)? Find other examples of how Nastasia Rugani uses foreshadowing.
- Symbolism: What does the greenhouse symbolize for the girls?

Characterization

Who is the "heroine" in the story? Why do you think she deserves to be called a heroine?

Compare and contrast Sasha and Phoenix.

How does the author let you get to know Mr. Smith's character? Find examples from the story.

Describe the other characters in the book. What kinds of people are they? Write about their beliefs, dreams, fears, strengths and weaknesses, and vices and talents.

Discuss the different classifications of the characters in the story including the protagonist, the antagonist, and the foil. Which characters are symbolic, flat, round, static, and/or dynamic?

How do the characters conduct themselves? What do they say and do to reveal themselves?

How do other characters in the story feel about each other? Discuss how their feelings change from the beginning to the end of the story.

What are your opinions about Phoenix, Sasha, Mr. Smith, Vanilla, Dad, Erika, Marlon, Bertha, and Ivan?

As the plot progresses, characters in the story have nicknames. Discuss some of the names in the story and their significance.

Themes

In your own words, explain Nastasia Rugani's message(s) for this book.

What point about human values or experiences is she trying to make? What do you think her attitude is towards these ideas?

How were the themes reflected through the behaviors of the characters?

What did you come away with as the reader?

What were you thinking about as you closed the book?

“It only takes a moment for your whole world to change.” What does this quote from *About Phoenix* mean? What significance does this quote have in the story?

Conflict

Discuss the people, forces, ideas, interests, and values that oppose each other in the story. What important decisions do the characters have to make? What do these things represent?

Based on the list below, what are the different types of conflict in *About Phoenix*?

- Man vs man
- Man vs self
- Man vs nature
- Man vs society
- Man vs fate

Word Work

Go back to the book. As you read, find a minimum of 25 words that are new or unfamiliar to you.

For each word, write:

- the page number on which you find it
- the context in which you find it (copy the sentence or phrase from the book and underline the word)
- your best guess of the word’s meaning based on the clues available
- the dictionary definition of the word and any other common forms of the word
- your own original sentence using the word or form of the word that demonstrates your understanding of its definition

Writing connections

1. Write a description of the events that took place before the novel started.
2. How is the main character of the novel similar to a person that you know? Discuss your answer in an essay.
3. Pretend that you are the author and you have been asked to explain which parts of the novel were the easiest and the hardest for you to write.
4. Have you had an experience similar to that of one of the characters in the novel? Write about this experience.

5. Write a poem that describes the plot of the novel.
6. Write an essay describing any changes that the main character underwent throughout the novel.
7. Write about why you liked the ending or how you would change it.
8. Interview one of the characters and ask him/her to explain some of the actions in the novel.
9. Write a newspaper article for the local paper from the beginning, middle and end of the story.

Figurative Language

What did the following mean in the book? Who said it and why?

- “I’m a secretive person—‘as secretive as the recipe for Coca-Cola.’” (p. 13)
- “. . . her eyes hungry for secrets.” (p. 23)
- “It’s become our temple, our place of pilgrimage.” (p.29)
- “Kids can sense these things, like animals.” (p. 32)
- “He preferred *angels of sabotage*.” (p. 45)
- “I only keep this photo to remind myself what never to become.” (p. 125)
- “It’s as real as a broken rib.” (p.158)
- “It gets stuck somewhere, the place where all important words hide.” (p. 164)
- “Still, those two survivors remind me too much of me and Sasha to abandon them to the frost: the way they hang from their cracked stems, their petals in a void looking like ship wrecked castaways.” (p. 178)
- “Instead this kiss is like the first pillar of a building, finally rising from the ground after years of planning and work.” (p. 204)