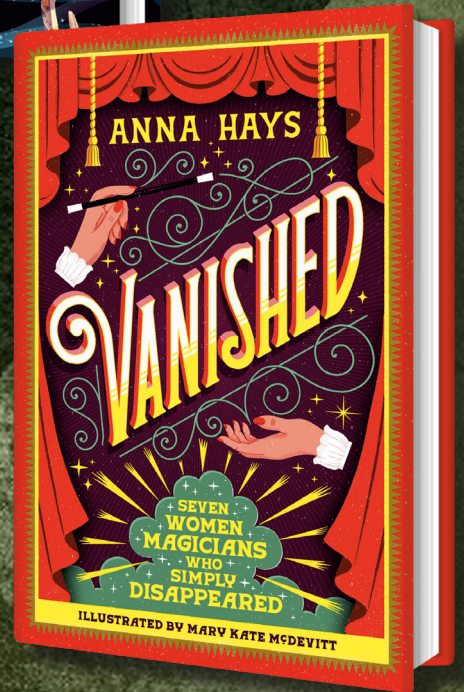
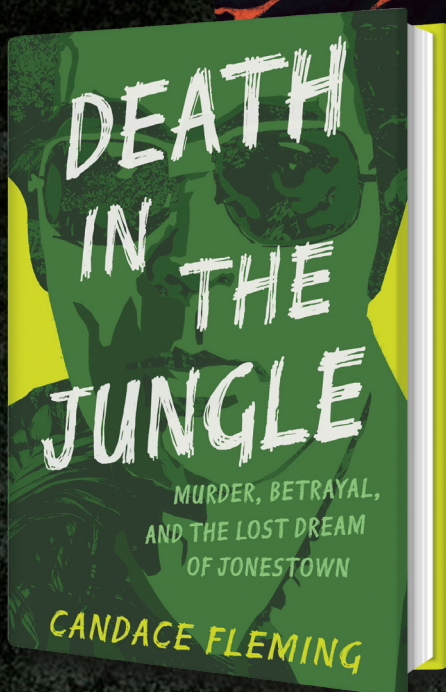
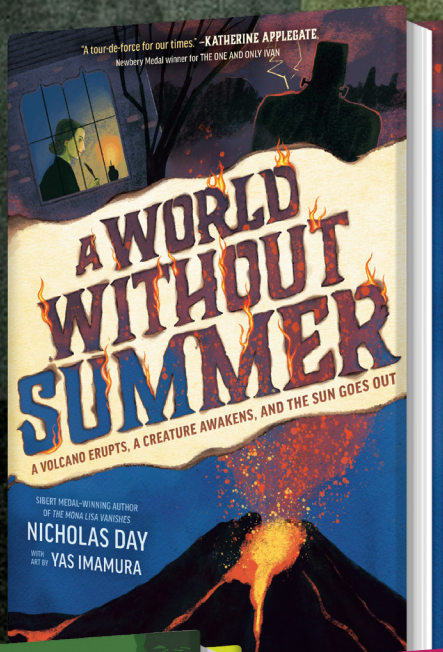


Narrative Nonfiction

BOOK CLUB GUIDE



Starting a Nonfiction

BOOK CLUB GUIDE

Interested in starting a nonfiction book club at your school or library but not sure where to start?

This guide includes general tips for getting started, plus title-specific discussion questions to help make your first book club meeting a success!

Tips for Nonfiction Book Clubs

1. Let students know why they are reading the book by providing a purpose for their reading. They could analyze the author's thesis/claim, make connections to a time period they are studying, analyze the cultural impact of the magicians, etc.
2. Preteach vocabulary to prepare students to read the book including words like *vaudeville*, *pantomime*, *traveling circus*, *velocipede*, *Coney Island*, and *dime museum* to help orient them to the text.
3. Before reading, teach students about the structure and flow of the book so they can access the tools, images, primary source sets, and definitions included within the text.
4. Design a bookmark with reading strategies, key terms and definitions, or questions to guide student reading.
5. Check out blogs of other ELA teachers to support your book clubs. Ashley at <https://buildingbooklove.com/> is a valuable resource, as well as Abby at [Write on with Miss G.](#)
6. Locate resources like [The Remedial Herstory Project](#) to support your work learning about history that is often left out of textbooks.



Tips for Leading Discussion

It is important that all readers feel safe when participating in a book discussion. Building a classroom community that values asking questions, using evidence when supporting thinking, and empathy to others will benefit students every day but especially during book club discussions.

1. Have a routine for students to ask questions as they read. They can put questions on Post-its, note them on an online form, or write them in their reading journal. Allowing a routine of asking questions creates a safe space for all.
2. Have a routine for students to collect evidence to respond to questions as they read. Focus on a few questions for the entire class to answer as they read, or divide the questions up by group.
3. When discussing a nonfiction text, it is helpful to use text evidence to support the discussion. This allows students to dig more deeply into the text and firm up their thinking by relying on the evidence presented.
4. Provide sentence starters to students to use during the book discussion to strengthen their confidence and their responses.
5. Asking questions about actions, impacts, and feelings as you read nonfiction allows students to build empathy for the people discussed in the book and others.
6. Reading aloud portions of the text to students and modeling your thinking as you respond to discussion questions is a great way to support students as they grow in these skills. When they see how an expert can use the text to learn and grow, they grow as readers and discussion leaders themselves.
7. Leave space for students to participate in the discussion without speaking in front of other students by using a free online tool like [Mentimeter](#) to collect student responses and share them with the class.

Need Help Picking Your First Book? Read on for Some Ideas!

VANISHED:

Seven Women Magicians Who Simply Disappeared

About the Book

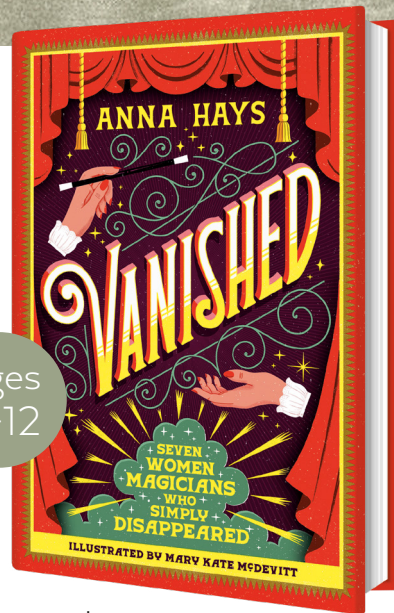
During the Golden Age of Magic from 1860 to 1930, seven women magicians in America defied Victorian conventions and created a unique place in history for themselves and future performers. There was Anna, the mind reader; Adelaide, who could float in midair; Talma, who could magically shower the stage with gold coins . . . and many more!

During a time when women were typically confined to the home, these trailblazers crossed oceans on steamships and traveled the globe, bringing their imaginative brand of magic to audiences around the world. They followed their hearts and pursued their dreams of performing magic in the spotlight when women had neither a vote nor a voice in America.

They made history. Yet once their career ended, so did their legacy.

For decades, their stories were hidden, or overshadowed by male counterparts, but now they have come to life in this vibrant and captivating book.

Themes: Biography & Autobiography, History & Social Studies, Art, Music & Theater, Supernatural, Nonfiction



Ages
8-12

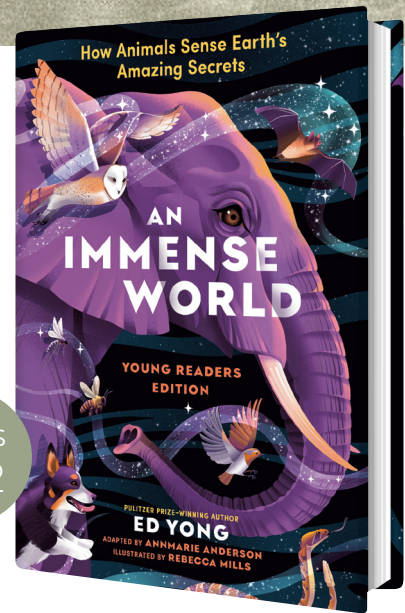
Discussion Questions

1. Hook readers by asking them to draw a magician or list as many famous magicians as they can. Then have students share their drawing or list. Next, introduce the book and ask students to reflect on their drawings or lists. Did they include female magicians? Why or why not?
2. What did all seven women have in common?
3. Which of the seven woman magicians would you have most liked to see perform and why?
4. How did these women break the mold and move beyond their expected gender stereotypes?
5. What lessons can we learn from each magician?
6. How did the families, husbands, and friends impact the success or struggle of the magicians?
7. How is the impact of these magicians still present in our culture?
8. Why did the author choose to highlight key terms throughout the text? These words include *Light Séance*, *Dark Séance*, *Bullet Catch*, *Chair Test*, *Battering Ram*, *Three Graces*, *Asrah Levitation*, *Metamorphosis*, *Puzzling Parasol*, *Chalk Talk*, and *Frame Illusion*. How did this help support the reader?
9. How did tragedy change the lives of Anna, Adelaide, Dixie, Mary, Margaretha, and Ellen, and what can we learn from their perseverance?
10. How was Emma Ellen Armstrong's story different from the other six magicians discussed in the book? How was her journey made more difficult because of Jim Crow laws and other racist structures in place?
11. How did the design of the book help support your understanding of the time period discussed, magic, and more? Consider the images, primary sources, color, and overall organization of the text.
12. How does Hays include historical context to help the reader better understand the time periods covered in this book? How did these details help you better understand the courage, perseverance, and tenacity of the magicians?
13. In the epilogue, Anna Hays says, "I also keep wondering if I got it right. With nonfiction, there are leaps of faith when evidence is scarce, which was the case for these women who had been virtually forgotten from history." (p. 221) What does a nonfiction writer do when there is a lack of evidence? Do you think Hays was able to get it right?
14. Hays says, "The magicians portrayed in *Vanished* opened my eyes to the adventure that comes with living out a dream, even if that dream means overcoming hardship and adversity." (p. 223) In her book we learned about seven women who vanished from the history books and their impact on culture and magic was forgotten until Hays wrote this book. Who else has been hidden from the history books, and how can their stories be brought to light?
15. In the introduction, Hays says, "My hope with *Vanished* is that when you read these incredible true tales of fearless women, you too will brave the impossible and live a life of passion and adventure." (p. 3) Did Hays meet this goal? How will you bravely meet the impossible?

Discussion questions written by Nicole Woulfe

An Immense World

Ages
9-12



About the Book

Did you know that there are turtles who can track the Earth's magnetic fields? That some fish use electricity to talk to each other? Or that giant squids evolved their enormous eyeballs to look out for whales?

The world is so much BIGGER and more “immense” than we humans experience it. We can only see so many colors, we can only feel so many sensations, and there are some senses we can't access at all.

Exploring the amazing ways animals perceive the world is an excellent way to help understand the world itself. And this young readers adaptation of the mega-bestseller *An Immense World* is perfect for curious kids and their families. Sure to capture young readers' interest, it is filled with amazing animal facts and stunning full-color illustrations.

Along the way are tons of amazing animals facts: Did you know that leopard pee smells like popcorn? That there is a special kind of shrimp whose punches are faster than a bullet? That it's important to take your dog for dedicated “smell walks”? Want to know the real reason zebras have stripes? (Hint: it's not for camouflage.) Pick up this enthralling and enormously entertaining book to find out!

Themes: Animals/Nonfiction, Science & Nature, Ecology & Conservation, Concepts/Senses, Nonfiction

Discussion Questions

1. Think critically: Why are so many “smell words” borrowed from “flavor words”?
2. Why is taste important? Why would a baby be born with the ability to taste bitterness?
3. What is the difference between taste and smell?
4. Why does Yong compare a scallop's brain to a security guard watching monitors?
5. What is the difference between monochromats, dichromats, trichromats, and tetrachromats?
6. Why are tetrachromats so difficult to identify?
7. Why are rats used for experiments? What is the difference between nociception and pain? How are they related?
8. How is hibernation different from sleep?
9. Why do you think touch is one of the least studied senses?
10. What do treehoppers and elephants have in common, despite their huge difference in size?
11. How has hearing guided the evolution of some animals? Why does bird hearing change across the seasons?
12. Why is echolocation referred to as “touching with sound”?
13. Compare electrolocation and echolocation. How are they similar? How are they different?
14. How does learning about an animal's experience of their world expand our understanding of our own?
15. What affects are humanmade noises having on animals? Why do they more dramatically affect sea creatures?

[Click here for the full discussion guide](#)

A World Without SUMMER

About the Book

A couple of hundred years ago, on a quiet Indonesian island, a volcano called Tambora erupted with a force and violence that changed history.

It tore apart the island, and in the months and years that followed, its fallout tore apart the world. The sun refused to shine; the rain refused to stop. Everything that everyone assumed would always be there—a world that made sense, a climate that made sense—was suddenly gone.

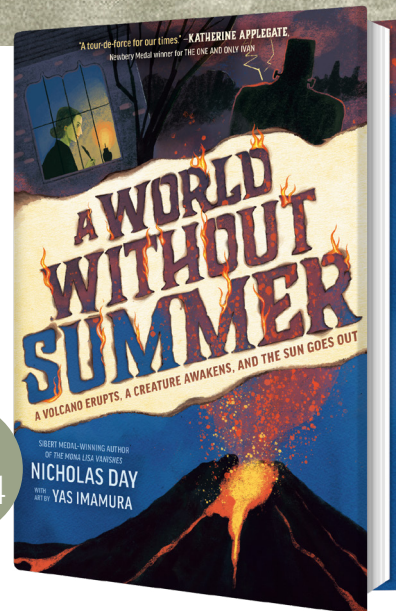
From this riot of thunder and lightning, a young woman named Mary Shelley conceived of a scientist and his cursed creature. From the nightmare of Tambora, she wrote a nightmare of a book: *Frankenstein*—a terrifying reminder of how much damage we humans might do, without even realizing it.

This is the story of a volcano that changed the world and a creature that changed us.

Once upon a time, everything was different. And no one knew if it would ever be the same.

In this masterful work of middle-grade nonfiction, Nicholas Day, author of the Sibert Award-winning *The Mona Lisa Vanishes*, brings us a story taken from the archives but seemingly scripted for us today: a tale of climate change and human folly and hope—and what happens when the world suddenly goes wrong.

Themes: Nonfiction



Ages
10-14

Discussion Questions

1. Our story begins in the archipelago of Indonesia. What is an archipelago? Find Indonesia on a map, then locate the island Sumbawa, home of Mount Tambora. Now find a map that shows Indonesia relative to its tectonic plates and identify the Ring of Fire. Research the Ring of Fire and its geographic and geological significance. Keep Tambora's location within this volatile basin in mind as you read the book.
2. Illustrator Yas Imamura used digital brushes and gouache to create artwork that appears throughout the book. What are these materials—digital brushes and gouache? Sometimes nonfiction books will include photographs or other primary visual resources. Why might this particular story rely on original artwork? What does the artwork signal to you as you are reading? How does this specific artwork support Nicholas Day's storytelling?
3. Create a timeline and update it with major events and significant dates as you are reading. Clearly, we'll note April 10, 1815, as a bold entry! What other notable events will you add to your timeline? Feel free to work as a class on a larger timeline and consider including sketches with visual representations of the events you include.
4. Early in the book, author Nicholas Day introduces us to the phrase "climate shock—a sudden, terrifying shift in the seasons." (p. 2) Is this a term you're familiar with? Can you think of recent examples of climate shocks, such as prolonged drought in the Horn of Africa or California's forest fires, environmental events that bring "the chaos, the uncertainty, the fear" (p. 2) like that which followed Tambora's eruption? As you're reading, keep a list of questions you have about climate shock and work with a trusted adult to find reliable sources for climate science information to answer those questions.
5. This book starts with Tambora's eruption, then weaves the stories of Mary Shelley and the weather-related catastrophes of the Year Without a Summer. Discuss the author's choice of verb tense (see pp. 1, 38, and 260, for example), the narrative flow of *A World Without Summer*, and the use of multiple plot threads to advance the overarching theme. Is this the first book you've read that connects seemingly disparate elements into one tight story, or can you think of others? What effect does it have on you as a reader to piece together multiple events occurring in different places at the same time?
6. Which unillustrated scene of the story is so cinematic you can picture it in your mind as you're reading? Create a four-panel comic rendering of that moment in a graphic novel format.
7. Author Nicholas Day's writing style is distinctive—it's concise yet floridly descriptive, sardonic but still collegial, frank and informative, and occasionally grim. How did the narrative voice make you feel as you read this book? Create a collage or a playlist inspired by the book's tone and pace.

Discussion questions created by Kit Ballenger

[Click here for the full discussion guide](#)

HICK

About the Book

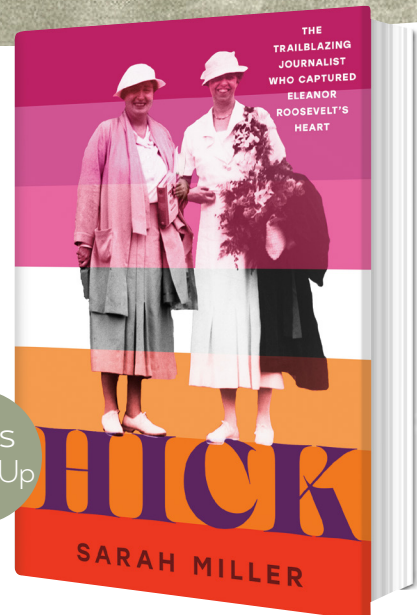
Lorena Hickok came from nothing. She was on her own from the age of fourteen, cooking and scrubbing for one family after another as she struggled to finish school. But the girl who secretly longed for affection discovered she had a talent with words.

That talent allowed Hick to carve out a place for herself in the male-dominated newsrooms of the Midwest, where she earned bylines on everything from football to opera to politics. By age thirty-five, she'd become one of the Associated Press's top reporters.

At the moment her career was taking off, Hick was assigned to cover Eleanor Roosevelt during FDR's presidential campaign. By the close of 1932, Hick was head over heels in love with the wife of the president-elect. And her life would never be the same.

Acclaimed author Sarah Miller read the 3,500 letters that exist between Lorena Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt to reconstruct their friendship and love, and bring Hick's story to a new generation.

Themes: History & Social Studies, Biography & Autobiography, Girl Interest



Discussion Questions

1. How does Hickok's ethical dilemma in the prologue set the stage for the rest of the book?
2. What aspects of Hickok's early years shaped her strengths and weaknesses as a reporter, friend, and person?
3. From a young age, Hickok determined that something was wrong with her by misinterpreting her unhealthy family dynamics as her "fault." Who were the many people in Hickok's life that helped her realize she mattered, and how did they do so? Who has positively impacted your life?
4. How did Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt affect one another personally and professionally?
5. Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt experienced conflict in their relationship and, for the most part, lived very different lives. What connection and values did they share that enabled them to develop and maintain a strong relationship?
6. How and why does Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt's relationship change over time? How have your relationships changed over time, or how might they change?
7. This story, particularly the intimate details, is pulled from the long letters Hick and Eleanor wrote to each other their whole adult lives. What kind of story might be written about you based on the messages between you and your friends?
8. How did Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt's relationship affect American and world politics, and the field of journalism? How do your relationships affect the world around you?
9. How did Hickok's socioeconomic status as a single woman impact her finances and therefore the life choices available to her in the first half of the 1900s?
10. When Hickok lived in Minneapolis with Ellie, homosexual acts were a crime. When the Lorena Hickok Papers were opened in 1978, the reporter who discovered them tried to reseal or remove them to "protect" Eleanor Roosevelt's legacy. What has happened since then that allows this book to be written and published in mainstream media now?
11. In the author's note the author describes her experience reading the Hickok-Roosevelt correspondence and how she chose to handle the implicit bias all readers bring to primary sources. How did her choice to primarily attribute emotions through quotations impact the writing? How did it affect the story?
12. The author states, "The precise nature of Hickok and Roosevelt's relationship is still debated today." How do you interpret their relationship? How does the nature of their relationship matter to history?

Discussion questions written by Erica Lobel

[Click here for the full discussion guide](#)

DEATH in the Jungle

8 Starred Reviews

About the Book

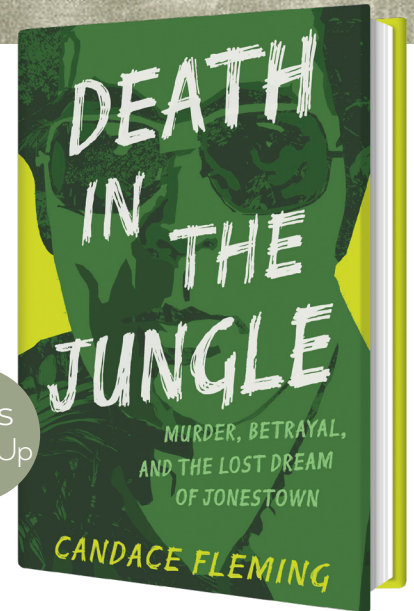
Using riveting first-person accounts, award-winning author Candace Fleming reveals the makings of a monster: from Jones's humble origins as a child of the Depression to his founding of a group whose idealistic promises of equality and justice attracted thousands of followers to his relocation of Temple headquarters from California to an unsettled territory in Guyana, South America, which he dubbed "Jonestown" to his transformation of Peoples Temple into a nefarious experiment in mind control.

And Fleming heart-stoppingly depicts Jones's final act, persuading his followers to swallow fatal doses of cyanide as a test of their ultimate devotion.

Here is a sweeping story that traces, step by step, the ways in which one man slowly indoctrinated, then murdered, 900 innocent, well-meaning people. And how a few members, Jones's own son included, stood up to him . . . but not before it was too late.

History & Social Studies, Nonfiction

Ages
12 and Up



Discussion Questions

1. In the prologue, a former member of Peoples Temple reflects, "No one joins a cult, they join a cause." (p. 16) How does this framing help you understand why so many people joined Peoples Temple?
2. How did Jim Jones's early years mold him into the leader he would become?
3. How did Jim Jones use racist policies like redlining to his advantage?
4. Why did Jim Jones make the shift from religion to socialism? How did this shift impact the members of Peoples Temple?
5. As Fleming ends part one, she writes, "It would be another decade before Stephan learned the truth: His father had been the bogeyman." (p. 75) How does this sentence demonstrate her craft as an author? What other examples of Fleming's craft have you noticed?
6. On page 107, Jones is quoted as saying, "When your world has failed you, I'll be standing, because I am freedom. I am peace. I am justice. I am God!" How does this shift in language give Jones even more power?
7. "Jones had long meddled in the family life of his followers, but by 1972 he was routinely breaking up marriages, recommending divorces, and suggesting alternative partners for adults." (p. 131) Why was this strategy effective in controlling members of Peoples Temple? What other steps did Jones take to maintain control?
8. Chapter 24 is called "Death and Sacrifice." Why were these powerful themes for Jones?
9. How were journalists able to make the "First Cracks" in Peoples Temple, as Fleming describes in chapter 26?
10. On page 191, Fleming introduces the promotional film Jones made to show members in California. These promotional films are available online. After viewing the film, reflect on your thoughts. Does the film match the description on page 191? What surprises you about the footage? What questions do you have after watching?
11. What was it like to live in Guyana as a member of Peoples Temple? How did things change as more members arrived?
12. "The timing of these broadcasts was intentional. 'Hitler did his indoctrination speeches around six to seven p.m. when workers were home eating and their resistance to change was low,' one innercircle member had written to Jones in a memo. It was an idea the Führer-admiring Jones seized on." (p. 219) What other lessons from Hitler did Jones utilize, and how were the members of Peoples Temple impacted?
13. As Fleming explains, "within the Black community African American members of Peoples Temple were stigmatized as having been duped by a white man." (p. 312) Why does Sikivu Hutchinson believe that argument is inadequate?
14. Fleming is aware of the power of words and makes sure to inform the reader about her word choices at the start of the book. How does this framing help the reader better understand the text? What other shifts in language have you encountered in your study of the past, and why was that shift crucial to your understanding of the topic?

Discussion questions written by Nicole Woulfe

[Click here for the full discussion guide](#)