

PEACHTREE *Teen* BOOK CLUB GUIDE



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Hollow by Taylor Grothe

- ★ “Lush prose conjures vivid imagery that increasingly unsettles as Grothe’s tale tips from tense to terrifying.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)
- ★ “A fantastic lost-in-the-woods horror.”
—*Booklist* (starred review)

ABOUT THE BOOK

Don’t Let the Forest In meets *The Whispering Dark* in a queer YA cult horror following a recently diagnosed autistic teen who becomes enmeshed in a community of outcasts harboring sinister secrets.

After a meltdown in her school cafeteria prompts an unwanted autism diagnosis, Cassie Davis moves back to her hometown in upstate New York. Cassie’s never truly felt normal anywhere, but she does crave the ease she used to have with her old friends.

Problem is that her friends aren’t so eager to welcome her back into the fold. They extend an olive branch by inviting her on their backpacking trip to Hollow Ridge. But when a fight breaks out their first night, Cassie wakes to a barren campsite—her friends all gone.

With severe weather approaching and nearing sensory overload, Cassie is saved by a boy named Kaleb, who whisks her away to a compound of artists and outcasts he calls the Roost. But as the days pass, strange happenings around the Roost make Cassie question her instincts. Are the dangers in the forest, on the trail, or in the Roost itself?

In a world where autistic characters rarely get to be the hero of their own stories, *Hollow* is as much a love letter to neurodiversity as it is a haunting tale you’ll want to read with the lights on.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Hollow* is structured in five parts. Why do you think the author chose this structure, and how do the titles of each part reinforce that choice? In what ways do the John James Audubon quotes shape your expectations or understanding as you enter each section?
- The book begins with: “Cassie Davis was no hero” (p. 1). Why does Cassie believe this about herself? According to the novel, what does it mean to be a hero—or not to be one? How does *Hollow* explore and get to the root of this question?

- Think about the patterns of a hero's journey. What does it mean to be on a hero's journey? How does or doesn't Cassie's journey align with the archetypal hero's journey? Where does the pattern break from the traditional hero's journey structure? What might those differences reveal?
- How does the way Cassie's autism and anxiety are framed affect your understanding of her character and her journey? In what ways did Cassie's journey help you to understand yourself and your own life journey? Do you think of yourself as the hero of your own story? What shapes that view?
- Coming-of-age stories often follow characters as they navigate identity, change, and self-discovery. In what ways can *Hollow* be read as a coming-of-age story? What parts of Cassie's journey might feel familiar to many readers, and what parts are shaped by experiences specific to her neurodivergence, family background, or trauma? Do you think "coming-of-age" is the best way to describe this novel, or does it miss something essential? Why or why not?
- Conflict drives both the tension and the emotional depth of *Hollow*. Consider how Cassie's internal doubts and fears collide with external dangers and complex relationships. How does the novel use these intertwined conflicts to explore what it means to be seen, understood, and accepted? How do moments of conflict push Cassie toward self-discovery, and what does this suggest about the role of struggle in coming-of-age stories or, more generally, in personal growth?
- How does *Hollow* use the elements of horror—fear, setting, suspense, foreshadowing, and mystery—to shape your experience of the story? Which moments made you feel the most tension or unease, and why? How do these elements reflect Cassie's inner fears, her relationships, and the challenges she faces?
- What defines friendship for Cassie? How is that similar to or different from how Melody, Jaq, and Blake define friendship? How would you describe the relationship that Cassie, Jac, Melody, and Blake have? What evidence of their friendship do you see in the novel?
- If you were ghosted by a good friend who then came back into your life, would you give them a second chance? How does *Hollow* portray the pain and complexity of reconnecting after distance or betrayal? What does the book have to say about forgiving, reconnecting, hanging on to the past, or letting go?
- Are the friendships in the novel healthy or harmful? What do these relationships reveal about what the characters need and what they fear? Which character would you choose as a friend, and what does that choice say about what you value in relationships?
- In what ways do Cassie's relationships with her parents and her friends create pressure to perform, mask, or change? What kinds of coping mechanisms do Cassie, Jac, Melody, and Blake use when dealing with the feeling of being abandoned or left behind? How does using these strategies impact Cassie, Jac, Melody, and Blake as individuals and as friends?
- Why is Cassie afraid of telling the truth about what's been going on in her life to her friends? How do her experiences affect the way she sees herself? How do you think her experiences motivate the way she acts with Kaleb? Who does she need to trust?
- In *Hollow*, the author uses crows, wooden dolls, and the forest setting as recurring symbols. How do these elements reflect Cassie's fears, her emotional state, and her struggles with identity and belonging? In what ways do they complicate what the Roost represents as a place of safety, and how do they connect to one another symbolically to reveal the novel's deeper themes?

- In what ways do Cassie’s fears and emotional struggles intersect with the dangers and mysteries of the settings around her? Could the story exist without these external pressures? How would removing them change Cassie’s journey?
- Childhood memories don’t necessarily represent reality. What does *Hollow* suggest is the essence of “childhood”? What does Kaleb mean by “Good friends like that, they keep you young?” (p. 127). How is this story about the disappearance of childhood illusion?
- How do the main characters’ own emotional wounds shape the way they interpret each other’s behavior? Where in the story do they misread one another because of their personal pain, and where do they manage to see each other clearly despite it? Look for moments when a character fails to recognize someone else’s pain and moments when they succeed. What do these moments reveal about their emotional limits and strengths?
- The novel argues that Cassie is worthy of love exactly as she is. Why do you think it’s so easy for Cassie—and for many people—to believe they must change major parts of themselves to be accepted? Have you ever felt pressure to change who you are in order to be liked? How does *Hollow* explore this universal experience through a neurodivergent lens?
- What do you know about the residents of the Roost? How do you think they came to be there? Were they all “trapped and remade into something else” (p. 301) or do you think some of them wanted to be there? What do you think about Melody’s choice?
- How does the novel use foreshadowing and mystery to deepen the tension? Identify clues about characters, events, or outcomes that made you rethink your assumptions as the story unfolded. How does this interplay of the unknown and the revealed mysteries shape your experience of the book’s horror?
- What did you think about the resolution of the novel? How did you think this story was going to end? What ideas stayed with you after finishing the novel?

Guide created by Rachael Walker, a consultant on educational programs with a special focus on children’s literacy and reading resources, Arlington, Virginia.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Taylor Grothe is a neurodivergent (ASD) NB horror writer with an MFA from Fairfield University. Their work has appeared in *Haven Speculative*, *Shortwave Magazine*, *Coffin Bell*, *Parents*, *Verywell Family*, *Brevity’s* writing craft blog, and an anthology published by Bag of Bones Press. Taylor acted as a special editor for the *Brevity* special issue *Trans Experience* in 2022. They live in southwestern Connecticut with their spouse, two daughters, a Portuguese Water Dog, and two cats. *Hollow* is their debut novel.