

The Scarab Heart

by Michael Gallagher



author photo by Elaine Jeffs

A discussion guide for reading groups

As a teacher—as well as a 15-year veteran of various reading groups—I find the quickest way to kill a productive conversation about any book is to introduce the kind of questions that only ever belong in an exam.

*The best questions to ask are always open ones. What did you think of this book? Which characters were you able to relate to? Which parts gripped you and which parts didn't? You might also want to comment on the story's pace, the language used, the climax and what comes after it—the dénouement. As *The Scarab Heart* contains two intertwining stories, bear in mind that it has two climaxes and two dénouements.*

That said, here are a few suggestions you may like to consider when discussing this book:

- ⤴ Given people's reactions to Lizzie's abilities in the novel, is she wrong to want to return to a normal life?
- ⤴ What do you think Lizzie learns from Merit?
- ⤴ When Miss Otis learns about Lizzie's relationship with Aashiq, how well does she handle the situation? What makes her handle it this way? How does Merit's grandmother deal with Merit's and Smenkh-ka-re's relationship before the arrival of the plague?
- ⤴ Was Miss Otis right to force Lizzie to use her powers in front of everybody to save Mr Peyton's friend? Would Lizzie have stepped in anyway?
- ⤴ The author Kurt Vonnegut when giving advice to aspiring writers said they should always make their characters want something—even if it's only a glass of water. What do you think the *Ifritah* wants? Is the blue stone a blessing or a curse? Why do you think it breaks?

Do email me to let me know how your group gets on with it. I'd be fascinated to hear!