The Song of Orphan's Garden

READING GROUP GUIDE

About the Book

Since the death of their parents, Lyriana and her brother Zave have been on their own in a world that's getting ever-colder and more dangerous. Without the Fermata they need to enter one of the Giant King Cormoran's gardens, they are desperate to reach the fabled Orphan's Garden. If the stories are true, this lush, warm garden is an escape from the icy world, free from cruel King Cormoran. If they don't find the garden soon, Lyriana isn't sure Zave will make it.

But Lyriana and Zave are not the only ones searching for Orphan's Garden. The Giant boy Brob's family has been banished by King Cormoran, left to the cruel lashings of the Winter Spirits. Everyone knows Giants can't last long in the Winter Blight, but Brob has a secret: a lush garden deep in the Winter Blight that he accidentally created when he was only six years old. Just when Brob starts to lose hope that the magical garden is still out there, there it is. Except that it's overrun with Human children! Can Brob and Lyriana put aside their differences and find a way to work together to save the garden and rescue them all?

About the Author

Nicole M. Hewitt is a middle grade author living in the Chicago suburbs with her husband, three grown kids, and two overly-enthusiastic pups. She first flexed her creative muscles as a theatre major at the University of Illinois and later taught theatre, writing, and ELA at a large homeschool co-op. More recently, she worked as the Kids' Specialist at her local Barnes & Noble. Nicole loves singing and can often be heard spontaneously composing incredibly profound songs about the fluffiest members of her family (the dogs, in case you weren't sure).

For additional materials, including a book trailer, sheet music, deleted scenes, and more, visit nicolemhewitt.com/resources

Written by Chris Clark, a writer and reading teacher who lives with her family in coastal Maine. This guide has been provided for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story through poems rather than in a more traditional prose format? What did you enjoy most about it? Was there anything you found challenging about reading a story told in verse?
2. What is Orphan's Garden? Who created it, and what was unusual about its creation? What does the garden offer to the children who live there? Is there a place in the world that you find especially safe and healing? Where is it, and why does it feel so special to you?
3. In what ways do the Giants and Humans in this story misunderstand each other? Do you see similar misunderstandings in the world around us? What do you think we can do to bridge these gaps?
4. How do the Giants and Humans feel about having to work together to maintain the gardens? Have you ever had to work with someone you didn't like or trust? Did you find a way to work together productively, or did you struggle?
5. Lyriana and her mother are both Songsummoners. What does it mean to be a Songsummoner? How does Lyriana feel about being one? What is a Greensgrower? Why does Brob want to be one? Would you want to be a Songsummoner or a Greensgrower? Why or why not?
6. Lyriana says, "I know better / than to be like Mama." What does she mean by this? Why doesn't she want to be like her mother?
7. What is Fermata? Where does it come from, and why is it so valuable in Gairda? What is the cost of Fermata for the people who can summon it? Bonus: Look up what a fermata is in music and discuss how that's related to the story.
8. What are the Seasonal Spirits like and what role do they play in Gairda? How are the spirits like and unlike the Humans and Giants?
9. What is King Cormoran like? Is he a good leader? Why or why not? What do you think makes someone a good leader?
10. In the poem, "A Recitation of King Cormoran's Justification," King Cormoran tries to explain why he behaves as he does. Do you buy his justification? This poem is written as a sestina, which is a structured form of poetry in which the words at the ends of lines are repeated in a strict pattern. Why do you think the author chose this form for "King Cormoran's Justification"?
11. Why do Brob and his family get exiled from King Cormoran's gardens? Do you think this is fair? What do you think is a fair way to treat people who have made a mistake?
12. What do Brob and Lyriana think of each other when they first meet? Why? How does their relationship change over time? Have you ever disliked someone when you first met them, and then your feelings changed as you got to know them better? Who was it? Why didn't you like them at first, and why did your feelings change?
13. Brob, Lyriana, and Zave all have a mix of Giant and Human Blood. Why don't they want other people to know about this? How does this mixed ancestry turn out to be a benefit?
14. Why does Brob wait so long to tell Lyriana and the others that he is not actually an orphan? Do you think this was the right decision? Have you ever waited a long time to share something important with people you care about? Was it the right decision for you, or did you wish you had told them sooner?
15. Why is Lyriana so reluctant to trust people? Do you trust people easily, or are you more hesitant, like Lyriana? What are the benefits of trusting people? What can be hard or scary about it?
16. How does Brob feel when he finds his garden full of Humans? What happens to Orphan's Garden after Brob kicks the children out? Why do you think this happens?

17. Lyriana thinks that "Maybe we are building something here / stronger than blood / stronger than walls. "What are Lyriana, Brob, and the other children building? How is it different from the world the adults in their lives have built?
18. As he gets to know Lyriana and her Human friends, Brob says, "The truth of the world feels foggier now, and clearer all at once. / Like I've been viewing my own personal history through a / cracked lens and I'm just now starting to make the repairs." In what ways are the children changing how Brob views the world? Have you ever had an experience that majorly shifted your view of the world?
19. How do Brob's parents treat him? How does it make Brob feel? Have you ever felt frustrated by the way your parents treat you?
20. The poems in THE SONG OF ORPHAN'S GARDEN are told in a multiple characters' voices. Whose voices are included? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story through multiple voices and styles of poetry rather than just one narrator and style?
21. Compare the poems written in Lyriana's voice to the ones written in Brob's voice. How do they look different on the page? What else is similar and/or different about their voices in the poems? Why do you think the author did this?
22. What is the role of music in Gairda and in the characters' lives? What musical language and references to music did you notice in the story? Is music an important part of your own life? In what way?
23. What is an ocarina? Why is her mother's ocarina so precious to Lyriana? What happens to the ocarina, and how does it make Lyriana feel? Have you ever lost or broken something really important to you? What was it, and how did it make you feel? How did you move on from the loss?
24. In the poem "Medley," Lyriana and Brob's voices join together in a single poem for the first time. What is a medley in music? What is happening in the book during this poem, and how is it a medley? What happens next?
25. What sacrifice does Lyriana make at the end of the book? Why does she make this sacrifice even though she has sworn she will not be like her mother? Do you think it was the right thing to do?
26. At the end of the book, Lyriana realizes that she is "merely / one chord / in a complex concerto." What does she mean by this?

Extension Activities

1. Music holds great power in THE SONG OF ORPHAN'S GARDEN. Create a glossary of the musical terms in the book. Define each one and explain how it's used in the book. If you'd like, you can add audio to your glossary to give examples of different musical instruments and forms.
2. Several of the poems in this book are written in structured poetic forms, which are listed on the next page. Choose one of these forms and research it. Make a poster or slideshow that answers these questions: What are the features of a poem written in your chosen form? What are some other examples of poems written in this form? Why does this form work well for the poem or poems written in it in the book? If you'd like, try writing a poem in that form yourself!

Guide to the Poetic Forms Used in this Book

In addition to the free verse poems in the book, the author uses several other forms of poetry. They are:

Awdl Gywydd Poem
A poem made up of four-line stanzas with seven syllables per line (originally a Welsh poetic form). The poem follows specific complex rhyming rules and uses both internal and end-of-line rhymes. “The Seasonal Spirits' New Song” is written in this form.

Blitz Poem
This form of poetry is a stream of short phrases (often including clichés) that uses repetition in a very specific pattern: the first word of line one and two are the same, and then the last word of the second line starts the next two lines, and so on. It normally consists of exactly 50 lines, but because of Brob’s formatting, the author combined two lines into one with spacing between them. There are special rules for the final two lines of the poem and even the words for the title have to come from specific lines! "What it Takes" is a blitz poem.

Double Etheree
An etheree has 10 lines. The first line has a single syllable, and each line “grows” by one syllable until the tenth line has 10 syllables. (Or, in a reverse etheree, the lines start at 10 syllables and go down to one). A double etheree combines an etheree and a reverse etheree together into one poem. "The Watcher" is a Double Etheree.

Elegy
An elegy is a poem that expresses loss or grief, often about the death of a person or something that has died, like a relationship or feeling. The poem “Oh Sister! My Sister!” is an elegy. It is modeled after a famous elegy by the poet Walt Whitman, "O Captain! My Captain!"

Ghazal
A type of poetry made up of rhyming couplets (originally an Arabic verse form). The first couplet includes a rhyme followed by a refrain at the end of each line. Then the rhyme and refrain is repeated in the second line of the rest of the couplets. The poem "The Seasonal Spirits Speak" is a ghazal.

Haiku
A three-line poem with seventeen syllables, written with a 5/7/5 syllable count (originally a Japanese poetic form). Haikus often focus on nature and capture a single moment in time. The poems “Winter Spirits,” “Winter’s Joys,” “Summer,” “Autumn,” and “Spring” are written in this form.

Sestina
A poem with six stanzas of six lines and a final triplet. All stanzas have the same six words at the ends in six different sequences (in a very specific pattern), and all six words appear in the final triplet. “A Recitation of King Cormoran's Justifications” is a sestina.

Sonnet
A fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter and adhering to a specific rhyme scheme, often with a volta, or “turn” toward the end, where there is a distinct change in the argument or thought. The poem "Splendors Spoiled" is written in this form.

Traditional Nursery Rhyme or Lullaby
The poem “Summer's Healing” is written in this form.