

Race to the Bottom of the Sea

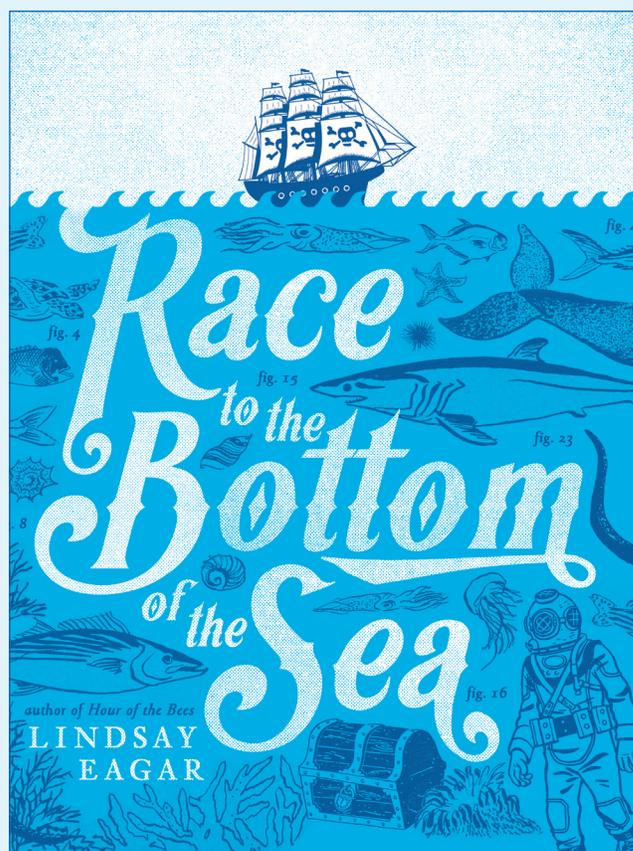
LINDSAY EAGAR

About the Book

When her parents, the great marine scientists Dr. and Dr. Quail, are killed in a tragic accident, eleven-year-old Fidelia Quail is racked by grief—and guilt. It was a submarine of Fidelia’s invention that her parents were in when they died, and it was she who pressed them to stay out longer when the raging Undertow was looming. But Fidelia is forced out of her mourning when she’s kidnapped by Merrick the Monstrous, a pirate whose list of treasons stretches longer than a ribbon eel. Her task? Use her marine know-how to retrieve his treasure, lost on the ocean floor. But as Fidelia and the pirates close in on the prize, with the navy hot on their heels, she realizes that Merrick doesn’t expect to live long enough to enjoy his loot. Could something other than black-hearted greed be driving him? Will Fidelia be able to master the perils of the ocean without her parents—and piece together the mystery of Merrick the Monstrous before it’s too late?

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



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Also available in audio and as an e-book

★ “Eagar’s novel never lags or loses heart, and it’s irresistibly baited with a cursed treasure hoard, danger, and candy. . . . Refreshingly, women are as likely to captain a ship as plunder it in this fictional world.”
—*Booklist* (starred review)

★ “Set in a world that combines futuristic and historical elements to intriguing effect . . . this is an exciting maritime adventure with a strong, layered heroine.”
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)



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Discussion Questions

1. From the beginning of the book, Fidelia is presented as someone who is courageous and intelligent. Imagine the panic and fear that set in when she finds the *Egg* mangled and dented. What would make Fidelia want to continue to be courageous and brave even after the worst has happened?
2. Fidelia had insisted her parents stay out longer in the *Egg*, “had pushed, pushed to the very edge of the storm’s mercy” (page 39). Why does Fidelia blame herself for their fate?
3. For a period of time after the *Egg* disaster, Fidelia does not even “put so much as a toe in the ocean” (page 60). Do you think Fidelia is afraid of the ocean, or is the ocean too much of a painful reminder of what happened to her parents?
4. Aunt Julia suggests that she and Fidelia “need a new start” (page 68). By the time the book ends, do you believe they have found that new start? Why?
5. When Fidelia meets Merrick, he says, “I’m not just a pirate, Quail. I’m *the* pirate” (page 83). What does Merrick mean by this? Does he prove it to be true throughout the course of the book?
6. Fidelia messages her aunt telepathically that she will find a way home. The author writes, “Home. Fidelia still didn’t know where that really was” (page 134). By the end of the book, does Fidelia find a new home, or do you think she still doesn’t know where it is?
7. How do things change for Merrick when he is imprisoned by Niccu for the first time and becomes a captive on his own ship? What does this do to Merrick’s sense of pride? Do you think Merrick knows he will escape?
8. Fidelia can’t forget Merrick’s words “We’re all dying” (page 162). She asks herself, “What would it be like? To know your own countdown had started? To know, every day, that the end was coming, soon enough to measure?” (page 163). Do you think Merrick considered these questions? How do you think he would have answered? How would you answer?
9. “The Quails’ work wasn’t about death. It was about life—and, yes, sometimes that included death” (page 189). What does the author mean by this? How do you know?
10. Merrick reminds Fidelia that she is not the only one who ever lost someone, but to Fidelia “it felt that way sometimes. It felt like no one else in the world could possibly be as alone as she was” (page 205). Do you think Fidelia feels this way because no one else understood ocean science like her parents? Why does Fidelia feel so alone, even though she has her Aunt Julia?
11. Merrick boasts that he is “a vicious, greedy pirate who only cares about gold” and says, “What else is there to chase after?” (page 230). Has Merrick really been after the gold all along? What is truly his heart’s desire? How do you know? Why does it mean so much to him?
12. When Merrick is captured by Admiral Bridgewater, Fidelia realizes she doesn’t want to leave his side, “not when he was so fragile” (page 307). Why have Fidelia’s feelings toward Merrick changed since he first captured her? Has Merrick become her friend?

13. Fidelia knows that Merrick is dying because he'd signed his death sentence when he went into the cave of the red daisies. She suddenly becomes concerned with *how* Merrick will die, because "it did make a difference" (page 331). Why does it make a difference to Fidelia how Merrick dies?
14. When Fidelia is ultimately reunited with her aunt, Julia exclaims, "You're all right!" (page 351). But Fidelia questions whether she really *is* all right. What might make her wonder this?
15. When Fidelia tells her aunt she is going back out to tag the shark, Aunt Julia surprises her by saying, "I was wrong. . . . You are not just a girl. You are a Quail" (page 375). What does it mean to be a Quail to Aunt Julia? To Fidelia?

About the Author



Lindsay Eagar is the author of the novel *Hour of the Bees*. She lives in the mountains of Utah with her husband and daughters.

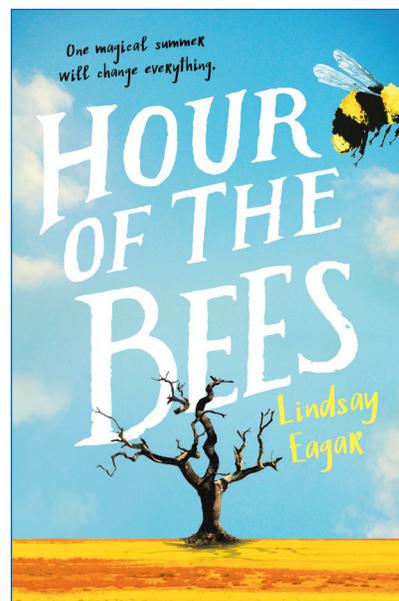
These questions were prepared by Dylan Teut, director for the Plum Creek Children's Literacy Festival in Seward, Nebraska, and an instructor of literacy at Concordia University.

Also by Lindsay Eagar

★ "Eagar seamlessly blends a twelve-year-old girl's summer of change with a hefty dose of magical realism in this accomplished debut. . . . Fairy-tale motifs ("No rain for a hundred years") emphasize the stark physicality of the New Mexican mesa, with its oppressive heat, spindly sheep, and numerous dangers. Through this atmospheric setting, Eagar sustains a sense of wonder and longing for small things (bees, seeds, stories) to respond to big human needs." —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

★ "Tightly plotted and elegantly characterized, this is a striking debut. Both Carol's journey and Serge's stories seem inherently true, and the juxtaposition of the two results in a moving, atmospheric novel of family, heritage, and fairy tales that are more real than not." —*Booklist* (starred review)

★ "The delicate magic of Serge's story ties present and past together in a beautifully written, affecting story of forgiveness and understanding that enables Carol to move forward in her own life, resetting her values and claiming her own place in her grandfather's story. Her sulks, fears, and desires render her credibly twelve, and the storytelling ably prepares readers for her less predictable decisions. Offering a compelling introduction to Latin American magic realism, this will have appeal for middle-school lovers of literary fiction." —*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* (starred review)



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