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COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

The Watch That Ends the Night: Voices from the Titanic provides a sampling of mentor texts for poetry, while also offering the content and specialized vocabulary that is the hallmark of informational text. Historical fiction, as its name implies, is a hybrid of literary and informational text. You can use this guide to extend the exploration of the story of the *Titanic*, poetry, and much more.

The speaking and listening standards of the Common Core State Standards state that students in grades 9–12 should be able to “initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade specific] topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.” The guidelines for students in grades 6–8 are nearly identical. The discussion questions in this guide will help students to master these skills. They are also specifically connected to the reading literature anchor standards.

THE WATCH THAT ENDS THE NIGHT

VOICES FROM THE *TITANIC*

BY ALLAN WOLF

About the Book

Arrogance and innocence, hubris and hope—twenty-four haunting voices of the *Titanic* tragedy, as well as the iceberg itself, are evoked in a stunning tour de force.

Millionaire John Jacob Astor hopes to bring home his pregnant teen bride with a minimum of media scandal. A beautiful Lebanese refugee, on her way to family in Florida, discovers the first stirrings of love. And an ancient iceberg glides south, anticipating its fateful encounter. The voices in this remarkable re-creation of the *Titanic* disaster span classes and stations, from Margaret (“the Unsinkable Molly”) Brown to the captain who went down with his ship; from the lookout crew and wireless men to a young boy in search of dragons and a gambler in search of marks. Slipping in telegraphs, undertaker’s reports, and other historic records, poet Allan Wolf offers a breathtaking, intimate glimpse at the lives behind the tragedy, told with clear-eyed compassion and astounding emotional power.



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Discussion Questions

1. How does knowing some of the history of the *Titanic* affect the way you read *The Watch That Ends the Night*? Does it change the tone of any of the poems?
2. The author says that in some cases he combined research about several individuals into one character in order to create that character's personality. Why would he choose to do that?
3. How is the book's structure different from that of other books you have read? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a story told completely in poetry, letters, telegrams, and reports?
4. How do each of the characters' attitudes and beliefs differ from one another? Are some characters more likeable than others?
5. How does the author make each voice unique?
6. Why might the author have chosen to include the voices of a ship rat and the iceberg?
7. Which poems rhyme or follow a structure? What effect does this have on the tone of the poems or on the depictions of the characters?
8. Think about the passengers' background stories. Are they different or similar to what you'd expect them to be?
9. The author often uses irony. Cite some examples. Is the irony effective? Does it make you think that the characters are looking back on their experiences, or that they are writing poems as the novel unfolds? Explain why.
10. Each character reacts to the sinking ship in his or her own way. Some continue to do what they've been doing. Why might they choose to deal with the situation in this way?
11. How do you feel about the "women and children first" policy?
12. Who do you think the author blames for the sinking? What makes you think that?
13. What are the differences between the ways the members of various social classes are treated? How does this compare to today's society?
14. On page 151, the Spark says, "Communication is all about speed." Do you believe that to be true? Why or why not?
15. What role does new technology play in the novel?
16. How is sound used in the Spark's and the Postman's poems? What effect does this have on the reader? What are some examples of onomatopoeia (words that imitate the sound associated with them), and how does the use of such words enhance this effect?
17. On page 446, the author says he made up the theft of Jamila's money. Why might he have done this? What other decisions does he make as a writer?
18. Sometimes a book's message can be summarized in a single sentence called the theme. Allan Wolf refers to a book's theme as the truth of the novel. How would you sum up this book's truth in a single statement?

Classroom Projects and Activities

The Watch That Ends the Night: Voices from the Titanic contains extensive back matter, including bibliographical, biographical, and historical information, as well as a complete *Titanic* Miscellany. In addition to the websites listed on pages 463–466, these four sites are particularly useful for a classroom teacher encouraging further research.

TITANIC: THE UNSINKABLE SHIP

<http://www.britannica.com/titanic>

HISTORY ON THE NET

<http://www.historyonthenet.com>

TITANIC SCIENCE

<http://www.titanicscience.com>

DOCS TEACH

<http://www.docsteach.org>

Special section of *Titanic* primary documents

Research

Have students read the author's note on page 435. Point out that historical fiction does not always match exactly with history. Then, as a research project, invite students to answer a question the book raises for them. For further inspiration, students may wish to read the factual biographies of each character beginning on page 436.

Note: The Common Core guidelines for research to build and present knowledge state that students should be able to “conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.” They call on students to “draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.”

Immigration Persuasive Essay

Author Allan Wolf comments on immigration and immigrants through the thoughts and language of his characters. Ask students to consider the words of Olaus Abelseth after the sinking (p. 387), then write an essay answering the question, How is a lifeboat a metaphor

for a country that invites the hopes and dreams of immigrants who are seeking a better life? Have them include an argument about the ways immigration in this country is the same today as it was in 1912, and how it differs.

Note: The college and career readiness anchor standards for writing for grades 6–12, text types and purposes, calls on students to “write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.”

Extension: Invite students to see how many references to immigration they can find throughout the book.

Morse Code Investigation

Have students learn about the history of Morse code. The code itself may be found on page 450, along with the decoded messages of Harold Bride, the Spark. Encourage students to decode these messages on their own.

Poetry

Use *The Watch That Ends the Night* to teach a unit on poetry.

The final poem in the iceberg's voice (page 424) reads simply “I am.” Here the author calls attention to his own writing process by comparing the statement “I am” to the poetic term *iamb*. An iamb is a unit of poetry (a *foot*) made up of two syllables—the first unstressed, the second stressed. The effect is that of a heartbeat: *lub-DUB*. Iambic pentameter refers to a line of poetry made up of five iambs.

As a class, compare the words of the iceberg on page 43 to those on page 415. Have two students read each poem aloud. Point out that the meter of the early poem is a consistent iambic pentameter (five feet or “beats” per line), while the meter of the later poem has changed to an inconsistent meter with a shorter line length: the

first three lines are iambic tetrameter (four feet), the fourth line is three feet, the fifth line is only two, the sixth line is four again. Now have three other students read aloud the words of the iceberg on page 417, then page 421, and finally page 424. Ask the class, How does the shifting form of the poetry fit the shifting form of the iceberg itself? Why do you think the author chooses this form for the iceberg's voice? In what ways are the iceberg's last words both fitting and ironic?

The Watch That Ends the Night is written in a style often categorized as a verse novel. While some of the pieces can be read as stand-alone poems, many of the pieces are meaningless (and less poetic) outside the context of the book's storyline. Have students work in pairs to find two poems in the book, one that stands alone and another that could not stand up outside the book. Have each pair present their poems to the class.

Ask the class: What other attributes do you observe about the verse novel? What advantages and disadvantages does the verse novel have compared to a more traditional prose novel?

Writing Prompts

Watch the 1997 movie *Titanic* and compare and contrast the romance depicted in the movie between Jack and Rose to the romance depicted in *The Watch That Ends the Night* between Alfred Rush and Jamila Nicola-Yarred. Which is more realistic?

Author Allan Wolf portrays many characters in pairs: Margaret Brown and Helen Candee, Harold Bride and Jack Phillips, Oscar Woody and John March, Charles Joughin and Isaac Maynard. What are the advantages of these pairings?

Consider how the Frankie's Gang poems allow the reader to hear from four characters at once. What do these multi-voice poems add to the story?

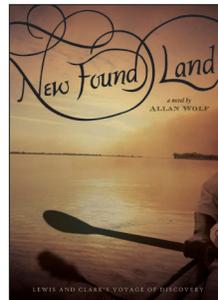
How do the factual biographies of each character in the back matter affect the way you think of the book's fictionalized story? How can historical fiction help us understand history better than traditional nonfiction history?

About Allan Wolf

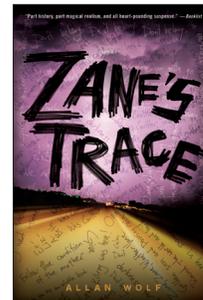
Allan Wolf, an expert poet and storyteller, is the author of the award-winning novels *New Found Land: Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery* and *Zane's Trace*. He lives in Asheville, North Carolina.

Allan Wolf does a formal author presentation (for young people and adults) based on *The Watch That Ends the Night*. It includes readers' theatre, PowerPoint slides, and a five-foot-long foam rubber *Titanic* puppet. You can find more information on his website: <http://www.allanwolf.com>.

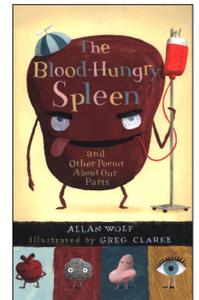
Also by Allan Wolf



New Found Land
HC: 978-0-7636-2113-1
PB: 978-0-7636-3288-5



Zane's Trace
HC: 978-0-7636-2858-1
PB: 978-0-7636-4378-2



The Blood-Hungry Spleen
PB: 978-0-7636-3806-1