

Ghosts: A Novel Study Guide

Ghosts: A Novel by Raina Telgemeier

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Ghosts: A Novel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section 1, pgs 1-50.....	4
Section 2, pgs 51-107.....	7
Section 3, pgs 108-135.....	10
Section 4, pgs 136-183.....	12
Section 5, pgs 184-240.....	15
Characters.....	18
Symbols and Symbolism.....	20
Settings.....	22
Themes and Motifs.....	23
Styles.....	28
Quotes.....	30

Plot Summary

This study guide specifically refers to *Ghosts: A Novel* by Raina Telgemeier : Graphix, imprint of Scholastic, Inc. 2016.

Ghosts: A Novel is a graphic novel about a family moving to a northern California town in hopes of improving the quality of life for Maya, a young girl with cystic fibrosis. Cat, Maya's older sister, is reluctant to move because she does not want to leave her school and friends. However, she knows the move is important to her sister's health. The salty air may help Mays's breathing.

When the family arrives in Bahía de la Luna, it is cold and windy with lots of fog. Cat and Maya explore the area and go to the ocean. Maya is excited to be breathing in the ocean air. They see a boardwalk and try to get into an old arcade. Once they sneak inside, they meet Carlos, who tells them about a ghost tour and all the ghosts that live in the town. Cat rejects the idea of ghosts and takes Maya home.

At home, the girls learn that they have been invited to dinner to meet their new neighbors. When they arrive, Cat realizes that Carlos is her neighbor. Carlos continues to talk about the ghosts in the town and his parents also talk about the día de los muertos celebration. Maya is interested in the ghosts, but Cat does not want to think about it. She gets scared when they make their way home and she is surrounded by the fog and can feel the wind whipping around her.

Carlos offers to take Cat and Maya to meet the ghosts. Maya and Carlos run ahead to the mission with Cat falling behind. She sees her first ghosts and thinks about telling Maya until she meets up with Maya and Carlos and finds that they are surrounded by ghosts. The ghosts steal air from the living so that they can move around. Once the ghosts take too much air from Maya, her health fails quickly. Cat rushes her home to get her to the hospital and Carlos calls 911.

With Maya in the hospital, Cat refuses to speak to Carlos. By the time the school year starts, Cat remains reluctant to spend time with Carlos, but Carlos continues to apologize. Cat makes a new friend in Seo Young.

Maya comes home from the hospital and now has a breathing tube. Cat is concerned about Maya's health and wants to keep her away from the ghosts. Once Halloween arrives, Maya is disappointed that she is not well enough to go trick-or-treating. Maya encourages Cat to go to the día de los muertos party with Seo Young. Cat does not want to go, but relents.

At the día de los muertos party, Cat is overwhelmed by all of the ghosts and the festivities. She meets Carlos' Uncle José who died as a child. José teaches Cat about his life as a ghost and Cat takes him to meet Maya. After José leaves, Cat and Maya realizes that their deceased grandmother has left them a table full of food. They celebrate and eat with their mother.



Section 1, pgs 1-50

Summary

Ghosts: A Novel is written in frames, much like a comic book. The story begins in August with Cat and Maya and their parents getting fast food in Southern California, where they currently live. The family is moving north to Bahía de la Luna because the girls' father got a new job. However, the most important reason for the move is to help with Maya's health. Cat texts with her friends at home. She feels bad about leaving, but she understands why the family is moving. Maya has cystic fibrosis and the sea air in the new town, where is cloudy most of the year, will help with her breathing. The dad turns up the radio, and Maya starts singing along. Maya starts talking about the friends she will miss. Cat is annoyed because Maya is listing all of Cat's friends.

When the family arrives at their new house, the wind is howling. It is chilly because the ocean is nearby. They begin to unpack and listen to music. Maya jumps on the bed and starts coughing. Her mother gives Maya her breathing treatment, which consists of a vest that rattles her body, loosening the mucus in her lungs. The power to the vest causes a fuse to blow. Their mother suggests that Cat take Maya outside to explore. They find a pathway and cross paths with a black cat. Maya wants to pet it, but Cat thinks it will bring bad luck. They continue through the woods and reach the ocean. They race down a staircase to the beach. Maya breathes in the salt air and sees an arcade on the boardwalk. The girls decide to explore.

The arcade is locked, so Cat and Maya peek through the windows. Maya squeezes through a doorway. Cat tries to get her to leave, explaining the dust is dangerous for Maya to breathe. Maya shouts hello and Carlos, a boy the same age as Cat, appears. Carlos tells them that they are early for the ghost tour. Maya is excited, but Cat rejects the idea of ghosts and tries to get Maya to leave. Carlos tells them that they will be back once they have lived in Bahía de la Luna awhile.

Back at home, the girls' mother explains that The Calaverases, their new neighbors, are having them over for dinner. They all go next door, and it turns out that Carlos and his family are the new neighbors. They meet Carlos' father Javier and mother Juana. They have chips and salsa and play with maracas. Carlos tries to get Cat to shake the maracas, but she refuses. They eat tamales and Leona, the girls' mother, explains to them how she wishes they could have tasted her mother's tamales. Carlos explains that Leona may see her mother during día de los muertos. Cat is annoyed by all the talk about ghosts. Maya asks what día de los muertos is and Leona explains that is a celebration the day after Halloween. Javier explains about the parade in town and how there is a celebration at a mission, which is regarded as "a doorway to the spirit world" (45). During dessert, Carlos explains that the fog in the town is the perfect weather for the ghosts. Cat would rather go home.



As they leave for the night, it is windy and foggy. Cat tells herself it is just the weather. She gets frightened and runs into the house.

Analysis

Ghosts: A Novel opens with the family having gotten food from their favorite fast food place before heading out town. As sister, Maya and Cat have a fairly commonplace relationship. What heightens their relationship is Cat's narration explaining Maya's illness. Cat is keenly aware of how serious her sister's cystic fibrosis is and juxtaposing it with something as mundane as eating fast food on a road trip demonstrates how Maya's illness is a part of the everyday life of the family. The interactions in the car help establish the themes of family and fear. This is a solid family unit who is going through a significant change. Certainly there will be fear at the changes that moving brings. As Maya starts singing in the car, it shows how she is more carefree, whereas Cat tends to be more sensitive to the seriousness of the illness and its effects on the family. That the family is in transition at the start of the novel, it foreshadows a transition at the end, showing the family in a state of forward motion. The move the family makes is symbolic of this motion.

Once they arrive at the new house, they all settle in and the reader learns more about Maya's illness and her treatment. When the fuse blows, the girls are sent outside to explore. Cat is reluctant at accepting their new town. She is mindful of Maya as Maya runs around. She cautions her and looks after her. When the girls come across a black cat, Cat is immediately concerned with bad luck and keeps Maya from petting it. Maya is more welcoming and less fearful. She wants to pet the cat and does not concern herself with superstitions. This interaction is indicative of how the girls will react to the revelation that ghosts live in the town.

The presence of the supernatural and the issues of insecurity and awkwardness are examined as Cat and Maya explore the boardwalk and arcade. Just as Maya ran down the steps to the beach trying to pet the black cat, she wants to explore the arcade and see what is inside. Once they get into the arcade, Cat becomes concerned for Maya because she does not think it is good for her to breathe in the dust. The girls meet Carlos, and he tells them about the ghosts. Cat is reluctant to believe. In conversation, she suggests that she is hopeful that ghosts are not real. Cat's refusal to accept the idea of ghosts demonstrates her refusal to accept the serious nature of Maya's disease. In being overprotective of Maya, Cat likely feels some control over keeping her sister from dying.

The interactions between Carlos and Cat are awkward. Cat rejects Carlos' comments about ghosts, but the awkwardness moves past that. They are similar in age and there is likely some flirtation that they are not quite ready to acknowledge or handle. Cat shuffles Maya off as a way to avoid the further conversation. It is also possible that she wants to keep Maya from hearing about ghosts, which she likely regards as a discussion of death.



The motif of death is again realized once the girls get to The Calaverases' for dinner. Cat is not thrilled to see Carlos and does not want to talk or hear about ghosts. But the family is joyful in the description of the día de los muertos celebration. Cat thinks about wanting to be back home and this gives insight into how she may be remembering home as a place where her sister was not as sick. All the discussion of the dead, even if in a celebratory fashion, weighs heavy on Cat. Further, Leona's memories of her mother gives weight to the discussion of the dead. Cat never met her grandmother because she died shortly after Cat was born. In this way, Cat feels the permanence of loss.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Cat get angry when Maya lists the names of the friends she will miss?

Discussion Question 2

What does Cat's protectiveness of Maya at the boardwalk reveal about their relationship?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Leona reminiscent of her mother during the dinner party?

Vocabulary

digestion, gloomy, treatment, mucus, soul, fuse, explore, dangerous, arcade, boardwalk, bienvenidos, spirit, día de los muertos, celebrated, pretend, mission, accommodating



Section 2, pgs 51-107

Summary

In Section 2, Maya begins her “nightly ritual” (50), which consists of getting supplemental nutrients through a port in her stomach. After helping Maya, her dad goes to check on Cat. Cat explains that while she is happy that the move will help Maya, she does not like the new place. He explains that she is just homesick and missing her friends. When Cat complains about everyone talking about ghosts in the town, he suggests that there may have been just as many ghosts back home, but she just did not see them. He tells her goodnight, and she gets frightened. The wind rattles the window, and Maya gets up and looks outside. She spots the black cat in the tree.

The next morning, Cat goes downstairs and overhears Maya ask their mother about their grandmother. Leona explains that she did not always get along with her mother because she felt like a very American teenager, while her mother held the conservative traditions she brought with her from Mexico when she immigrated. Leona rejected her mother’s recipes in favor of microwave meals. Also, she preferred trick-or-treating to día de los muertos. She admits that she regrets not becoming fluent in Spanish. Cat joins them, and they eat concha, a type of donut, which Juana sent home with them the night before. Maya texts Carlos with Cat’s phone which angers Cat.

Later, Carlos arrives, and Cat tells him quickly that Maya is who texted him. Maya shows Carlos the ofrenda they are making for their grandmother. He tells them it needs more decorations. He and Maya go outside and look for things to decorate it. Maya suggests a seashell, but Carlos says it is bad luck to bring seashells into the house because it lures “the discontented undead.” They talk about the ghost tour and pirates. Cat interrupts the conversation, and Carlos dares Cat to go on the ghost tour.

The next day, Carlos takes Maya and Cat on the ghost tour. They walk to the boardwalk and see the arcade, which used to be a bathhouse. He tells them about a projectionist who died in a fire that haunts the cinema. He explains about ghosts on the docks and in the lighthouse. When they get to the Alley of Murals, Maya wants to know if they will see any ghosts. Carlos explains that it is too early in the year to see them. Cat thinks he is lying about the ghosts and he tells her he can prove that ghosts are real. Maya tells her sister that she wants to know what happens when a person dies. Cat tries to deflect her sister, but Maya understands that she will die.

Carlos takes Maya and Cat to the mission to see the ghosts. They have to walk to a remote part of town and through the woods. Cat cautions Carlos about Maya’s lungs and running. Maya and Carlos take off and Cat chases after them, tripping. Cat tries to catch up, but is too far behind. When she reaches the mission, she sees a ghost. She thinks about how she will have to tell her sister, but then she sees Carlos and Maya and they are surrounded by ghosts. Carlos tells them that the ghosts speak Spanish and can be shy around new people. He makes introductions and offers the ghosts a soda.



One of the ghosts transforms into a skeleton-like ghost and greets them. Carlos explains that because the ghosts cannot breathe, they absorb the “essence of the world breathing” (96). Maya is excited playing with the ghosts, and the ghosts like her. Maya begins coughing from the ghosts stealing her breath. Cat tries to chase them away. She grabs Cat and begins running, while Carlos calls 911.

Maya ends up in the hospital. The doctor thinks the spell was caused by the cold air. Cat’s parents are disappointed in Cat. At home, Juana brings over dinner for the family. Carlos tries to apologize, but Cat tells him to stay away from her and Maya. Carlos leaves.

Analysis

Section 2 picks up after the family goes home from the dinner party. Maya and her father are taking care of Maya’s nightly ritual. She needs to take in additional nutrients. The dad gets May situated for the night and then goes in to check on Cat. There continues to be the contrast in the girls’ dispositions. Maya is accepting and appears happy, while Cat seems glum and fearful. Cat is honest about her feelings with her dad. He understands that the move is difficult on her, but he understands that they are all aware of why the move was important. When Cat complains about how people keep talking about ghosts, her dad suggests that the ghosts in their new town may not be anything new. It may have been just as likely that there were ghosts in their old town and that Cat just did not see them. The dad suggests this in a chiding way. He is trying to lighten Cat’s mood by being playful with her. As soon as she is left alone, however, Cat gets scared. The window rattles and she hears noises. Instead of hiding under the covers, she makes a point of going and looking out the window. This demonstrates her willingness to confront what is out there, even though she has no idea what it may be. She spots glowing eyes in the tree and she thinks she may have seen a ghost, but the eyes belong to the black cat. This shows how Cats views intertwine the themes of fear and the supernatural.

The next day, Maya talks with her mother about her grandmother. Cat is mostly an observer to the conversation. These may be questions that she would like to ask, but is unable to. In contrast to Leona talking about how she rejected the traditions of her mother’s homeland, Maya embraces the Mexican tradition of an ofrenda. Maya eagerness to create an ofrenda to her grandmother likely reflects how she wants to be remembered when she is gone. In keeping her grandmother’s spirit alive, she is instructing her family on how to keep hers alive as well.

The idea of the supernatural continues to develop when Maya invites Carlos over and he takes the girls on the ghost tour. The interaction between Cat and Carlos remains awkward. Cat is quick to tell Carlos that Maya is the one who texted him, deflecting any possibility that she likes him. She also continues to think that Carlos is lying about the ghosts. Carlos is adamant that he can prove that they exist, but that it is not the time of year when where they are out and about. He agrees to lead them to the mission, feeling confident that they will be able to see one when they get there. Maya remains eager to



see them and is ready for the adventure. Cat remains cautious. Once Maya takes off running with Carlos, Cat is concerned about Maya running. They get ahead of Cat when Cat trips.

With Cat as the narrator, the story stays with her as she makes her way toward the mission. Fear continues to be an issue as Cat peers around corners at the mission. When she spots a ghost, she is in disbelief. Immediately, she thinks of how she will have to tell Maya. Cat is experiencing some acceptance, not only of an afterlife, but also of following Maya's lead to not be afraid. She continues to look for Maya and Carlos and soon finds them in a courtyard at the mission, surrounded by ghosts.

Carlos explains about the ghosts and how to interact with them. Once the ghost decides to make an introduction, its shape shifts from a ghostly blob to a well-defined skeleton. Maya is energized by the ghosts and they start playing. Maya and the ghosts all appear happy, but their interactions get out of hand. Because the ghosts feed off the breath of the living, their interaction begins to compromise Maya's breathing.

Cat's fear returns as she runs the ghosts off and tries to help her sister. Carlos feels helpless and in a way responsible. He calls 911 while Cat runs off with Maya to get medical attention. Carlos attempts at an apology reinforce the theme of awkwardness and insecurity. The events of the day causes a rift between Cat and Carlos and Cat sends him away.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Cat believe Carlos is lying about the ghosts?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Maya so interested in communicating with ghosts?

Discussion Question 3

How does Maya's interest in ghosts affect her relationship with Cat?

Vocabulary

ritual, nutrients, relationship, obsessed, abuela, immigrated, stubborn, ancestors, modern, recipes, fluent, traditions, concha, handiwork, ofrenda, decorating, driftwood, discontented, revenge, gracias, seeking, normally, discount, bathhouse, amusements, rigged, cinema, rebuilt, projectionist, phantom, tether, beacon, shipwrecks, murals, revolutionary, overlap, contact, entire, shiver, chatter, hola, absorb, supposed, handle, pant, amazed, essence, ancient, centuries, fault, recognize, overexerting, medication



Section 3, pgs 108-135

Summary

Section 3 begins in September when Cat is beginning school. She sees Carlos, and he asks about Maya. Cat reveals that Maya is still in the hospital. Cat excuses herself and goes into the bathroom where she meets Seo Young. Cat is hopeful that Seo Young does not believe in ghosts, but she is looking forward to seeing the ghost of the cutest boy she has ever seen.

At home, Maya is back at home with a breathing tube. Car asks if it is permanent. Her mother reminds her that cystic fibrosis is degenerative and that Maya will never be cured of it. Cat plays music for Maya. At school, Cat and her friends talk about video games. When Carlos walks past, her friends suggest that she has a crush on Carlos. Carlos passes Cat a note that reads: "Please forgive me." (118).

On her way home from school, Cat hears rustling in the wind and hopes it is the black cat again. A ghost appears and she panics, thinking the ghost cannot follow her home and get to Maya. She keeps running, asking the ghost what it wants. She screams that "Maya's not ready!!!" (124). Back at home, Cat and her parents eat fast food and her dad goes back to the office to work. Her mother asks Cat to take out the garbage. Outside, Cat sees ghosts at the fence. She tells the ghosts they are not welcome. Inside, her mother asks who Cat was shouting at. She tells her mom it was a stray cat.

Cat hears Maya coughing and goes to check on her. Maya asks if the ghosts are around and tells her sister that she wants to talk to them. Cat looks outside and when she sees the ghosts, she closes the curtains. One of the ghosts slips in through the window and begins making music. Maya asks if Cat can hear the music too, and Cat can.

Analysis

Section 3 jumps ahead in time. The school year has begun, and Cat is getting to know her new school and make new friends. The awkwardness continues between Cat and Carlos. He makes repeated attempts to apologize to Cat and ask for forgiveness. Because Maya remains in the hospital, Cat struggles with her interactions with Carlos. As Cat makes new friends, such as Seo Young, the tension between Cat and Carlos is obvious. The tension can be interpreted as a symptom of the crush each of them has on the other.

Once Maya is back at home, she has a breathing tube. Cat asks her mother about whether or not the breathing tube is permanent. The tube is a constant reminder of Maya's frailty. Because the disease is degenerative, Cat's mother tries to prepare Cat for the inevitability of Maya's condition. Cat is bothered by the fact that the move was supposed to help improve Maya's condition, but it does not appear to be working out that way.



Fear and death are at the center of how Cat's character arc continues to develop. The narrative follows Cat on her own. She is reflective, and she is afraid. When she hears the rustling, she is hopeful that she is hearing the black cat. It is as if the black cat is a stand in for what Cat has previously experienced with Maya's illness. If the cat were to jump out in front of her, it would be less scary because Cat knows how to react to that. But Cat is forced to confront something new. This time she is confronted by a ghost. It is important that she does not run away from the ghost. In earlier sections, Cat ran inside when she got spooked by the thought of a ghost, but now her reaction is changing. She chases after the ghost, in part to chase it away, but also to confront the ghost. She yells "Maya's not ready!!!" (124). She fears that the ghosts are coming to take her sister. In this way, the ghosts become symbolic of the inevitability of her sister's death. In confronting the ghost as she does, it demonstrates that while she is not ready to lose her sister, she is will to confront the reality of her sister's death.

Back at home, Cat goes to check on Maya. She continues to try and keep the ghosts away from Maya, but one slips through the window. When the ghost makes music, and both sisters are able to hear it, it is meant to comfort both of the sisters. The ghosts are not coming for Maya in a menacing way, but rather to help her prepare for the inevitability of her disease.

Discussion Question 1

How does Cat screaming at the ghosts address the theme of fear?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the ghosts keep appearing to Cat?

Discussion Question 3

What does the music the ghosts make for Maya reveal about them?

Vocabulary

dedicated, definitely, permanent, degenerative, probably, setback, refuse, rebound, principle, quarrel, stray



Section 4, pgs 136-183

Summary

Section 4 begins in October. Cat wakes up, and Maya is jumping up and down exclaiming that the sun is shining and the fog has lifted. She tells Cat that their dad is going to take them out to shop for Halloween costumes. Cat tells Maya that she has plans with her friends. While she is at the boardwalk with her friends, Cat thinks about how Maya would love it. Her friends ask who Maya is and she tells them she is a friend from back home. They spot a día de los muertos figure called La Catrina, and Cat asks why she has her name. Her friends explain that La Catrina is a famous part of the celebration.

Maya meets up with Cat and her friends. She is excited to tell them about her Halloween costume. She introduces herself as Cat's sister, and Maya realizes that Cat has not told her friends about having a sister. Maya shuts Cat out on their way home. Cat goes to Maya's room to talk and apologize. Cat tries to explain that she needs something for herself. The doorbell rings, and Carlos is standing on the porch with a bouquet of marigolds. He asks about Maya. Cat thinks the flowers are for her, and Maya takes them for the ofrenda. Maya declares that the family is ready for Grandma to visit.

The setting shifts to Halloween night. Maya is dressed as an angel, and Cat dresses as La Catrina. Trick-or-treaters begin to arrive. Cat and her friends are ready to go out. Maya is disappointed that she is not able to go with them, but Cat agrees to give her half of the candy. Seo Young asks if Cat can attend the día de los muertos party at midnight, and Leona agrees. After they leave, Maya is sad because she cannot go out with them and that she is not feeling any better after the move. She wants to have fun while she still can.

Cat and her friends trick-or-treat at Carlos' house, and the girls tease Cat about Carlos liking her after they leave. Seo Young asks if Cat has changed her mind about ghosts because she saw the ofrenda. She explains that opening the door to one ghost invites them all. Cat breaks away from her friends, explaining that she needs to go home. She rushes into the house and locks the door. She joins her family to watch scary movies. Cat gets scared and runs off to her bedroom. Later, Maya knocks on Cat's door and asks if she is avoiding going to the party. Cat explains that she is protecting Maya from the ghosts and what happened to Maya when they went to the mission.

Maya is angry that Cat is refusing to do what she cannot. She also asks Cat if she will be afraid of her ghost when she dies. Maya tells Cat to go to the mission. Cat agrees to go. On her way, Cat notices that there is no wind or ghosts. She meets up with her friends, and they go to the mission. Cat is shocked by all the ghosts playing around in the celebration.



Analysis

At the opening of Section 4, Maya is still using her breathing tube. However, she is jumping up and down, celebrating that the sun is out. She wakes up Cat, and the sun seems to be a hopeful omen. Family, awkwardness, and insecurity are intertwined in the characters' interactions. Maya is happy and excited to go shopping for Halloween costumes with her sister and dad, but Cat has other plans. With Maya doing better, Cat likely feels as though she can go with her friends. Maya is disappointed, but the narrative follows Cat.

As the girls all make their way along the boardwalk, Cat learns more about *día de los muertos*, including the famous figure La Caterina. When Cat sees her name as part of the celebration, she begins to have a stronger connection to the celebration. She may not be ready to accept the ghosts or the celebration, but she is beginning to understand that she is included in the celebration.

When Maya spots her sister, she rushes to see Cat and her friends. Maya's happiness is short-lived as she is hurt that Cat has not told her friends about her. Maya is initially concerned that Cat did not tell her friends about the breathing tube, but she soon pieces together that Cat did not tell her friends that she had a sister. Maya is understandably dejected and hurt and is angry with Cat. Cat makes attempts at apologizing and explaining, but Maya is reluctant to accept what her sister has to say. Cat explains that she needs something to herself. It is as if Cat is trying to explain how much of her life and self is shared within the context of Maya's illness. She is sympathetic and protective of her sister, but no other aspect of her life is free from Maya. This was a brief opportunity to have something to herself. Cat quickly recognizes how much it hurts Maya and tries to make amends.

It is not long after that Carlos arrives with a bouquet of marigolds. Cat answers the door and awkwardly accepts them, initially thinking that the flowers are for her. Before she can make a comment to Carlos, Maya intercepts the flowers, knowing that they are for her *ofrenda* to her grandmother. Maya now feels that the *ofrenda* is complete and that they are ready to welcome their grandmother into the home. Maya is hopeful that her grandmother will arrive as a way to let her know that she will one day be able to reconnect with her family as well.

Once Halloween arrives, Maya is feeling left out because she is not well enough to go trick-or-treating. Cat and her friends are ready to go out for a traditional Halloween night. It harkens back to Leona's earlier comments about wanting to go trick-or-treating as a girl instead of celebrating *día de los muertos* as her mother wanted. Seo Young asks for Cat to join the *día de los muertos* celebration. She is hesitant, but agrees to let her daughter go.

Cat, however, is much more reluctant. She does not feel comfortable going to the celebration, Maya gets frustrated with her because Cat is refusing an opportunity that she would love to be able to have. The sisters talk, and Maya convinces Cat to go. She does not want Cat to go for her; rather she wants Cat to go for herself and take the



chance and confront something new. Maya is also afraid that after she dies Cat will be afraid of her ghost. Maya knows that Cat must go to the celebration so that the sisters will be able to connect once Maya dies.

Discussion Question 1

What does Cat's decision not to tell her friends about Maya reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 2

How does the ofrenda connect the themes of the supernatural and death in novel?

Discussion Question 3

How does Maya's behavior reveal her attitude toward death?

Vocabulary

costumes, skeleton, awkward, self-conscious, risky, altar, wandering, courage



Section 5, pgs 184-240

Summary

In Section 5, Cat is overwhelmed by all the spirits at the celebration. She does not understand what is happening, and Seo Young tells her to “go with it!” (186). There is music and dancing. Seo Young looks for Pablo, the cute ghost she met last year. She also introduces Cat to some of the other ghosts. Seo young shows Cat how to blow a kiss to the ghosts to help them speak. Cat goes to the fountain and sits next to the ghost of an old woman. Cat asks if she is her grandmother, but she is not. She gets a bottle of soda and takes it to the old woman and sits with her. The old woman tells Cat she thinks she has a good spirit.

Cat sees Carlos, and he introduces her to Tío José, who died as a child. José asks if Maya is at the celebration. Cat asks José how he died, but he does not remember. He explains that his family has not forgotten him, which is why he is able to come to the celebration. The band starts to play, and Carlos asks Cat to play maracas and she does. Cat tells José that she wishes Maya was at the party. José leads Cat home to get Maya. He flies through the air with Cat. She is scared. Carlos catches up with them to fly around. They fly over the ocean and past the lighthouse and through the neighborhood.

At the house, Cat finds her parents asleep and Maya on the floor. Cat rushes to her and tries to wake her. Maya finally comes to and tells Cat that she ate all of Cat’s chocolate. Cat introduces Maya to José. Maya talks to José about how she worries about Cat being alone when she dies. José explains that he was able to befriend Cat and he is dead. Maya wonders if she will be able to make new friends. He tells her that she will lose some things, but not everything when she dies. There are perks at being a ghost that the living do not have, like running and jumping and dancing.

Maya takes off her breathing tube and puts in on the floor for José to try. He loves it, and takes in the air. He tells Carlos that he is ready to fly again. Carlos tells them that they should get back to the party. Cat gives José a kiss for strength and gives Carlos a peck on the cheek as well. Carlos and José take off.

Maya teases Cat about being in love with Carlos. The girls look at what candy is left, and Cat asks if Grandma ever showed up. Maya says no, but is hopeful that she might next year. They hear a scratching at the door and Maya looks outside and sees something coming toward the house. Outside is the black cat. The girls open the door and the black cat strides inside and leaps through the kitchen. The girls start to smell something and the smell wakes up Leona. Their mother goes into the dining room and sees lots of food that her mother used to make on the table. The girls tell her they did not make the food. Leona is confused, but they all enjoy the food.



Analysis

Section 5 finds Cat in the midst of the *día de los muertos* celebration. Cat finds the celebration “incredible” (185). She is overwhelmed by the experience. Seo Young makes introductions and looks around for the ghost she met the previous year. There is so much activity and celebrating around her, Cat does not quite know what to do. When she sees the old ghost woman, she wonders if she is her grandmother. She approaches the ghost and speaks with her. Instead of running from ghosts or yelling for ghosts to go away, Cat is now able to interact and communicate with a ghost. While the ghost turns out to not be Cat’s grandmother, the two have a conversation and Cat begins to understand the joy around her. While Cat has long been afraid of the unknown and the reality of Maya’s death, she is comforted by what she sees.

In meeting Tío José, Cat is able to gain insight into what it is like for someone young to die. Tío José represents Maya and through their conversation, Cat is able to understand that Maya will not be able to remember her death. This helps to calm more of Cat’s fears. In interacting with Tío José, Cat realizes that Maya needs to spend time with Tío José. All along, Maya has been wanting to talk with a ghost, suggesting that she may have specific questions. In Tío José, Cat has found the proper ghost for Maya.

Tío José takes Cat and Carlos back to Cat’s house. They fly through the air. At first Cat is afraid, but she soon gives herself over to the freedom of the experience. Through this, Cat is able to achieve some peace and understanding of the darkness that awaits her family. Once at the house, Cat finds Maya on the floor and rushes to wake her. She is fearful of the worst, but Maya comes to and reveals she has overindulged in candy. Cat makes introductions and Maya and Tío José have a conversation. He is able to clarify questions for Maya. When Maya offers her breathing tube to Tío José, it symbolizes her acceptance of death. It is also her way of thanking Tío José for the clarity he has given her. Whatever fear Maya had has now shifted to acceptance.

While the reader may expect Maya to die by the end of the novel, it is important that Maya is living at the conclusion. Just as the novel opened with the family moving to a new destination, the novel keeps the family moving. Yes, Maya’s illness is terminal, but she is with her family and celebrating at the end.

The celebration is fueled by the grandmother’s response to the *ofrenda*. Cat, Maya, and their mother are able to enjoy the grandmother’s recipes and be joyful in each other’s company. Leona is confused by the appearance of the black cat and the food, but the girls tell her to “Just go with it.” (239). This shows the family in motion, moving forward. They are capable of facing what the future brings. This connects the supernatural with family, indicating how the family has learned to stay together no matter what happens. Though death can separate the family physically, they will still be together in spirit.



Discussion Question 1

How does Cat's interaction with the old woman ghost explore the ideas of awkwardness and insecurity?

Discussion Question 2

What does Cat's decision to lead a ghost (Tío José) to Maya when she tried so hard to keep ghosts away from her sister reveal about Cat?

Discussion Question 3

How does the reveal of the grandmother's cooking at the end inform the character arc of the black cat?

Vocabulary

incredible, fashionistas, lo siento, bonadoso, nudge, tio, encore, maraca, terrible, certain, benefits, moral, talented



Characters

Cat (Catrina)

Cat (Catrina) is a teenager who moves with her family to Bahía de la Luna, a seaside town where the family hopes that her sister Maya will be able to have a better quality of life. Cat is conscientious of Maya's disease. At times, she feels dejected because her sister gets most of the attention.

Cat is reluctant to leave her friends and school. While she understands that the move will help her sister, she does not like it. After meeting, Carlos, Cat rejects the possibility of ghosts. She comes around after Carlos takes her and Maya to the mission.

Cat wants her Maya to be well, but she understands and accepts the seriousness of the disease. Cat is not ready for her sister to die, but is comforted by knowing about the spirit world.

Maya

Maya is a young girl who has cystic fibrosis. She moves with her family to Bahía de la Luna because the sea air will help Maya's breathing.

Maya wants to be included, and she looks up to her sister. She understands the gravity of her disease. She can see its influence on those around her.

When Carlos tells Maya and Cat about the ghosts, Maya is interested. She wants to understand the possibility of an afterlife because it gives her hope that she will be able to interact with her family after her death. She also wants to experience what she can while she has the opportunity in this life.

Carlos

Carlos is a teenager who meets Cat and Maya when they move to town. He tells them about the ghosts. He takes them to the mission to introduce them to the ghosts. Carlos wants people to believe and understand about the ghosts. Tío José, the ghost of Carlos' uncle, is one of the ghosts at the día de los muertos celebration. He tells Maya about the marigolds for her ofrenda.

Carlos has a crush on Cat.



Seo Young

Seo Young is the girl that Cat befriends at school. Cat is hopeful that Seo Young does not believe in ghosts, Then Cat learns that she does believe in them. Seo also has a crush on a one-hundred-year-old ghost.

Tío José

Tío José is Carlos' uncle who died as a child. He does not remember his death, just as people do not remember their birth.

Black Cat

Black Cat is a cat that crosses Cat's path a few times – in the tree outside her window and on the path to the mission. The cat arrives at the house and comes into the house. The cat is representative of Cat's grandmother.

Leona

Leona is the mother of Cat and Maya. Leona's mother is the grandmother for whom Maya makes an ofrenda.

Grandma

Grandma is Leona's mother. Maya makes an ofrenda for her. Her cooking ends up on the dining room table after the black cat gets into the house.

Javier

Javier is Carlos' father.

Juana

Juana is Carlos' mother.



Symbols and Symbolism

Día de los muertos

Día de los muertos symbolizes the seriousness of Maya's illness and how her death is inevitable, even if she does not die in the novel.

Ghosts

Ghosts symbolize how Cat and Maya are coping with Maya's illness and their desire to remain connected.

Fog

Fog symbolizes how Maya's illness hangs over the family.

Halloween

Halloween symbolizes how Cat and Maya can find joy in celebrating the known as they prepare for the unfamiliar, such as día de los muertos.

Breathing Tube

The breathing tube symbolizes Maya's illness and her vulnerability.

Move

The move symbolizes how the family is adjusting to the severity of Maya's illness.

Skeleton

The skeleton symbolizes the support the presence of a loved one's ghost gives to the living.

Breath

Breath symbolizes life and how the living can give life to the spirit of someone who has passed.



Spanish

Spanish symbolizes how the living must learn to communicate with the dead as if learning another language.

Ofrenda

Ofrenda symbolizes how the family welcomes spirits and their desire to connect with the spirit world.



Settings

Bahía de la Luna

Bahía de la Luna is the fictional town Cat and Maya's family moves to in an effort to help Maya's health. The town is known for ghosts, fog, and a día de los muertos celebration.

Mission

The mission is where Carlos takes Cat and Maya to meet the ghosts. It is also where the día de los muertos celebration takes place.

Boardwalk

The boardwalk is a rundown area with an old arcade with murals and an old cinema. It is where Cat and Maya meet Carlos and learn about the ghost tour and all the ghosts in the town.

Carlos' House

Carlos' house is next door to Cat's and Maya's house. Cat's family goes to the house for dinner after they move to the town. It is where Cat's and Carlos' families meet each other.

The Allende-Delman House

The Allende-Delman House is where the family moves to help Maya's health. It is where Maya makes her ofrenda to her grandmother. It is also where the black cat arrives and the grandmother's cooking appears.

The School

The school is where Cat meets Seo Young.



Themes and Motifs

Death

The author uses death as a motif in *Ghosts: A Novel*. The concept of death creates an urgency for a character's actions.

At the outset of the novel, it is established that Anya suffers from an incurable, degenerative disease. The family is moving in an effort to help Maya's quality of life. However, as Leona points out to Cat after Maya comes home from the hospital with the breathing tube, Maya will continue to get worse.

The move at the start of the novel presents the reader with a metaphorical death through the family's move. Cat leaves her friends and school behind, which represents a type of death. Cat must build a new life elsewhere, just as the rest of the family will as well.

It is through Maya that the sense of urgency is established. While everyone has only a finite amount of time in life, Maya's experiences are heightened because she knows that her time is limited. It is limited, not only in the amount of time she may have left, but also in the amount of time in which she will be able to do the things she wants. Her illness already places limits on her, and she is frustrated by how her health keeps her from going trick-or-treating. She wants to continue to do the things she has always done, but she knows she has limits.

Maya likes to run and jump, as any child would, but she can over exert herself, which is what happens the day Carlos takes her and Cat to the mission to meet the ghosts. Through her experiences, Maya begins to express frustrations with Cat because of her reluctance to do the things Maya cannot do. Because of Cat's fear of the ghosts, Maya is concerned that Cat will be afraid of her ghost when she dies.

While death has a role throughout the entirety of the novel, it is not presented in a grim fashion. The *día de los muertos* celebration is a way to celebrate and honor those who have passed. Maya is excited by the celebration, but she is unable to attend. Cat is reluctant to attend, but she does so at Maya's urging. Once Cat sees the revelry at the mission, she begins to understand the joy and happiness that the celebration offers. When she meets Tío José, she decides that she must find a way to share the celebration with Maya.

Maya does not die in the novel, but the reader is aware of the direness of her condition, Tío José, who is the ghost of Carlos' uncle, is representative of a child that has died. He is able to answer questions for both Cat and Maya as a way to help them both prepare for Maya's eventual death.

Another way that death is used throughout the novel is in Leona's remembrances of her mother. Maya tries to connect with the grandmother she never met by creating an



ofrenda for her grandmother. This welcomes her grandmother's spirit and allows the black cat to enter along with all the cooking left for the girls to enjoy.

Family

The author uses the concept of family to demonstrate inclusiveness and memory.

Family is an obvious motif in *Ghosts*. The novel begins with a family traveling to live in a new town in order to help the youngest daughter have a better quality of life. From the outset, the motivations of the family are to help one another. The family accepts the challenges of Maya's illness and copes with them in the best ways they know how.

While Cat may be disappointed in leaving her friends and school behind for her sister's benefit, she tries not to be selfish. She voices her disappointment, but does not direct it at Maya. She does not blame her sister, rather she wants her voice to be heard. She is able to talk with her parents and Maya. It demonstrates how the family comes together and continues to foster inclusiveness.

At the dinner party, Leona has memories of her mother. Because Cat and Maya were unable to know their grandmother, Maya embraces the tradition of making an ofrenda to include their grandmother. Leona remembers struggling with the traditions her mother brought with her from Mexico. In contrast, Maya uses one of those traditions to welcome the grandmother back.

Carlos is empathetic to Maya's illness. He tries to include both Cat and Maya by telling them about the ghosts and traditions in the town. He is devastated after Maya ends up in the hospital and apologizes repeatedly to Cat and asks for forgiveness. What Cat does not realize is that Carlos is able to relate to what Cat and her family are going through with Maya.

The introduction of Tío José demonstrates how another family is able to cope with the death of a child. Tío José is able to give clarity to both Cat and Maya about what happens after death and returning for the día de los muertos celebration. Since Tio is a child, the girls can relate to Tio.

Fear

The author uses fear to illustrate how fear motivates people in positive and negative ways.

In a novel that addresses a degenerative illness through a child's perspective, it is natural to expect that fear will be explored. The author creates an undercurrent of fear in all elements of Cat's family. The move is motivated by wanting to help Maya's health. It may be frightening to pick up and move to a new location, but the fear of Maya degenerating faster in their present location motivates the family to face their fear elsewhere.



Understandably Maya is afraid of dying, but she does not let fear consume how she lives her life. She accepts her fate and chooses to find joy in her life. She enjoys breathing in the ocean air and exploring her new town. She likes going places with Cat and is intrigued by Carlos' conversations about ghosts.

By contrast, Cat is scared of the ghosts. She gets frightened and runs into the house while walking in the fog. For Cat, ghosts represent death, and this is what she most fears. She is not fearful of death for herself, but rather the vulnerability of Maya and the very real possibility that her sister will be taken away from her. In fact, Cat denies the existence of ghosts as a way to reject the idea of her sister dying. Shooing the ghosts away is a way in which Cat tries to protect her sister.

Maya's fear manifests differently from Cat's. While Cat rejects the ghosts, Maya wants to meet and talk to them. She also wants her sister to interact with them as well. In getting her sister to do so, it will ensure that Cat will be able to spend time with Maya after she dies.

The author chooses to have Maya living at the end of the novel. It is clear that Maya will die, but it is unclear as to how close to death she may be. In this way, the author addresses the fear of the unknown. Maya and Cat, and by extension, the reader are given the opportunity to learn from the ghosts, particularly Tío José. Having Maya alive at the end of the novel offers hope and allows the family to face their fears together.

Supernatural

The author uses the supernatural as a way to give comfort and hope to a family facing a degenerative illness.

From the title, the reader is aware that the supernatural will play a part in the novel, but the ghosts are not introduced at the outset. Instead, the family is introduced and make their way to a new town. Ghosts are not introduced until Cat and Maya run into Carlos on the boardwalk. He tells them that they are early for ghost tour, which intrigues Maya and perturbs Cat. From the outset, Maya is open to the possibility of the supernatural, while Cat is reluctant to believe.

Carlos insists that he is able to prove that ghosts exist. Cat continues to reject the possibility. Carlos takes the girls to the mission in order to see the ghosts. When Cat finally sees a ghost, she is alone. The reader, like Cat, experiences the presence of a ghost alone. It is not until Cat meets up with Maya and Carlos that she sees the amount of ghosts in the area.

At the dinner party, Cat and Maya learn about día de los muertos and the celebration at the mission. Carlos' family is as excited by the celebration as he is, indicating how much the community values the supernatural. Cat witnesses the same when she meets her friend Seo Young and learns that she looks forward to the celebration as well.



While Cat is reluctant to go to the celebration, the reader follows along with her to the mission. Through the panels, the reader witnesses the people in the mural moving from facing Cat as she walks by to facing the opposite direction to watch her continue on toward the mission. When she arrives, ghosts and people are everywhere. There is music and Tío José even takes Cat and Carlos to fly to Cat's house.

Maya's interaction with Tío José gives the girl comfort regarding what she faces through her illness. The ghosts have also offered music to Maya (and Cat) via music as well.

The black cat is also a comforting presence, even though it scares Cat initially. After Maya completes her ofrenda for her grandmother, the black cat enters the house and soon there are piles of food, representing their grandmother's cooking on the dining room table. The girls share the feast with their mother as the supernatural has offered them a comforting meal to share.

Awkwardness and Insecurity

The author uses awkwardness and insecurity to illustrate the universal stages of growing up, even in Cat's heightened state of reality.

It is not uncommon for families to move for a multitude of reasons. For Cat and her family, the reason for moving is rooted in her sister's illness. While the illness may heighten the urgency for the move, the feelings that the family, and in particular Cat, experience can be considered normal rites of passage.

Cat must attend a new school, get to know her new town, and make new friends. She may bristle at the prospect of ghosts and the weather, but Cat is understandably homesick, which informs how she reacts to her new home. She wants to leave because she is surrounded by the unfamiliar and feels insecure.

Before the new school year begins, Cat meets Carlos. Their interactions are awkward. Carlos tries to impress her with stories about ghosts, while Cat bristles at what he says and tries to get away from him. She is annoyed when her family has dinner at his family's house as well.

s

By the time school starts, Cat has spent more time with Carlos, has seen that ghosts are real, and blames Carlos for Maya ending up in the hospital. He tries repeatedly to apologize, which she rejects. Cat's new friends pick up on the tension between Cat and Carlos. While they are unaware of what happened with Maya, they are able to recognize that both likes the other.

This uncomfortable interaction between them is indicative of a lot of what relationships at this age look and feel like. It just so happens that this relationship is set against the backdrop of the supernatural.



The awkwardness continues when Carlos brings the bouquet of marigolds for Maya and Cat believes that the flowers are for her. Maya quickly sweeps the flowers away, preventing Cat from revealing her mistake. While the flowers are not for Cat, Carlos uses them as a way to connect with Cat. It is a reason to see her.

After the celebration, Carlos and Tío José and Cat all return to the Cat's house to talk to Maya. Once it is time to go, Cat gives a kiss to Tío José for energy and gives a peck on the cheek to Carlos as well.

Another aspect of Cat's awkwardness and insecurity is when it is revealed that she has not told any of her new friends that she has a sister. When Maya discovers the truth, she is devastated. Cat is able to explain that she wanted the friends for herself, but it still speaks directly to how uncomfortable Cat is as she explores new facets of growing up.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is that of Cat, a teenage girl, who has recently moved to a new town with her family. She is not happy about the move, but she understands the positive impact the it may have on Maya's health.

The story is told primarily through Cat's perspective, although the animation makes it easier for readers to recognize how characters are feeling or reacting from a more generalized perspective. In this way, the novel does give an impression of omniscience, even though Cat is leading the story.

The author offers the reader insight into the cultural significance of the día de los muertos celebrations. It introduces the celebration to Cat and Maya and, perhaps, the reader. The book also suggests the existence of the supernatural, with ghosts and the spirits returning. This suggests an ideology that supports an afterlife.

Because of Maya's frail health, Cat is learning to accept the reality of her sister's disease while going through normal adolescent rites of passage, such as having a crush on a boy, making new friends, and having to move away. While Cat's story includes the extraordinary, it does so in the context of everyday situations that readers will be able to recognize.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is simple and straightforward. It is appropriate for early readers, yet not simplistic enough to alienate older readers. Some words, such as "discontented" may be challenging for younger readers. The issues addressed in the novel may be appropriate for older readers as well.

The story is told through animated panels and dialogue, similar to a comic book. The dialogue is conversational and age-appropriate for the characters. Slang is not used.

Spanish is used intermittently throughout the novel. The words are made understandable to non-Spanish readers by way of context and the accompanying images.

The animation enhances the story. Sound cues are given, such as "creak" and "whoosh" to develop the atmosphere created by the drawings. These sound elements enhance Cat's narrative and experiences. The sound words are examples of onomatopoeia.

Structure

The novel is presented as a graphic novel. As a graphic novel, the story is written in frames, similar to a comic book. The animation is clear and vibrant, with an emphasis on bright colors, matching a palette traditionally seen in día de los Merton celebrations,

The novel takes place over three months. Time is indicated by section breaks. There are not chapter breaks throughout. The sections are August, September, October, and Late October. The sections vary in length, with August and September being longer sections than the October sections combined.

The story is told through dialogue in the panels, Cat's first person narration is presented through text boxes separate from the dialogue or through thought bubbles.

Spanish is used throughout the novel. It should be easily understood by non-Spanish speakers through context. Either the dialogue or images help to clarify. There is one footnote used to define what an "ofrenda" is. Spanish punctuation involving exclamation marks is also utilized, with the punctuation coming before and after the sentence, with the first exclamation mark upside down.



Quotes

Of course I don't want to die. And I want Maya to be as healthy as possible. Duh!"
-- Cat (chapter 1 paragraph 23)

Importance: The quote shows how aware Cat is of her sister's illness. Cat had previously made an off-hand remark about wanting to die to be dramatic.

Breathe it in..."
-- Maya (chapter 1 paragraph 95)

Importance: The quote demonstrates how Maya welcomes the family move to a place that might help her.

Once you've actually lived in Bahía de la Luna...you'll change your mind."
-- Carlos (chapter 1 paragraph 132)

Importance: The quote shows Carlos' beliefs and how much he wants to share the ghosts in the town with others.

Girls, I wish you could have tasted your grandma's tamales. You would have loved them."
-- Leona (chapter 1 paragraph 170)

Importance: The quote illustrates the power of food as a memory for Leona.

We want the spirits to feel welcome on their special day, so we throw them a big party with the best music, dancing, and food!"
-- Javier (chapter 1 paragraph 190)

Importance: The quote details how the town celebrates the dead and the joy it brings to the living.

Because of the fog, the ghosts see our town as the perfect place to hang out."
-- Carlos (chapter 1 paragraph 198)

Importance: The quote shows the influence Carlos' words have on Cat as she walks home in the fog and gets frightened.

I have to talk to a ghost, Catrina."
-- Maya (chapter 1 paragraph 298)

Importance: The quote illustrates Maya's acceptance of new experiences and trying to get the most out of the time she has left to live.



Most of the people buried here were from Mexico, so they like it when you speak Spanish to them.”

-- Carlos (chapter 1 paragraph 378)

Importance: The quote demonstrates the importance of being able to speak the language of the dead in order to be able to communicate.

This is amazing! I've been talking to her for three minutes...and she hasn't brought up ghosts once!”

-- Cat, as narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 20)

Importance: The quote shows how much Cat wants to forget about the ghosts and how they frighten her.

YOU'RE NOT WELCOME HERE!!”

-- Cat (chapter 2 paragraph 95)

Importance: The quote illustrates how Cat rejects the ghosts because she does not want her sister to die.

You...you told them I exist...right?”

-- Maya (chapter 3 paragraph 38)

Importance: The quote shows how Maya is fearful that Cat will forget her or, even worse, pretend she never existed after she is gone.

I guess it's hard not to feel good when you're surrounded by so much life!”

-- Cat (chapter 4 paragraph 156)

Importance: The quote demonstrates Cat's newfound openness to the ghosts and what it will be like for Maya and herself after Maya dies.