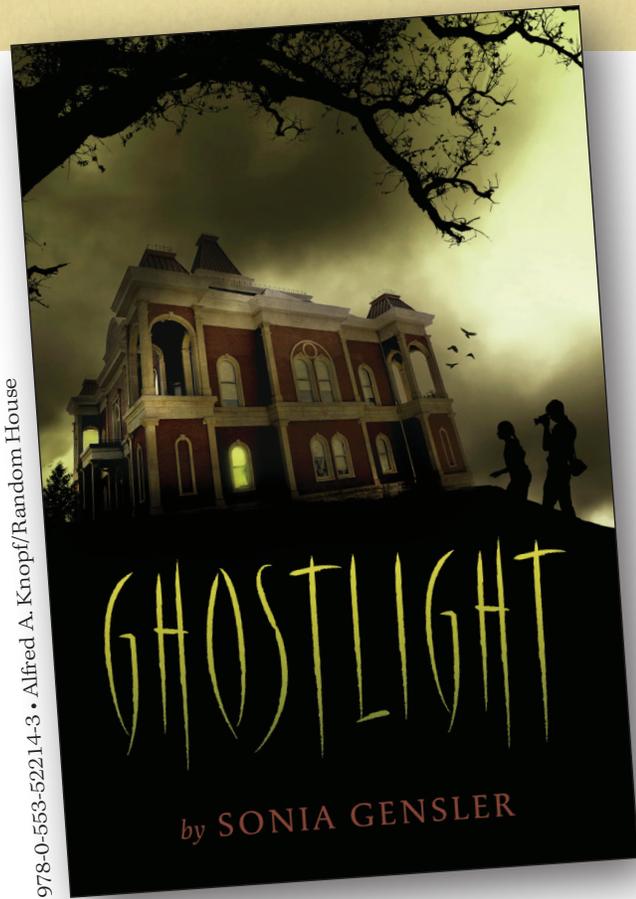


DISCUSSION GUIDE



GHOSTLIGHT

BY
SONIA GENSLER

NOTHING EVER HAPPENS ON Avery's grandmother's sprawling farm, where she and her brother spend the summers. That is, until Avery meets Julian, a city boy with a famous dad, whose family is renting a nearby cottage. When Julian announces his plans to film a ghost story, Avery jumps at the chance to join him.

Unfortunately, Julian wants to film at Hilliard House, a looming, empty mansion that Grandma has absolutely forbidden her to enter. As terrified as Avery is of Grandma's wrath, she finds the allure of filmmaking impossible to resist.

When the kids explore the secrets of Hilliard House, eerie things begin to happen, and the "imaginary" dangers in their movie threaten to become very real. Have Avery and Julian awakened a menacing presence? Can they turn back before they go too far?

Sonia Gensler's chilling ghost story will captivate young readers who'll find in Avery an authentic main character coming of age and facing her darkest fears.

"Frightening and engrossing."

—KIRKUS REVIEWS

"Well paced and suspenseful with a sensitive, endearing protagonist."

—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

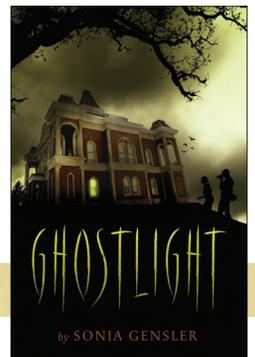
Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are noted throughout. For more information about the Common Core, visit corestandards.org.

BEFORE READING

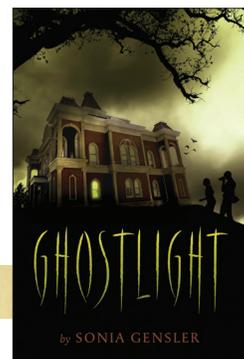
What games and activities did you enjoy doing when you were younger? Were any of the activities imaginary games? At what point in your life did your interests shift away from imaginary play? What activities replaced the imaginary play?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

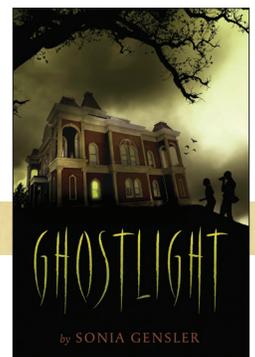
- ▶ The novel opens with the main character, Avery, stomping furiously around her grandmother's property when she discovers that her older brother, Blake, is no longer interested in playing their ongoing game of Kingdom, an imaginary land they invented. What does Avery's reaction to her brother's lack of interest in playing with her reveal about the differences between the brother and sister? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**
- ▶ A new character is introduced as Avery storms away from her grandmother's house. He's described as being "... shorter than Blake, and skinnier, but seemed around the same age. His button-down shirt was bright white, and his khakis were creased in all the right places. They were city clothes, too nice for summer on a Tennessee farm. He carried a fancy camera with a huge lens ..." Who is the new character and why do you think Avery would be drawn to a person seemingly so different from her? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3**
- ▶ Avery's grandmother is a strong authority figure in her life but also an important source for advice and guidance. Early in the story Avery's grandmother says to her, "You can't go looking to Blake for your happiness." How does this advice affect Avery's budding friendship with Julian? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3**
- ▶ Julian's dad, Curtis, is renting a cottage on Avery's grandmother's property for the summer. Avery and her grandmother meet Curtis when they make an official welcome visit to the cottage. Avery's first impression of Curtis is as follows: "Everything about Curtis Wayne seemed expensive. His jeans were soft and distressed in that artistic way that 'reeked of boutique,' as Mom would say. His hair had blonde streaks, and he'd used product to make it stick out in all the right places. He was tanned, but his color was so even that I figured it didn't actually come from the sun." Why do you think the author chose to introduce both Julian and Curtis to the reader through a detailed description of their appearance and clothes? What might this description say about the nature of these characters in the story? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3**
- ▶ What important things about Julian's father and Julian's photos of Hilliard House did Avery discover when she visited Hollyhock Cottage? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



- ▶ Explain the education Avery receives from Julian about the art of filmmaking. Why do you think that Avery responds so positively to Julian’s instruction about how films are made? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
- ▶ Julian is fascinated with Hilliard House and is focused on using the site for his movie. What is Avery’s grandmother’s feeling about the house? What is Avery’s connection to the house? How might Avery and her grandmother’s views on Hilliard House affect the shooting of Julian’s film? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3
- ▶ Avery presses her grandmother for more information about the history of Hilliard House and its previous occupants. What facts does Avery’s grandmother share? What does Avery discover about her family’s history in her grandfather’s photo albums? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
- ▶ Both Julian and Avery share the challenge of explaining an absent parent. Julian’s mom is not in his life and Avery has no connection to her father. How does this unique fact affect the growing friendship between Avery and Julian? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3
- ▶ Why is Julian so fixated on scary movies and why does he want to turn their summer movie project into a psychological thriller? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
- ▶ Julian and Avery visit the family cemetery to collect information for their film. What do they learn about Margaret Anne, her mother, and her father from looking at their gravestones? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
- ▶ Julian’s younger sister, Lily, arrives at Hollyhock Cottage excited to join Julian and Avery on their project. What is Lily’s role in the making of the movie? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
- ▶ Avery “borrows” her grandmother’s keys to Hilliard House. What do the filmmakers find when they first enter the house? What is the mood? What things do they see as they go from room to room? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
- ▶ What role does the doll in the pink dress found in Hilliard House play in the kids’ movie? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
- ▶ The filmmaking trio also discovers a handmade quilt with the initials SF sewn in its corner. How is this quilt central to the truth about what happened to Margaret Anne at Hilliard House when she was seven years old? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
- ▶ Avery’s mom arrives at the farm for a brief visit. During her stay, Avery’s mom shares her history with Joshua Hilliard and Hilliard House. What new information about the mysterious house and its occupants does Avery learn from her mom? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1



- ▶ Why does Julian decide to title his film project *Ghostlight*? How does this title connect the world of the theater to the happenings at Hilliard House? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2**
- ▶ As the film project progresses, Lily and Julian trick Avery for the sake of the film. What do they do to Avery to elicit the reaction they hope to capture on film? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**
- ▶ Lily finds a framed photo in Hilliard House of two young girls labeled MARGARET ANNE & AILEEN. Who is Aileen and how does she fit in the puzzle surrounding Margaret Anne's death? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**
- ▶ In the aftermath of Lily's faked death at Hilliard House, Avery distances herself from Julian and Lily and reconnects with her brother, Blake. What project do Avery and Blake decide to do together? How has their relationship shifted at this point in the story? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3**
- ▶ Blake and Avery find Julian prowling around Hilliard House when they are shooting their movie. Julian says, ". . . there's something going on in that house. You think you're done with it, but I'm not sure the house is done with us." What eerie things do the three witness inside Hilliard House that prove Julian's observations true? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**
- ▶ All along the filmmakers assumed that the ghost haunting Hilliard House was Margaret Anne. At the end of the story, the kids speculate that the presence may be a melancholy ghost paralyzed with grief. Who do the kids believe is haunting Hilliard House and why is he there? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**
- ▶ Curtis visits Avery's grandmother's house to share information about Julian's asocial behavior. What information does Curtis share about why Julian was motivated to make a scary film and to force Avery to face her fears as part of the filmmaking process? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**
- ▶ Church is a central part of Avery's grandmother's life. What happens at her church when she places a prayer request in the prayer box? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**
- ▶ Why do you think Avery went back to an empty Hilliard House to show the movie she made with her brother? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**
- ▶ Each character in *Ghostlight* is on a journey to sort through secrets and changes. What do you think were the lessons that Avery, Blake, Julian, and Avery's grandmother learned as a result of researching local history and creating a film? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2**



The discussion questions and activities in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public school in San Diego, California. She holds both masters' and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

ACTIVITIES

- ▶ Avery decides to create her own movie about Hilliard House after her film project with Julian falls apart. She has to organize her story: “I divided my first sheet of paper into eight squares, each one representing an individual shot. When Julian first told me about shots and angles, he’d called this kind of thing a storyboard. With a regular pencil I sketched out how each shot would look. It wasn’t the best drawing I could do—just outlines and stick figures so I had an idea of what should go where within the frame.” Imagine that you are a filmmaker preparing to tell a story of how Avery and Julian met on her grandmother’s farm. Create an eight-paneled storyboard that details the sequence of events of how these characters met.
- ▶ Julian shows Avery how shots in a film can be framed to elicit specific emotions from the audience—people can appear larger and more powerful and houses can seem more menacing depending on the angle from which they’re viewed. Point of view is central to telling a story through film. Think about the scene at the beginning of chapter 29 where Avery and Blake run into Julian when they return to Hilliard House to film. Draw a picture of how each character views this chance meeting. Think about what details you would add to the drawings to show how each character feels about running into each other. Include a caption under each illustration to describe how each character feels about meeting at Hilliard House. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.6**
- ▶ Julian lives in a world of film. He is fascinated with old movies and what he can learn about filmmaking from watching them. Imagine a movie version of *Ghostlight*. Which actors would star in it? Design a movie poster for the film version of the book. Include the names of actors, a slogan to entice viewers to want to see the movie, and an illustration to go with the title of the film.
- ▶ *Ghostlight* is an atmospheric ghost story. Try your hand at writing a spine-tingling story. Imagine two siblings are camping out in the old barn at their grandmother’s farm one night when they hear a strange noise . . . What happens next? Consider what sensory details and dialogue between the characters you might add to help build the necessary suspense in your ghost tale. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3**
- ▶ Julian has Avery watch a series of old horror movies paying close attention to the way the films build suspense and fear, how camera angles and close ups affect the mood, and how a shaken camera mimics a character’s loss of control. Watch one or more of these films referenced in the book: *The Haunting*, directed by Robert Wise, of *The Sound of Music* fame, in 1963; *The Innocents*, starring Deborah Kerr, from 1961; and *The Uninvited*, screenplay co-written by *101 Dalmations* author Dodie Smith, from 1944 (steer clear of the 2009 film of the same title). As with all movies shown in a classroom setting, these films should be previewed by the teacher to assess appropriateness. Obtain permission from parents before sharing the movies with students. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.7**



Sonia Gensler is the author of two young adult novels published by Knopf, *The Revenant* and *The Dark Between*, in addition to *Ghostlight*. As a child growing up in rural Tennessee, she dreamed of teleporting to medieval Europe to experience firsthand the bygone days of chivalry and romance. When international time travel proved impractical, she compensated by devouring books. As an adult, she decided to share her passion for stories by teaching literature and writing to high school students for ten years. She still thinks fondly of her days in the classroom now that she writes full time from her home in Oklahoma. For more information, visit soniagensler.com.

SECRETS AND HONESTY

Name _____

It seems that most of the characters in *Ghostlight* have a secret. Avery's mom tells Avery, "I want you to think about secrets and honesty. . . . There's a lot that you've been keeping from Grandma." Think about the secrets each character is keeping in the story and fill in the character chart below. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**

Character	Secret/s that s/he is keeping
Avery	
Julian	
Avery's mom	
Mrs. Shelton	
Lily	

THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Name _____

Avery and Julian are drawn to one another in friendship because of their love of storytelling. Avery is an experienced writer of stories. Julian is an experienced filmmaker of stories. Use the Venn diagram to compare the differences and similarities of storytelling through writing and through film. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.7**

Writing

Filmmaking

