

TOR TEEN

Teacher's Guide



A Kids Top Ten Indie Next Pick
(Winter 2015-2016)

A Goodreads' Best YA Book of the Month
(January 2016)

A New York Times Bestseller

- ★ "Dennard's rich descriptions, insightful characterizations, and breathtaking action sequences will keep readers on their toes."

—Publishers Weekly starred review

"Fantasy readers will sink comfortably into this work, and await with pleasure the next installment."

—Booklist

"A masterfully told tale... A great choice for fans of fantasy adventure and strong female characters."

—School Library Journal

"[Dennard's] Worldbuilding is impressively detailed...cinematic action scenes keep the storytelling brisk...."

—Kirkus

About this guide

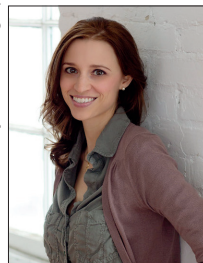
The questions and activities that follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Truthwitch*. The material is aligned with Common Core State Standards for Literacy in English and Language Arts (www.corestandards.org), however please feel free to adapt this content to suit the needs and interests of your students or reading group participants.

About *Truthwitch* and the *Witchlands* series

On a continent ruled by three empires, some are born with a "witchery," a magical skill that sets them apart from others. In the *Witchlands*, there are almost as many types of magic as there are ways to get in trouble—as two desperate young women know all too well.

Safiya is a Truthwitch, able to discern truth from lie. Iseult, a Threadwitch, can see the invisible ties that bind and entangle the lives around her. Safi and Iseult just want to be free to live their own lives, but war is coming to the *Witchlands*. With the help of the cunning Prince Merik (a Windwitch and ship's captain) and the hindrance of a Bloodwitch bent on revenge, the friends must rise above their doubts and fight to learn who they are, if they are going to stay alive and preserve the balance of their world.

Photo credit: Emily Rae Photography



New York Times bestselling author **Susan Dennard** has come a long way from small-town Georgia. As a marine biologist, she got to travel the world—six out of seven continents, to be exact (she'll get to Asia one of these days!)—before she settled down as a full-time novelist and writing instructor. She lives in Michigan with her husband and two dogs, and she is extremely active on social media. You can find her on

her blog at SusanDennard.com, on Twitter as @stdennard, at [Facebook.com/SusanDennardAuthor](https://www.facebook.com/SusanDennardAuthor), or contributing to Pub(lishing) Crawl. thewitchlands.com

Ages 13-17 ★ Grades 8-12

Leveling information: Lexile level: 810L, AR Level 6.1 UG, AR Points 18.0, AR Quiz No. 181105 EN



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Pre-reading Activities

Writing & Discussion Activities

- A central motif in *Truthwitch* is that of friendship, its many forms and depths, and its relation to trust. Invite each student to reflect on a friendship they value highly. In a group, invite each student to share five words they would choose to describe their friend. Then, individually, have each student write a short essay explaining how this valued friendship began, how often the writer sees this friend, activities or traditions these friends share, and the reason this friendship is important.
- *Truthwitch* is the inaugural title in author Susan Dennard's Witchlands High Fantasy series. High Fantasy is a literary genre that often includes:
 - Characters who are nonhuman or who have special powers
 - Setting in an imagined world or a parallel or alternate world
 - Objects or places imbued with special significance or power
 - Plot elements (actions) involving multiple characters, settings, or interwoven events
 - A broad time-frame for action or important references to ancient and/or future times
 - Epic themes, such as the battle between good and evil
 - Magic

Invite students to keep a reading journal for *Truthwitch*. As they read, have them note which elements of fantasy Susan Dennard uses to tell her story and how; track the various types of witches and the warring empires of the Witchlands; and record pages on which they find favorite quotations, particularly pertaining to the story's themes. Students can use their journals for reference as they turn to the questions and activities which follow.

Supports Common Core State Standards:
W.8.2, 9-10.2, 11-12.2; W.8.4, 9-10.4, 11-12.4;
and SL.8.1, 9-10.1, 11-12.1

AFTER READING THE BOOK

Discussion Questions

- As the novel begins, Safiya and Iseult are in a dangerous situation. How do they come to this predicament? How does the author use a scene of high action to also reveal important elements of Safiya and Iseult's characters and their relationship to each other?
- What is "stasis"? Why is it important to Iseult throughout the novel? What helps you find stasis during difficult moments in your own life?
- What is a "Threadsister"? What is a "heart-thread"? How are these types of relationships important to understanding the novel?
- What is the Truce? In what year of the Truce does this story begin? Why is this important? What role have Safi's people, the Dalmotti, played in the evolution of the Truce?
- Describe the powers and limitations of Truthwitchery. Why is Safi a "heretic" Truthwitch? If her powers were known to all, what dangers might she face?
- What deal does Uncle Eron make with Safi in Chapter 7? How might this exchange be viewed as a critical turning point in the novel's plot and for Safi emotionally?
- In Chapter 11, what details are revealed about the Bloodwitch who pursues Safi and Iseult? Do these revelations change your perspective on this character? Is Aeduan friend or foe to the girls? Explain your answer.
- How is Iseult an imperfect or unusual Threadwitch? Does this limit or enhance her powers? Do you think Iseult is glad or content to be this kind of witch? How do you think she would answer that question if asked directly?
- What happens to Iseult when she returns to her mother? What old wounds are reopened? How does Corlant treat Iseult? How does he treat Gretchya? How is Iseult affected by the changes she witnesses in Midenzi community power hierarchy?
- What is "cleaving"? How is the first cleaving described in the novel? How do Safi and Iseult react to this event? How is the last cleaving depicted before the story ends? Does this last cleaving change your understanding of the term? If so, how?
- Susan Dennard depicts a world with an expansive embracing of gender, sexuality, and love. Find examples in the story of how she depicts this variety and breadth.
- What kind of witch is Merik? How is his



relationship to his Threadbrother, Kullen, like or unlike Safi's bond with Iseult?

- From what kinds of prejudice does Iseult suffer? How is she judged and by whom? Do you see parallels between what Iseult suffers and the situations of discrimination and prejudice in our world today? Explain your answer, with examples.
- How do Safi and Merik first meet? What secrets does each keep from the other that complicate their relationship? How do they eventually discover how their journeys and goals might intertwine?
- Who is Evane? How has her path crossed Iseult's before they meet on the Jana, and why is this important? How does keeping Evane on his ship speak to the quality of Merik's character?
- When she reaches Nubrevna, Safi is shocked by the way the landscape differs from the descriptions she has heard. Evane says this is because "...those who win wars are those who write history" (p. 257). What does Evane mean? How does her statement reshape Safi's view of the Witchlands, and her role as a domna, more broadly?
- Does Safi truly understand her special ability? How has it helped her? In which instances has it failed her and why? As the novel progresses, whom do readers realize are aware of Safi's unregistered magical talent and how does this create more (or less) danger for Safi?
- Who are the Cahr Awen? What is their relationship to the Origin Wells? What truth may Safi and Iseult be facing about the Cahr Awen as the story reaches its conclusion?
- Who is the Puppeteer? When does Iseult first learn about the Puppeteer? How and why do you think the Puppeteer is able to reach inside Iseult's dreams?
- On page 85, Safi's goal for her life is freedom. However, on page 394, as she battles Vaness the Empress of Marstok, she realizes she has a greater goal. Describe this goal and its evolution. Has reading Safi's story made you see any of your own goals in a new light? Explain your answer.
- Compare Merik's relationship to Kullen with his relationship to his sister, Vivia. How does Safi relate to her Uncle Eron and other fon Hasstrel relatives? What might these observations suggest about the value of family ties versus Thread ties in the Witchlands?
- In Chapter 39, Iseult considers the journey she has taken and the state of her life, harkening back to the Nomatsi phrases, Mhe verujta, meaning "trust me as if my soul was yours." How might the novel be read as an exploration of the way Safi, Iseult, Merik, and others comprehend and employ that vital notion?

Supports Common Core State Standards:
RL.8.1-4, 9-10.1-5, 11-12.1-6;
and SL.8.1, 3, 4; SL.9-10.1, 3, 4; SL.11-12.1, 3, 4.

Research & Writing Activities

MAGIC

Create a booklet or informational poster helping readers track the variety of witches who populate the Witchlands. Note each type of witch (e.g., Truthwitch), associated magical abilities, the names of characters in the story who possess this type of magic, and your own thoughts about this type of witchcraft.

SETTING

Based on clues from the text, use watercolors, oil pastels, or colored pencils to create a landscape featuring one of the Origin Wells. Create a caption card for your artwork naming the well and briefly explain its current status.

LANGUAGE

Create a PowerPoint or other multimedia presentation describing how the author uses the following words in multiple ways to create a deeply specific vocabulary for the novel: Thread, witch, stone, or wind.

SLANG

Review your reading journal or page back through the novel to find at least five examples of Witchlands slang (e.g., "...Gretchya hates to snag the settlement's weave" (p. 97); "Matski scum" (referencing Iseult). Can you think of expressions from the present-day real world that could parallel those found in the book? With friends or classmates, discuss how these phrases serve to deepen the world-building vocabulary of the novel.

FOLK MUSIC

Aboard the Jana, the Nubrevnan shipmates sing a song which anchors their culture and traditions in a time frame beyond the boundaries of the novel. Go to the library or online to learn more about the history and uses of folk songs. Then write a folk song a different set characters might sing during another scene in *Truthwitch*.

ENCHANTED OBJECTS

Use stones, yarn, clay, glass, or other art materials to make your version of a Threadstone. Create a label for your creation explaining what it can do.

FRIENDSHIP

In its many forms, friendship can be studied as a defining motif in *Truthwitch*. Go to the library or online to find multiple definitions of friendship. Make a list of famous friendships in arts and politics. Create a bibliography of friendship-themed novels. Find quotes discussing friendship. Finally, with classmates



or group members, make a word cloud, collage, or other graphic representation of your exploration of the term friendship.

FOILS

To establish drama and anchor her fantastic world, Susan Dennard presents many contrasting pairs within the novel. For example, Safi and Iseult represent action versus thought, fair hair versus dark, and social prominence versus insignificance. Create a chart or table on which to list other examples of contrasting pairs, or foils, within the novel along with notes explaining ways in which they represent character, plot, setting, or thematic oppositions.

ALLEGIENCES

In the course of the novel, Safi fights many foes, but are they all true enemies? Though she captures Safi, Vaness is trying to do right by her people. Though he is a Bloodwitch, Aeduan has yet to kill Safi or Iseult. In the character of Vaness, Aeduan, Uncle Eron, Merik, Habim, or Mathew, write a three to four paragraph journal entry describing your deepest dreams and wishes for yourself (and your people, if applicable), your opinion of Safi and Iseult, and how these young witches might be part of your future plans.

SELF

At the end of the novel, Safiya has stopped running from her identity and begun to embrace its truth and, perhaps, its power. Have you ever had an experience which caused you to change the way you see yourself or to change a dream or goal? Has Safi's story given you some perspective on your experience? Write a short essay describing this experience and, if applicable, relate it to Safi's journey.

Supports Common Core State Standards:

RL.8.1-4, 9-10.1-5, 11-12.1-6;

SL.8.1, 4; SL.9-10.1, 4; SL.11-12.1, 4;

and W.8.1-4, W.8.6, W.9-10.1-4, W.9-10.6, W.11-12.1-4, W.11-12.6

