

The Deep Dark

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR
MOLLY KNOX OSTERTAG

SCIS: 5490999

ISBN: 9781338839999

RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
 (Sexual References)

SYNOPSIS

Everyone has secrets. Mags's has teeth.

Magdalena Herrera is about to graduate high school, but she already feels like an adult with serious responsibilities: caring for her ailing grandmother; working a part-time job; clandestine makeouts with a girl who has a boyfriend. And then there's her secret, which pulls her into the basement each night, drains her of energy, and leaves her bleeding. A secret that could hurt and even kill if it ever got out—like it did once before.

So, Mags keeps her head down, isolated in her small desert community. That is, until her childhood friend Nessa comes back to town, bringing vivid memories of the past, an intoxicating glimpse of the future, and a secret of her own. Mags won't get attached, of course. She's always been strong enough to survive without anyone's help.

But when the darkness starts to close in on them both, Mags will have to drag her secret into the daylight, and choose between risking everything . . . or having nothing left to lose.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Molly Knox Ostertag is the acclaimed ABA Indie and *New York Times* bestselling graphic novel author-illustrator of *The Girl from the Sea* and the Witch Boy trilogy: *The Witch Boy*, *The Hidden Witch*, and *The Midwinter Witch*, as well as a writer for animation. A graduate of the School of Visual Arts, Molly was featured in the *Forbes* 30 Under 30: Media list in 2020. She's married to fellow writer and artist ND Stevenson, and they live in Los Angeles with two cats and a very cuddly dog.

You can find her online at mollyostertag.com.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What do you think the title could be referring to?
 - What does the imagery on the cover make you think of?
 - What genre do you predict this book is likely to be?
 - Where does it look like this book is set?



- What do you think the characters on the cover are doing in the cover artwork?
- What does the body language of the characters on the cover tell you about them and their relationship to each other?
- Having read up to p 15, as a class, discuss what you now know about the setting and characters of this novel. Some things to consider in your discussion might be:
 - Where and when is this story set?
 - How does the place where this story is set differ from where you live, and in what ways is it similar?
 - Who is the main character of this novel, and what do we know about their life?
 - What language does Mags speak with her abuela, and her mother?
 - What does Abuela mean in English?
- How would you describe Mags' life prior to Nessa's arrival back in town?
- Why does Mags choose to decline Nessa's request to talk on Instagram?
- Who does Mags think might have been looking for her at work?
- Make a pinhole camera of your own, take a series of photographs, and compare them to photographs taken with your phone camera. Use the pinhole camera images and the phone camera images to create a larger artwork, or piece, that contrasts what each type of photography can capture of a scene. If you can't make a pinhole camera, experiment with different filters and settings on your phone camera, and take images using the different filters on your phone without looking at the screen, then take another image of the same scene with your usual photo settings while looking at the screen. Use these two sets of images to create a larger artwork. or piece, that contrasts what each type of photography captured of the scene.
- Why does Ava keep dating Ethan when she is clearly interested in a relationship with Mags, and why does Mags accept this situation for so long?
- How does Mags' policy of keeping people at a distance affect her emotionally? How does it affect those around her? What is it about Nessa that finally allows Mags to stop doing so?
- What do you consider to be the most emotionally fraught scene in this story, and why do you consider it to be so?
- Use online resources, a Spanish/English dictionary, or some other method to help you translate the Spanish language dialogue within the story. How does knowing the meaning of what Mags and her family are saying affect your understanding of events? Do you consider that knowing the translation of the dialogue in these scenes is helpful, essential, or extraneous to understanding the story as a whole? Why do you think this?
 - In small groups, discuss why you think the author chose to write these exchanges in Spanish without a translation?
- Mags tells Ava that she thinks 'it's right to lie if the truth would hurt someone . . . It means you care about someone, to lie to them like that.' (pp 160–161). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not and in what ways?
 - In small groups, or as a class, discuss the concept of white lies, and the broader concept of lying to protect others. Consider during your discussion, whether you personally would prefer to be lied to by someone else in order to protect you, or if you would rather know the truth no matter how hurtful.
 - Individually write a one page persuasive text arguing for or against a personal policy of lying to others in order to protect them, and whether it is ultimately beneficial for all parties concerned, or damaging to everyone involved.
- Nessa tells Mags that she is taking photos with her pinhole camera as part of a 'memory archaeology project, where she is trying to recapture the feeling of being here when I was a kid, while recognising how it's impossible to recreate those conditions.' (pp 203-204). Attempt a memory archaeology project of your own. Choose a time or place that is firm in your memory, and explore different ways of representing what it means to you. The aim is to create an imaginative work that captures and represents how you feel, rather than attempting a comprehensively realistic representation. You can use photography like Nessa does, or you can choose a different form of visual media; audio, text, or a combination of any of these.
- Nessa says to Aaron on p 419 'I'm not the person you want me to be, and I'm not gonna try to be her anymore.' As a class, discuss this statement, and what it says about Aaron and Nessa's relationship. Include in your discussion, consideration of the concept of 'emotional blackmail', and why it is so important that we accept others as who they are, not insist that they should pretend to be who we want them to be.

- What, in your opinion, does Aaron’s observed behaviour throughout the novel say about him as a person, and what advice do you think he would most benefit from?
- Mags was born with the strange creature wrapped around her, and all her life it has been hidden away from sight for fear of it frightening or hurting others. In small groups, discuss how this can be metaphorically considered to be true for many people, and compare it to Mags’ experience. Some things to consider in your discussion could be:
 - Why do people hide parts of who they are from others?
 - What keeps people from being consistently open and honest about who they are?
 - Who is the best example of not hiding yourself, and of not hiding from yourself, in this novel?
 - When the creature escaped, it hurt someone without Mags’ wanting it to or meaning for it to do any damage. However, when the creature was intentionally released, it only caused harm when Mags was intending it to. Does this reflect the metaphorical reality of people keeping parts of themselves hidden, or is it more complex in reality than in this fictional situation?
 - What can we all learn from Mags and Nessa’s experience with the creature when it is let out?
 - When someone keeps part of themselves hidden, who ends up being hurt the most by this?
 - Are there any situations you can think of where keeping part of yourself hidden is safer and more sensible than letting everyone know all about who you are?
- For Mags, the metaphor of keeping part of yourself hidden is a very solid and real literal situation. What are some other metaphorical ways in which we talk about ourselves, about our relationships with others and about how we interact with and think about the world?
 - As a class, discuss some of the different metaphors that we use to discuss our daily lives, then individually choose one to explore in a more literal fashion.
 - Create a three to six panel comic strip introducing a character who, in their day-to-day life, has to cope with living the literal reality of a metaphorical (figurative) expression.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE