

ACTIVITIES

1. The characters in *An Ember in the Ashes* are often confused about their feelings for one another. Their wants and desires sometimes clash. Helene longs for Elias, but he is unclear about his feelings for her. Elias is drawn to Laia, but she finds comfort in the presence of Keenan. Write a dialogue between the characters that illuminates their feelings for each other. It can be a declaration of love, or a humorous way of hedging. Be sure to write the other character's reactions. This can be a serious or funny scene.
2. Create a poster/collage that interprets the meaning of the title *An Ember in the Ashes*.
3. Make the silver masks of *The Masks* (perhaps use aluminum foil). What expression best represents each character? Consider Grandfather's sternness, Marcus's sneer, the Commandant's coldness, and Helene's devotion.
4. "Found poetry is created by taking words and phrases from a piece of literature and reframing them as poetry; making changes in spacing and lines; adding or deleting text, and, thus, imparting new meaning. (It's the literary equivalent of a collage.)" Using one of the book's themes, such as "Secrets and Lies," as the title of your poem, write a found poem using words and phrases from *An Ember in the Ashes*.
5. Research ancient Roman schools/education. Make a Venn diagram of the similarities and differences between Blackcliff and your research. Or, research ancient Roman weapons and military skills and compare them to the weapons and military training in *An Ember in the Ashes*.
6. Find one of your favorite dialogues in the book, such as the scene in Elias's cell between Laia and Elias or one of the scenes between Cain and one of the characters. With a small group, practice and then perform a reader's theatre production of the scene. You may consider using a narrator, sound effects, some simple costumes, and perhaps some blocking.
7. After doing research, make an encyclopedia, either hard copy or a computer slide show/power point, of the different kinds of mythical beings, "the old creatures," in the book such as jinn, ghuls, wraiths, efrits, etc. Show pictures, define their powers, and tell/write their stories. Did the author make up any of the mythical beings that are in her book?
8. While Laia is trying to get her brother Darin out of prison, she doesn't hear from him, or know he is all right. And Darin has no idea what has happened to Laia. Write a series of letters between the siblings. What do you think they would say to each other?

ABOUT SABAA TAHIR



Author photo by Christophe Testi



Sabaa Tahir grew up in California's Mojave Desert at her family's eighteen-room motel. There, she spent her time devouring fantasy novels, raiding her brother's comic book stash, and playing guitar badly. She began writing *An Ember in the Ashes* while working nights as a newspaper editor. She likes thunderous indie rock, garish socks, and all things nerd. Sabaa currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her family.

For more information, please visit Sabaa at SabaaTahir.com or on Twitter @SabaaTahir.

DON'T MISS THE OTHER BOOKS IN THE EMBER QUARTET!



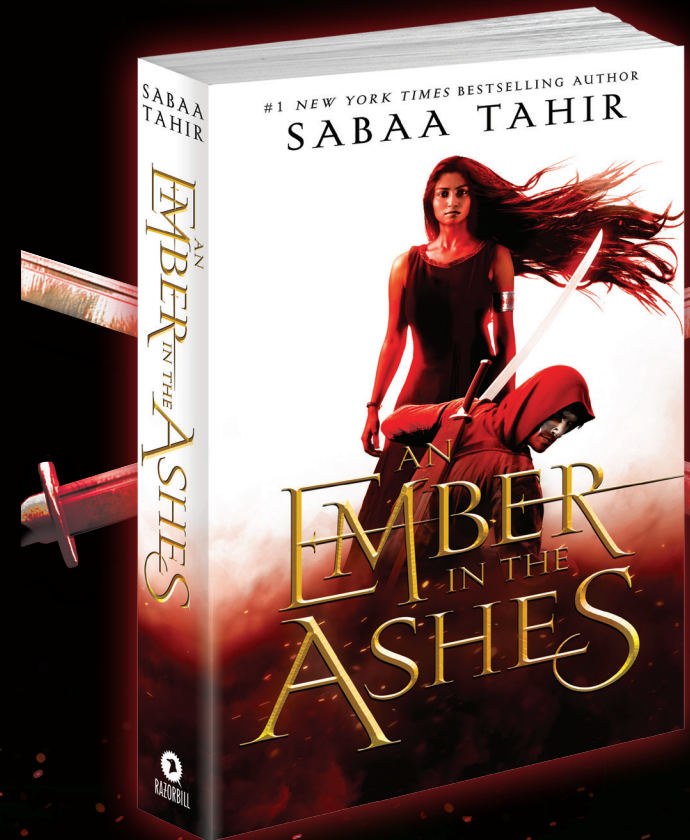
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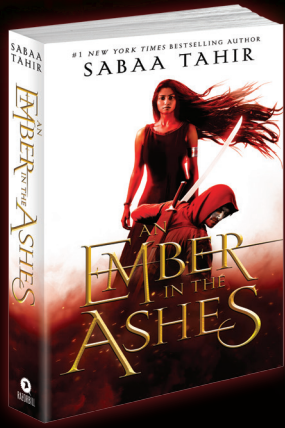
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This guide was written by Shari Conradson. Shari has taught English, drama, and history in Northern California for thirty-four years. She runs a teen book group and believes that everyone loves stories! It's just a matter of finding the right story for that unique individual.

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO





LAIA
IS A SLAVE.
ELIAS
IS A SOLDIER.
NEITHER
IS FREE.

BOOK ONE IN THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING SERIES

Under the Martial Empire, defiance is met with death. Those who do not vow their blood and bodies to the Emperor risk the execution of their loved ones and the destruction of all they hold dear.

It is in this brutal world, inspired by ancient Rome, that Laia lives with her grandparents and older brother. The family ekes out an existence in the Empire's impoverished backstreets. They do not challenge the Empire. They've seen what happens to those who do.

But when Laia's brother is arrested for treason, Laia is forced to make a decision. In exchange for help from rebels who promise to rescue her brother, she will risk her life to spy for them from within the Empire's greatest military academy.

There, Laia meets Elias, the school's finest soldier—and secretly, its most unwilling. Elias wants only to be free of the tyranny he's being trained to enforce. He and Laia will soon realize that their destinies are intertwined—and that their choices will change the fate of the Empire itself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are Elias and Helene similar and different? Why do you think that they became best friends?
2. Because she runs from the Mask who kills her grandparents and takes her brother, Laia believes she is a coward; this feeling of cowardice leads to self-loathing. Does Laia make a good or bad choice when she decides to run from the Mask? How does her opinion of herself lead to her future decisions?
3. In what ways is the Empire sexist? Consider how others—even her comrades—perceive and talk about Helene. How did the Commandant's father treat his daughter even after all of her accomplishments?
4. "There's nothing to me that is worth anything, Laia," the Augur says. "I am an error, a mistake... We are, all of us Augurs, guilty." What do you think of the Augurs? What kind of beings are they? Are they human? Are they the good guys or the bad guys? How much control do you believe that they have over the Empire?
5. What kind of person is the grandfather? Is he a loving, caring grandparent or a heartless, self-centered patriarch?
6. How does the Empire keep control over its lands? How do military regimes in our world take and keep control? Consider how these regimes influence their youth. Blackcliff's motto is "Duty first, unto death." Are there places like Blackcliff in our world's history? Are there places like Blackcliff in the United States?
7. The novel contains many references to animals, especially birds, such as falcons, vultures, and shrikes (also known as butcher birds). The black guard's symbol is a bird, Grandfather is referred to as a falcon, Marcus is a snake, and Laia's mother is the Lioness. What does this animal imagery add to the book? What feelings do these animals evoke?
8. How do Elias and Laia change? What do they learn about themselves?
9. What does Izzy show us about what it means to be human?
10. Is the Resistance an admirable coalition? What are its goals? What would the Empire be like if the Resistance triumphed?
 - Mazen lies in order to pursue the Resistance's mission. The mission is to commit murder. Is Mazen a heroic character for his attempts to take down the repressive regime of the Empire?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

11. Laia lives in poverty while Elias comes from a noble, wealthy family. Laia is a slave. Elias is enslaved by the Empire. Who is in a better situation?
12. Why are Elias and Laia each "an ember in the ashes"?
13. After hearing the story of the Jinn that Cook relates, do you believe that the Scholars are unjustly oppressed or getting the treatment that they deserve?
14. Who makes the best romantic partners? Should Laia be with Keenan or Elias? Should Elias be with Laia or Helene?
15. If you were going to make *An Ember in the Ashes* into a movie, what scenes/characters/parts would you cut out? (Remember that the novel is almost 450 pages and a movie is usually under two hours.) Would you add a scene or character that is not in the book?
16. Which character do you have the most in common with? Why?

RESEARCH/ESSAY PROMPTS

1. What is the purpose of each of the four trials? Describe how each trial achieves its purpose.
2. Elias speaks often of the training that made him a soldier. "My knife is in my hands, though I don't remember drawing it... Years of training keep my arm steady as a rock." He also questions whether his military instincts come from his cruel and sadistic mother. He fears that his brutality is biologically inherited. Are people born soldiers? What evidence in the novel supports your answer?
3. Look up the definition of "technology." What is the importance of technology in *An Ember in the Ashes*? (Consider the definition(s) of "technology" that you find.) How does technology change the balance of power in our world? What is the significance of the pursuit of knowledge? Are technology and the pursuit of knowledge beneficial or harmful? Give examples from the novel and from our world.
4. The novel examines the concept "the ends justify the means." Explain what this saying means and how it relates to the book. Do you believe that how you achieve a goal is important?