

The Forager Brothers: Ghost Light

Educator & Book Club Guide

A novel by Jessica Bora

For readers ages 8–12 · Grades 3–7

Discussion questions · Classroom activities · Writing prompts · Curriculum connections

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Welcome, Educators and Book Club Leaders

Thank you for bringing *The Forager Brothers: Ghost Light* into your classroom, library, or book club. This guide is designed to help young readers go deeper into the world of Dylan and Vin Bisht — and into the real Pacific Northwest forests, real mushroom science, and real questions about family, observation, and discovery that the novel explores.

Everything in this guide is optional. Pick and choose what works for your readers and your schedule. Activities range from quick discussion starters to multi-day projects, and questions are organized by theme so you can pull what you need.

A note on the science

The mycology, ecology, and natural history in this book are real. Bioluminescent fungi, mycorrhizal networks (*the Wood Wide Web*), chanterelles, and parasitic fungi like *Ophiocordyceps* (the so-called "zombie ant fungus") all exist. The back-of-book science guide — written in Dylan's voice — is a great launchpad for further exploration.

About the Book

Synopsis

Dylan and Vin Bisht have been foraging the trails of the Pacific Northwest since they could walk. They know the smell of rain on old-growth Douglas fir, the apricot scent of a chanterelle, and their favorite trail near Snoqualmie Pass better than any place on earth. Their family's connection to the forest runs deep — passed down from their great-grandfather, a forest ranger in the foothills of the Himalayas.

When a day at Seattle's Wild Mushroom Show takes an unexpected turn, and a world-famous mycologist warns of mysterious happenings in the Cascades, the brothers find themselves tracking a mystery that science can barely explain. Something is spreading — and the forest itself may be trying to tell them what.

Book Details

- Title: *The Forager Brothers: Ghost Light*
- Author: Jessica Bora
- ISBN (paperback): 9798255024148
- Format: Paperback (5×8 trim, 161 pages) and Kindle eBook
- Publication: April 14, 2026
- Age range: 8–12 · Grades 3–7
- Genre: Contemporary adventure / mystery with STEM themes
- Ordering: Available through IngramSpark (for libraries and bookstores) and on Amazon

Themes

- Sibling relationships and shared adventure
- Family legacy and intergenerational knowledge
- Observation, curiosity, and the scientific method

- Pacific Northwest ecology and natural history
- Environmental stewardship and the responsibility of knowing a place well
- South Asian American identity rooted in nature and the outdoors

Before Reading: Prime the Pump

A few quick activities to build curiosity before students open the book.

Quick-fire warm-up questions

- What is the coolest thing you have ever found in a forest, park, or backyard?
- Do you know anyone who is really good at noticing things in nature? What makes them good at it?
- Have you ever learned something from a grandparent or older relative that nobody else in your family knows?
- Have you ever seen a mushroom up close? What did it look like, smell like, feel like?

Quick pre-read mini-research (10 minutes)

Ask students to look up one of the following and share one interesting fact:

- Chanterelle mushroom
- Bioluminescence in fungi
- The Wood Wide Web (mycorrhizal networks)
- The Cascade Mountains or Snoqualmie Pass

Map moment

Pull up a map of Washington State. Find Seattle, the Cascade Mountains, and Snoqualmie Pass. For readers outside the Pacific Northwest, take a minute to describe the terrain — dense evergreen forest, mossy understory, rain, trails winding into the foothills. Setting the scene geographically makes the book's world land harder.

Discussion Questions

Organized by theme. Use what fits your readers. Mix comprehension with open-ended questions for the best discussions.

Characters and Relationships

1. Dylan and Vin are brothers, but they approach problems differently. How would you describe each brother's style? Whose approach is closer to your own?
2. Vin keeps detailed field notes and carries a field guide everywhere. Why do you think documentation matters so much to him? What do you keep track of in your own life?
3. Dylan is described as someone who "sees what nobody else notices." What does it take to be a good observer? Is that something you can learn, or is it a personality trait?
4. How does the brothers' relationship change over the course of the book? Point to a specific moment that shows this change.
5. Who is the most surprising character in the book, and why?

Family and Legacy

6. The brothers' great-grandfather was a forest ranger in the foothills of the Himalayas. How does his story shape who Dylan and Vin are, even though they never met him? Is there someone in your family whose story shapes who you are?
7. Knowledge gets passed down in the Bisht family — how to forage, how to notice things, how to love the woods. What is something that has been passed down in your family? Who taught it to you?
8. The Bisht family is Indian American, and their love of the outdoors connects generations. How does the book show that a deep connection to nature can come from many different cultural backgrounds?

Science, Curiosity, and the Scientific Method

9. Dylan and Vin use real foraging knowledge to investigate the mystery. At what points in the book do they act like scientists? What do scientists do that you saw the brothers doing?
10. The mycologist warns that something strange is happening in the Cascades. How do adults and kids react differently to this warning? Who takes it most seriously, and why?
11. Name three real scientific concepts you learned from this book. Which surprised you the most?
12. The book features bioluminescent fungi — real mushrooms that glow in the dark. Why do you think a living thing would evolve to glow? (There are several real theories — see if you can find one.)
13. "The Wood Wide Web" is the nickname for the underground fungal network that connects trees. How does knowing this change the way you might walk through a forest?

Setting as a Character

14. The Cascades and Snoqualmie Pass are not just backdrops — they almost feel like characters. Find a sentence or passage where the forest feels alive. What makes it feel that way?
15. How would this story be different if it were set somewhere else — a desert, a city, a beach? What does the Pacific Northwest specifically bring to the mystery?
16. If you were dropped into Dylan and Vin's favorite trail right now, what would you notice first?

Mystery and Plot

17. What is the first clue that something is wrong in the forest? How did you react to that moment as a reader?
18. Mysteries work by planting small details that matter later. Find one detail from early in the book that turned out to matter. Did you notice it the first time?
19. If you could ask Dylan and Vin one question about their investigation, what would it be?

Big Ideas and Open-Ended Questions

20. Do you think the forest is "trying" to communicate with anyone in this book? Is that a scientific idea, a poetic idea, or both?
21. What responsibilities do people have to the places they know and love? Does knowing a forest well give you a job to do?
22. The book ends with a message that hints at more to come. Where do you hope the next adventure takes Dylan and Vin?

Classroom Activities

A mix of quick activities and multi-day projects. Each activity lists its subject area, grade range, and approximate time.

1. Build Your Own Field Guide Page

Subject: Science, writing, art **Grades:** 3–7 **Time:** 45–60 minutes

Vin carries a field guide everywhere. Students create one page of their own field guide for a living thing found near their school or home — a tree, a bird, an insect, a plant, a fungus. Each page should include:

- A detailed drawing (from observation if possible, from a photo if not)
- Common name and scientific name
- Habitat — where you'd find it
- Three identifying features
- One surprising fact
- A short personal note: "What I noticed when I looked closely"

Combine all pages into a class field guide that stays in the classroom or library.

2. Mycorrhizal Network Diagram

Subject: Life science **Grades:** 4–7 **Time:** 30–45 minutes

Students research the "Wood Wide Web" and create a diagram showing how trees and fungi communicate and share resources underground. The diagram must show:

- At least three different trees, labeled by species
- The mycorrhizal fungal network connecting their roots
- Arrows showing the flow of water, sugars, nutrients, and chemical signals
- One example of how the network benefits the trees

Extension: Research the work of Dr. Suzanne Simard, whose studies helped popularize this concept. What did she discover?

3. Mushroom Identification Walk

Subject: Science, observation **Grades:** 3–7 **Time:** 30 minutes outdoors

Take students outside — a schoolyard, nearby park, or nature trail. In small groups, ask them to find and photograph (not touch) any fungi they can see. Back inside, use a regional fungi guide or app to attempt identification. Discuss:

- Where were fungi growing? (On logs? In soil? Under trees?)
- What colors, shapes, and textures did you see?
- Why are fungi so important to the ecosystem?

Important: Never touch or taste wild mushrooms. This activity is about observation only.

4. Scientific Method Investigation

Subject: Science, critical thinking **Grades:** 4–7 **Time:** Two class periods

Present students with a small mystery from the natural world they can actually investigate: Why are worms on the sidewalk after rain? Why do some leaves change color earlier than others? Why does one patch of grass stay green longer than another? Students work through the scientific method:

- Observation — what do you notice?
- Question — what are you curious about?
- Hypothesis — what do you think is happening, and why?
- Investigation — what would you do to find out?
- Conclusion — what did you learn?

Connect it to the book: Dylan and Vin do this same process in the Cascades, just with higher stakes.

5. Family Story Interview

Subject: Social studies, writing **Grades:** 3–7 **Time:** Homework + one class period to share

Dylan and Vin's great-grandfather is part of who they are, even though they never met him. Students interview a parent, grandparent, or older relative and write a one-page story about something that older generations of their family knew, loved, or did. Prompts:

- What is something your grandparents (or great-grandparents) were really good at?
- What's a place that was important to them?
- Is there something they knew how to do that nobody in the family does anymore?
- What's one story about them that you want to make sure never gets forgotten?

6. Design the Sequel Cover

Subject: Art, literature, writing **Grades:** 3–7 **Time:** 45 minutes

The book hints at a next adventure. Students design a cover for the imaginary sequel and write a three-sentence back-of-book description. Where should Dylan and Vin go next? What mystery are they chasing? Display covers around the classroom.

7. Bioluminescence Research Poster

Subject: Life science **Grades:** 4–7 **Time:** One class period + research time

Bioluminescent fungi ("ghost mushrooms") are real. So are bioluminescent jellyfish, fireflies, and deep-sea fish. Students research one bioluminescent organism and present a poster including:

- What the organism is and where it lives
- How it produces light (the chemistry — luciferin and luciferase)
- Why scientists think it glows (defense, attracting mates, attracting prey, communication)
- One question about it that scientists still don't know the answer to

Writing Prompts

Short prompts for quick writes, journal entries, or longer creative pieces.

Narrative prompts

- Write a scene in which Dylan and Vin discover something the book never told us about. Match the voice and tone of the novel.
- You are hiking your favorite trail when you notice something that shouldn't be there. Describe what you see, and what you do next.
- Write a field journal entry from Vin's point of view about a day that is not in the book.
- Imagine you are a character who lives in the forest — a mushroom, a tree, a bird. Describe the brothers as you see them passing through.

Reflective prompts

- Is there a place you know as well as Dylan and Vin know their trail? Describe it so that someone who has never been there can see it.
- What does it mean to "pay attention"? When was the last time you really paid attention to something, and what did you see?
- Write about a family tradition or a piece of family knowledge that matters to you.

Argument prompts

- Should kids be allowed to investigate serious problems adults are also working on? Use examples from the book and from real life.
- Is it more important to protect forests for human enjoyment, or to protect them for the living things that depend on them? Defend your answer.

Vocabulary and Science Terms

Words and concepts students may want to know going in or look up as they read.

Term	Meaning
Mycology	The scientific study of fungi.
Mycologist	A scientist who studies fungi.
Fungi	A kingdom of living things separate from plants and animals, including mushrooms, molds, and yeasts.
Chanterelle	A golden, trumpet-shaped edible mushroom known for its apricot-like smell. Common in Pacific Northwest forests.
Matsutake	A prized aromatic mushroom found in PNW forests, important in many cultures.
Bioluminescence	The ability of a living organism to produce light through a chemical reaction.
Mycorrhiza	A symbiotic relationship between a fungus and the roots of a plant.
Mycorrhizal network ("Wood Wide Web")	An underground fungal network that connects the roots of many trees, allowing them to share nutrients and chemical signals.
Spore	A tiny reproductive cell that fungi release to create new fungi.
Forage	To search for wild food — especially edible plants, mushrooms, or berries.
Ecology	The study of how living things interact with each other and their environment.
Ecosystem	A community of living things and their physical environment, working together as a system.
Ophiocordyceps	A real parasitic fungus that infects insects, sometimes called the "zombie fungus."
Cascades	The mountain range that runs north-south through Washington, Oregon, and into California.
Snoqualmie	A region and mountain pass east of Seattle in the Cascade foothills.
Old-growth forest	A forest that has developed over a long time without significant disturbance, containing very old trees.
Field guide	A book used to help identify plants, animals, fungi, or other things in nature.

Curriculum Connections

How the novel connects to different subject areas. Use these as starting points for building lessons.

Science

- Life science: fungi, decomposers, ecosystems, interdependence of living things
- Ecology: food webs, symbiosis, mycorrhizal networks
- Scientific method: observation, hypothesis, investigation, evidence
- Earth science: Pacific Northwest ecosystems, climate, temperate rainforest
- Chemistry: bioluminescence (luciferin and luciferase reactions)

Language Arts

- Character development across a novel
- Setting as an element of fiction (setting as "character")
- Mystery structure: clues, red herrings, reveal
- Sibling dynamics as a literary relationship
- Using descriptive sensory language (smell, sound, texture)
- Back-of-book nonfiction voice: writing science for a young audience

Social Studies

- Pacific Northwest geography and ecology
- Indigenous and cultural knowledge of plants and foraging
- Immigration and identity across generations
- South Asian American family history in the U.S.
- Conservation and public land stewardship

Writing

- Scientific observation journals
- Narrative writing from a character's perspective
- Interview and oral history (family story project)
- Persuasive writing about environmental responsibility

Art and Creative

- Nature illustration and observational drawing
- Book cover design
- Diagrams and scientific illustration
- Map-making (real trails, imagined trails)

Book Club Discussion Guide

A shorter, lower-prep version for parent-child book clubs, family reading groups, or library discussions.

Opening question

Go around the room: what is one thing in this book that made you want to go outside?

Middle of discussion

23. Which brother are you more like — Dylan or Vin?
24. What was the single most surprising thing you learned about nature from this book?
25. If your family had a "legacy knowledge" like the Bisht family's foraging, what would it be?
26. Was there a moment when you were genuinely worried for the brothers? What made that scene work?
27. The book mixes real science with a mystery plot. Did that mix work for you, or did one side pull you out of the other?

Closing question

If you could go on one hike with Dylan and Vin, which trail would you want it to be — a real one you know, or a fictional one from the book?

Activity suggestion (for parent-child groups)

End the meeting with a short nature walk, even around the neighborhood or library grounds. Challenge everyone to come back with one thing they noticed that they might not have noticed before reading the book.

Author Visits, Readings & Events

Jessica Bora is based in the Seattle area and available for readings, author visits, and events at schools, libraries, bookstores, and community organizations throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Possible visit formats

- Classroom reading and Q&A (30–45 minutes)
- Library story hour or family reading event
- Book club visit (in person or virtual)
- Bookstore signing and reading

To inquire about an event

Email: theforagerbrothers@gmail.com

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For librarians and booksellers

The Forager Brothers: Ghost Light is available through IngramSpark for standard library and bookstore ordering. ISBN (paperback): 9798295798832. Review copies available on request — please email with your affiliation.

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Thank you for sharing this book with young readers.

The forest is waiting.

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