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Discussion Questions

1. Evil takes several forms in this book. It is evoked physically, emotionally, and socially. Discuss the different ways that evil is represented – how it is exhibited, by whom, and to what effect. What role does gender play in the representation of evil?

2. Lucas’s father, Colonel Ezra Whiting, is a particularly complex character. Do you believe his character is defined by what he did to Judith? Does his involvement in defending Roswell Station, or even his justification for muting Judith, give him any moral leeway in terms of how he should be judged? Or were his desires and actions enough to condemn him?

3. Do you feel that Ezra’s death was heroic and does it exonerate him at all? Do you think he chose his death as an act of penance, or was it cowardice because he couldn’t face the villagers after his lies and secret deeds were exposed?

4. Rupert Gillis is a decidedly malicious character. What purpose do you think he serves in the story? Is he merely a plot device, or does he play a role in developing Judith’s character? How so?

5. Darrel’s injury is presented as a direct juxtaposition to Judith’s. Compare and contrast their situation and the way they are treated. Does gender play a role? If their situations had been reversed, how might things have been different for them? What other factors might play a role in the way Darrel and Judith are perceived after their injuries?

6. Judith’s mother is the first to shame her upon her return. Why do you think she reacted the way she did? Did their society’s attitudes toward disability, sexuality, and religion influence the way her mother valued Judith after her return, or was her response mainly personal? What effect did her reaction have on Judith, and how would Judith’s story have been different if her mother had welcomed her back with open arms?

7. What effect does the structure of the novel have on the story? What would change if the book were structured more traditionally?

8. The book ends in a place of uncertainty. We do not know if Judith and Lucas will stay in Roswell Station or if they will move on. What do you think the outcome would be if they decided to stay? If they leave? Would they be able to leave the past behind?

9. Although the physical violence enacted on Judith can be viewed as the crux of her story, there is also a great deal of emotional violence inflicted on her. Discuss these different forms of violence: In what ways do they influence Judith’s development as a character? Do they affect different aspects of her identity?

10. Despite the vague setting and time period, in what ways does Judith’s story relate to modern social issues? How significantly has contemporary public dialogue evolved regarding topics such as abuse, sexuality, and privacy? Has it changed at all?

11. Silencing unwanted voices is an important theme in this story. In what ways are victims and witnesses of crime or violence silenced now? How are girls’ and women’s voices silenced? Do culture and tradition play a role in whose voices may or may not be heard? If so, how?

(Questions provided by the publisher.)
About the Author

Roaming through the garden, age 5. Photo by Sally Gardner.

I grew up on a 50-acre farm in Western New York as the youngest of seven children. We grew much of our own food and harvested eggs from our chickens. We also kept turkeys, pigs, rabbits, and oodles of dogs and cats. I was free to ramble around our pond full of frogs and turtles, and wade in our crick full of minnows and crawdads. I was lucky to be the caboose kid in a big family full of avid readers, with a mother who loved poetry.

I had a perfect little library of children’s classics to reread to my heart’s content. I think I came close to memorizing *Charlotte’s Web*, the *Little House* books, the *Great Brain* series, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little Women*, *The Secret Garden*, *Just So Stories*, *Heidi*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *A Little Princess*.

In high school I filled my time with clubs, sports (volleyball, track, cross country), music lessons and singing, babysitting and jobs (YMCA), friends, and still, books. College was much the same – more volleyball, more friends, more jobs (slinging pizza, making copies). I attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY, where I majored in communication.
I dreamed of being many things – a marine biologist, a chemist, a mother, a gymnast, a Solid Gold Dancer – but always, writing was on the back of my mind. Whatever else I might be or do, I hoped writing would be part of the mix.

In college I met my husband Phil. We married young and started our family soon after. Now we’re the parents of four boys, including three teenagers, and we don’t know where the time went. To keep the gender balance more even in our home, we have two girl cats.

2013, on my front porch. Photo by Bruce Lucier.

After my fourth son was born, I decided that since my family dreams were now well underway, it was time to pursue writing novels. I went back to school and earned an M.F.A. in writing for children and young adults from Vermont College of the Fine Arts, where I learned from many talented and committed writers for young people. *The Amaranth Enchantment* was the second novel I wrote in school, and the first one to sell to a publisher. Since then I’ve written *Secondhand Charm*, *All the Truth That’s In Me*, and the *Splurch Academy for Disruptive Boys* series with my older sister, Sally Faye Gardner, as the illustrator. *All the Truth That’s In Me*, my first YA novel, is my most recent release. It’s a 2013 Horn Book Fanfare title, a School Library Journal Best of 2013 book, and a Kirkus Best Teen Read for 2013. It has been named a Junior Library Guild Selection and has been nominated for a Carnegie Medal and a YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults award, and will be published in 12 countries internationally. My next
novel, a middle grade titled *The Scandalous Sisterhood of Prickwillow Place*, will be published in September 2014 in the US by Roaring Brook, in Germany by Theinemann Verlag GmbH, in the UK by Piccadilly Press, and in Brazil by Editora Rocco.

Now I’m home full-time, keeping the cats company by day while I write, and chasing the boys around in the afternoons and evenings. If you want to know if I’m working on another book now, the answer is always, “Yes.”

[http://www.julieberrybooks.com/about](http://www.julieberrybooks.com/about)
JULIE BERRY: Giving voice to a silent character

BookPage® Interview by Diane Colson, October 7, 2013

Julie Berry has entranced middle grade readers with her romantic fantasies, *The Amaranth Enchantment* and *Secondhand Charm*, and thrilled them with the hilarious adventures in her Slurch Academy for Disruptive Boys series. So it should be no surprise that her new novel for teen readers, *All the Truth That’s in Me*, surpasses the highest expectations.

The story of Judith, a teen girl tormented by memories of a murder and a silence she cannot break, is difficult to read at times. Berry creates a nearly primitive village, ruled by religious fervor and violence, yet Judith’s voice is lovely as she reveals her story, addressing the boy she has loved her entire life. The bleak setting only emphasizes the purity of Judith’s love. It’s a story that will stay with readers long past the final page.

Julie Berry answered some questions for BookPage about the origins of Judith’s character and how Berry herself became a writer.

There are so many remarkable qualities that make *All the Truth That’s in Me* unique, and the force that pulls it altogether is Judith’s voice, raw and uncensored. She tells her story in second person, which is hard to do convincingly. Where did her voice come from, and why did you decide to structure the narration this way?

*All the Truth That’s in Me* began as a writing exercise. I never had the idea to write about a character like Judith, or one with her problems. I simply asked myself, one day, if I could write a second-person novel, or even part of one. I flipped open my laptop, had a bit of a think and began to write. “You didn’t come,” the first line, is all I had to go on when I started typing. Judith appeared and took over, conjuring a scene that revealed to me her longing, her isolation, her pattern of skirting notice and flouting her mother’s rules to snatch glimpses of the thing she desperately wanted, but couldn’t have: Lucas. I couldn’t believe the treasure I’d stumbled upon when she visited my impromptu writing exercise. Judith, to me, is self-existent, and her voice is distinctly her own. It’s certainly not mine. Her story is told in second person because that’s how she wanted to tell it; the fact that her narration, like everything else about her, points insistently to Lucas when we first meet her, is something beyond her control.

The setting in the story is not specified beyond the name of the settlement: Roswell Station. Why not? Did you have a real place in mind as you wrote the story? (Any relation to Roswell, New Mexico?)

I’m embarrassed to admit that Roswell, New Mexico, never once crossed my mind. I get a giggle out of the association every time I see someone raise the question online. Roswell is a solid old Anglo name, and that’s what I went for. The world Judith inhabits, and her particular community within that world, are very loosely inspired by the dynamics that led to the formation of the British colonies in North America. I wanted a world readers would recognize as resembling our Puritan heritage, and I needed a small community perched on the unstable
border between two worlds—civilization (the motherland) and emptiness, wilderness and sea. I shaped the kind of world Judith’s story needed, but I was determined to paint it only loosely, impressionistically, because I did not want real places or real chronologies (in other words, capital-H History) to overshadow the story that very much belonged to one girl.

"Much of literature explores this question of whether it is possible to find ourselves happily ever after, alone together."

The narrative is non-linear, almost mystical in its wandering nature through Judith’s past and present. How did the story evolve into this shape? Why do you think this unconventional structure works for this story?

The order of details in the book wasn’t the result of any kind of architecture or planning. It’s how I wrote the piece, or as I think of it, how Judith revealed her life to me. I made almost no changes to the order of sections. It works in the way it does because it’s organic, I think, to her consciousness. I’ve come to see that despite the meandering timeline, there is a logical flow to the order of chapters. Details from the present and from several layers in Judith’s past weave together in the stream of her consciousness, following the associative leaps Judith makes as she goes through her day. If it’s working, I believe it’s because Judith’s experiences have fractured her life, so it follows that her experience of the world would likewise be fractured, leaping from past to present to try to make sense of senselessness.

Why did you decide to silence Judith? And why in such a violent way?

Judith showed up silenced. In fact, “silenced” and "obsessed" were all I knew about her after I wrote the first page. I didn’t yet know why. As for the violent way Judith’s speech was stolen, it was clear from the start that when she said she was “forbidden from telling,” nothing short of an absolute, permanent and physical silencing had taken place, an act which had to come from savagery. Her silence was not built solely on fear or trauma, though those elements were also present. For most of us, these muzzles can be more than enough.

Of the many emotionally charged scenes in the book, perhaps the most intense is when Judith returns home, mutilated, and is rejected by her mother. Your portrayal of the mother’s cycle through joy, horror and revulsion is particularly vivid. Was this difficult to write?

Not difficult creatively, but painful emotionally, without question. I could see it, smell it, feel it, so rendering it in prose wasn’t unusually hard, but feeling for Judith—and for her mother—was heartbreaking.

Judith is isolated through her muteness, and the town of Roswell Station is isolated as well. In Roswell Station, this isolation contributes to the inhabitants’ ability to practice their own interpretation of the Bible. Why is isolationism such an important part of this story?

As I wrote the story, I felt rather than understood the kind of world Judith needed to inhabit. Since writing it, though, I’ve come to see Roswell Station as a mirror into Judith’s psyche. Like
her, Roswell Station is young, newly formed, struggling to cohere and uneasy in its place in the world. It has only barely weathered catastrophes that ought to have crushed it, yet it proves its resilience surprisingly. It is, as you say, singularly alone, cut off and at war with its motherland, with only the most tenuous links to neighboring villages that might offer support. Tweak this description slightly, and we can apply it to Judith herself.

Aloneness is a recurring theme in young adult literature. Sometimes, like the Puritans, we want to be alone, whether to escape society for its impositions, or flee Babylon for its excesses, so we can live life on our terms. Sometimes we are alone in crowds when we very much wish to be otherwise. Young people, and the not-so-young, navigate between their solitary and communal natures, and much of literature explores this question of whether it is possible to find ourselves happily ever after, alone together.

**YA fiction right now is full of hyper-violence and teens thrown into the worst situations imaginable. Why do you think that is? How do you see your book contributing to the genre?**

Well, peril and violence make for good drama, which makes for good reading, so that’s probably where it starts. Also, as film technology advances, high-concept action-film narratives become more popular and convincing, and this shapes the tastes of young readers. These stories are much more in the zeitgeist today than they were when I was a teen.

More to the point, fiction dramatizes, outwardly, conflicts that are more internal, more subtle and less visible, and the young adult years are replete with turbulence on every front: social, parental, emotional, romantic, biochemical. Violence serves to simplify and polarize a conflict—now we no longer wonder whom the enemy is, nor what the appropriate way is to engage in battle with them. So I’m especially interested in the young adult literature that subverts that sense of certainty, and complicates the polarity of good and evil, even amid violent struggles.

That said, I never thought of myself as writing a violent story when I wrote *All the Truth That’s in Me*. It’s all there, I know—war, assault, captivity, mutilation—so it’s probably laughable that I didn’t see it that way, but I really felt myself to be writing a very intimate, private, interior type of novel. The violent elements I listed are there, but they’re not, in the end, what Judith’s story is really all about.

**You grew up in a family of book lovers. Do you think that influenced your desire to write? What’s one book you read as a child that has stayed with you?**

Growing up in a houseful of book lovers made me desperate to read. I couldn’t bear to be left out of something so important to my sibs. Writing was a natural byproduct, I think, just as people who seriously love food inevitably figure out how to cook. I was the youngest of a brood much older than me, so they discussed *Anna Karenina* as I struggled through *The Secret Garden* (long before I was ready for it, in typical over-reaching youngest-kid fashion).
Our family owned a small but well-curated library of children’s classics, and I re-read them obsessively. They all shaped me, but I do remember one book I read for the first time at 12, one which left me both swooning and vowing that I would someday, somehow write a book that made others feel the way I felt. That book was *Beauty* by Robin McKinley.

**What would your teenage self think of the books you’re writing now?**

My teenage self would be flabbergasted that I actually managed to write and finish a book, *any* book, since her writing attempts all floundered on very short, very bad stories. I think she might be distracted from the novel itself by her desperate curiosity to know who this Berry guy might turn out to be (and oh, what a treat lay in store!). We’d have to withhold from her the truth that I am she so as not to warp the space-time continuum. I do hope she’d love my books, and I think she would, since she’s the girl I try to write for, and I write from both her memories and the books she loved.

**What’s the best thing about being a YA author?**

The writing itself is my favorite thing about being an author. Making a new story is the happiest part of my job. The challenge is to make sure that I don’t let other parts of the job (travel, promotion, teaching, business management, correspondence) eclipse writing in my nutty schedule.

The freedom to write is a gift. I’m grateful every day that I was raised and educated in such a way that writing became an option for me. I’m lucky to have a family that encourages my writing, and I’m lucky to live in a place and time where education, libraries, affordable computers and ubiquitous Internet access remove any real barriers I might face. Regardless of what the market may do, no one can take writing away from me. That feels like freedom to live the life I want to live, and I’m grateful.

**What’s next for you?**

I have a couple of projects for several age levels at various stages of exploration and play, and I’m working on a new YA novel for Viking that I’m very excited about. Details will be announced very soon.

http://bookpage.com/interviews/15703-julie-berry#.VJD5QitCh8E
Author interview: Julie Berry on the power of her protagonist

Marama Whyte, October 3, 2013

Hypable speaks to *All The Truth That’s In Me* author Julie Berry about her new novel and the problems with historical fiction.

*All The Truth That’s In Me* is a fantastic, disturbing, and optimistic novel from author Julie Berry.

For our thoughts, you can read Hypable’s **spoiler free review**, where you have the chance to win an eBook of the recently released novel. The giveaway is open internationally.

*All The Truth That’s In Me* was released on 26 September in the United States and 1 October in Australia.

Julie Berry is the author of *The Amaranth Enchantment* and *Secondhand Charm*. *All The Truth That’s In Me* is her first Young Adult novel.

In ‘All The Truth That’s In Me’, you seem to be intentionally avoiding giving the reader any indication of the exact place or time when the story takes place. Why was it important for you to separate the story in this way?

I felt that by blurring the lens on the factual specifics of Judith’s place and time, I could fill the novel’s frame entirely with Judith: her longing, her anguish, her resolve. This was her story, and I didn’t want questions about dates, places, or notable figures from the past to obscure her drama even slightly.

We refer sometimes to a book as a contract with the reader which an author must honor. Historical fiction adds a few extra clauses to that contract which I wasn’t interested in signing, this time. For other projects, though, I absolutely would – including one I’m working on right now.

Judith’s slow development of speech seems very realistic to a reader – did you do extra research into speech therapy or a similar area to achieve this realism?

I did consult informally with a friend of mine who is a practicing speech therapist when I was writing this book, but mainly I spent a lot of time attempting to talk as Judith would have talked by imagining my tongue to be inert and non-existent.

One thing I learned from this practice is that it would have been very uncomfortable to stretch one’s lower tongue so as to use it to make sounds that require a full tongue. And it would be an act of great courage to speak out without fear when one’s sound could never be quite right.

Tell us about your choice in writing style – why an internal monologue written almost as a confession from Judith to Lucas?

The whole project began as an experiment to see if I could write a novel, or even a bit of one, in second person. As it turns out, what my experiment produced wasn’t technically second person,
but I found something that profoundly interested me in the voice of this character who had so much to tell one boy, but couldn’t. It kept on working so I kept on writing.

Did you try writing the story in any other style or from a different perspective, or did you know it was always going to be structured this way?

The way it appears now is the only way I ever attempted it. With other projects I have often experimented with shifts in narrator, tense, or point of view, but Judith’s voice was so sure of itself that I never deviated from it.

‘All The Truth That’s In Me’ deals with some very confronting issues, for any reader (young or old). Were you hesitant or worried about this book being marketed as a Young Adult novel – did you think the subject matter might alienate the readership?

The fuzzy boundary lines between different readership ages have always puzzled me, so these days I just write what comes, and assume I can fix the mess later with an editor’s help. I have to trust that if a story is strong, it can find its readership, and good editors can steer me well.

With All The Truth That’s In Me, any time I paused to wonder how the market would respond to its subject matter, I tended to grow anxious and doubtful. So I tried not to think about it at all.

This book is unlike anything else I have ever read, so I’m curious what your inspiration was when writing it. Were you influenced by any particular authors, or books?

I knew some loose comparison to The Scarlet Letter would be likely, and as the story progressed I realized readers might compare the story to Laurie Halse Anderson’s Speak, but it had been years since I’d read the latter, and decades since I’d read the former. The only thing I can confidently say inspired the book was Judith herself. I stumbled upon her by accident, and what a happy accident that was for me.

What do you hope readers take away from this book?

Six hours, give or take, transported completely out of their own lives and into Judith’s. That’s what I hope readers take away. I got to spend months being Judith, and I’m so glad. I always want readers to lose themselves completely in a story and feel something, whatever the book invites them to feel. That experience is the best takeaway any book can offer.

Can you give us a recommendation of a Young Adult novel that you have read recently?

I’m right in the middle of Marcus Zusak’s The Book Thief right now. I know; I’m the last one on the planet to read it. It’s magnificent. But you already knew that.

http://www.hypable.com/2013/10/03/author-interview-julie-berry-all-the-truth-thats-in-me/
Without a Voice: ‘All the Truth That’s in Me,’ by Julie Berry

The New York Times

By JENNIFER HUBERT SWAN
Published: November 8, 2013

We tell young women today to speak up for themselves in matters personal and political, but if we look to examples in classical and contemporary literature, the results of truth-telling can be dire.

Arguably, the most famous heroine to suffer from this danger is tragic Lavinia from Shakespeare’s bloody “Titus Andronicus,” whose father’s enemies first rape her, then cut out her tongue and lop off her hands so she can’t expose their identities. Doggedly, she uses her mouth and a stick to scrape their names in the dirt but is later murdered for her efforts. In Greek mythology, Cassandra rejects Apollo’s romantic overtures, and as punishment he curses her so she will always tell the truth but never be believed. She too is raped, in the fall of Troy, held captive by Agamemnon and then murdered by his jealous wife. In more recent history, Melinda Sordino, the stoic protagonist of Laurie Halse Anderson’s modern young adult classic “Speak,” becomes selectively mute after being raped at a party and spends a year trying to find her voice again. Brutal examples all, but which is worse: not to be able to speak, or to speak the truth and not be believed?

This is the question Julie Berry raises in her disturbing and provocative first novel for teenagers. Judith, the dutiful daughter of what seems to be a Puritan family (Berry sets her tale in a frustratingly vague colonial setting), is 14 when she is abducted from her village. Imprisoned by her captor for two years, she returns home with her tongue cut out. Now 18, she is shunned by both family and neighbors, who insist on believing her attacker took “her maidenhood” and view her as a “fallen” woman. “I am shocking. What was done to me was shocking. I am outside the boundaries forever, no longer decent.”

Resigned to her lot, Judith lives on a small farm with her scornful mother and indifferent brother. Her only respite from work and her own dark thoughts is the crush she nurses for Lucas, a neighbor and childhood sweetheart.

When her quiet village is attacked by an army of “homelanders” intent on taking the fertile farmland for themselves, Judith is desperate to save Lucas and the men who follow him into a losing battle. She flees to the one place she never wanted to see again: her kidnapper’s hidden
forest lair. Through gestures and grunts, she persuades the madman to use his arsenal of gunpowder to blow up the attackers’ ships. In return, she reluctantly offers to become his wife. But when the plan works and the smoke clears, her kidnapper’s corpse lies among those of their adversaries. The mysterious explosives expert is identified as Colonel Whiting, Lucas’s father and a former war hero who was believed to be already dead. Naturally, the villagers want to know “where in Jesus’ name” he has been, and if the dumbfounded Lucas had any knowledge of his father’s deception. But Judith is unable to tell anyone that Whiting was the monster who took her tongue and that Lucas knew nothing.

All these sensational events unfold in just the first quarter of the novel, and you might wonder how Berry will maintain suspense after uncovering one of the major plot points of her story so quickly. But many secrets are yet to be divulged, and Berry discloses them in fleeting flashbacks that add another layer of tension to Judith’s current situation. Judith and Lucas’s tender romance, conveyed mostly through glances, gestures and one very chaste night spent together, is challenged at every turn by circumstances and the young lovers’ own conflicting understanding of the truth and lies that surround them. Readers will be kept enjoyably unsettled until all is finally resolved in the very last pages.

Even though society would have us think we’ve left those tragic characters of female mythology behind, Judith’s story reminds us of the need to listen for the often voiceless fears girls may be concealing behind their bravado. With the help of unlikely allies, Judith is finally able to recover her voice, face her accusers and speak “all the truth that’s in me.” She seizes the right that today’s young women often take for granted: to be heard and believed. Julie Berry effectively combines elements of traditional genre literature to create a distinctive novel that includes a powerful message about the value of women’s voices and what is lost when they are silenced.

Jennifer Hubert Swan is the middle-school librarian at the Little Red School House and Elisabeth Irwin High School. She blogs at Reading Rants.

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/books/review/all-the-truth-thats-in-me-by-julie-berry.html?_r=0