

DISCUSSION POINTS FOR READERS OF THE GOOD THIEF

The Writer & Her Craft

- How does the title set the stage for the book? How does it relate to the story being told? What are its classical/historical connotations?
- Tinti chose a quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson to serve as an epigraph. What purpose does this passage serve?
- Tinti grew up in Salem, Massachusetts, the home of the infamous witch trials of the late 17th century. How is this cultural and historical background evident in the book?
- How does Tinti balance the darkness of the story's graverobbing, murder, etc. with lighter elements, and even humor?
- Discuss Tinti's writing style, especially the sentence structure, diction, tone, setting, story structure, and use of figurative language, metaphor and imagery.
- How does the author use symbols—whether visual or biblical or literary—to further the story, or to enhance the structure of the narrative?
- Discuss how Tinti's writing is visual. In what ways is the book "cinematic"?
- What portions or aspects of the writing did you find most artful and enjoyable to read?

Characters & Motivation

- Consider the meaning of the different characters' names (e.g., Brother Joseph, Benjamin Nab, Mrs. Sands, Sarah and Samuel). What are the historical, biblical and/or etymological implications of these names? How do these names match the personalities or actions of each character?
- What does Ren learn or take from each of the myriad characters in the book? What is the author trying to convey by incorporating them into Ren's story?
- How does each of the adult male characters serve as a father figure to Ren?
- How are men and women portrayed differently from one another? What different roles do they serve for Ren? Do any fulfill the role of the idealistic "mother" figure that Ren holds in his imagination?
- How are children portrayed in the novel? Are their thoughts and actions believable?
- Why does Ren steal?
- The Good Thief introduces many unusual characters in unusual situations, from Dolly the resurrected killer to the dwarf living on his sister's roof. What purpose, metaphorical or other, do they serve in the novel?

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- Who are Pilot and the hat boys? What is their role in the story?
- Why does Tom adopt Brom and Ichy from the orphanage? How does Brom and Ichy's arrival shift the direction of the story?
- What motivates McGinty to keep Ren captive? What grudges does he hold and why?
- Discuss the concept of nature vs. nurture in relation to Ren's upbringing—his actions and his character.
- How does Ren navigate the rough moral waters of his participation in Benjamin and Tom's graverobbing and Dolly's actions?
- Consider the friendship that grows between Ren and Dolly. What do they learn from each other?
- How does Ren change throughout the course of the novel? How do other characters change?
- The tale is told from the perspective of Ren, who is a boy. How does his youthful perspective affect the story?
- How do the different characters react to Ren's missing hand? What does that tell the reader about that character?
- Did the real story of how Ren lost his hand shock you as a reader? How does Ren react?
- What story does Ren tell McGinty about his "real" father? Why does he tell this story?

Issues, Themes & Plot

- How do the setting of the book (in small-town New England) and the time (mid-19th century) reflect Ren's character and the narrative?
- What does the novel tell us about the people and culture of that region during that period of history?
- How does the author inform the reader about the landscape her characters are exploring?
- The novel begins with several scenes in the monastery orphanage. What information does the reader get from this first section of the book and in what ways does this setting/do these characters return throughout the novel?
- How is the element of discovery revealed through the character of young Ren?
- What defines a coming-of-age novel and how does *The Good Thief* fit that definition?
- What differentiates a children's coming-of-age novel from an adult coming-of-age novel, if anything?

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- What different talismans are evident in the book? What purpose do they serve for the characters?
- How is Ren's missing hand both a blessing and a curse (for him or other characters)?
- Ren finds *The Deerslayer* to be "better than histories or psalms, better even than *The Lives of the Saints*." What is it that he connects with in this novel? How is his experience of *The Deerslayer* different from what he likes about *The Lives of the Saints*? What does it tell us about how he is growing and changing? What role does each play in the narrative and as a reflection of Ren's character?
- Discuss how the following play out in the novel and how each affects the characters of the story: friendship, competition, loneliness, religion/faith, superstition, sacrifice, redemption, morality, adventure. • In what ways is the novel one of resurrection as well?
- How does Ren's relationship with/feelings about religion change throughout the novel?
- How are different types of "family" portrayed and understood? How do different family structures or relationships parallel one another?
- When he is sitting with Dolly's body, Ren tells his friend about the adventure he has missed, believing that "the right words could make anything happen." How does storytelling function on numerous levels and in relation to various characters in the novel?
- Benjamin tells Ren that when you hear the story that you don't want to hear, then you know it's the truth. How does this forewarning come true for Ren at different times throughout the story?
- Ren relishes the taste of an orange and the warmth of a quilt. What might these examples of his appreciation for the simple pleasures tell contemporary youth about our modern lives and consumer-based society?
- Why is it important for the narrative that Ren's real history is such a mystery until late in the novel?

Speculative Questions

- What do you think Tinti's motivations were in writing this novel?
- Would this story affect older readers differently than younger ones? Why?
- How do stories function in a society and for the individual? What are the purposes of telling and retelling stories to ourselves and to others?