

WISHES AND WELLINGTONS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ARRANGED BY JULIE BERRY



From award-winning author Julie Berry comes a middle-grade fantasy adventure full of humor, heart, and magic.

Be careful what you wish for...

Maeve Merritt chafes at the rigid rules at her London boarding school for “Upright Young Ladies.” When punishment forces her to sort through the trash, she finds a sardine tin that houses a foul-tempered djinni with no intention of submitting to a schoolgirl as his master.

Soon after that, an orphan boy from the charitable home next door, a mysterious tall man with ginger whiskers, a disgruntled school worker, and a take-no-prisoners business tycoon are in hot pursuit of Maeve and her magical discovery. It’ll take all of her quick thinking and sass to set matters right. Maeve Merritt is one feisty heroine you won’t soon forget.



Julie Berry has written multiple award-winning novels for children and young adults, including Printz Honor winner *The Passion of Dolssa* and Odyssey Honor winner *The Scandalous Sisterhood of Prickwillow Place*. She holds an MFA in writing from Vermont College, and she now lives in southern California with her husband and four sons.

Maeve’s troubles begin with a punishment for getting into a fight with a bully. Throughout the story, she encounters several other bullies willing to use meanness, threats, or humiliation to get what they want.

- What examples can you think of where Maeve showed a wise response to a bully?
- What examples show her making an unwise or wrong response?
- Does Maeve ever act like a bully herself?
- From the bullies you saw in the story, do you think they would’ve admitted, if they were honest about it, that they were being bullies? Or do you think they believed their actions were fully justified?
- What do *you* think? Were any of the story’s bullies (or potential bullies) justified in their use of meanness, threats, or humiliation to get what they wanted?



WISHES AND WELLINGTONS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ARRANGED BY JULIE BERRY



Maeve knows she doesn't fit well with her mother's idea of how a girl her age should behave. Her headmistress, Miss Salamanca, thinks Maeve's behavior is shockingly wrong for "upright young ladies."

- What unwritten "rules" for how girls and women should act in 1896 did you notice in the story?
- What details in the story show those rules in action, and/or the social "punishments" for breaking them?
- What actions or desires of Maeve's didn't fit society's expectations?
- What names was Maeve called by others for her non-typical behaviors? How did that make her feel?
- If you were a girl in late Victorian London, how do you think you would feel about those social rules? How about if you were a boy at that time?
- Does our society, today, still have unwritten rules and punishments for people who don't fit some fixed notion of how a certain gender ought to behave?

Mermeros, as Maeve quickly learns, is no easy djinni to get along with. He's arrogant, rude, and unafraid to speak critically of others—right to their faces!

- How are Mermeros and Maeve alike?
- How are they different?
- By the end of the story, do you think Maeve or Mermeros (or both of them) had learned something from each other?

Maeve is *impulsive*, which means that she often speaks acts quickly on her emotions, without stopping to think about what's right, or what's wise, or what the consequences of her actions might be.

- What kinds of trouble does this cause for her?
- Does it seem to you that she learns something about thinking first, over the course of the story?
- Have you ever made an impulsive, emotional choice that caused problems for you? What did you learn from that experience?

When Maeve and Tom first meet, she sees him as an enemy, and a rival for Mermeros, the djinni. By the end, her relationship with Tom is entirely different.

- What brought about the change?
- What does Maeve learn about herself, good and bad, in the process of getting to know Tom?
- What does the final choice Maeve makes to help Tom show us—and show her—about how she's grown?

WISHES AND WELLINGTONS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ARRANGED BY JULIE BERRY



This story shows a world with a great deal of difference and division between people based on their access, or lack of access, to wealth (or money), education, and career (or job) opportunity.

- Which characters were focused on gaining more wealth? Why do you suppose they were?
- Which characters suffered from lack of good education? Which characters valued learning?
- How would you compare the orphan boys at the Mission Home and School for Working Boys with the girls at Miss Salamanca's School for Upright Young Ladies in terms of the *career opportunities* they could look forward to, and the *wealth* they could expect to have (or not have) in their future lives?
- How did opportunity (or lack of it) shape the hopes and fears of: Maeve, Tom, and Maeve's father, Mr. Merritt?
- In Victorian Britain, *education* gave people access to greater *opportunities*, which offered the prospect of gaining more *wealth* or *money*.
 - Is that still true today?
 - Have we made progress compared to 1896?
 - Do we need to make more progress still?

A tin of sardines that opened with a key was a fairly new innovation in 1896. To Maeve, it was a sign of modern progress. Imagine you were writing a story about a kid in our present world who finds a djinni in an unusual container that represents today's world.

- What container would you pick?
- What kinds of problems might your fictional kid face if they found an all-powerful djinni today?
- Would magical wishes be better at solving problems, or creating new ones?
- Bonus: Write the story!

