

## Book club 7: Family & identity

*A Dark Inheritance*  
by H.F. Askwith

### Rules

In this book club you will discuss *A Dark Inheritance* by H.F. Askwith in a group of 4-6 readers. You will start a conversation by responding to discussion questions about the text. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 quiz questions about the text. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of genuine questions that you have. Each group member consults the group about a part of the text that they thought was unclear. Together, you try to find answers to the questions that are raised. After everything has been cleared up, your group is ready to proceed to the next round.
- 3 Round 3 consists of questions for discussion. There are two categories to choose from. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is when you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit [www.litlab.nl](http://www.litlab.nl). A teachers' manual and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at [www.litlab.nl/docenten](http://www.litlab.nl/docenten).



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### Introduction

*'My brothers and I were truly cursed. Cursed to die before we could inherit the fortune our father had strived to build.*

*And if there really was a curse that killed the young men of our family on their eighteenth birthday, then I would be its next victim.'* (p. 15)

*A Dark Inheritance* by H.F. Askwith takes you into the chilling world of Felix Ashe, a young man burdened by a terrifying family legacy (*nalatenschap*). As his eighteenth birthday approaches, Felix becomes consumed by a desperate race against time. Can he unravel the secrets of his past and break the family curse before it claims his life too?

This book club invites you to discuss the questions posed (*gesteld*) to you by *A Dark Inheritance*: can we escape the consequences of the choices made by our parents? How should we try to understand the actions of our loved ones even if we disagree with them? Is it justifiable (*gerechtvaardigd*) to harm others to save yourself?

### Round 1: Understanding the plot

Take turns turning over a card and answering the question. After the person whose turn it is has answered, the rest may add to that answer or share their own views.

### Round 2: Initial questions

Take turns selecting one of the excerpts (*fragmenten/stukjes*) from the book listed below. Formulate a question you would like to ask one of the characters, and work together to find an answer to that question.

1. Felix's mother tells him his father is coming home: 'You see ... been through?' (p. 5-6)
2. Violet hears about the casebook: 'There was a ... my head.' (p. 219-222)
3. Felix and Lois kiss for the first time: 'Regurgitating all ... fear for.' (p. 236-239)
4. Felix receives a mysterious letter from Wade: 'I returned ... of time' (p. 385-386)

### Round 3: Discussion

Take turns turning over a card from a pile of your choice and answer the discussion question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

### Round 4: Opinion

Review *A Dark Inheritance* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



### Question 1

How would you describe Felix's mental health issues at the beginning of the novel?

### Question 2

What is the price Felix's father paid for his fortune?

### Question 3

What is Violet's motive to find Hugo Leery?

### Question 4

What happens when Violet is forced to fight her boyfriend Lachlan?

### Question 5

What event helps Felix and Lois to escape from the mansion of Imperium Mortis?

### Answers

1. He suffers from fears and anxieties.
2. He was cursed: there would be no heirs for his wealth.
3. She wants to bring him to Ada to proof her loyalty.
4. She shoots and kills him.
5. The police raids the building.



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



### Personal connections? 1

Can you think of any stories, myths, or legends about curses or family pacts that you've heard about? How are they the same or different from the curse in *A Dark Inheritance*?

### Personal connections? 2

What are your own beliefs about the supernatural or dark magic? Did the novel challenge or reinforce (*bevestigen*) your perspective? Explain your answer.

### Personal connections? 3

Can you relate to the ways in which Felix deals with the fear and pressure surrounding the curse? Would you have reacted the same way? Explain your answer.

### Personal connections? 4

What choices did Felix make that you admire or find questionable (*bedenkelijk*)? Explain your answer.

### Personal connections? 5

Discuss the concept of free will versus predetermined (*vooraf vaststaand*) fate. Do you believe we have control over our own destinies? Or do you believe that our future is predetermined? Explain your answer by using examples from the book.

### Personal connections? 6

The existence of secret societies is a theme in the novel. Do you believe such groups exist in real life? Why (not)?

### Personal connections? 7

Why do you think humans are so fascinated by the concept of curses, dark magic, and the occult? Consider the fear of the unknown, the allure (*aantrekkingskracht*) of forbidden knowledge, or the thrill of the macabre (*het griezelige*). What elements make gothic horror stories so attractive? Explain your answer.

### Personal connections? 8

What do you think of Violet's decision to shoot Lachlan, the boy she's in love with, to prove her loyalty to Imperium Mortis? Under what circumstances is self-defense allowed, in your opinion?



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

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Personal connections?

4

Personal connections?

8

Personal connections?

7



### Food for thought? 1

How are the forces of good and evil represented in the characters and their actions? More specific: is Felix a purely good character, or does he make morally questionable choices in his fight for survival? Explain your answer.

### Food for thought? 2

Felix is not the only one in the novel who risks the lives of their loved ones while trying to save themselves or others: Hugo Leery, Felix's father and Violet face similar choices. Compare their situations: what are the main differences between their dilemmas?

### Food for thought? 3

As readers our views of some characters change several times throughout the novel: Felix's father, Violet, and Wade, for example, seem to turn from good to evil and back. Do you think that the novel makes their double nature understandable? Explain your answer.

### Food for thought? 4

Share specific examples from the novel where the author builds suspense. Does the author use unfilled gaps, cliffhangers, red herrings (= a misleading or distracting piece of information), or a constant sense of danger to keep you guessing? Explain how these elements affected your reading experience.

### Food for thought? 5

What are your theories about Felix's fate? Did he break the curse, escape it temporarily, or surrender to its power? Specify what you think the author is trying to make clear in the final scene.

### Food for thought? 6

How did the historical setting of the 1920s and the years after World War I influence the story? Did these historical elements connect to the novel's themes in any way?

### Food for thought? 7

The novel explores the power of family bonds. How did Felix's relationship with his family, both living and deceased, shape his actions? Explain your answer.

### Food for thought? 8

The novel presents Imperium Mortis ('the empire of death') as the ultimate evil. Is there also an opposite value in the novel? Hope, love, trust, family, anything else? Explain your answer.



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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