

HC: 978-0-7636-7220-1
 E-book: 978-0-7636-7582-0
 Also available in audio

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.

EGG & SPOON

by Gregory
 Maguire



About the Book

Elena is a young Russian peasant with a world of worries. Her father is dead, and her mother is dying. One brother has been drafted by the Tsar, and the other is also far away. Plus, she's starving, like everyone else in her village. Then one day a train arrives. Aboard is untold wealth, a cornucopia of food, and Ekaterina, better known as Cat—an aristocrat who is Elena's age, just about her size, and on her way to meet the Tsar in Saint Petersburg. When the lives of the two girls intertwine, a wild and glorious adventure begins. Identities are confused, a monk is imprisoned, a prince goes missing, and—in a bravura performance that could only spring from the fantastic imagination of Gregory Maguire—wise-cracking Baba Yaga, Russia's fabled witch, rides to the rescue on Dumb Doma, her high-stepping, chicken-legged home.



Discussion Questions

1. As the story unfolds, the narrator reveals more and more about himself. Does your opinion of him change along the way? How trustworthy is he? How likable? Why does he risk so much for Elena?
2. What are the major differences that divide Elena and Cat at the beginning of *Egg & Spoon*? By the end, what are their common bonds?
3. The Firebird is described as the “bright soul of all the Russias” (page 4). What does that mean? How can a country have a soul? Does America have one?
4. Great-Aunt Sophia has gone to enormous trouble and expense so that Cat can be introduced to the Tsar’s godson. Why? What does the older woman want for her niece? What does Cat want for herself?
5. “Ambition without direction,” Peter Petrovich tells Elena (page 28), “is like milk without a cup.” What does he mean by this? Which characters in the novel prove his point? How?
6. Russian aristocrats in this novel seem more likely to speak French than Russian. What does this suggest about their attachment to their homeland? They also tend to doubt the existence of Baba Yaga and the Firebird. Why?
7. “I *am* life,” says Baba Yaga (page 144) soon after she meets Cat. What do you think she means by that? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
8. Baba Yaga’s wicked wit sometimes flies right over the heads of her listeners. What are some of her jokes that you caught? What are some of her zany, comic anachronisms (puns, references, or quotes from our time, not Tsarist Russia’s)? Which are your favorites? Why?
9. In *Egg & Spoon*, the arctic is melting because the great ice-dragon can’t fall asleep. “When human voices halt their cry of *want* and *want*,” he says (page 385), “then I will sleep again.” What is the cause of climate change in our time? In what ways does human wanting contribute to the problem?
10. The families in *Egg & Spoon* come in many forms, some traditional and some deliciously wacky. Which family in this novel would you want to join? Why?
11. Baba Yaga isn’t the only character in this book whose bark turns out to be worse than her bite. Which other characters gradually reveal their softer side? Why are they slow to show kindness?
12. Prince Anton calls himself and his fellow travelers the League of Freed Prisoners, yet only Elena has been a prisoner. What confinements have the others escaped?
13. According to the narrator, there are two kinds of stories, and *Egg & Spoon* might be telling “both kinds at once: a stranger comes to town *and* a hero goes on a journey” (page 84). Who is the stranger who comes to town in this novel? Who is the traveling hero? Can you think of a story that *doesn’t* fit either type?

14. “There is enough world for everyone,” says the dragon (page 386). “But everyone cries in want of *more*.” Do you agree? Why is it so difficult to know the difference between enough and more than enough?
15. “Perplexity,” according to the narrator, might have been Elena’s greatest strength (page 365). What does he mean by that? Do you agree? How can uncertainty do more good than conviction?
16. “The word *Elena* means ‘light.’” Maxim Rudin explains (page 393). Why is this such an appropriate name for his daughter? How does Elena live up to it?
17. What is the significance of the title? Does it refer to one particular egg in this novel full of remarkable eggs? What connection does an egg have with a spoon? “Does being in possession of a spoon give you more right to the egg?” the narrator asks (page 188). What do you think?
18. Both of the protagonists have a chance to hold and cherish one of the two eggs in the story: the fabulous bejeweled Fabergé egg and the unhatched egg of the Firebird. What kind of value is attached to each egg? Is one worth more than the other? What about the endlessly renewable egg laid by the immortal hen of the tundra?

About Gregory Maguire

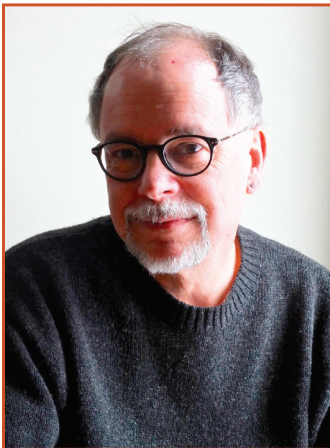
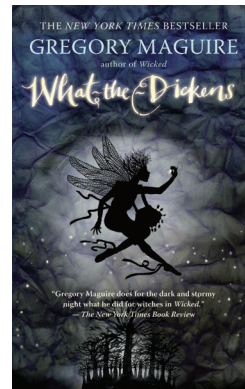


photo © by Andy Newman

Gregory Maguire is renowned for his book *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, which launched the smash Broadway musical and several best-selling companion novels. The author of more than twenty-five books

for readers of all ages, including *What-the-Dickens*, a *New York Times* bestseller, he lives with his family outside Boston, Massachusetts.

Also by Gregory Maguire



The *New York Times* bestseller
What-the-Dickens: The Story of a Rogue Tooth Fairy

HC: 978-0-7636-2961-8

Trade PB: 978-0-7636-4147-4

PB: 978-0-7636-4307-2

E-book: 978-0-7636-5171-8



CANDLEWICK PRESS
www.candlewick.com