

MAGRUDER'S CURIOSITY CABINET

a novel

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READING GROUP GUIDE



1. *Magruder's* takes inspiration from plague outbreaks that occurred in San Francisco and Honolulu in the early 1900s. If there were a case of the plague in your neighborhood, how do you think you would react? How about in your local school? Did the plot remind you of more recent events, such as the Ebola outbreak? Or did this seem entirely different? Why?
2. Kitty starts the novel alone on a bench, thinking about drowning herself. She ends as the leader of a fairly big con to save Magruder's. How does she get from point A to point B? What motivates her to change and grow? Does she fail at any point?
3. Some of the characters are "unusual" because of their physical bodies, while others are "unusual" because of their lifestyles. How does the question of choice impact the characters? Does a character like Rosalind have more choice than a character like Zeph? Or not?
4. What attracts certain "normal" characters like Nazan and Spencer to the Magruder's world? And on the other hand, why do you think some characters find the world threatening?

5. Whitey the fireman warns Zeph to stay away from anarchists because of the “trifecta”—meaning that membership in three minority groups is too many. This idea is sometimes described as “intersectionality,” which refers to being affected by multiple types of oppression (such as racism, sexism, classism, ablism, and homophobia). What other examples of intersectionality do you notice in *Magruder’s*? How does intersectionality impact how characters understand the world and one another?
6. Books play a fairly large role in the story: *The Souls of Black Folk* and *The Wizard of Oz* both appear in the first chapter, Nazan and Spencer’s first conversation involves Austen and Wells, and a copy of *Captains Courageous* changes Spencer’s mind about what his next move should be. Why do you think authors reference other books in their own stories? What do you learn about a particular character based on what book he or she is reading?
7. What role does friendship play in the story? What are some of the key friendships that develop over the course of the book? How and when do characters such as Zeph and Spencer start to see each other as individuals rather than types?
8. At one point, Rosalind tells Seamus the bellhop, “Not one of us knows what we can do, until one fine day, we stand up and do it.” What other instances did you notice where characters “stand up” and do something they didn’t intend? How does it work out for them?
9. The story of *Magruder’s* is told from a few different points of view. There are certain points—for example, the death of Bernard the Giant—where the reader knows more about what’s happening than the characters do. Why do you think the author decided to tell the story this way? How do changes in point of

view affect the plot, the characters, and the reader? Was one character's point of view more compelling than another?

10. The conclusion of a novel can leave the reader satisfied or disappointed, happy that it's over or wanting more. How did *Magruder's* ending affect you? Why?