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Family Reading Guide for "Brick Dust and Bones"

Conversation starters for parents and children

Getting Started

What This Book Is About

"Brick Dust and Bones" tells the story of Marius Grey, a twelve-year-old Cemetery Boy in supernatural New Orleans whose job is to tend the ghosts in his family's graveyard. But Marius has other plans: he's secretly hunting monsters to earn mystic coins so he can bring his mother back from the dead. As his mother's window to return closes, Marius must hunt bigger and more dangerous monsters, navigating New Orleans's gritty bounty-hunting underworld. The story explores grief, love, dangerous choices, and the question of whether we can—or should—try to reverse death.

Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Grief and loss:** The depths of pain when we lose someone we love and the desperate desire to have them back
- **Dangerous choices driven by love:** How caring deeply about someone can lead us to take increasingly risky actions
- **Acceptance vs. fighting reality:** The tension between accepting loss and trying to undo it
- **Consequences of breaking rules:** What happens when we abandon safe paths for dangerous shortcuts
- **The cost of our goals:** Understanding that achieving what we want might require sacrifices we haven't fully considered
- **Living between worlds:** Navigating different realities and the responsibilities that come with special abilities

Content Note for Parents: This book deals with death, grief, and monster hunting. It explores heavy emotional themes including a child's loss of a parent and increasingly dangerous choices. Consider your child's emotional readiness for these topics.

Character Connection Questions

About Marius

- How do you think Marius feels about losing his mother?
- Why do you think he's willing to take such dangerous risks?
- What does Marius's job as a Cemetery Boy tell us about his world?
- Do you understand why Marius makes the choices he does, even if they're dangerous?

About Grief and Loss



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- How do different people handle grief and loss?
- What would you say to Marius about his plan to bring his mother back?
- How might Marius's grief be affecting his decisions?
- What are healthy vs. unhealthy ways to cope with losing someone you love?

Big Ideas to Explore

Death, Resurrection, and Letting Go

- If you could bring someone back from the dead, should you?
- What might be the costs or consequences of reversing death?
- How do we honor people we've lost without trying to undo their death?
- What does it mean to "say goodbye" to someone who has died?

Risk and Desperation

- How does grief make people take risks they normally wouldn't?
- When does fighting for what you want become self-destructive?
- What would you risk for someone you love? Where would you draw the line?
- How can we tell when we're losing perspective about our goals?

Rules, Duties, and Dangerous Shortcuts

- Why do you think Marius is "not supposed to" hunt monsters?
- What responsibilities is Marius neglecting while pursuing his goal?
- When is it okay to break rules, and when is it dangerous?
- What's the difference between taking risks for something important and being reckless?

Fun Conversation Starters

The Supernatural World

- What do you think it would be like to be a Cemetery Boy?
- How do you imagine the world of ghosts and monsters in New Orleans?
- What do you think "living between worlds" means?
- If mystic coins existed, what would you save up for?

Monster Hunting

- What kind of monsters do you think Marius hunts?
- Why would there be a bounty-hunting market for monsters?
- What makes something a "monster" vs. just a different kind of creature?
- What would be scariest about hunting bigger and meaner monsters?

New Orleans Setting

- What do you know about New Orleans and its supernatural reputation?



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- How does setting matter to this story?
- What makes New Orleans a good location for ghost and monster stories?
- Would this story be different if it were set somewhere else?

Discussion Activities

Exploring Grief and Loss

- Discuss how different cultures and families handle death and remember loved ones
- Talk about healthy ways to cope with loss and grief
- Share family stories about remembering people who have died
- Explore the difference between honoring memory and trying to reverse death

Real-World Connections

- Research New Orleans cemeteries and their unique above-ground tombs
- Learn about how different cultures view death and the afterlife
- Discuss the concept of "stages of grief" and where Marius might be
- Explore how literature helps us process difficult emotions

Conversation Tips for Parents

Creating Safe Spaces

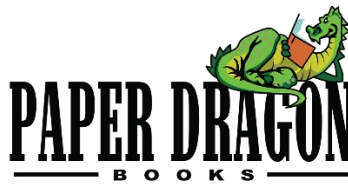
- **Acknowledge the weight of these topics** - death and grief are genuinely difficult to discuss
- **Validate your child's emotional responses** - this story might bring up strong feelings
- **Share your own experiences with loss** - age-appropriate honesty helps children process
- **Be prepared for questions** - this book might prompt questions about family deaths or fears about losing you

Encouraging Deep Thinking

- **Ask about Marius's choices:** "Do you agree with what Marius is doing? Why or why not?"
- **Explore consequences:** "What might happen if Marius succeeds? What if he fails?"
- **Discuss perspective:** "How might Marius's mother feel about his dangerous quest?"
- **Connect to values:** "What does this story teach about grief and letting go?"

Making It Personal

- **Discuss family approaches to loss:** How does your family remember loved ones who have died?
- **Explore healthy coping:** What helps when we're sad about loss?
- **Connect to family values:** "This reminds me of how our family believes..."



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- **Plan related activities:** visit meaningful places, share memories of loved ones, create memory projects

Questions by Age Group

For Younger Readers (Ages 11-12)

Focus on basic moral questions and character choices:

- What do you think about Marius's plan to bring his mother back?
- How does hunting monsters show how much Marius misses his mother?
- What would you do if you were Marius's friend?
- What are other ways Marius could honor his mother's memory?

For Older Readers (Ages 13-14)

Explore deeper themes of grief, mortality, and moral complexity:

- How does the story explore different stages of grief?
- What does "Brick Dust and Bones" suggest about accepting death?
- How do Marius's increasingly dangerous choices reflect his emotional state?
- What are the ethical implications of trying to resurrect the dead?

Handling Sensitive Topics

Death and Grief

- Acknowledge that losing a parent is one of the hardest experiences someone can face
- Validate that Marius's desperation is understandable even if his methods are concerning
- Discuss that grief can make people think and act in ways they normally wouldn't
- Connect to resources if your child is dealing with significant loss

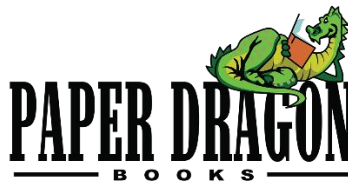
Dangerous Risk-Taking

- Explore how desperation can lead to poor decision-making
- Discuss the importance of having support and talking to trusted adults
- Emphasize that risking your life doesn't honor someone who loved you
- Connect to age-appropriate discussions about recognizing when emotions are driving dangerous choices

Resurrection and the Supernatural

- Acknowledge different religious and cultural beliefs about death and afterlife
- Discuss how fiction explores questions we don't have real answers to
- Explore why humans have always wondered about reversing death
- Connect to your family's beliefs and values about death and what comes after

Questions About Family Loss



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If your child has experienced loss:

- Be prepared for the book to bring up emotions about their own loss
- Validate their feelings and experiences
- Discuss differences between Marius's fictional world and real grief
- Emphasize healthy ways to remember and honor loved ones

Activity Ideas

Memory and Remembrance

- Create memory books or boxes for loved ones who have died
- Share family stories about ancestors and those who have passed
- Visit meaningful places like cemeteries or memorial sites
- Discuss how your family keeps memories alive

Creative Projects

- Write your own supernatural New Orleans story
- Design your own fantasy currency system (like mystic coins)
- Create art inspired by themes of memory and loss
- Write letters to loved ones who have died

Cultural Exploration

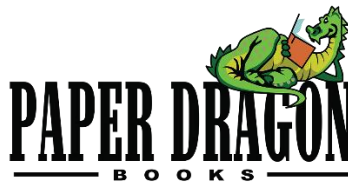
- Research New Orleans history and culture
- Learn about different cultural approaches to death and remembrance
- Explore Day of the Dead traditions and other memorial customs
- Visit museums with exhibits about local death customs and cemeteries

Moral Discussions

- Debate: "If you could bring someone back from the dead, should you?"
- Discuss real-world situations involving difficult choices and consequences
- Explore the concept of "the cost of getting what you want"
- Consider when fighting for something becomes self-destructive

Remember

"Brick Dust and Bones" provides opportunities for deep conversations about loss, grief, love, and the difficult work of accepting death. While these are heavy topics, they're important ones that literature helps us explore safely.



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Use Marius's story as a starting point to discuss how we cope with loss in healthy ways versus unhealthy ways. The book shows the dangerous extremes of trying to reverse death, which can lead to conversations about honoring memory without being consumed by it.

Most importantly, let the story open up conversations about your family's beliefs and approaches to death, loss, and remembrance. Marius's desperate quest highlights both the depth of love between parents and children and the importance of eventually finding peace with loss. Whether Marius succeeds or learns to say goodbye, his story teaches that how we grieve and what we risk in that grief matters profoundly.

If this book brings up difficult emotions for your child, use it as an opportunity to strengthen communication and provide support. Sometimes the hardest stories are the most important ones to read and discuss together.