



**Discussion Questions for
Hammer of Witches
by Shana Mlawski**

1. Which of the many stories in the book do you most relate to, and why? Some stories and characters to consider: the golem, the hameh, Titivillus, Leviathan/Job, the unicorn, the sleeping princess, the Baba Yaga, the story of the half-genie, Amir al-Katib's story, Uncle Diego's story, Rodrigo's story.
2. Think about the various religious and ethnic conflicts in the book, such as the conflict between Catholic Spain and the Moors, the Spanish Inquisition and converted Jews, and the Spanish explorers and the Taíno. Do any of these conflicts remind you of conflicts going on in the world today? In what way?
3. At the beginning of the story, Baltasar says he has no interest in meeting his father. Why do you think he said that? Do you think he meant it or not?
4. What do you think the Baba Yaga's prophecy meant? Do you think it came true? What about Titivillus's predictions?
5. Since you read *Hammer of Witches*, has your view of Christopher Columbus changed? How? If you were to teach a child about Christopher Columbus's first voyage to the Americas, what would you say?
6. Compare and contrast the ways different characters use magic. What do these distinctive Storytelling styles say about each character? Think of a favorite story from your childhood. What would Baltasar say about the story? What about Catalina, Jinni, Amir, Arabuko, or Uncle Diego?
7. Why do you think some characters in the book can use magic while others can't?
8. Throughout the book, Catalina criticizes Baltasar, yet she continues to travel with him. Why do you think Catalina acts the way she does? Do you agree with her when she criticizes Baltasar?

9. Research the Taíno groups living on Hispaniola in 1492. How has Taíno culture shaped your life in the twenty-first century? (Things to think about: Taino foods, inventions, words.)
10. As a child, Baltasar considered Amir al-Katib a hero, but later he decided al-Katib was a villain. Do you think there's a true hero in *Hammer of Witches*? If so, who is it? If not, why not? Do you think there's a true villain in the book? If so, who is it? If not, why not?
11. Read the scene at the end of Part II where Baltasar and Jinni fight (hardcover pages 261-265). Who do you think is right in this case? Why?
12. Toward the end of the book, Rodrigo tries to convince Baltasar that they have the same goals. In what ways are these characters similar? How are they different? Later, Baltasar also says he and Amir al-Katib look alike. How are these characters similar? How are they different?
13. At the end of the book, Baltasar wonders if the Spanish and the Taíno could have avoided conflict. What do you think?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shana Mlawski is a native New Yorker who writes educational materials and tutors middle and high school students. She has written more than a hundred articles for the pop culture website *OverthinkingIt.com*, some of which have been featured in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Ms.* magazine. She graduated cum laude from Yale with a B.A. in English with a concentration in creative writing, and received a master's in education from Columbia University Teachers College. *Hammer of Witches* is her first novel.

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