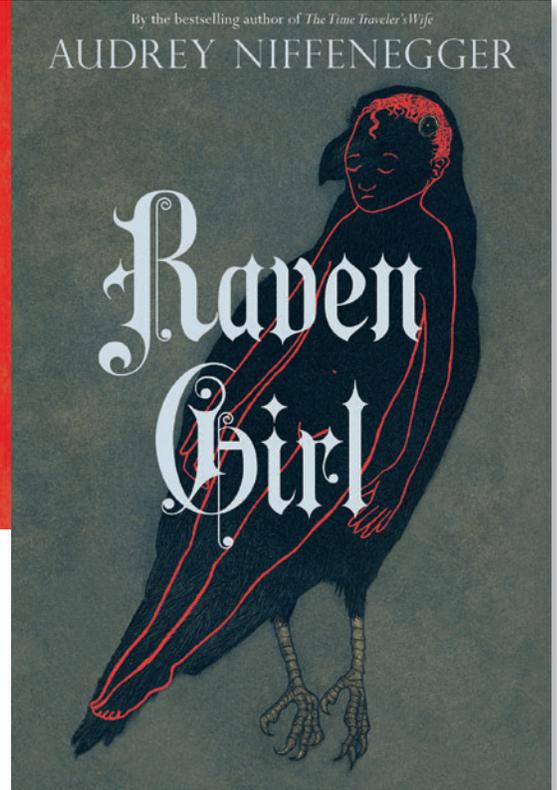


## READING GROUP GUIDE TO

# Raven Girl

BY AUDREY NIFFENEGGER



## INTRODUCTION

“Once there was a Postman who fell in love with a Raven.” So begins the life and the story of *Raven Girl*, lonely daughter, gentle soul and the half human/half raven heroine of this modern fairy tale. Full of mystical elements, dark and beautiful prose, and very real longing, this tale captures the imagination and evokes a magical world that seems at once both preternatural and utterly human.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1) There are many references to ravens throughout literature and culture. What do ravens traditionally symbolize? How does that traditional symbolism differ from the ravens in this story? How are they similar?
- 2) In the “acknowledgements” the author states that “fairy tales have their own remorseless logic and their own rules.” What are some examples of this in *Raven Girl*? Do you think this is a traditional fairy tale?
- 3) How do you think the illustrations add to the tone of the story? Do they enhance the mood? If so, how?
- 4) Do you think the Postman was right to take the Raven away from her nest and her raven family? How do his actions correlate to humanity’s relationship with nature and attitude toward animals?



## QUESTIONS CONTINUED

- 5) Raven Girl is half human and half raven. There are many such hybrid creatures, or chimeras, throughout mythology and fairy tales. Discuss the challenges that generally face such creatures in these stories and how do they relate to real life. If you had to create a chimera that represented you, which animals would you incorporate and why?
- 6) What role do the cats play in this story? The ravens generally view them as “perfidious”. Do you agree?
- 7) What role did the Boy Detective serve in the narrative? What do you think his motives were in his action toward the doctor? What do you imagine was his fate?
- 8) Discuss the doctor’s character. Do you think what he did for Raven Girl was ethical?
- 9) In the story, Raven Girl tells the doctor, “Inside I am a raven. I only look human.” This dichotomy seems to be at the heart of her isolation. What real life societal issues could this notion speak to? Could this story be read as an allegory about those who identify as transgender?
- 10) Raven Girl can neither speak as a human nor fly as a raven. How does this contribute to the underlying themes of community, isolation, and conformity?
- 11) The doctor introduces Raven Girl to the possibility of physical transformation through surgery. He says, “We have the power to improve ourselves if we wish to do so. We can become anything we wish to be.” Do you think this is true in reality? Western society accepts many medical procedures for “self improvement.” How are they similar to the transformation Raven Girl desires? How do they differ? What is lost, and gained, through these transformations both in real life and in *Raven Girl*?
- 12) Discuss the ending of the story—were you surprised? Why or why not?

