

Darkness Before Dawn

Study Guide

| The following questions could be used for small group discussions, whole class discussions, or short answer written questions. | Common Core Standard(s) |
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| 1. <i>Darkness Before Dawn</i> begins at the end of the story and then takes the reader back to April of the junior year in high school. It is told in first person, from Keisha's point of view. Think about the author's choices in text structure. What is the advantage of having a story told in first person? What is the disadvantage? Support your answer with details from the text. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 RL.6-12.6 |
| 2. A motif is a word or image that is repeated throughout a novel that helps to highlight or unify a central idea. Trace the references to the use of the word of "silver" in the novel, and explain how silver is important to the development of the story using specific details from the text. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.2 RL.6-12.4 |
| 3. Even though Keisha is intelligent and mature, she is easily entangled in Jonathan Hathaway's trap. Explain how this occurs using specific details, and discuss whether you think Keisha's mistakes are realistic. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 |
| 4. Discuss the role of Edna. Why is she significant, even though she is a very minor character? What does she teach Keisha and Jalani about people who are homeless and/or needy? What is meant by her statement, "Yo spirit is a shinin' silver star, chile. Can't nobody take that away from you."? | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 |
| 5. Discuss the character of Jonathan Hathaway. Does he have any redeeming qualities, or is he purely a negative character? What might have made Jonathan the person he became? Support your answer with evidence from the text. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 |
| 6. Discuss the character of Leon. What makes him a positive character? Why is he good for Keisha, and why does she initially reject him? How did his background affect his personality? Support your answer with evidence from the text. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 |
| 7. Discuss Joyelle and what you thought about her name change. What was the effect of her name change on how she dealt with the problems she faced? Based on what you see in her character in the text, did changing her name really make a difference? | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 |
| 8. Explain how Joyelle managed to crash her father's car using specific plot details. Why do you think she did it? Base your answer on evidence from the text. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.2 RL.6-12.3 |
| 9. Discuss the characters of Rhonda and Tyrone. Discuss how they manage to control their emotions, as well as their reactions to those feelings, in spite of the intensity of the feelings they have for each other. Support your answer with details from the text. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 |
| 10. In Chapter Fourteen of <i>Darkness Before Dawn</i> , the kids are at Rhonda's house doing homework on poetry. Analyze the poem at the very end of the book. How is it effective for the message Keisha wants to give? | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.5 RL.6-12.7 |
| 11. Keisha is searching for "a real man-someone who is mature and | RL.6-12.1 |

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| sophisticated" throughout the story. What qualities are found in "a real man?" Discuss each of the male characters in the story (include students as well as adults) and tell how they fit your qualifications. | W.6-12.1 |
| 12. Keisha says at the end of <i>Darkness Before Dawn</i> , "We, the members of this graduating class, are joined together forever in a circle of friendship and memories. Because of our unusual difficulties, we have become stronger. Our shared tears have become the glue that has bound us together in love." Explain what she means using details from the text. How are difficulties in life sometimes useful for make people grow closer together? | RL.6-12.1 W.6-12.1 |
| 13. Explain the title of the novel. What was the "darkness?" in the lives of not just Keisha, but all of the characters? Why did it have to come before the "dawn" in their lives? How would you describe the "dawn?" Support your answer with details from the text. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.4 W.6-12.1 |
| 14. Explain how the title might apply to a real life situation. | W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4 |
| The following questions are designed to be individual writing projects or small group writing projects depending upon the needs of your classroom. | Common Core Standard(s) |
| <p>Narrative</p> <p>" Like silent trumpets, the lights of the auditorium suddenly blaze. We seniors cheer, the audience stands and applauds, and then we hear the tinny sound of 'Pomp and Circumstance' coming from the school orchestra sitting down front. I always cry when I hear that song. As we march proudly down the aisle in the procession, excited parents flashing cameras and waving with joy, I think back to my first day of school as a kindergartner, how scared I was, and how a skinny little boy named Andy Jackson shared his peanut butter sandwich with me. I think about grade school and long division, of junior high and locker partners, of high school and basketball games, and of hospitals and funerals."</p> <p>Write a narrative paper about memories of years gone by. Your reader should be able to picture the scene.</p> | RL.6-12.5 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4 |
| <p>Newspaper Article</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write a story for your newspaper. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first day of school in any American high school Graduation day in any American high school Write a magazine article about Jalani. Include her life in Africa, her relationship with her parents and her new step mother, the death of her mother, and her relationship with her new friends. Include drawings of Jalani's clothing designs if you like. Write a biography of Jonathan Hathaway, focusing on his childhood. Include details about his mother, his father, and his thoughts while growing up. | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.2 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4 |
| <p>Letters</p> <p>Write a letter to one of the characters in the book and explain your feelings about the events in the story. What advice would you give and why?</p> | RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 |

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| <p>Point of View Paper</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In diary form, write the life of Edna for several months. Include details about how she managed to live her life. 2. " "But I found one woman who made a difference, at least for a little while," I told her. "Who? A queen?" "Not really. Her name was Boudica. She was a princess of . . . let's see what it says here. . . some tribe called the Iceni, way back in 61 AD. "Too long ago for me to care," Jalani said. "No, this woman was really pretty cool," I tried to explain. "Even though her mama was stupid enough to give her a dumb name like Boudica!" We both laughed. "Hey, what's up, my name is Boudica!" Jalani couldn't stop laughing. "She sure wouldn't have made it in our school," I agreed, giggling at the image of a girl having to live with a name like that. "Anyway, she had long flowing, red hair, down to her knees, with a deep voice and a huge body. She was over six feet tall and could beat up a man!" "With a name like Boudica, she probably had to beat up everybody!" Jalani still couldn't stop laughing. "She was a woman who could kick some butt if she really had to. And she had to." "What happened?" Jalani asked, intrigued, wiping her eyes. "When the Romans came to England to take over her people, they took her captive, beat her up, and raped her two daughters." "Raped?" "Yeah. Raped." I shuddered. Our laughter had died suddenly. "Anyway, when they released the women, Boudica was so angry that she went around the countryside, gathered up both men and women, and formed a little army all her own." "You go, girl," Jalani said. "So did she chase the Romans out?" I sighed. "She killed hundreds of them!" Me and Jalani smacked hands in a high-five to celebrate Boudica's brief victory. "The fight lasted for almost a year, it says here. Then the Romans, of course, killed her." "Of course." Jalani sighed. "But for one brief moment in history, she showed the men what power really was," I said proudly. "Is that who you're doing your report on?" asked Jalani. "Yeah, there's no other woman who stands out like that for several centuries." "I'm sure they existed. But nobody wrote about them in the books." "Because the writers were all men!" " <p>Read the passage above and explain how point of view makes a difference. How might this warrior queen be described by a male reader? Why is it less common to find examples of powerful women in history? How would this book be different if it were told from Jonathan's point of view?</p> | <p>W.6-12.4 RL.6-12.6 W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4 W.6-12.9</p> |
| <p>Descriptive Paper</p> <p>" When the lift dropped us off at the top of the slopes, the view was breathtaking. It looked like one of those paint-by-number pictures that I used to do when I was ten years old. Bright, clean snow covered the world--it looked like tons of spilled sugar. The pine trees decorated the scene with green. I breathed deeply of the cold, fresh air. It was the first time in several months that I had felt truly free."</p> <p>Using the passage above as a guide, write a descriptive paper that uses sensory</p> | <p>RL.6-12.5 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p> |

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| <p>imagery. Use vivid verbs and powerful adjectives and adverbs as you write. Use as many of the senses as you can--sight, sound, smell, touch, taste--as well as deep, rich colors.</p> | |
| <p>Persuasive Paper</p> <p>""Where have you been, young lady?" my mother demanded. "At the art museum. Honest! What's the big deal?" I'd never spoken to Mom like that before. Either the coffee or the kiss had made me bolder than usual. "Don't you speak to me in that tone of voice," Mom warned. "Why didn't you call me?" "I left you a note." I was angry. "I've been home for three hours!" my mother continued. "The art museum closed at five. Did you go to the library?" I started to lie, but decided not to, even though I knew the truth would get me in trouble. I felt rebellious, and my uneasiness about Jonathan made me turn my fears into words that I shot like bullets at my mother. "I went to a coffee shop by the University. And then I stopped by Eden Park." "A coffee shop? That's not your usual hangout." I could tell Mom didn't like the tone of voice that I was using. "Who did you go with? Rhonda?" "No." I was silent for a moment. "I went with Jonathan Hathaway," I said finally. It made me feel good to see the anger and disapproval on Mom's face. Now it was her turn to be silent. "Explain," she finally said. Her voice was sharp like a razor. She was really pissed. I looked at my mother, but didn't answer right away. I took off my coat and hung it up in the closet. While my back was turned, I wiped my lips with my gloves--just to make sure I didn't have any smeared lipstick to make this situation worse."</p> <p>Read the passage above, then write a persuasive paper that includes an introduction, three support paragraphs, and a conclusion. You can use one of the ideas below, or you can choose your own:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Three problems caused by lack of good judgment." • "Three issues that cause arguments between parents and teenagers." • "Three things I wish parents understood." | <p>W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4</p> |
| <p>Comparison</p> <p>Friendship is extremely important in <i>Darkness Before Dawn</i>. Compare the friendships of the following people using details from the novel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Keisha and Rhonda ○ Joyelle and Angel ○ Leon and Keisha ○ Jalani and Gerald ○ Monty and Keisha ○ Jalani and Rhonda | <p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4</p> |
| <p>Expository Essay</p> <p>"Now I'm a good skier, but this was my first time this winter, so I started on the gentler slopes. The air bit my face like tiny knives. I hated to admit it, but my mother, as usual, was right. I took Monty down a small hill, called Little Bluff, and even though it was his first time on the slopes, he did well and didn't fall once. The expression on his face as he reached the bottom of the hill was worth effort of</p> | <p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p> |

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| <p>getting him ready to do it. He was exultant. "Let's do it again!" he cried. So we took the lift back up. That's when BJ offered to take him down another, bigger hill, so Monty left me in an instant, excitedly following BJ. I smiled as I watched him go. It was good to see him happy. I saw Leon in the distance, and noticed he was heading my way, but just then, Jonathan skillfully skied over to where I stood. "Race you down!" he challenged, and I forgot all about Leon for the moment. "You're on!" I answered Jonathan as I took off. He barely had time to put on his goggles before I had left him in a swirl of snow. He laughed as he took off behind me, easily catching and passing me. "Good thing this was Little Bluff," I gasped. "I would have left you like yesterday's snowman."</p> <p>Read the passage above. Write an expository (explanatory) paper on how to ski, or a paper on skiing in the Olympics. You will have to conduct research to get this information.</p> | |
| <p>Character Sketch</p> <p>Write a character sketch of Keisha-what made her unique-her personality, her strengths and weaknesses, her ability to overcome serious obstacles. Use specifics from the book to illustrate your points.</p> | <p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p> |
| <p>Conversation/Dialogue</p> <p>"The old woman looked up suddenly. "My name's not 'Ma'am.' It's Edna." She chuckled. "Ain't that an ugly name?" "I think it's a nice name," Jalani said. She handed the whole bowl of soup in the plastic container to Edna, who gulped it greedily. She had no need of a spoon--she was very hungry. "What's your name, honey?" Edna asked Jalani as she finished off the soup. "Jalani." "Now that's a pretty name!" Edna declared. "A nice African name! I like that! And you're a pretty girl to match it." Jalani smiled shyly. "And what your name, chile?" she asked me. "I never said you was ugly, now. Don't go getting' mad at old Edna." I smiled and told her my name. "Keisha? What kind of name is that? Sounds like a sneeze!" She wiped her mouth on her coat sleeve and laughed at her own joke. I smiled, but I said nothing. "Do you have someplace to go, Edna?" Jalani asked. "Sure, chile. Don't you worry none about me. I'm heading down to the shelter for the night. I'll be fine. Specially now that I had that soup. The food they give us down there is clean and good, but it's made from what I called recycled leftovers, if you know what I mean. Nothing wrong with it; it just ain't fine cuisine, if you know what I mean. Not rich and fine like your homemade soup! I'll sleep good tonight, thanks to you!" Jalani started to cry. "I wish I could help you," she mumbled helplessly. "Now, child, ain't nobody cried about me in a hundred years or so. So don't start now. I like my life. I got no bills, no obligations, no worries. I got friends here on the streets and a warm place to sleep on these winter nights. And every once in a while, I meet a couple of kids like you that lets me know the world is gonna be OK. Now get on inside out of this cold. Both o' you! You done a good thing today. And that's just 'bout good enough!"</p> <p>Using the passage above as a guide, write a conversation between an older person and a teenager, or a person with a dialect and a teenager. Make sure the personality</p> | <p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p> |

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| of the two speakers is clear in your dialogue. | |
| Poetry Write a poem about one of the following topics, or choose a topic of your own that deals with the ideas in the book. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear• Guilt• Loneliness• Confusion• Sorrow• Pain• Loss• Hope | RL.6-12.4 W.6-12.3 |