

The Mirror Door Study Guide

The Mirror Door study guide, part 1

About the Author:

Janice Clark grew up in a house full of books, where reading was a normal daily activity and imagination was encouraged. She was filled with curiosity, and sought answers in books. Not content to stop at mundane facts, she liked to ask "what if" questions. What if magic were real? What if cats could talk? What if you could climb a moonbeam? Since the answers weren't always available, she sometimes made up her own.

Now that she's supposedly grown up, Ms. Clark shares her questions and stories with other children of all ages. What if Lewis Carroll's Alice stories were true--only not quite the way he told them?

Occasionally playing at being a grown-up, Ms. Clark also writes poetry, essays, inspirational books, and reviews for *The Fix*. But the children's stories are more fun.

About the Inspiration:

The Hall of Doors series started when I wrote a short story for a granddaughter who was mourning the loss of her cat. I asked myself, "What if the cat didn't really die, but just went somewhere else, to a magical world where she would be young and healthy again?"

In the process of writing *The Mountains of the Moon*, I discovered Selena's castle with its magical Hall of Doors. Naturally, I wanted to know what was behind each one, so I started exploring. After seeing artist J. W. Kalin's wonderful cover picture, I had to take a trip through *The Door in the Sky* next.

So now which door to open? Many years ago, I helped my younger sister practice for the part of Alice in a school play. I thought it would be interesting to put Sammy in a similar situation, but with a twist. What if Sammy's friend Kerri got the part, instead? How would Sammy react? Could that lead to another trip up the moonbeam path, and to another door?

About the story:

Sammy and Kerri have become close friends, but the friendship is tested when Kerri is chosen over Sammy for the part of Alice in the school play. Sammy's cat, Peaches, insists that Sammy follow her up the moonbeam path, where she's needed to play the part of the "real" Alice on a diplomatic mission.

Sammy travels with the cats, BB and Peaches, through a series of magic gateways, each a short-cut to their ultimate goal, but opening on many dangers. Sammy has to gather her

courage and think hard to meet the challenges, some of which are reminiscent of events in *Through The Looking Glass*, but not quite the same.

With the aid of a group of fairy children, Sammy solves a mystery, recovers some stolen property, and is able to smooth over a quarrel between two of Selena's allies. She realizes the importance of keeping the peace, and goes home to exercise her new diplomatic skills.

The Characters:

Sammy (Samantha Jane Evans): A young girl with a lot of curiosity and courage, but a bit of a temper--also called "Alice" by some of the other characters.

Kerri Wilson: Sammy's best friend.

Sammy's mom: a loving but busy single mother.

Kerri's mom: protective of her daughter, but likes Sammy.

BB (Princess Buttermilk Biscuit): A very old cat who used to live with Sammy, but now lives with Selena in her magic world.

Peaches: Another cat, one of BB's descendants, who now lives with Sammy.

Selena: BB's friend, a fairy princess who lives in a castle at the end of the moonbeam path; Selena's father is leading the armies in the ongoing war against The Dark.

Miss Brown: the teacher in charge of the school play, who won't take no for an answer.

Captain Thomas: a cat, captain of the house guards for the Duchess of Cheshire.

Pixie soldiers

Talking flowers, including a hungry dandelion and an impertinent daisy.

The Red Queen (Rosara), The White Queen (Bianca) and The Duchess--cousins who sometimes don't get along; allies of Selena and her father.

Other people at the Duchess' estate.

Students at Sammy's school.

Servants in Selena's castle.

Fairy children and kittens.

Two groups of crows who like shiny things and aren't too particular how they get them.

The Door in the Sky study guide, part 2: Questions for Discussion

1. Sammy thinks she wants the lead in the school play, but she's so afraid of rejection that she almost talks herself out of trying for the part. We call that sort of behavior "self-defeating." Do you think it's common for people to make up excuses to convince themselves they can't have what they want? Why would they do that?
2. At the tryout, Sammy stubbornly refuses to take a copy of the script, even though she's nervous and keeps forgetting her lines. Is this more self-defeating behavior?
3. Sammy blames Kerri when she loses the part. Do you think Kerri is to blame? How would you feel, if you were in Kerri's place?
4. When Sammy goes home, she picks a fight with her mother and even argues with the cat. Sometimes when people get angry, they don't think very clearly. They lash out at everyone and don't seem to be able to stop. What could Sammy have done to deal with her anger?
5. Sammy has calmed down a bit by the time she gets to Selena's castle. She may be feeling ashamed or embarrassed about her fight with Kerri. What does Selena do or say to help Sammy feel better?
6. Sammy faces a lot of dangers and complications on her trip. When crows take her backpack, she starts to get angry. But she realizes that she needs to be calm and in control of herself to deal with the situation. What does she do?
7. When Sammy is in danger from the humpty, what does Peaches do to help her? Do you think Peaches found this a little bit funny?
8. Sometimes a quarrel between two people can affect many other people. When Sammy talks to the fairy children, she learns that they aren't supposed to play together because the adults are angry at each other. Have you ever been in a situation where someone else's quarrel affected you? How did you handle it?
9. Peaches had suggested that Sammy might help with their problem by talking to the fairy children. What does Sammy learn? What does she do about it?
10. Sammy helps to mend the friendship between the Red Queen and White Queen. Do you think she learns something in the process? Does it help to solve her own problem?

The Mirror Door study guide, part 3: Topics for Research and Discussion

The study topics provided for book one of *The Hall of Doors* series, *The Mountains of the Moon*, can apply to this book, and to the series as a whole. They include Cats in Literature, Fictional Worlds, Trading Places (identifying with the hero), Magic, and Change. Additional topics follow.

Topic #1 Keeping your temper

Most of us get angry sometimes. We know that anger can make us lose control of our actions, so that we may say or do things we'll later regret. Part of growing up involves learning to cope with those angry feelings, so that they don't get out of hand. That doesn't mean repressing or "bottling up" the anger, but learning to deal with it in constructive ways. Anger can be useful, if it motivates you to work toward making necessary changes.

When four-year-old Maggie became angry or rebellious and realized things were getting out of hand, she would declare, "I need to change my attitude." Then she'd go to her room, or behind the couch, or disappear into a handy cardboard box, to be alone for a while. This self-imposed "time out" gave her, and the adults, time to cool down and look at whatever issue was in question more calmly.

People who don't learn to exercise self-control as children may have many problems as adults. Sometimes it helps to role-play in advance, before emotions take over. Can you think of some situations that might make you angry and possible ways to cope with the problem?

Topic #2 Lewis Carroll

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson wrote his most famous books under the pen name of Lewis Carroll. He taught mathematics at Christ Church College, Oxford, but was fond of writing nonsense stories and verses. Many believe the books *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* were written particularly for Alice Liddell, daughter of the Dean of Christ Church. Alice and her sisters were probably the first to hear the story of *Alice in Wonderland*, before it was published.

Dodgson wrote scholarly books as well as children's stories, and enjoyed creating riddles and logic puzzles. Both of the Alice books are partially based on games.

Find out more about Lewis Carroll, or about his writing. There are several biographies available, as well as "annotated" copies of the Alice books that explain many of the hidden meanings.

As an alternative, look for books and stories that utilize the "mythology" created by Carroll in his books. There have been several in recent years. List a few and tell what they borrowed from the Alice books, and what was changed.

Topic #3 Magical mirrors and portals

It's fun to think about simply stepping from one world or place to another. Many fantasy stories, including old "fairy tales," use magical mirrors and similar devices to gain information or to travel instantly to a far-away place. Science fiction also uses instant travel devices, but tries to provide a plausible explanation for how such a system might work in the real world.

Find three stories that have magic mirrors, and at least one that involves stepping through the mirror or another sort of gateway to another place. Tell a little about the story. Who uses the mirror or device and why? What happens that wouldn't have been possible without the magical device?

Do you think that "instant transportation" is really possible? What might be some of the complications in traveling from one world (planet) to another? [Hint: consider planetary rotation as well as differences in gravity and atmosphere.]

Topic #4 Crows

Sammy encounters two groups of crows, who have some characteristics in common. They like shiny things, and will take whatever they find. Do real crows do this? Read a little about crows and related birds, and tell how their behavior matches or is different from the ones in the story. Do crows show intelligent behavior? Can a crow learn to talk?

Topic #5 Rattles and other collectibles

People collect all sorts of things, so maybe a rattle collection isn't too odd. Can you find a reference to a rattle causing a quarrel in Lewis Carroll's books? (Hint: look for Tweedledum and Tweedledee in *Through The Looking-Glass*.)

People with money, and especially royalty, have been known to collect such items as the elaborate jeweled Easter eggs made by Faberge for the Russian czars. Name some other collectibles and tell a little about them. What do you collect?