

THE FREEDOM MAZE

BY DELIA SHERMAN

ABOUT THE BOOK

On a tense summer night in 1960, thirteen-year-old Sophie Fairchild Martineau sits in her grandmother's ancient house on the remains of the once grand River Oak plantation and makes an impulsive wish. Amazingly, a magical creature grants it. Suddenly she's gone back a hundred years to "the Good Old Days," as Grandmama calls them, when the Fairchild family was rich, their house was grand, and the "War of Northern Aggression" was still in the future. Sophie, however, soon discovers crueler truths about 1860, especially when her own ancestors look at her frizzy hair and tanned skin and decide she's a slave.

Winner of an Andre Norton Award

An American Library Association Best Fiction for Young Adults Selection

A Kirkus Reviews Best Children's Book

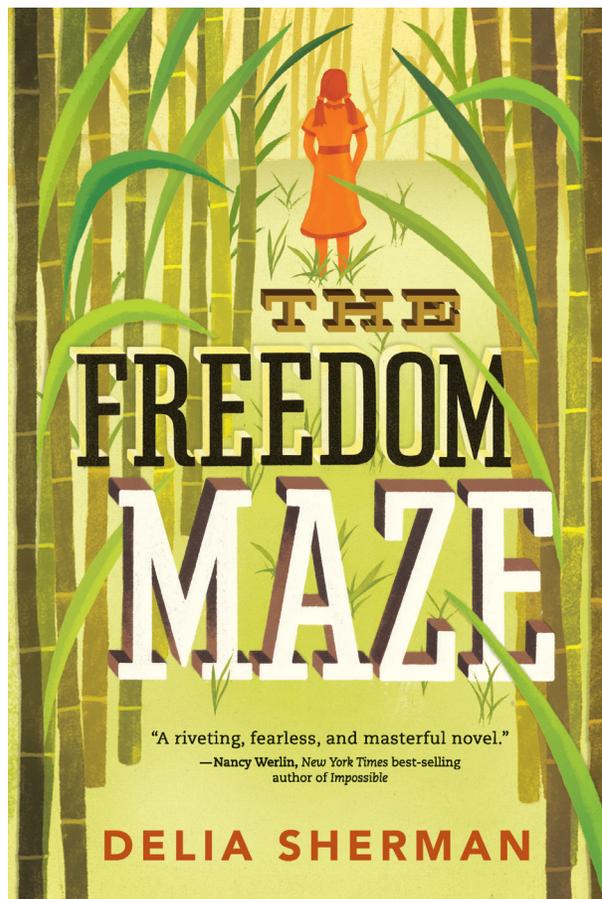
A Mythopoeic Fantasy Award Winner

"The multilayered story combines fantasy, clever literary allusions, and societal observations into a unique coming-of-age story." —Booklist

★ *"Compassionate and thought-provoking."*
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)



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Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help your students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL**), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL**). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “Life was easier when Sophie told Mama what she wanted to hear” (page 1). What does Sophie’s mother want to hear from her daughter? What does Grandmama want to hear from her daughters? How does each generation of Fairchild women define “ladylike” behavior? How do you?
2. Why do Sophie’s mother and grandmother refer to America’s Civil War as the War of Northern Aggression? Why do they consider the years before the war to be “the Good Old Days”?
3. When Sophie first realizes that she has traveled back in time, she worries about “changing the course of history by mistake” (page 53). Does she change history? How could knowing about the future influence the choices Sophie makes and thus jeopardize the future as she knows it?
4. Sophie’s experience illustrates just how changeable racial identification can be. Why is she considered white in 1960 but black in 1860? Who gets to decide a person’s racial identity? Why should it matter?
5. Old Mrs. Fairchild assumes that Sophie is her grandchild, and several other slaves on the plantation are known to have been fathered by Fairchild men. How do you think the Fairchilds justified keeping their own relatives as slaves?
6. The longer Sophie spends in the nineteenth century, the more she loses touch with the twentieth century. At what point in the novel did you first realize that Sophie was beginning to forget about her old life? Does losing those memories make life easier for her as a slave or more difficult? Why?
7. No matter which century Sophie finds herself in, her day-to-day world is largely run by women. How did these women gain their power? How do they use it? What happens to the men in their lives?
8. House slaves and field slaves at Oak River live very differently. How is each type of slave viewed by the Fairchilds? How do they view each other? Why does Old Mrs. Charles Fairchild initially make Sophie a house slave? Why is she later sent to the field?
9. Mammy tells Sophie that Old Mrs. Fairchild is a “kind, Christian lady” (page 76). Would you describe Mrs. Fairchild as kind? Why does Mammy?
10. *The Freedom Maze* is set almost entirely on the Louisiana bayou, but New Orleans and New York are often on the characters’ minds. What does each city mean to the nineteenth-century inhabitants of Oak River? What do they represent to the twentieth-century inhabitants?

11. Why do most of the slaves at Oak River have geographic names? What does this tradition tell you about the Fairchild family? What new name does Antigua take for herself? Why?
12. Who is Yemaya? Who is Papa Legba? What does he mean when he tells the Creature that “all doorways belong to me” (page 81)?
13. Sophie mistakenly believed that time travel would be fun for her, just as it was for the characters in a favorite novel. Why does the Creature bring Sophie back to 1860? Why doesn't her pain trouble him?
14. “Sometimes it seemed to her like she was always getting sent somewhere she didn't want to be and left there, like luggage in a railway station” (page 101). Is Sophie right? How is she abandoned in the twentieth century? How is she abandoned in the nineteenth?
15. Sophie travels one hundred years into the past, from 1960 to 1860. What if she instead were to travel fifty years into the future, from 1960 to our time? What would surprise her about the twenty-first century? What would shock her?
16. How are the nineteenth-century Fairchilds similar to their twentieth-century descendants? In what ways are they different?
17. Not long after returning to the twentieth century, “Sophie cried, and wished that the Creature would come take her back to the past, and then was mad at herself for wishing something so stupid” (page 242). Why does Sophie want to return to the past? Do you agree that it is a stupid wish? Why or why not?
18. Sophie is three inches taller when she comes back to 1960, but that's not the only way she's grown. What does she now understand about the racial inequality of her own time? What does she understand about herself?

ABOUT DELIA SHERMAN

A writer for readers of all ages, Delia Sherman now lives in New York City, where she was raised, but she was born in Tokyo and spent her childhood vacations with relatives in Texas, Louisiana, and South Carolina. Her stories have been featured in several young adult anthologies, and her novels for younger readers are *Changeling* and *The Magic Mirror of the Mermaid Queen*.



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