

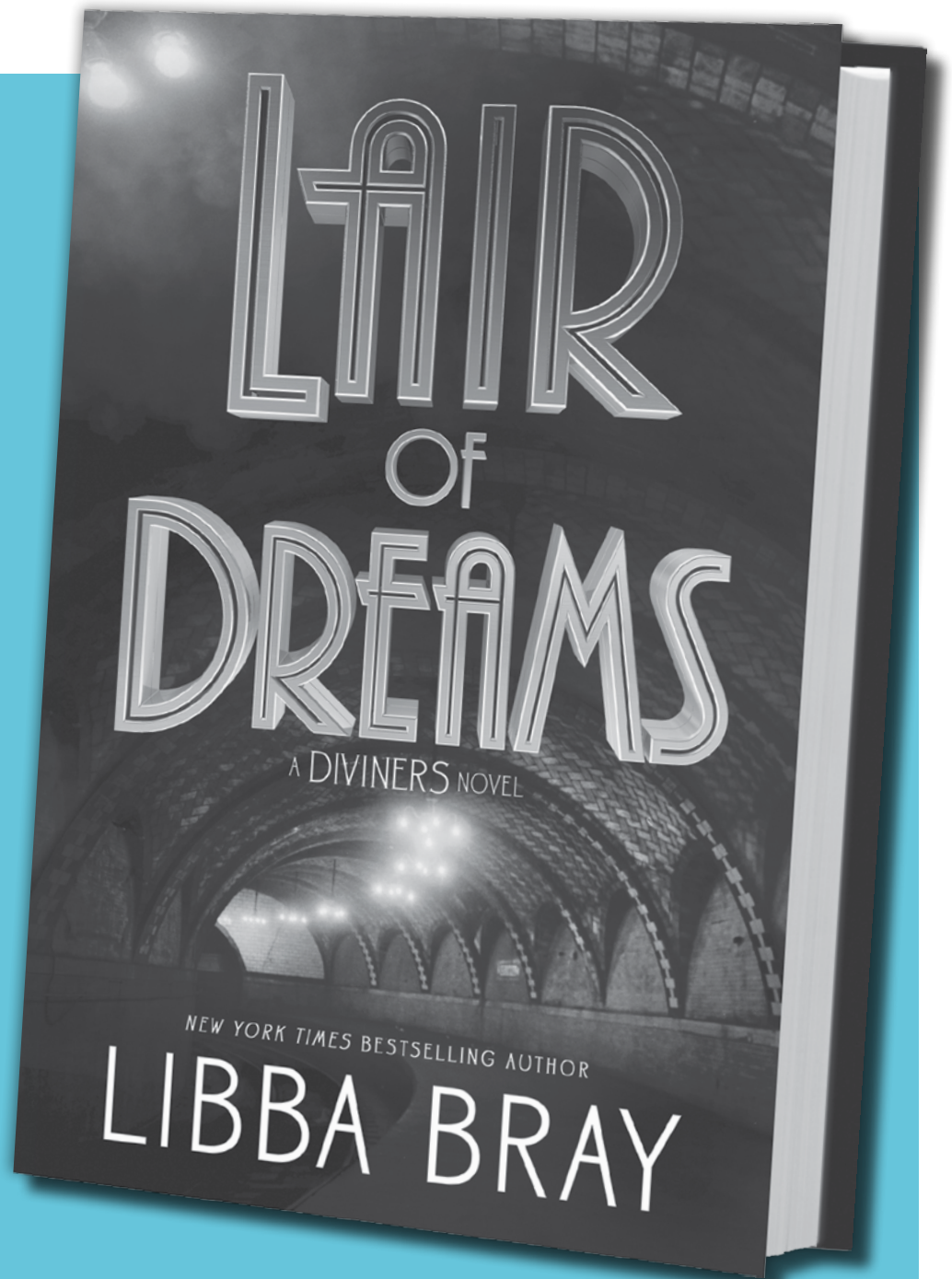
# LAIR OF DREAMS

## Curriculum connections

- ❖ American History
- ❖ Social Studies

Ages 15 & up

by  
LIBBA BRAY



## PRE-READING

### Reading Objects

Evie O’Neill, America’s Sweetheart Seer, has a unique gift when it comes to reading people’s secrets. But anyone can look at objects and draw conclusions. When presented with images and artifacts from the late 1920s, what do your students know—or think they know—about the historical time period of *Lair of Dreams*? If you can, put real objects in students’ hands—like a radio tube, wave comb, or flask—along with images from the era. Try these sources for ideas:

### Teaching the American 20s

[hrc.utexas.edu/educator/modules/teachingthetwenties/images.php](http://hrc.utexas.edu/educator/modules/teachingthetwenties/images.php)

### Primary Sources from the Roaring Twenties

[loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/gatsby/procedure.html](http://loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/gatsby/procedure.html)

### Ad\*Access

[library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess/date/1927](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess/date/1927)

### Becoming Modern: America in the 1920s

[americainclass.org/sources/becomingmodern](http://americainclass.org/sources/becomingmodern)

When you have a large variety of images and artifacts ready, have students get in small groups to examine, discuss, and organize what they know about each item. Can they identify the item and its significance? Who might be connected to the item? Can they draw connections between all the items? What else do they want to know about the item? Have groups share their responses with the class. How accurate or deep is their knowledge?

Plan to have students search for and share additional images that represent the period, real people, lifestyles, culture, literature, etc., that they encounter or have questions about as they read the novel. With the novel packed with allusions, ask students to note where they encountered the reference, analyze its meaning, and share their annotated illustrative image in a place for collaborative knowledge where all students can access it—like a classroom bulletin board or a Tumblr blog. If you and your students are ambitious, create a wiki or use Book Drum ([bookdrum.com](http://bookdrum.com)) to turn their research and analysis into multimedia content that helps explain and illustrate the novel.

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM OR LIBRARY

### Text set or theme basket collections

Text sets or theme baskets are collections of resources in a variety of formats—articles, essays, histories, short stories, novels, picture books, poems, music, photographs, maps, video, film, art, artifacts, etc.—and complexity levels. By contemplating resources that offer them many different perspectives, students gain a deeper understanding of topics, concepts, and themes. Not familiar with this instructional strategy? Take a look at Teaching Strategies: Text Sets ([learner.org/workshops/tml/workshop4/teaching.html](http://learner.org/workshops/tml/workshop4/teaching.html)) or Blending Multiple Genres in Theme Baskets ([adlit.org/article/21689](http://adlit.org/article/21689)).

With its many layers of themes and topics, *Lair of Dreams* can be either a rich starting point or welcome addition to a text set or theme basket. Use it in a text set anchored by canonical literature like *The Great Gatsby*, or create curricular connections by gathering unifying texts around one of the book’s many content-area themes such as the Roaring Twenties, spiritualism, racism, the American mythos, dreams, prohibition, radio, or the immigrant experience.

Text sets can also be student generated. As students read and identify themes and ideas of the novel, they can work alone or in small groups to build their own text sets that focus on exploring what interests them. As they build their text sets, they should note why they included each resource and what specific connections it helped them to make. They should also come up with questions about their theme or issue for future users of their set to ponder and research. Make student text sets available to the entire class to help broaden knowledge and perspectives on a variety of topics.

### Book club

If students are practiced in active listening and contributing to discussions, a book club approach to reading *Lair of Dreams* is an excellent way to promote productive conversation without assigned literature discussion roles. As they read, small groups of students share their personal responses to the book and their thoughts on the wide range of issues addressed in it, such as discrimination, religious and political fervor, the supernatural, dreams, the American Dream, xenophobia, human trafficking, identity, ideology, sexual orientation, and friendship.

Because book clubs are reader response centered, having students keep a response journal will help support student responsibility and ownership of the book club. Students can use their journal notes, drawings, observations, and questions as a jumping-off point for discussions. Discussion questions in this guide can help spark and support big picture discussion, but also ask students to come up with at least three items—a comment, inference, question or a quote to unpack—to discuss each time their group meets. Also, ask them to keep track of their conversation by having a scribe take notes at each meeting.

After finishing the book, have students compile the best of their own discussion questions and organize them as a discussion guide to share with future book clubs. And then throw a swell party! Decorate the joint and invite your readers put on their glad rags, soak up some giggle water (ginger ale), dig into a Waldorf salad, and start hoofin’.

### Beautiful Dreamer: Music & Poetry

Stephen Foster’s parlor song “Beautiful Dreamer” echoes throughout *Lair of Dreams*. Find versions of the music-box melody online to play for your students and see if they are familiar with this sentimental ballad. Where have they heard it before? What images or words come to mind as they listen? Does the music make them think of a particular character, theme, or event from the book? Why do they think the author chose this song? Discuss what it contributes to creating a dream-like atmosphere, then have students further explore the language of dreams and dream worlds in the book by creating a found poem.

A found poem is a collage of language. Students pick and choose words and phrases from an existing work then rearrange them to make them mean something. Ask them to create a found poem that evokes their feelings about dreams—either the dreams they have when they are asleep or the kind of dreams that express aspirational goals. In creating their found poem, they should use *Lair of Dreams*, but could additionally draw from “Beautiful Dreamer” or the works of others referenced in the book, such as Langston Hughes or Carl Jung. Poems should go through a couple revisions and some peer reviewing before having students read them aloud.

### American Dream: Myth or Reality

Jake Marlowe tells Jericho that America is “A place where any man can realize his dream.” Discuss the idea of the American Dream with your students. What is it? How would they define it? Do they agree with Jake Marlowe? Or is the American

Dream a myth, a mere invention? Have students write their own definition that includes some examples of people they feel have realized the American Dream. As a group, get students to share their responses. Have them look for what the people they have described have in common and what they have in common with them.

Are there characters in *Lair of Dreams* in pursuit of the American Dream? Ask students to choose a character. Then, as that character, have them show how the character might interpret the American Dream using a mode of expression that seems natural to the character. For example, a student working as Henry might write a song; Ling, a science experiment; T.S. Woodhouse, a news article; Memphis, a poem; or Mabel, a letter to the editor. Students could also collaborate around a radio show by Evie or an interpretative dance by Theta. Students should plan to do some research about the culture and history of the era to get a sense of how history and events influence their character’s interpretation of the American Dream. When students present their projects, they should also note how their character’s pursuit of a dream might influence or affect other characters or the world.

### The Dream Factory

Let students scare others when they make a short film of what they find horrifying in *Lair of Dreams*.

Their film can interpret any aspect of the book they find frightening. Some may want to create a film that focuses on real life horrors like abuse, human trafficking, murder, addiction, or being buried alive. Others may be drawn to the supernatural such as ghosts, bargains to bring back the dead, or nightmarish dream-devouring monsters. Or they may just want to put their favorite scary scene from the book on film. Students will need to determine the form their film will take before developing a script and storyboard. Encourage them to think creatively about film types that will best tell the story: thriller, documentary, horror, newsreel, animation, musical, or film noir?

Whether they are working in pairs, small groups, or alone, give students plenty of time to cast and work on their films, which should include all the features relevant to their film type: music, costumes, make-up, special effects, transitions, titles, still shots, etc. Instruct students to make use of public domain resources to avoid copyright infringement and to give appropriate credit to all involved in the film’s making. Plan a “Fright Film Fest” to exhibit their films and give students the opportunity to participate in Q & A sessions about their work.

## Visions of Loveliness

Did fashion plates like Evie and Theta play with paper dolls? Many fashion trends found in ladies magazines in the 1920s were advertised through paper doll supplements, making it easy to imagine slipping on Clara Bow's glad rags.

To illustrate characterization, ask students to create two paper dolls of one character from *Lair of Dreams*—one doll that represents, as Dr. Jung described, the conscious self and one that represents the shadow. The dolls, the clothes they wear and any accessories they possess should reveal the character's true identity as well as the identity the character presents to others. For example, a conscious self Ling paper doll might wear a long dress over leg braces, orthopedic shoes, and hide behind a pile of books. But a shadow self Ling paper doll dresses like a scientific-minded dream walker.

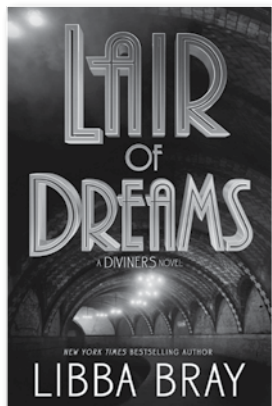
To make their dolls, students can draw or manipulate photos or other images. Have students create their dolls and their clothes and accessories on full sheets of paper. That will give them space to label and describe each outfit, explain what the clothing and accessories reflect about the character, and make connections to the historical period and events in the book.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you skipped the first page, then you missed the epigraph of the book, which includes a Chinese proverb (“*To believe in one’s dreams is to spend all one’s life asleep,*”) and a quote from Walt Whitman (“*I cannot be awake for nothing looks to me as it did before. Or else I am awake for the first time, and all before has been a mean sleep.*”) In sharing these quotes, do you think the author is showing intention, offering something that inspired her or something else? Do you like epigraphs? Why or why not? How is this epigraph a fitting one for *Lair of Dreams*?
2. In *Lair of Dreams*, Libba Bray tells a supernatural story against a vivid historical backdrop. How did you decide what was historically true and what was made up? What knowledge or discovery did you take away from this book that you might not have found by reading a history book?
3. What did you learn about the status of women, the disabled, immigrants, interracial relationships, and homosexuals during the time period of the book? What advice do characters offer each other for dealing with societal restrictions? What advice would you give someone being treated differently or unfairly because of gender, race, sexual orientation, or class? Discuss how opportunities for women, minorities, and the LGBT community have evolved since the 1920s and what prejudices and roadblocks still remain.
4. As people define and pursue their own dreams, they create the future—for themselves and sometimes for our nation and the world. Discuss both historical and fictional examples of this found in the book.
5. Each Diviner has a unique supernatural power. Which characters are these and what are their powers? Do the characters with these powers feel they are gifts or burdens? How do their gifts affect their self-identity? Discuss how the Diviners use their powers to hurt or help themselves or others.
6. Theta is worried about all the time Henry spends dream walking, but it takes her a long time to ask for help on how to stop him. Have you ever kept someone else’s problem a secret and tried to deal with it on your own? What was your experience like?
7. What is the effect of the structure of the novel? Each character’s voice is distinct throughout the story. Why do you think the author chose to tell it from multiple points of view? Discuss why you like or don’t like hearing from each character in this ensemble cast. How would the story be different if it were told from a single point of view?
8. Discuss the author’s purpose in introducing the character Sarah Snow, who calls the Diviners “a symptom of a nation that’s turned away from God and American values.” What kind of debate might Sarah Snow and Jericho have about religion and American values? Or Mabel and Ling? Uncle Will and Evie?
9. Understanding history is at the heart of the novel. What has happened in the past that people seem to have forgotten? Why are these things important? Why are some things kept secret?



## about the books



### LAIR OF DREAMS

HC 978-0-316-12604-5

Also available in ebook format

- ★ “The ambitiously broad focus of this novel strikes just the right balance in its division of narrative might, developing each of the dizzyingly large cast of diverse characters with an impressive attention to detail and with period-specific, witty dialogue.”

—Kirkus Reviews

- ★ “Bray illuminates the dark side of the American Dream in her long-awaited sequel to *The Diviners*, weaving xenophobia, industrial progress, Jazz Age debauchery, government secrets, religious fervor, and supernatural horror into a sprawling and always entertaining narrative.”

—Publishers Weekly

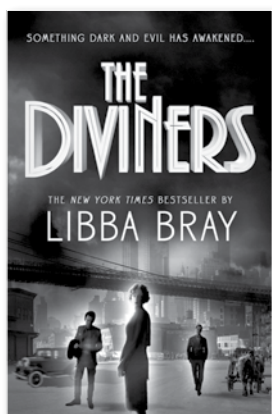
- ★ “Multilayered, character-driven, and richly rewarding.”

—School Library Journal

- ★ “Bray weaves connections between her numerous characters and explores friendships, dark secrets, and dramatic love interests. This book will fly off the shelves.”

—Voices of Youth Advocates

## also by Libba Bray



### THE DIVINERS

HC 978-0-316-12611-3

PB 978-0-316-12610-6

Also available in ebook format

- ★ “The book is big and wants to be the kind of thing you can lose yourself in. Does it succeed? It’s jake, baby.”

—Booklist

- ★ “1920s New York thrums with giddy life in this gripping first in a new [series] from Printz winner Bray... The intricate plot and magnificently imagined details of character, dialogue and setting take hold and don’t let go. Not to be missed.”

—Kirkus Reviews

- ★ “Engrossing, spooky, and thought-provoking.”

—Library Media Connection

- ★ “The compelling and dramatic supernatural plot explores self-actualization, predestination, the secrets everyone hides, and, of course, good versus evil. An absolutely terrific read and, thankfully, the first in a planned series.”

—School Library Journal

- ★ “Everyday moments and a romance or two help lighten the mood of this creepy, dark, twisted tale of things that go bump in the night.”

—Voices of Youth Advocates

## about the author



Libba Bray is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Gemma Doyle* trilogy; the Michael L. Printz Award-winning *Going Bovine*; *Beauty Queens*, an L.A. Times Book Prize finalist; and *The Diviners* series. She is originally from Texas but makes her home in Brooklyn, NY, with her husband, son, and two sociopathic cats. Visit her online at [libbabray.com](http://libbabray.com).



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BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

LittleBrownLibrary.com

This educator’s guide was written by Rachael Walker, Children’s Literacy Consultant