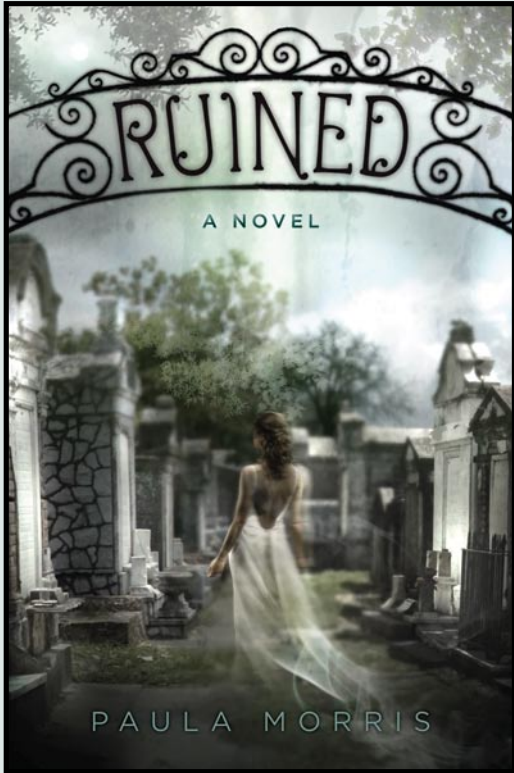


# DISCUSSION GUIDE



## ABOUT THE BOOK



### Ruined

Written by Paula Morris

ISBN: 0-545-04215-1 • ISBN13: 978-0-545-04215-4

Ages: 12 and up • Grades 7 and up

Rebecca Brown couldn't feel more out of place in New Orleans, where she comes to spend the year while her dad is traveling. She's staying in a creepy old house with her aunt Claudia, who reads tarot cards for a living. And at the snooty prep school, a pack of filthy-rich girls treat Rebecca like she's invisible. Only gorgeous, unavailable Anton Grey seems to give Rebecca the time of day, but she wonders if he's got a hidden agenda. Then one night, in Lafayette Cemetery, Rebecca makes a friend. Sweet, mysterious Lisette is eager to talk to Rebecca, and to show her the nooks and crannies of the city.

**There's just one catch.**

**Lisette is a ghost.**

**A ghost with a deep, dark secret, and a serious score to settle.**



### PRAISE FOR RUINED

★ "With this haunting love letter to New Orleans, Morris makes her YA debut....This moody tale thoroughly embraces the rich history, occult lore, and complex issues of race, ethnicity, class, and culture... turning the city into a character in its own right. Rather than shy away from the shameful or tragic moments of the past, Morris uses them to capture the city's essence."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review



## AUTHOR BIO



PHOTO: ROBERT TRATHEN

### PAULA MORRIS

was born in New Zealand, but currently lives in New Orleans, where she teaches creative writing at Tulane University. She is the author of several short stories and novels for adults. Find out more about Paula Morris at her blog: [trendybutcasual.typepad.com](http://trendybutcasual.typepad.com).

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## RUINED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Ruined* opens with a prologue about yellow fever. This epidemic took the lives of more than eight thousand people in New Orleans in the summer of 1853. Most of the lives lost were those of immigrants—causing people to refer to the disease as Stranger’s Disease—though the disease did finally claim many native residents. Do you think an epidemic of this proportion could happen today? If it did and it was immigrants who were affected first, what do you think the response of the “native” people would be?
2. More than 150 years after the epidemic, the ancestors of thousands of immigrants have become the locals, bringing the customs of the past to the present city of New Orleans. For this reason the diversity of New Orleans is vast, with certain customs intertwining with others. How do customs shape the lives of the characters in *Ruined*? Example: Aunt Claudia’s voodoo background.
3. Hurricane Katrina ripped through New Orleans in 2005 with devastating results that are still felt today. Although most of *Ruined* takes place in neighborhoods that were not flooded, Paula Morris incorporates this event into the novel. How does Rebecca feel these haunting effects?
4. Hurricane Katrina affected people around the United States. Pictures and stories of this massive hurricane were on TV, online, and in the newspaper. When you think of this event, what are the pictures or stories that come to mind (the Ninth Ward, the levees, the helping hands, etc?)
5. New Orleans has a rich, historical past with many traditions still alive today. What has occurred in your town or city that would be considered a historical or popular event? How does your town or city commemorate this event?
6. In *Ruined*, there is a recognized class system both in school and outside of school. Rebecca comments on the unfairness of these “social intricacies” to her Aunt Claudia. How does a system like this influence a person’s upbringing and daily life? What are the negatives of a class system and what, if any, are the positives? How would one work to break down this kind of system?
7. Anton Grey tells Rebecca that “Everything here is about family.” Family is prominent throughout the novel, whether it’s Rebecca’s relationship with her father or the families of Helena Bowman and Anton Grey. How does family shape the choices that are made throughout the novel? How does your family shape your choices?
8. In chapter sixteen, Lisette takes Rebecca through the streets of New Orleans on a walk to Lisette’s house in Tremé on the anniversary of her death. Rebecca sees many ghosts from different points in time and notices much sadness and unrest. Take the time to re-read this section of the novel, choose one of the ghosts or a group of ghosts and describe what you think their lives were like before death.
9. Lisette is not aware of anything that happened after 1853. What are the most important events and inventions you would tell her about and why? Choose carefully; each event and invention reflects the world in a different way. For example: Dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Woodstock, TV, computers, and the election of President Barack Obama.
10. Racism is prevalent throughout this novel. Many steps have been made toward equality, but we are not there yet. How have things changed between Lisette’s time and Rebecca’s? How do you see things changing or hope they will change in the future?

