

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

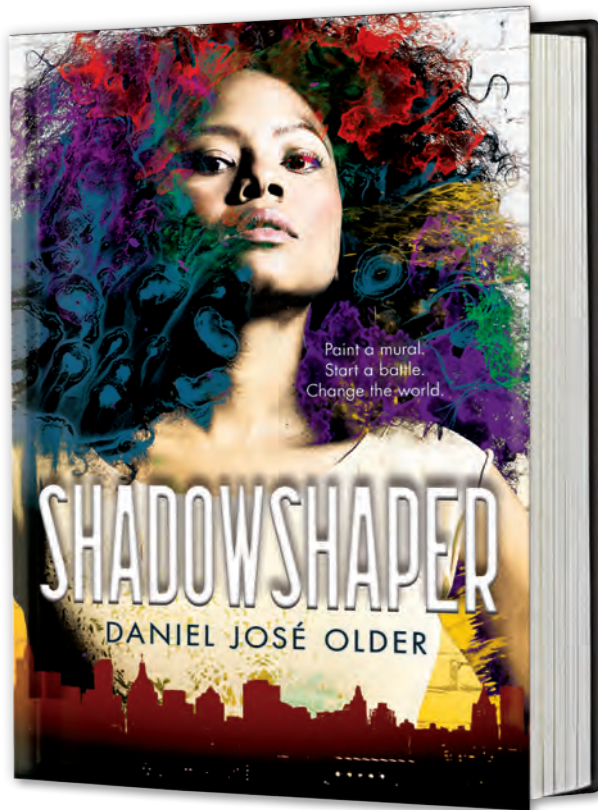
AGES  
12 & UP  
GRADES  
7 & UP



## THE SHADOWSHAPER CYPHER SERIES

DANIEL JOSÉ OLDER





# SHADOWSHAPER

## Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how different members of Sierra's family react to the family's shadowshaping legacy. Consider how their genders, ages, interests, and family positions influence their reaction to shadowshaping.
2. Research the role of the trickster in folklore. Read some examples of trickster stories here: <http://americanfolklore.net/folklore/tricksters/>. Once you've read a few examples, consider the character of Uncle Neville. Do you consider Uncle Neville to be a trickster figure? Why or why not?
3. In *Shadowshaper*, Sierra notes that "Now her best friend's neighborhood felt like another planet" (p. 81). What does she mean by this? Read materials on gentrification, starting with these resources from the National Council of Teachers of English: <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/EJ/1052-nov2015/EJ1052Focus.pdf>. After reading, consider Older's use of gentrification and displacement as a theme in the novel. How does Older critique gentrification? Do you see gentrification as a positive or negative change to communities, and why?
4. Female body image is an important theme throughout *Shadowshaper*. Identify quotes from the novel that tell the reader how Sierra feels about her body and the color of her skin. How do her community, family, and friends contradict or validate these feelings? How do her feelings about her body change as the novel continues?
5. According to a review of *Shadowshaper* by the *New York Times*, "In the best urban fantasy, the city is not just a backdrop, but functions as a character in its own right, offering up parallels between personal histories and histories of place." Identify parts of the novel where you see this happening, and how. Consider how Sierra's shadowshaping skills are deeply rooted in her connection to Brooklyn and her community.

Discussion Questions for *Shadowshaper* cover Common Core State Standards for Reading: Literature, Grades 9–12.1, 2, 3, 4, 9.

## Extension Activities

1. The author chose to integrate Spanish and English words throughout this book. If you are unfamiliar with Spanish, take the time to look for any words you do not know, first trying to guess their meaning through the context and then looking them up. How does this language integration add to the story and/or your understanding of the characters? (CCSS.RL.9–12.4)

# SHADOWHOUSE FALL

## Discussion Questions

1. What is shadowshaping? How do shadowshaping and art intersect? How does Older use shadowshaping to empower the often negatively stereotyped activities and abilities of many youths of color? In answering this question, consider Sierra's use of graffiti and street art, as well as Izzie's use of freestyle rapping in shadowshaping.
2. Read Daniel José Older's *Buzzfeed* article *Diversity Is Not Enough: Race, Power, Publishing* ([https://www.buzzfeed.com/danieljoseolder/diversity-is-not-enough?utm\\_term=.hkYZ8Ro1JV#wgamMdWRKY](https://www.buzzfeed.com/danieljoseolder/diversity-is-not-enough?utm_term=.hkYZ8Ro1JV#wgamMdWRKY)). What does Older mean when he says "diversity is not enough"? How does the Shadowshaper Cypher series respond to the problems Older sees in the publishing industry?
3. How are *Shadowshaper* and *Shadowhouse Fall* both critiques of patriarchy and sexism? Consider the different roles of women and men (as well as the relationships between them), both from within and outside of the shadowshaping world.
4. Sierra and her friends often butt heads with their history teacher, Ms. Rollins. Why do you think this is? Review this article about white teachers in classrooms made up predominantly of students of color: [http://www.slate.com/articles/life/tomorrows\\_test/2016/06/how\\_white\\_teachers\\_can\\_become\\_culturally\\_competent.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/tomorrows_test/2016/06/how_white_teachers_can_become_culturally_competent.html). After reading, discuss whether or not you think Ms. Rollins is a "culturally competent" teacher.
5. How does Older use *Shadowhouse Fall* to comment on the lives of youth and communities of color? Consider his inclusion of issues such as police/state violence, deaths of black youth, racial profiling, gentrification, school to prison pipelines, and stereotyping.
6. On his Twitter, Daniel José Older calls *Shadowhouse Fall* a novel about "fighting back" and states that "you can't tiptoe towards justice" (May 5, 2016). Where do you see the truth of these statements throughout the novel? What do you think Older means when he says you can't "tiptoe" towards justice? How do you see Sierra, both in her character and in her actions, as an embodiment of this statement?
7. How has Sierra's relationship with her mother changed over the course of *Shadowshaper* and *Shadowhouse Fall*? When and why do you think their relationship changed?
8. The theme of autonomy is prevalent throughout this book. Describe the ways in which Sierra and her friends must fight for the right to be in control of their own lives. Consider their relationships with their families, their schools, the police, and the mystical figures that rule the shadowshaping world.
9. Sierra and her friends attend Octavia Butler High School. Research who Octavia Butler is and what she did. Why is it significant that the characters in this book attend a school named after her? Does the inclusion of her name in this story help you to better understand the kind of world that Older is trying to create in his story?
10. Sierra has mixed feelings at the time of Grandpa Lázaro's death. How had his recent actions influenced their relationship? Consider the larger implications of his actions. If what Grandpa Lázaro did was in the name of keeping their family and community traditions alive, what is your opinion on the importance of tradition? Is maintaining tradition ultimately beneficial or harmful to a family/community, or both?

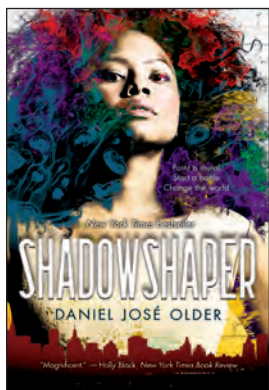
Discussion Questions for *Shadowhouse Fall* cover Common Core State Standards for Reading: Literature, Grades 9–12.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9.

## Extension Activities

1. Street art/graffiti is a big part of Sierra's life and of the shadowshaping world. Research artists such as Banksy and Jean-Michel Basquiat, as well as other street artists, creating a slide show of street art images you believe to be powerful and effective. After creating your slide show, write a few paragraphs on how these visual artists use images to convey meaning. Do you think there is a line between street art and what we might consider to be vandalism? Where would you draw that line and why? (CCWW.RL.9–12.9; CCSS.W.9–12.7)
2. Older's act of shadowshaping is used to invoke and call up spirits of the dead, and is grounded in Sierra and her family's Puerto Rican culture and ancestry. Take time to research the way your own culture engages with death and the afterlife, writing a short synopsis of your findings, and then compare that to the traditions, beliefs, and values you saw throughout *Shadowhouse Fall*. (CCWW.RL.9–12.1,9; CCSS.W.9–12.7)



## About the Books



### *Shadowshaper*

Hardcover:

978-0-545-59161-4 • \$17.99

Paperback:

978-1-338-03247-5 • \$9.99

Also available in ebook format.



### *Shadowhouse Fall*

Hardcover:

978-0-545-95282-8 • \$18.99

Also available in ebook format.

A Top Ten YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults Selection • A Top Ten ALA Quick Pick  
A Kirkus Prize Finalist • An Andre Award Nominee • A *New York Times* Notable Children's Book  
An NPR Best Book of the Year • A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year

Sierra Santiago planned an easy summer of making art and hanging out with her friends. But then a corpse crashes their first party. Her stroke-ridden grandfather starts apologizing over and over. And when the murals in her neighborhood begin to weep tears . . . Well, something more sinister than the usual Brooklyn ruckus is going on. With the help of a fellow artist named Robbie, Sierra discovers shadowshaping, a magic that infuses ancestral spirits into paintings, music, and stories. But someone is killing the shadowshapers one by one. Now Sierra must unravel her family's past, take down the killer in the present, and save the future of shadowshaping for generations to come.

“Magnificent.”—Holly Black, *The New York Times Book Review*

★ “A must.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Exceptional.”—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

Sierra and her friends love their new lives as shadowshapers, making art and creating change with the spirits of Brooklyn. Then Sierra receives a strange card depicting a beast called the Hound of Light—an image from the enigmatic, influential Deck of Worlds. The shadowshapers know their next battle has arrived. Thrust into an ancient struggle with enemies old and new, Sierra and Shadowhouse are determined to win. Revolution is brewing in the real world as well, as the shadowshapers lead the fight against systems that oppress their community. To protect her family and friends in every sphere, Sierra must take down the Hound and master the Deck of Worlds . . . or risk losing them all.

★ “Compelling.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Fantastic.”—*Booklist*, starred review

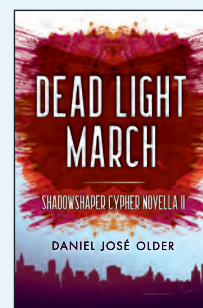
## THE SHADOWSHAPER CYPHER NOVELLAS



### *Ghost Girl in the Corner*

Ebook only:

978-1-338-17130-3 • \$0.99



### *Dead Light March*

Ebook only:

978-1-338-17131-0 • \$0.99

Set between the *New York Times* bestseller *Shadowshaper* and its sequel, *Shadowhouse Fall*, these novellas of mystery, love, and loss will draw you deep into Daniel José Older's magical Brooklyn.

## About the Author



Photo © Kevin Kane

Daniel José Older is a Brooklyn-based writer, editor, workshop facilitator, and composer. His first published YA novel, *Shadowshaper*, received four starred reviews, won the International Latino Book Award, was nominated for the Kirkus Prize and the Andre Norton Award for Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy, and was also recognized as a *New York Times* Notable Book and an NPR Best Book of the Year. It went on to become a *New York Times* bestseller. Daniel also writes music and plays bass in the soul-jazz band Ghost Star, and you can find his thoughts on writing, read dispatches from his decade-long career as an NYC paramedic, and hear his music at [ghoststar.net](http://ghoststar.net) and [@djolder](https://twitter.com/djolder).

This guide was written by Rebecca Kuss, who received her MSED in Reading/Writing/Literacy from the University of Pennsylvania, specializing in Children's and Young Adult literature, and is a reviewer for *Booklist* magazine.

 SCHOLASTIC

[scholastic.com](http://scholastic.com)

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.