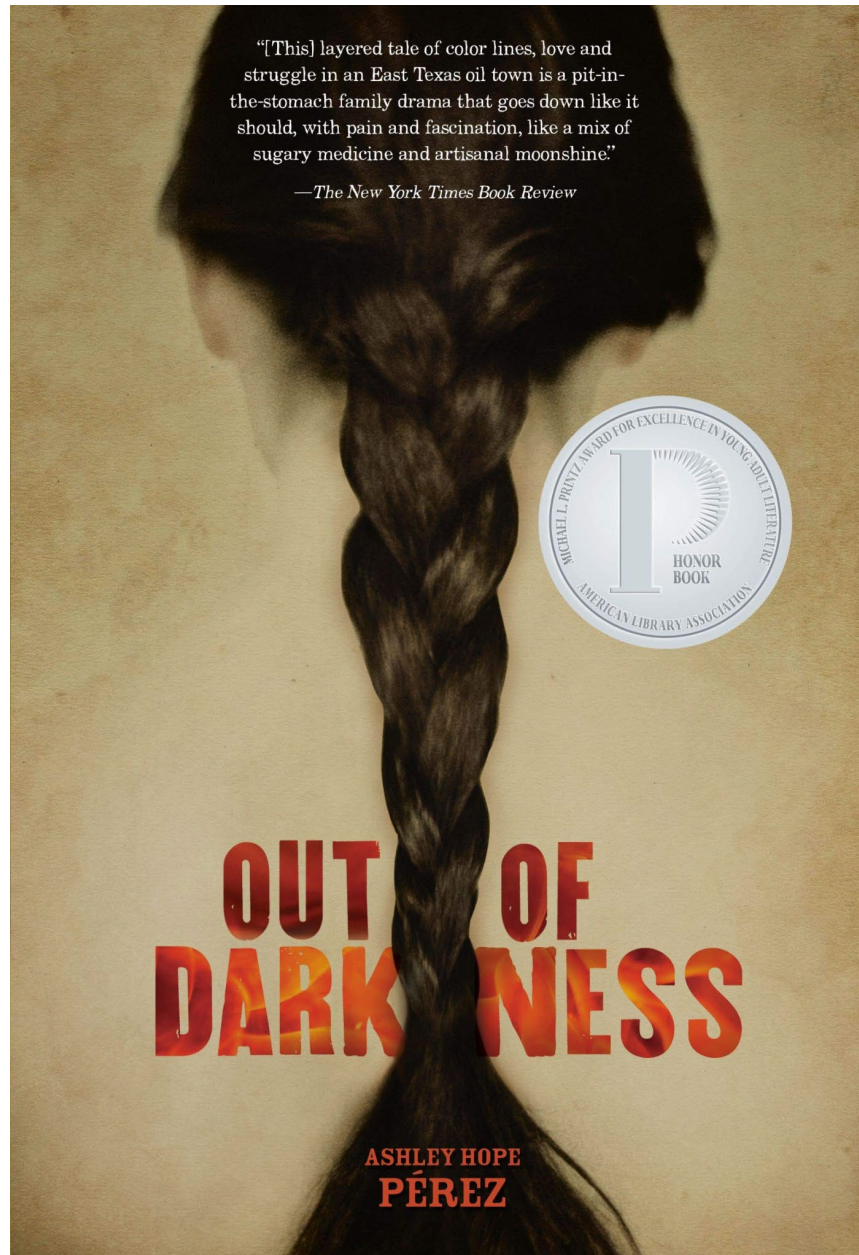


# Banned Books Week:

Discussion Questions for examining Ashley Hope Pérez's [\*Out of Darkness\*](#).



## SYMBOLISM

- What is the significance of the title “*Out of Darkness*”? What are some possible allusions or connections that contribute to understanding the story? You may consider when Wash gives Naomi a ring with small birds in flight carved into the outside— “each one as a wish for lightness, for freedom”(Pérez, 2019, p. 170).
- Reflect on the variety of violence within *Out of Darkness*. How are environmental destruction, racism, and classism interwoven throughout the novel?
- How is the role of religion complex in the story?

## CONFLICTS

- Consider the philosophy of “manifest destiny”—an idea first adopted by American settlers that suggested that the United States had a God-given right to take over every part of North America. In *Out of Darkness*, how might the setting, plot, and characters fall victim to or epitomize the essence of “manifest destiny”?
- In the book’s introduction, Pérez writes: “More than grief, more than anger, there is a need. Someone to blame. Someone to make pay”(Pérez, 2019, p. 2). How does this set up the novel? Furthermore, while gauging the new “foreigner”, the Gang notes: “We needed the Mexican girl; each in our own way”(Pérez, 2019, p. 60). What does this mean? How does this translate into contemporary society; how are minoritized women used? What are some other instances of scapegoating, placing blame, and projecting one’s own self-hate onto others in the novel?
- The novel offers a range of dramatically different notions of what “love” and “family” mean and how they can drive action. Describe these contrasting understandings of these notions and explain what accounts for their differences. (Carolhoda Labs)

## STRUCTURE

- The book progresses chronologically, with the exception of a section at the beginning. This section, “The Explosion,” is from Wash’s perspective in the brief interval before and immediately after the gas explosion. Why do you think Ashley Hope Pérez begins this way and doesn’t include this section later? How does this introduction set the tone for the rest of the novel? (Carolhoda Labs) How does this nonlinear plot narration of *Out of Darkness* contribute to the reader’s experience of the story? How can it be translated into a minority’s experience of navigating a new world?
- Why did author Ashley Hope Pérez choose alternating narrators to tell this story? What does it

bring or take away from the reader's experience of the story? Why did she choose to include a variety of narrators (a white man, white children, mixed children, a young Latina woman, and a young Black man)? What does freedom mean/look like for each narrator (Naomi, Wash, Henry, Beto, The Gang)?

- A frame narrative is basically when there is "a story within a story". What does this use of the frame narrative contribute to readers' understanding of *Out of Darkness*? At the end of the novel who is revealed to be the frame narrator of this story? What is the narrator's motivation for telling Wash and Naomi's story? (Carolhoda Labs)

## GO BEYOND THE BOOK

- *Out of Darkness* is a historical fiction novel, based on the 1937 explosion of London Jr./Sr. High School in oil boomtown New London, Texas. Although the characters were never real, they can still certainly resonate with readers. How do elements or characters of *Out of Darkness* remind you of current events or other real shared stories? What does Ashley Hope Pérez hope to share, teach, or equip us with through creating her story?
- "Mirror, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" is an analogy created by Rudine Sims Bishop that refers to the need for children to see themselves and others in the literature they read. Bishop explains: "Books are sometimes windows, offering views of [new or familiar worlds]. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been [built] by the author. [Sometimes] a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, [seeing ourselves within] the larger human experience. [Hence, as] a means of self-affirmation, ... readers often seek their mirrors in books"(Bishop, 1990, p. ix). Considering this metaphor, how can you appreciate *Out of Darkness* and read it as a mirror, window, or sliding glass door?
- Ashley Hope Pérez does not suppress the violence, brutality, and heartbreak that accompanies bullying, sexual abuse, and racism. How did her authentic presentation of these issues contribute to the reader's experience? What do you think of how she shared these stories? Are you changed as a reader after reading this book?

### References

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 6(3), ix–xi.

Carolhoda Labs. (n.d.). *Out of Darkness* Discussion Guide. Lerner Books. Retrieved August 31, 2022, from

<https://web.archive.org/web/20151111191855/https://www.lernerbooks.com/digitalassets/Assets/Title%20Assets/16981/9781467742023/Discussion%20Guide.pdf>

Pérez Ashley Hope. (2019). *Out of Darkness*. Holiday House.