

## Akata Witch Discussion Questions

1. "Akata" is a derogatory term that translates to "bush animal" which is used to refer to people from the African Diaspora, specifically Black Americans, implying they are an outsider and disconnected from their true culture (pg.11). Why did Nnedi Okorafor choose "Akata Witch" as the title of this book? What do you think the label of "Akata" means to Sunny in both the Lamb and Leopard worlds?

- I. For those struggling with the use of the term "Akata" in a way that is essentially reclaiming a narrative to turn something that was once negative into something seemingly positive, what do you think about a movement to challenge the original definition of this word?

2. Names can be powerful and are especially so in Igbo naming culture. What do you think Sunny's name and spirit face name Awanyu (Eye of the Sun) are meant to tell you as a reader?

3. Sunny moves between many different worlds culturally and literally throughout the book. Where do Sunny's various identities meet/clash with cultural expectations in both the Lamb and the Leopard worlds? How do your identities interact with each other to create you?

4. The in-story guidebook *Fast Facts for Free Agents* states that "one's ability lies with those things that mark him or her . . . Often they are things that lambs make fun of [as] imperfections. They can be physical, psychological, behavioral." (p. 99) What do you think marks the kids in the Oha Coven? What marks you, and what power would it translate to if you had Leopard abilities?

5. One of Sunny's loves is soccer. There are multiple barriers in both worlds to her playing in the way she wants to. What are those barriers and how does she claim her place?

6. What are your roots and how do they affect you? How do Sunny's roots affect her? What do you think Sunny gained after reading her grandmother's letter on pp. 343-34 after previously only knowing "she was the granddaughter of the scholar who taught a murderous psychopath" (p. 191)?

7. Sunny and the rest of her Coven all find mentors by the end of the book. Sunny has Sugar Cream, Orlu has Taiwo, Chichi has Anatov, and Sasha has Kehinde. What traits make each pair compatible and what traits cause friction? What does it mean to have a mentor or to be a mentee? Who are mentors or mentees in your life?

8. Chittim is "Currency you earn when you learn something. The bigger the knowledge, the more *chittim*." Pg 61. What rewards do you experience when you learn something significant?

9. The Leopard and Lamb worlds are both filled with danger and uncertainty. Some examples: The coven is told the world is not a safe place (pp. 118-119); Sunny contemplates life and death situations (p. 326); Miknikstic saw into the near future and knew about his death (p. 233, p. 236, p. 241). How do you define fear? When is fear a strength and when can it be a weakness?

10. Some members of the Oha coven have a reckoning when they impulsively tap into their power. (Sunny in the school fight, Sasha and Chichi summoning masquerades against police and at the party.) When was a time you had to stand up for yourself? In hindsight, was it justified or were you motivated by fear or frustration? Where is the balance between standing up for yourself and lashing out?

11. Do you think a person can be born evil? What does your imagination tell you evil is and what do you think has influenced these ideas?

12. Nnedi Okorafor uses language to depict Sunny's surroundings in a way that makes magical situations tangible and vivid. Think about one of these three chapters: Chapter 3: Anatov's House; Chapter 7: The Night Runner Forest; Chapter 19: Black Hat battle. Is there particular imagery or descriptions that stood out to you? What kind of sensations or emotions do they evoke? If you were trying to convey the feeling of a place in your life, how would you describe it?

13. "Speculative fiction is a genre of fiction that encompasses works in which the setting is other than the real world, involving supernatural, futuristic, or other imagined elements." (Oxford Languages) Speculative fiction is a powerful tool that reflects and deconstructs our reality—allowing us to envision what our future could be. What does *"Akata Witch"* help you see differently? What does it help you envision for the future?

14. Throughout the book, characters embark on both literal and figurative journeys of learning, often discovering their own unique powers. How does this story highlight the magic of learning in a way that resonates with the role of libraries today—not just as places for reading, but as spaces for transformative learning experiences?

15. In talking about her newfound knowledge in her Leopard Knocks books, Sunny says "each symbol spoke a complex idea, and the slightest change in the symbol shifted its meaning." This is very common in Nigerian languages, which can be very tonal at times, with accents and dots below letters changing their sounds and meanings. Does the English language have any similar constructions? How about other languages that you know or speak?

16. The brightest part of Leopard Knocks was said to be its library, The Obi Library. "Obi" means heart in Igbo. Why do you think this book named the library this term in particular when it comes to what libraries mean across cultures and what they hold within them? How do you interact with the libraries in your community (neighborhood, home, school, etc)?

17. Before the Zuma International Wrestling Finals, Sunny met Miknikstic on her trip to the bathroom (p. 227). He approached her as she navigated an emotional moment. He asked her if she was alright, gave her his yellow handkerchief and said, "My gift to you." The two spoke briefly as Sunny let him know that she was a free-agent and he provided her with some words of wisdom. Later when Sunny spoke to his wife, after he lost the match, she let Sunny know that he "picked and chose who he spoke to" and that Sunny had her blessing too. Why do you think Miknikstic chose to speak to Sunny?

18. Nnedi mentions that "most people dismiss Chichi and Sasha as disrespectful, uncouth children who can't even get through a year of school...doctors would prescribe Ritalin for their ADD and then throw their hands up, perplexed that it didn't work." She mentioned that as Leopard children, they're destined for great, great things. What do you think of that parallel of being labeled as needing medication in one world, but those same qualities being seen as gifts in another world?

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