Grades 3–7

HOLIDAY HOUSE BOOK CLUB GUIDE



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Airrelle of the Maroon Witches

by **Sumayyah Beck**

ABOUT THE BOOK

***Kiki's Delivery Service* meets *Black Panther* in this middle grade fantasy set in a richly imagined world where once-enslaved people have built an enchanted network of hidden witch communities.**

Anyone can become a witch in Missen Dessalin. If you can find the Missen, that is. Some say the whole reason it was called a "Missen" is because it was a gathering place for those who wanted to stay missin'.

Twelve-year-old Airrelle Bookman, born and raised in Missen Dessalin by two witch parents, has been waiting for magic to call to her *for years now*. She just has to secure her four patron animals, complete four rites, master four skills, and pass the initiation ceremony. Then she'll be a fully confirmed maroon witch, able to fly beyond the walls of the Missen as she pleases. Just like her parents, older siblings, and best friend Hosniya.

When the time for her trial finally seems to arrive, so do familial troubles and threats to the very safety and secrecy of Missen Dessalin itself. But an ordinary girl from beyond the protected walls of Missen, one who has grown up in our own tumultuous and unenchanted world, may just be the key to Airrelle's troubles.

Informed by the history of maroon societies and inspired by the fantasy worlds of Studio Ghibli, *Airrelle of the Maroon Witches* is a beautiful coming-of-age story about a shy but resourceful girl discovering her own power.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Throughout the book, Airrelle learns and thinks about the history and traditions of maroon witches and Oversiders. Define the word tradition. How does tradition influence the everyday lives of Airrelle's family, friends, and community?

- What is Airrelle's first impression of Overside? How does Airrelle's perspective of Overside change?

- The Missen Dessalin community is set in Southern California. How does the California setting influence the story?

- Airrelle questions the differences between Missen Dessalin and witch communities found in the South. What differences does Airrelle notice? What is the explanation given for the differences?

- Characters in the novel are often playing music or singing. How do characters rely on music and song throughout the story?

- Discuss Airrelle's relationship with her parents. How does the absence of her parents affect her journey to becoming a confirmed witch?

- Discuss Airrelle's relationship with her siblings. How do Airrelle's siblings show support during the absence of their parents?

- Momma struggles with her mental health in the novel. Explain how Airrelle and her family view the care that Momma needs throughout the novel. How does Momma's care affect Airrelle and her family?

- The relationships between witches and nature and animals play an important role in the novel. Discuss examples in the text that reflect how nature and animals interact with witches. How do nature, animals, and witches show care and support for each other in the story?

- Throughout the novel, Airrelle struggles with timing. Identify examples where Airrelle wants to influence events to occur on her own timeline. What conflicts and consequences arise from Airrelle trying to influence the timing of events?

- While on the granjourney, Elder Taiwo tells the story of the history of the original maroons. Before Elder Taiwo begins, Airrelle mentions that even though everyone knows the story already, everyone listens to the retelling. What detail in Elder Taiwo's retelling stood out to you? Is this detail a part of history that you were familiar with?

Guide created by Olivia Johnson, Middle School Librarian in Lewis Center, Ohio.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sumayyah Beck is a speculative fiction writer. Her work has been published by *Strange Horizons*, *PANK*, *Mizna*, and *Nat. Brut*, and she has participated in writing programs including the Clarion Workshop, Tin House, Kimbilio, and VONA. Born on Kumeyaay land with a Motor City mom/Windy City dad Black lineage, Sumayyah is a blended descendant of displaced Bantu, Hausa, and Fulani peoples. She currently resides in California where she completed her MFA in literature at the University of California San Diego. You can find her at: SumayyahBeck.com.