

# The Light Fantastic

by Sarah Combs

## ABOUT THE BOOK

It's April 19, 2013. Boston is on lockdown as police search for the marathon bomber. In Delaware, eighteen-year-old April Donovan braces for another birthday filled with tragic memories. In Nebraska, Lincoln Evans is on the road to save a beautiful and troubled girl. In California, the Mastermind has triggered his plan for the Assassins.

Told in seven interwoven narratives, this beautifully wrought novel transports readers across the country and into the darkest corners of the Internet. Tense and shocking, it explores three harrowing hours in the life of a generation on the brink—and it points past their shame and isolation to the redemptive light of healing and acceptance.

### Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL**), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL**). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. April can remember every day in her life with extraordinary clarity. “Some people might even call it a blessing,” she says (page 4). “Sometimes (lots of times) it’s a curse.” Do you think it’s a blessing or a curse? Why?
2. *The Light Fantastic* unfolds a few days after the Boston Marathon bombing. Why do you think the author chose to set her novel then? Why does April cry when the bomber is caught? Why is Gavin determined to run the next Boston Marathon?
3. Look closely at the chapter titles. How do they set the stage for the chapter? How do they signal the narrator of that chapter?
4. What are the “flashbulb moments” in April’s life? What have been the flashbulb moments in yours?
5. “There’s nobody else in this world I hate half as much as I hate myself,” one of the Assassins declares (page 67). Why is that comment enlarged and repeated over the next few pages? Why do the Assassins hate themselves? Should they?
6. “Shame. Shame. It weighs more than sorrow, and much more than regret,” Delaware thinks (page 63). “It feeds and hungers and preens, and it will not go away.” What is Delaware ashamed of? Why?
7. What drew Phoebe to the Assassins? What pulls her away from them?
8. Discuss Gavin’s relationships with Gina and April. Why do you think Gavin uses hashtags to express his feelings?
9. “They say that coincidences are God’s way of keeping anonymous,” a man in a wheelchair says to the Mastermind, paraphrasing Einstein (page 156). Do you agree? What are the various coincidences that run through this novel?
10. Leona refuses to accept April’s apology for humiliating her when they were younger. “Because any apology coming out of your mouth is not about me, it’s about you. You know that, right?” (page 266) Is Leona right about April’s motives? Should they matter?
11. The Mastermind’s father believes that everyone is born with a happiness threshold. Some people can almost always be happy; some can almost never be happy. Do you agree that our capacity for happiness seldom changes? Which characters in this novel find happiness easily? Which don’t?

12. How do face-to-face friendships differ from online friendships? Do you agree with Phoebe that there are two worlds, “the one I carry my body through” and “the one in the screen” (page 275)? Why or why not?
13. Mr. Goodrich talks about his generation’s experience with war. “But this thing,” he says (page 134). “I mean, what is this? Nobody can tell me that you kids aren’t fighting a war all your own.” What do you think he means by “this thing”? Are today’s teenagers in a new sort of war?
14. “People aren’t always what you think they are,” Pal tells April (page 230). Explore how this is especially true of the Gakhar family.
15. Thinking of the first-graders in Connecticut who survived the shooting in their school, Lincoln asks himself, “How do you carry on?” (page 89) How did he carry on after his loss? How did Sandy Hespil carry on after hers?
16. Why has the Mastermind built himself makeshift wings? What attracts him to the myth of Daedalus and Icarus?
17. “Look,” says Laura, straddling the Nebraska-Iowa line (page 170). “Two states at the same time.” What are the emotional states that she is divided by? How does Lincoln help make her whole again?
18. Hunkered down in the lockdown closet, Gavin makes a list of the real things, big and small, that matter to him. What would be on yours?
19. Discuss the meaning of the book’s title. What role does the Tennessee Williams play *The Glass Menagerie* play in this novel?
20. Discuss the significance of the book’s opening quotes: “Nowadays the world is lit by lightning!” taken from *The Glass Menagerie*, and “We’ve got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen,” by D. H. Lawrence. How do these two quotes speak to each other, and how do they relate to the title and the themes of the book?

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sarah Combs** is also the author of *Breakfast Served Anytime*. She has worked as a Latin teacher, an English instructor, and a youth and teen librarian. She lives with her family in Lexington, Kentucky.