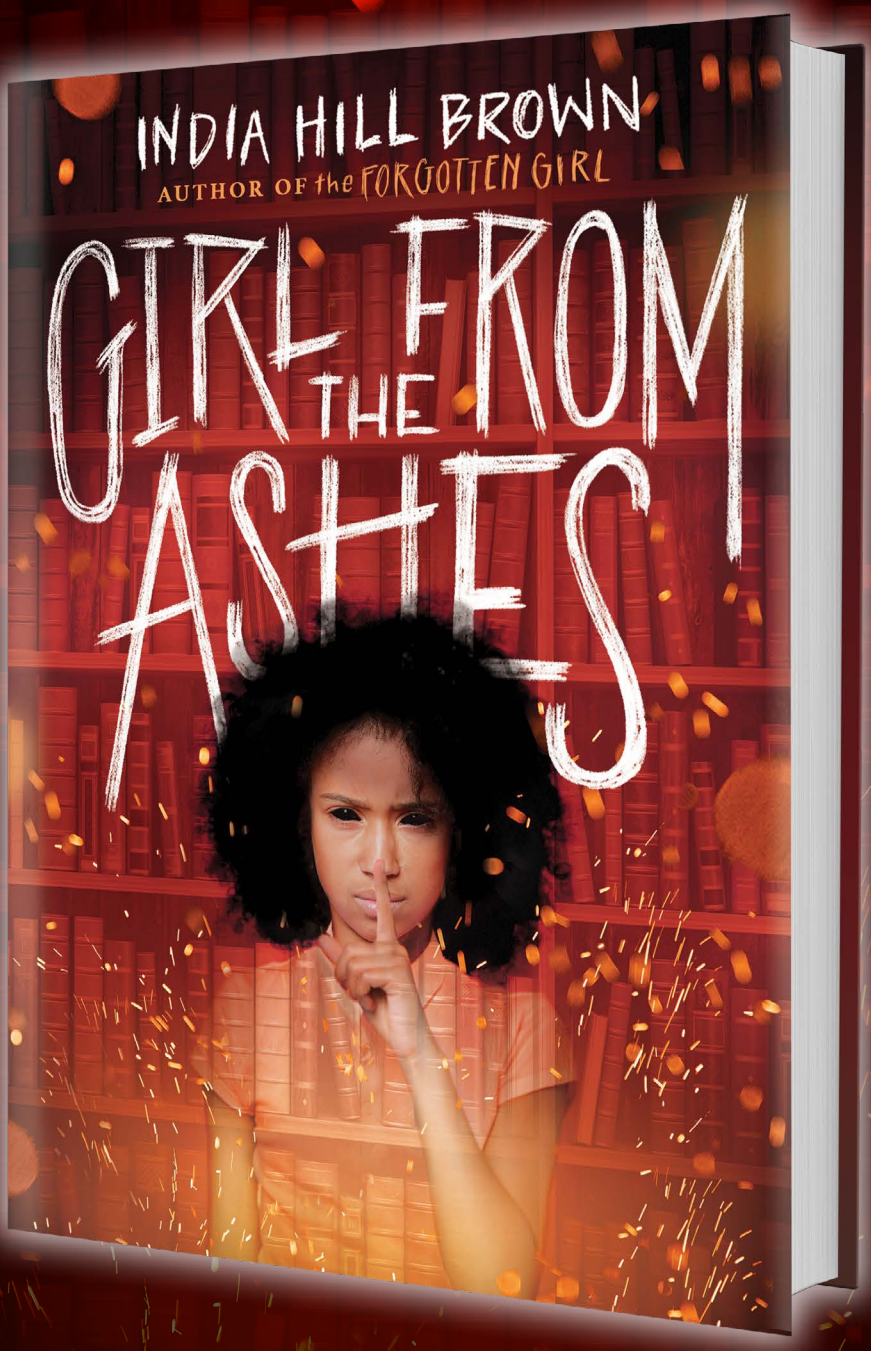
READING GUIDE

GIRL FROM THE ASHES

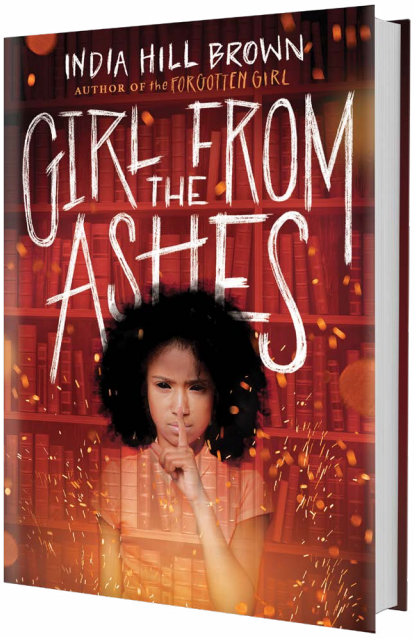
BY INDIA HILL BROWN

AGES 8–12
GRADES 3–7



The Power of Story
Connecting Readers, One Book at a Time

SCHOLASTIC



ABOUT THE BOOK

Gianna and Carter John are best friends, but they couldn't be more different. Gianna is small for her age, gets straight A's, and is the teacher's favorite. Meanwhile, Carter John gets in trouble no matter what he does and no matter how hard he tries, just because he's tall and his voice is loud.

Then one day in the town library while working on a class project with Gianna, Carter John gets in trouble yet again and reaches his breaking point. As his anger builds, a stack of books flies off the shelf, hitting the librarian.

Now everywhere he goes, strange things are happening. The smell of smoke hangs in the air. Sparks fly when Carter John gets in trouble. And he hears the voice of a young girl singing a song . . . a song about burning . . .

When fires start breaking out around town, Carter John and Gianna are determined to figure out who's responsible. They are certain that these are no normal fires . . . Something terrible once happened where the town library now stands, and someone's trying to send them a message about it. But who is she—and why is she determined to get revenge?

From the author of *The Forgotten Girl* and *The Girl in the Lake*, this is both a bone-chilling ghost story and a book about the history of segregated libraries.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been to a school library? What was it like? What about a public library? Do you have a public library card? What are some things people can do or access with a library card?
2. When you think of the words "library" or "librarian," what words or ideas come to mind? Do you know any librarians in your school or community? What kinds of experiences have you had with them?
3. Does your school have a policy about bullying? If yes, what does it say? If not, brainstorm ideas to create a policy. What are three things you could do if you noticed someone being bullied at school?
4. What does "delinquent" mean? How does Carter John feel when he is falsely accused and labeled a delinquent by the public librarian (p. 54–58)? How did you feel when reading that scene? How might you react if that happened to you or a friend?
5. How does Gianna feel when people call her "baby"? Do adults ever treat you as though you can't handle hearing about serious topics? How does that make you feel? How do you react? How do you wish adults would talk to you about serious topics?
6. What parallels do Carter John and Gianna uncover about what happened to Cora Belle and what's happening in their own lives?
7. How do Carter John's grandparents help Gianna and him learn about their town's history and events that happened before they were born? How does this information change how they think about present-day events? What are some ways that elders in our families and communities can help us learn about our history and understand our present?
8. What did you learn about Ronald E. McNair's life from reading *Girl from the Ashes*? What connections can you make to Carter John and Gianna's story?
9. How does Carter John react to being called a leader at his parent-teacher conference (p. 172)? What qualities do you associate with being a leader? What are some examples of how the idea of leadership influences Carter John's actions and sense of self?
10. Cora Belle disagrees with Carter John and Gianna about what actions to take when responding to injustice. How might Cora Belle's experiences influence her opinion? What information and experiences influence Carter John and Gianna's opinions? What do you think about their decision and the reasoning behind it?
11. When do fireflies show up throughout the book? What do you think they represent?
12. How do Carter John and Gianna use their research, art, and creativity to make "good trouble" (p. 188)?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. There are many different kinds of libraries: school libraries, public libraries, research libraries, museum libraries, and more! Research the history of your favorite library. What year did it open? Is it named for a person or people? If so, who, and why were they important? What individual or organization founded it? Was it ever segregated? If so, when did it become desegregated, and were there any individuals or organizations behind that decision? Create an annotated timeline with images and important dates, or make a presentation with your voice narrating the story of your local library. You may need to visit the library in order to find this information. Don't be afraid to ask your local librarian to help you!

2. Ask your local public or school librarian whether they have a list of rules, norms, or agreements for young people's behavior, and whether young people helped make them.

    - If they already exist and were not co-created by young people, or do not exist at all, ask whether you can get a group of your peers together to make new ones.
    - Alternatively, if they don't exist, ask whether you can create some.
    - As a further step, consider making a video for your peers explaining library norms and agreements and how they can be used to help communication between librarians and young people so that everyone feels welcome.

3. Use trustworthy sources and materials to make a fire safety plan for your library (hint: start by asking a librarian if they already have a plan in place!). If one already exists, consider creating it in other forms for younger library users. For example, you might make a visual map of the escape route, an audio or braille version for people with visual impairments, a map marked with the locations of fire extinguishers, or a comic illustrating what to do in case of fire. Make a plan to share your fire safety plan with young people in your community by talking to an adult about the best way to get the word out.

4. Create a body biography for any character in the book. Draw them and label each of the following with quotes and a connection to the story.

    - Head: What do they think?
    - Heart: What do they feel?
    - Hands: What would they carry?
    - Legs or Feet: Where do they go?
    - Eyes: What is an important thing they saw?
    - Mouth: What is something important they said?
    - Ears: What is something important they heard (or that someone else said to them)?
    - Use your creativity to give the character accessories or other details that match their character's plot sequence. For example, a firefly could be the background of Cora Belle's body biography.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

American Libraries Magazine | Desegregating Public Libraries americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/desegregating-public-libraries

EveryLibrary Action | Libraries, Segregation, and Civil Rights action.everylibrary.org/libraries_segregation_and_civil_rights

Horn Book Magazine | "The Shut Doors of Libraries" by Jeannine Atkins hbook.com/story/the-shut-doors-of-libraries

PBS | The Space Race: The Challenger Tragedy rmpbs.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/space-race-the-challenger-tragedy-video/retro-report

Zinn Education Project | Freedom Libraries: The Untold Story of Libraries for African Americans in the South zinnedproject.org/materials/freedom-libraries

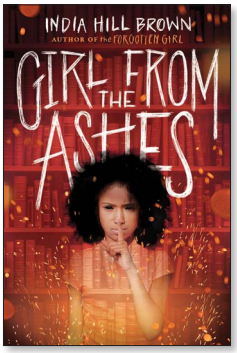
Zinn Education Project | Aug. 21, 1939: African Americans Arrested for Going to Public Library zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/alexandria-library-sit-in

Zinn Education Project | Feb. 27, 1960: McKenney Library Sit-In zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/mckenney-library-sit-in

Zinn Education Project | July 16, 1960: Greenville Eight Stage Read-In at Local Library zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/greenville-eight-sit-in

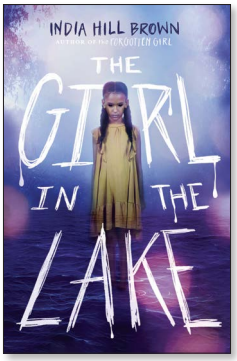
Zinn Education Project | March 7, 1964: St. Helena Four Stage Sit-In at Louisiana Library zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/st-helena-four-library-sit-in

BOOKS BY INDIA HILL BROWN



"When future astronaut Ron McNair was nine years old, he had the police called on him for refusing to leave the segregated local library. I was shocked to learn this. A segregated library? Growing up, I'd spent countless hours and days in the library with my mom and my little brother. I couldn't imagine getting kicked out of it just because of the color of my skin. Yet the accomplished Ron McNair was subjected to this racism at a very young age. This realization prompted the story of *Girl from the Ashes*."
–excerpt from the author's note by India Hill Brown

Girl from the Ashes
HC: 9781546116400 • $18.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available in ebook and audio download



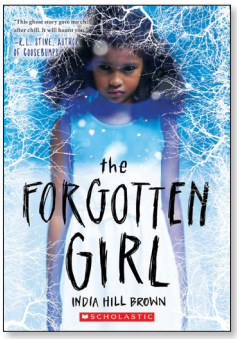
Buckeye Children's & Teen Book Award Winner
Mark Twain Readers Award Winner
Texas Lone Star Reading List

"This ghostly tale will help young listeners understand that our real history can be scarier than fiction, and fans of Mary Downing Hahn will love it."
—Booklist

"The slow burn reveal of Ellie's true intentions make for a fun, quick, and satisfyingly eerie read."
—Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

"Brown expertly reminds readers that the truth is scarier than fiction especially when it comes to historical truths and lived realities whose impacts echo through the generations. A gripping scary story weaving in the history of segregation."
—Kirkus Reviews

The Girl in the Lake
HC: 9781338678888 • $17.99
PB: 9781338678895 • $8.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available in ebook and audio download



NAACP Image Award Nominee for Outstanding Literary Work for Youth/Teens
ALSC Notable Children's Book

"Strong middle-grade characters who will undoubtedly be enjoyed by children and adults alike. The pacing of the plot will surely send a chill through the readers' spines as they follow Iris and her journey with the paranormal. [An] eerie read."
—Booklist

"The historical information about school desegregation, segregated cemeteries, and the Great Migration are welcome, unique additions. A ghostly tale with a historical twist."
—Kirkus Reviews

"Both historically and culturally relevant, Brown's thoughtful ghost story explores the legacy of racism through segregation."
—Publishers Weekly

The Forgotten Girl
PB: 9781338317251 • $8.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available in ebook and audio download

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Photo © Dailey Alexandra

INDIA HILL BROWN graduated with a bachelor of arts in mass communication from Claflin University. She was born and raised in South Carolina and currently lives there with her husband and son. Her debut novel, *The Forgotten Girl*, was an NAACP Image Award nominee and an ALSC Notable Children's Book. She is also the author of *The Girl in the Lake*. She has worked for HBO, *New York Magazine*, and the University of South Carolina, and has written for publications such as *Teen Vogue*, Apartment Therapy, and *Sesi Magazine*. When she's not working on her novels, she can be found playing around with her kids, reading a book, or writing in her (many) notebooks. Learn more at IndiaHillBrown.com, and follow her on YouTube (youtube.com/booksandbighair) and on Instagram (@booksandbighair).

About the writer of this guide: Julia E. Torres (MAEd, MA, MLIS) is a librarian and veteran ELA teacher reading, living, and teaching in Denver, Colorado, and the world. She can be found on most social networks as @juliaerin80.

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