



**Title:** Serafina and the Black Cloak

**Author:** Robert Beatty

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The questions in this document can be used as writing prompts and/or group discussion prompts for *Serafina and the Black Cloak*.

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**Content developed by certified ELA and History teachers and librarians, as well as the author:**

Patty Clark, Rachel Cummings & Robert Beatty

Please send feedback to [robertbeattyauthor@gmail.com](mailto:robertbeattyauthor@gmail.com).

#### COMMON CORE COMPATIBLE

*Serafina and the Black Cloak* and its educational materials are well suited for **Common Core** curriculum.

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Educational Materials for *Serafina and the Black Cloak*

- Writing & Discussion
- Activities
- Vocabulary
- History

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### General Questions / After Reading the Novel

1. Serafina has many characteristics of a particular animal, but the author never uses that word to describe her. What is the word and why do you think the author used that technique?
2. What has Serafina learned and/or how has Serafina changed by the end of the story?
3. What does this statement mean? “Our character isn’t defined by the battles we win or lose, but by the battles we dare to fight.”
4. What are the qualities of good and what are the qualities of evil in this story? Do you agree? What does good and evil mean to you?
5. What has Pa learned and/or how has he changed by the end of the story?
6. There is a point in the story where Serafina has to decide whether she should continue trying to fight the Man in the Black Cloak or just hunker down and hide for her own safety. She wonders: “Does doing nothing mean you’re evil?” Discuss or write about Serafina’s question. When else in history or in your own life would this question be applicable?
7. The Black Cloak allows a person to gather incredible knowledge and skills. Would you wear and use the Black Cloak? Is wearing and using the Black Cloak right or wrong? Or does it depend on how you use it?
8. When Serafina is wondering if she should try to help the people in the house solve the mystery of the missing children, the story reads: “Her pa had told her to leave them to it, that it wasn’t any of her business, that they weren’t her kin, but who was he to say who was kin and who wasn’t?” Discuss or write about this idea. What is Serafina getting at?
9. What does this mean? “She was beginning to see how difficult it was to determine who was good and who was bad, who she could trust and who she had to watch out for. Every person was a hero in his own mind, fighting for what he thought was right, or just fighting to survive, but no one thought they were evil.”
10. What are the themes of the story?
11. What are Serafina’s characteristics? How would you describe her personality/character to someone?
12. Could there be a sequel to this book? What are some of the things that you imagine could happen in the sequel?



13. This book can be described as historical fiction, but it also has elements of fantasy. List some of the elements that would fall into each category.
14. Cornelius Vanderbilt started with nothing, built a great shipping empire, and became one of the richest men in America. He passed his wealth on to his children and grandchildren, including George Vanderbilt. What was the main thing George did with his inheritance? Was this a good thing or a bad thing?
15. In 1899, when the story takes place, most homes were very primitive. What were some of the technological advancements at Biltmore Estate?
16. At the beginning of the story, how is Serafina's life different from Biltmore's other inhabitants (the Vanderbilts, the guests, and the servants)?
17. Find two pieces of evidence to support the statement: "Serafina is different from other girls."

## Research Assignments

1. Research the Gilded Age. What and when is it? Who coined the term and why?
2. Research Biltmore Estate and write an essay about it, with both facts as well as figurative language.
3. Research the Blue Ridge Mountains and write a factual essay about them. What's special about them?
4. Write a character sketch of Serafina. Who is she? What are her strengths and weaknesses? What does she want or need in her life?
5. Research and describe some of the wildlife that lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains.
6. Research and write an essay on Mountain Lions and/or Red Wolves.
7. Research and write an essay on the Dynamo and/or Edison's power generation and electric lights.
8. What forms of transportation were used in the story? Research and write an essay on the transition from horses, to trains, to automobiles around the Turn of the Twentieth Century.
9. Write an essay on the techniques the writer used to keep you reading and interested in the story.
10. Write an essay on the symbols and imagery used in the story.



### Chapter 1

1. Who is Serafina? What do you know about her? Describe her personality.
2. Why do you think Serafina and her father live in the workshop and not the servant's quarters or in town? Give two examples of how you came to this conclusion.
3. In what ways has the author established the elements of fiction (such as setting, character, voice, POV, and conflict) in this first of the chapter?
4. Where does this story take place? What do we know about it? Is it a real place or is it fictional?
5. What does Serafina remind you of? Provide evidence from the text of why you think that.
6. Describe Serafina's relationship with her father. What does the text say that supports your belief?
7. The story hints at several tensions between Serafina and her father. What are they and why might they be important?
8. Explain how Serafina is in some ways invisible. How do you think she feels about this? What evidence supports you?
9. What does Serafina witness in the basement of Biltmore Estate?
10. What do you think of the Man in Black and what do you think happened to the girl in the yellow dress?
11. At the end of Chapter 1, what questions are on your mind?

### Chapter 2

1. What are some examples of how Serafina acts like an animal? Give at least two examples from this chapter.
2. What does Serafina's behavior toward and confrontation with the Man in the Black Cloak reveal about her character?
3. How is Serafina physically different than most people and how do those differences save her now and make her an excellent C.R.C. (Chief Rat Catcher)?
4. What techniques is this author using to keep you interested and reading in the first two chapters?

# Serafina and the Black Cloak

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## WRITING & DISCUSSION



5. Thus far, does this story feel as if it's being told from a factual / objective point of view or from the subjective perception of a particular character?

### Chapter 3

1. In this chapter, Serafina battles with both anger and resentment. What causes these emotions and how does she deal with them?
2. Serafina has been told throughout her life to stay hidden and not to venture up the stairs. What factors contributed to her decision to ignore what she had been told and finally risk going up there? Provide at least two or three pieces of evidence to support your answer.
3. What leads Serafina to think that the Man in the Black Cloak is both some sort of specter but also "of this world"?
4. Why does Pa not believe Serafina's story about the Man in the Black Cloak?
5. What has Pa warned Serafina never to do? Why? Do you agree?

### Chapter 4

1. Do you think it is just a coincidence the estate's dynamo was sabotaged just at the time these disappearances are happening? Are these occurrences connected somehow?
2. Serafina is frightened by her father's reaction. Why is he acting this way?
3. What characteristics led the midwives to call the baby the devil's work?
4. What do you learn about Pa and his character?
5. Explain why Serafina and her father live in the basement rather than in town or with the other servants.
6. When Serafina's father tells her the story of how he came to be her father, Serafina feels it has "*opened up a thousand questions.*" What are some of the questions Serafina might have?

### Chapter 5

1. What evidence did Serafina find that might prove the Man in the Black Cloak actually existed? What does the evidence reveal to her?
2. Serafina struggles to define what a friend is. What is your definition of a true friend?



3. Do you agree with Pa that there are differences between people and you should stay to yourself?
4. In the Gun Room, why does Serafina take the time to look at her reflection in the glass? She stood, “wondering”. What do you think she is thinking?
5. Can you answer Serafina’s question: “How do you tell a friend from an enemy just by looking at them?”

### Chapter 6

1. What evidence can you find in this chapter that proves Braeden actually wants to be with Serafina?
2. We learn in this chapter that dogs have never liked Serafina and bark at her. Why do you think this is?
3. What characteristics of Biltmore led Serafina to think it could be a really spooky place?
4. What do you think happened to Crankshod and the driver?
5. What advice would you give to Braeden and Serafina in this chapter?

### Chapter 7

1. What evidence can you find to support Serafina’s conclusion that Braeden has a gift of communicating with horses and other animals?
2. What are the signals in this chapter that the forest is a dangerous place?
3. What is your theory for why and how the two trees blocked the road. Can you find two or three pieces of evidence that support your theory?
4. Why do you think the Man in the Black Cloak wants Braeden?
5. Are there examples of the extended metaphor in this chapter?
6. What did Serafina learn about herself in this chapter?

### Chapter 8

1. What evidence in this chapter proves Braeden is clever?
2. Why does Serafina think the Man in the Black Cloak is mortal?



3. What secret does Serafina tell Braeden and why?
4. Do you consider Braeden and Serafina friends? Why?
5. Compare and contrast Braeden versus Serafina.
6. Should Serafina have told Braeden who she is and where she is from? Would you have?

### Chapter 9

1. Serafina concludes that it's difficult to determine who was good and who was bad. What do you think this means? Do you think it's difficult? Have you ever made a mistake?
2. Why did Serafina disappear before the rescuers could arrive?
3. What lie does Crankshod tell? Why do you think he tells it?
4. The road splits into three different roads. Which path would you take and why?
5. Should Serafina try to stop the Man in the Black Cloak or just keep safe and let someone else do it?

### Chapter 10

1. What does this statement mean? "Our character isn't defined by the battles we win or lose, but by the battles we dare to fight."
2. What techniques and description does the author use to make the setting in this chapter feel creepy?
3. Which of the tombstone epitaphs is your favorite? Which one don't you understand? Can you make one up yourself?
4. Why do you think the author described the trees are "gnarled" and seem "twisted by agonizing pain"?
5. Do you agree with Serafina that she made a mistake leaving the main road?



### Chapter 11

1. Why do you think Serafina feels like being with the cubs is a “homecoming”? The author is using a particular writing technique here. Do you know what it is?
2. What happens because Serafina plays with the cubs?

### Chapter 12

1. Give at least two strategies Serafina uses in this chapter to find her way home.
2. What does this statement mean? “She was like a starved animal wolfing down a scrap and thinking it had eaten a full meal.”
3. Serafina wants to be home. Why? Do you think she will be happy if she gets what she wants?
4. Are there more examples of the extended metaphor?
5. What are Serafina’s thoughts about herself and her place in the world?
6. In this chapter, Serafina sees a young red wolf. What do you think the wolf symbolizes to Serafina? Why does she feel close to the wolf even though it is a creature very different from herself?

### Chapter 13

1. What do we learn about Serafina’s father in this chapter?
2. Why do you think Braeden’s door was unlocked?
3. Should Serafina resist the forest’s allure? What does the forest represent to Pa? to Serafina?
4. How is Serafina’s perception of “home” changing? How is her perception of the world changing?
5. Why do you think someone wanted to sabotage the dynamo?
6. What does Serafina mean, “There were too many forbidden stairs and doors and corridors between them [her and Braeden]”? What does this reveal about 19th-century social classes? Explain how the distance between Braeden and Serafina was not only physical but also social and economic. How might those differences affect their relationship?



### Chapter 14

1. In what ways is Serafina's "differentness" a positive rather than a negative?
2. What new conclusions does Serafina come to in this chapter?
3. Why was Braeden's aunt so intent on him meeting Clara Brahms?
4. What clues led Serafina to believe it was the Man in the Black Cloak in the hallway?
5. What present does Braeden give Serafina? How does this gift fit into Serafina's journey of self-discovery? Can you predict how Serafina will use the dress or where she'll wear it?
6. Braden says we are all different (and talented) in our own way. In what ways are some of the various characters different and talented?

### Chapter 15

1. In the book, are creatures of the night evil? Support your answer with details. What about in real life? Are creatures of the night bad?
2. What does evil really mean? What do you consider evil?
3. Serafina overhears the gentlemen arguing about how to handle the situation of the missing children? How would you handle the situation if you were in their shoes?

### Chapter 16

1. What are several indications that the people of Biltmore were losing hope?
2. Why didn't Serafina want anyone to play the pipe organ?
3. Give two of Mr. Vanderbilt's personality traits that Serafina learns about in this chapter.
4. How does Mr. Thorne make himself a valued friend of Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt?
5. Would you want to be like Mr. Thorne?
6. What does the ending sentence mean? "She couldn't put it all together, but she smelled a rat."



### Chapter 17

1. What are the factors that lead to Serafina's suspicion of Mr. Thorne?
2. How can you explain Braeden claiming what Serafina is saying about Mr. Thorne makes no sense while Serafina sees it making perfect sense.
3. Why do you think Braeden is so defensive of Mr. Thorne? Who are you loyal to and why?
4. Why might the Man in the Black Cloak be focusing on children? What do they have that he wants?

### Chapter 18

1. How have Serafina's feelings about her home changed in this chapter?
2. How is the Man in the Black Cloak so powerful?
3. What realization does Serafina have about herself in this chapter?
4. Why do you think the Man in the Black Cloak is so keen to get Braeden?

### Chapter 19

1. What was it Serafina observes in the Billiard Room about Mr. Thorne that looked different?
2. Why did Serafina step out into the open even though she knew Mr. Thorne would see her?
3. What does Serafina say she wants?
4. Serafina says, "Over the last few days, she had felt increasingly constrained here. She didn't want to be inside anymore. She wanted the freedom of open space and true darkness." What does this reveal about how Serafina thinks of herself and how her thinking is changing?
5. What is evil? Is it something in your heart? Is it the way others see you? Is it changeable? Is it innate?
6. How do you think Serafina will use the dress in her mission to defeat the Man in the Black Cloak?



### Chapter 20

1. What transformation are we seeing in Serafina in this chapter?
2. Why is stepping into the open so scary for Serafina in particular?
3. Do you know what Serafina's plan is?

### Chapter 21

1. What mistake does Serafina make in hiding from the Man in the Black Cloak? What didn't she plan on?
2. Who is the "yellow eyed prowler of the night"?
3. Serafina was "aware she was bringing two great forces together..." What were they, why was she pitting these forces against each other, and what do you predict will happen? Is this a clever plan or reckless?
4. At the end of this chapter, Serafina is stuck in the back of the lion's den and the lion is going to attack her. What do you think is going to happen?

### Chapter 22

1. What does this chapter mean?
2. In what way are Serafina and the lioness connected?
3. How do you explain Serafina's sense of belonging with the lioness and her family?

### Chapter 23

1. Serafina struggles with questions in this chapter. What are her conflicts?
2. What is her connection to the lioness and her cubs?
3. What new mystery does Serafina face? Do you have any thoughts about it?
4. What advice would you give Serafina at this moment? Have you ever had to give advice to a friend before they made an important decision?
5. She hears a voice say. "Put me on..." Who or what is speaking?



### Chapter 24

1. Would you put on the Black Cloak?
2. Is the Black Cloak something to fear and run from, or something to welcome and embrace?
3. Why can't Serafina resist the cloak?
4. Why do you think the cloak's clasp is engraved with tiny faces behind vines and thorns?
5. Do you believe the cloak is not going to hurt Serafina?
6. Why do you think this book is called "Serafina and the Black Cloak" rather than "Serafina and the Man in the Black Cloak"?

### Chapter 25

1. Why did the sorcerer who first had the cloak kill himself?
2. What power does the cloak possess?
3. After reading the 1st paragraph: Will the cloak be the same for her? Is it possible that it was evil with Mr. Thorne because he yearned for evil things? If she used the cloak in the right way, would it be OK?
4. What happens when Serafina puts on the cloak's hood?
5. Why might the power of the cloak be enticing and good?

### Chapter 26

1. What does Mr. Thorne mean by telling Serafina: "We're the same. We're on the same side."
2. What finally happens to the Black Cloak? And what happens then?
3. What does it mean that Gideon arrives?



### Chapter 27

1. Explain what happens after the Black Cloak is destroyed.
2. Who do you think the strange woman is and why?

### Chapter 28

1. Why did the woman want to know Serafina's name? Who gave Serafina her name?
2. In what ways is Leandra cat-like?

### Chapter 29

1. How does Leandra explain her ending up in the form of a lion?
2. How did Leandra explain her choice of who would take care of Serafina?
3. What was Leandra's explanation for why the Man in the Black Cloak wanted to capture children?
4. Why is this cemetery famous for graves with no bodies?
5. Serafina's mother is a catamount—what is a catamount and how does it explain Serafina's unique talents?

### Chapter 30

1. When Serafina returns to Biltmore, she discovers a search party is being organized. But for who?
2. Why does Leandra change back into the lion when they reach Biltmore? Why doesn't she immediately re-join human civilization?
3. What do Braeden and Pa each do that is against their nature, but they do it to search for Serafina?

### Chapter 31

1. Who is credited for finding Serafina?
2. Why is Mr. Bendel looking for Mr. Thorne? Where did Mr. Thorne go?
3. What is Mr. Vanderbilt's reaction to Serafina?



4. Braeden gave Serafina a beautiful dress, which she quickly ruined. What does Braeden say and think about this?
5. Mrs. Vanderbilt is going to send down some nice beds, blankets and pillows to the workshop for Serafina and her father. Why do you think she doesn't just offer them a servant's room upstairs with everyone else?
6. Mr. Vanderbilt tells Braeden, "There are few skills more important than picking good friends." In what way is that advice ironic?
7. When Mr. Vanderbilt asks Serafina about the wound on her neck, she says, "I just had a run-in with a nasty thorn." Did you catch that? Did you find it humorous?
8. At the end of the book, in addition to keeping her C.R.C. title, Serafina gives herself a new title. She takes great pride in this new position. What is it and what do you think it means for her future?
9. In what way has Serafina changed from the beginning to the end of the book?
10. Would you want Serafina as your friend or is she too weird?
11. Did you find the ending to be satisfying?
12. Can you envision a sequel to this book?