

## ABOUT

1918. Orcas Island, Washington.

Lucy Nowhere has spent her eighteen years working on the vast estate of the eccentric shipbuilder who took her in after she washed ashore in a green canoe as a baby. But she has long wished for a life off the island, and in a matter of days, she is set to leave for college—and, for the first time, choose her own future.

Then she finds her employer's severed head on the beach. Rumors swirl that a mischievous spirit and its minions, the sea wolves, have struck again. Lucy doesn't believe in myths. She knows that a human—a human murderer—killed him. And when she is unexpectedly named heiress to the estate, she understands the next target is her.

Her closest friend, the estate's vigilant young guard, begs her to escape while she can. But Lucy knows the only way she can discover who she is, and free the island of its curse, is to find the real killer—before she becomes the next victim.

**Four starred reviews!**  
**A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection!**

“Descriptive prose and sensorial imagery bring the intersectionally diverse people and beguiling setting of this gothic whodunit to vivid life. Realistically rendered characters navigate fast-paced events with a dash of romance, culminating in a captivating adventure that perceptively ruminates on themes of colonization, gender discrimination, and environmental collapse.”

— *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

*This guide was written by Dr. Joanne H. Yi, an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at Indiana University.*

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The setting of Nowhere within the San Juan Islands and the Pacific Northwest is critical to the story. Describe the setting using examples from the text. Why is the setting so important? How is the natural world used to motivate and move the action along for various characters?
2. The housekeeper, Mrs. Bonefat, tells Lucy, “‘Inventions are supposed to serve, not enslave.’” (Chapter 6) What did she mean by that? Discuss other innovations that you think have blurred the line between improving and deteriorating people's quality of life.
3. Upon his death, Mr. Sanders leaves the entirety of his business, Sanders Ships International, and his property, Nowhere, to Lucy. How does her inheritance change her life and her plans? What challenges lie ahead for Lucy?
4. Consider how various characters, including Lucy, Miss Jack, and the Can Man, experience racism and discrimination. Describe some of their experiences and provide evidence from the text.
5. Mr. Sanders believes that “easy money leads to nothing but hardship.” (Chapter 16) How does this viewpoint affect Mr. Sanders's relationship with Daniel and Nash? Do you agree or disagree, and why?
6. While thinking about how grief over Daniel's death has affected her and Nash, Lucy muses, “When robbed of a crucial source of light, how much of the plant dies or fades?” (Chapter 23) How has Daniel's death affected the people of the house, including Lucy, Nash, and Mr. Sanders?
7. In chapter 21, Lucy realizes she can communicate with sea wolves. How is Lucy's gift both a blessing and a curse? Why is this special ability dangerous?

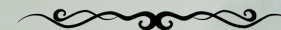
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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued)

8. At the Chinese labor camp, Lucy wonders, “Soon I will be meeting people with whom I share a common ancestry. But will I have anything in common with them? Will they recognize in me a kindred spirit? Or will I just be a strange, noisy intruder . . . a girl who does not belong here, or anywhere?” (Chapter 23) Can you describe a time when you felt similarly to Lucy while meeting others with a common ancestry or interest?
9. What is the Orkus? In chapter 25, Nash says the Orkus is a terrifying but easy way to explain the mysterious deaths of both humans and seals. What does he mean? Why is the notion of the Orkus easier to believe than an alternative?
10. Cookie, the head cook, is upset and grieved throughout much of the story. What does Cookie think about Nowhere and its development? Why is her perspective an important one to reflect on?
11. In chapter 34, Lucy learns that Eva attended a government-mandated boarding school for Native children and was separated from her family and forced to erase signs of her cultural identity, including her language. How do you see the impact of these experiences in her personality and actions?
12. Throughout the story, Lucy is pulled in two directions because of her romantic interest in both Koa and Nash. Why does Lucy have conflicted feelings toward Koa? What draws her to Nash?
13. Though Lucy is stunned to become the heiress of Nowhere, she steadily grows into her new role. What makes her a good leader? What actions does she take to keep her business and estate afloat, and what is the reasoning behind her decisions?
14. Lucy’s quest for the truth about her past is motivated by her desire to figure out how she fits into the world she was brought up in and a yearning for a place to belong. Where do you feel a sense of belonging? What family and sense of belonging does Lucy find at the end of the story?

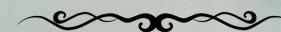
“The lushness and atmosphere of Nowhere is palpable; from feeling the strength of the orcas while swimming to delighting at the beauty of the mansion, Lee’s descriptions are sumptuously tangible. . . . Set in 1918 with excellent world building, this exceptional novel would be at home among both historical fiction or magic realism with no need to pick a side.”

— *Booklist*, starred review



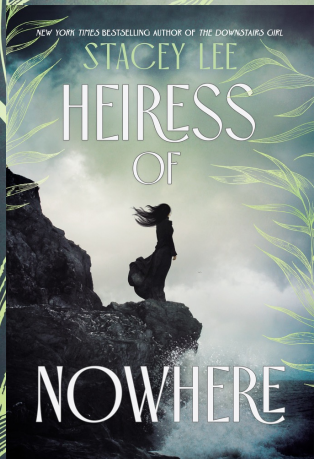
“Heiress of Nowhere cements Stacey Lee’s place as one of YA’s finest historical fiction writers. . . . Readers who enjoy historical mysteries by Ruta Sepetys, June Hur, and Monica Hesse will want to book passage to Nowhere posthaste.”

— *Shelf Awareness*, starred review



“A dark, vibrant and thrilling adventure . . . In Stacey Lee’s haunting and gripping historical mystery, readers are plunged into a layered and finely tuned thriller capturing an era of maritime innovation. . . . a skillful whodunit that ensures readers leave the last pages searching for a misty shore—and maybe even a peek at the creatures solemnly prowling the depths of the ocean.”

— *BookPage*, starred review



## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**Character Dossier.** Lucy is in a race to find a killer and figure out the mystery of her birth and identity before it's too late. Follow along with her as she uncovers clues, motives, and timelines by creating a "detective file" for each suspect. In a notebook, jot down notes that include brief descriptions, actions, and questions for both major and minor characters as they are introduced. Include important quotes, page numbers, and observations to help you uncover the mystery of Nowhere along with Lucy.

**Documenting the Natural World.** Remembering Mr. Sanders's claim that "where there is art, there is enlightenment," Lucy documents animals, plants, and fungi in her sketchbook. (Chapter 3) She also captures scenes such as a marble caterpillar on its way to becoming a butterfly, a murrelet's nest, and a mother orca and her offspring playing. Identify a specimen or phenomenon native to your area, and draw a picture of it, adding as much detail as possible. Keep in mind that the goal in scientific illustration is to combine accuracy and precision with visual and creative expression to foster a deeper understanding of the natural world.

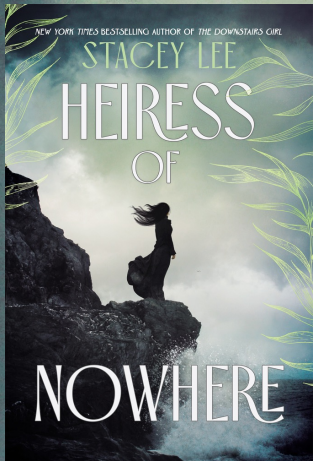
**Research Report: Asian Americans and Canneries in the Pacific Northwest.** As Lucy discovers more about her father, she is led to a Chinese labor camp where she is exposed to an unfamiliar but critically important means of economic development for Nowhere. Learn more about the important history of salmon canneries in the Pacific Northwest and their intersection with Asian American history. Conduct research on the economic impact of canneries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the racialized labor systems that upheld this trade and development. Consider how canneries were sites of racial exploitation as well as of community building and resistance for many Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants. Write up your report and share it with your classmates.

**Mushroom Network Simulation.** Trees and plants communicate with one another and pass along nutrients to survive through white threads of fungal mycelium. Lucy forms her own "mushroom network" by strengthening relationships with those she trusts to pass and receive critical information, including Eva, Flossie, Koa, and Nash. Engage in a team-building activity to identify your own mushroom network and its role in sustaining you and others.

Stand in a circle with a group of peers, friends, or family. Holding tight to one end of a ball of yarn, throw the ball to someone in the circle and make a statement that tells what the person does to help or support you and what you do for that person, for example, "You call me when I'm upset. I pack an extra snack for you." Keep throwing the ball of yarn to others in the circle and continue stating the relationships and actions that connect you. Consider how others' decisions and actions might influence you even if you don't interact often, and say them aloud. Talk together about how the yarn provides a tangible way of seeing the threads of connection and sharing of resources that build us up.



Stacey Lee is the *New York Times* bestselling author of historical and contemporary young adult fiction, including *The Downstairs Girl*, a Reese's Book Club YA pick; *Luck of the Titanic*, which received five starred reviews; and her latest, *Heiress of Nowhere*, a gothic mystery *Booklist* called "an exceptional novel" in a starred review. A native of southern California and fourth-generation Chinese American, Stacey practiced law for several years before retiring to start her real job—writing books. Her work has now been published in over a dozen countries and won the American Library Association's Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, the PEN Center Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction, the California Independent Booksellers Alliance's Golden Poppy Award, and the Northern California Book Award. She is a cofounder of the We Need Diverse Books movement and writes stories for all kids (even the ones who look like adults). Visit Stacey online at [StaceyHLee.com](http://StaceyHLee.com).



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