

Discussion Questions

The Once and Future Witches by Alix E. Harrow

1. Throughout the book there are references to feminized versions of real literary and historical figures (the Sisters Grimm, Andrea Lang, Alexandra Pope, etc). What does this say about the world of New Salem? How does it speak to the broader themes of the book?
2. The main events of the text happen in 1893, but there are references to many real-world events that occurred earlier or later, including the Pullman Strike and the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. Why? Why not adhere to a more accurate historical timeline?
3. The Maiden, Mother, and Crone are traditional figures in Western folklore and mythology. In what ways do Juniper, Agnes, and Bella fulfill or subvert their archetypal roles? What about the Last Three?
4. The return of magic is a classic trope in fantasy fiction, usually accomplished by a prophesized hero or a grand spell; restoring witchcraft is a little more difficult for the Sisters of Avalon. What setbacks do they encounter? Why are those challenges significant, in a thematic sense?
5. There are seven retold fairy tales in this book, all of them significantly altered from their familiar versions. How were they altered, and why? How do they complement the central story?
6. In *The Once and Future Witches*, witchcraft requires particular words and ways, but women from different cultural backgrounds use very different spells. Why isn't witchcraft universal? Why are there so many different languages and approaches?
7. The American suffrage movement was successful and admirable, but it was also riddled with racism, classism, and division. How does this story grapple with both the heroism and villainy of the suffrage movement?
8. The Sisters of Avalon find many of their spells hidden in nursery rhymes and children's songs. Why would such important words be found in such seemingly frivolous sources?

Source: Hachette Book Group Book Club Kit

