

The Ghost of Molly Flynn: Book One

Study and Discussion Guide

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About This Guide

This guide is designed for middle-grade and young-adult readers, classrooms, book clubs, homeschool settings, libraries, and families. The questions emphasize reading comprehension, character development, theme, inference, author’s craft, and discussion rather than simple recall. Because many questions are interpretive, students should be encouraged to support their answers with details from the novel. There may be more than one reasonable answer.

Spoiler note: This guide discusses the entire story, including the novel’s conclusion.

Before Reading

1. What expectations do the words ghost, pirate, sorcerer, and buried treasure create for you?
2. The protagonist has been twelve years old for three hundred years. What problems might come from being unable to grow up?
3. What might it mean to “belong” somewhere? Can belonging be something a person chooses or creates?
4. As you read, notice the ways humor appears beside danger, loneliness, grief, and fear. Why might an author combine those tones?

Recurring Ideas to Track

- Identity and change: How does Molly’s understanding of herself evolve?
- Belonging and found family: When does the Terror begin to feel like more than a ship?
- Stories and reputations: How do legends about Shadowcloak compare with the person Molly comes to know?
- Treasure and value: What kinds of things prove valuable, and why?
- Appearance and reality: How often are characters, places, or objects different from what Molly first assumes?
- Humor and wordplay: How does comedy affect scenes involving danger, death, or grief?

Chapter-by-Chapter Guide

Chapter 1: The Ghost in the Looking Glass

Focus: Molly introduces herself, explains what being a ghost is like, and reveals both her humor and her loneliness.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How does Molly describe being a ghost? Which parts of her afterlife seem useful, and which seem isolating?

2. What do Molly's comments about her death and loneliness reveal about the way she protects herself emotionally?
3. Why is the looking glass important in this chapter? What does Molly see when she looks at herself?
4. Find an example where humor makes a sad or unsettling idea easier to approach. Why does it work?

Chapter 2: The Night Mayor

Focus: Molly's encounters with the Night Mayor and Nicholas push her to consider leaving Crownsworth and seeking something new.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What does Nicholas understand about Molly that she has not fully admitted to herself?
2. What does "wanderlust" mean in this chapter, and why does the idea matter so much to Molly?
3. What is Molly risking by leaving the only home she has known for centuries?
4. At this point, what kind of change do you think Molly is really looking for?

Chapter 3: Stowed-Away Stowaway

Focus: Molly chooses a ship, leaves Crownsworth behind, and becomes a stowaway without even knowing where the voyage will take her.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. Why does Molly hesitate before boarding the ship? What finally matters more than her fear?
2. What does leaving Crownsworth represent beyond simply traveling to another place?
3. Why is Molly's failure to learn the ship's destination important to the mood of the chapter?
4. Describe why someone might choose uncertainty over something familiar but unsatisfying.

Chapter 4: The Story and the Storm

Focus: Life aboard the Great Divide introduces Molly to Terodyn and the legend of Shadowcloak before a storm throws her overboard.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What do the sailors' stories teach Molly about Terodyn and Shadowcloak?
2. How does Molly's boredom aboard ship help prepare the reader for the sudden danger of the storm?
3. What does falling into the sea force Molly to discover about the limits of being a ghost?
4. How does the chapter move from humor and curiosity into danger?

Chapter 5: Rock Bottom

Focus: Molly sinks to the ocean floor, encounters the wreck of the Terror, and is carried back to the surface by a mysterious supernatural force.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How is Molly's experience underwater different from what she expected being a ghost would be like?

2. What clues suggest that the wreck of the Terror is not an ordinary sunken ship?
3. How does the chapter use the literal idea of reaching “rock bottom” alongside Molly’s larger journey?
4. What do you think has happened to the Terror by the end of the chapter?

Chapter 6: Threads and Threats

Focus: Molly meets the skeletal pirate Shadowcloak, learns that he can touch and threaten her, and discovers that he intends to make her part of his plans.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. Why is Shadowcloak’s ability to touch Molly especially frightening to her?
2. What first impressions does Shadowcloak create? Which details make him threatening, and which make him strange or funny?
3. How does Molly respond to being treated as a recruit rather than as an invisible observer?
4. At this point, do you trust Shadowcloak? What evidence supports your answer?

Chapter 7: Crumbling and Conjuring

Focus: Molly’s ability to conjure objects becomes unexpectedly useful when Shadowcloak needs repairs, beginning to change their relationship.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What does Shadowcloak discover about Molly’s conjured objects that Molly herself had not fully considered?
2. Why is repairing Shadowcloak’s damaged leg important beyond the practical problem it solves?
3. How does Molly’s attitude toward Shadowcloak begin to shift in this chapter?
4. How does the scene involving Shadowcloak’s leg mix the grotesque with humor?

Chapter 8: Captain’s Privilege

Focus: Molly learns more about Shadowcloak, his ship, and the rules of their unusual partnership while discovering that the pirate needs her abilities.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What does Molly learn by exploring Shadowcloak’s cabin and talking with him?
2. How does the difference between Molly’s age in years and her apparent age complicate the way others see her?
3. What does Shadowcloak mean by “captain’s privilege” and what does it tell you about him?
4. Who has more power in Molly and Shadowcloak’s relationship at this point? Explain.

Chapter 9: The Isle of Souls

Focus: Shadowcloak sends Molly beneath the sea toward the Isle of Souls, where she discovers a community of ghosts and meets an unexpected guide.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How does Molly's second journey underwater differ from her first?
2. What surprises Molly about the Isle of Souls upon her arrival, and why do you think she surprises the sailors there in turn?
3. Why is discovering a community of ghosts important to someone who has spent centuries largely alone?
4. What questions does the Isle of Souls raise about how the dead exist in this world?

Chapter 10: Chockablock and Skullduggery

Focus: Molly explores the Isle of Souls, hears more about Shadowcloak's reputation, and follows a trail that leads toward the Peabody family.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How do the ghosts on the island react to Molly and to the name Shadowcloak?
2. What does "Crazy Bobby" reveal about the way stories and reputations can shape how people are treated?
3. How does Molly's search begin to turn her from a reluctant recruit into an active and willing participant?
4. What does "skullduggery" suggest about Shadowcloak and his history?

Chapter 11: The Pirate, Peabody

Focus: Molly meets an elderly Peabody, tells her own story, and learns that the missing treasure map may still exist aboard the Great Divide.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. Why does Molly decide to tell Peabody the story of how she came to the island?
2. What do Peabody's reactions to Shadowcloak and the things he says about him add to Molly's understanding of the pirate?
3. Why does the possibility that the map is aboard the Great Divide change the direction of the quest?
4. How are stories from the past influencing choices being made in the present?

Chapter 12: Reporting for Duty

Focus: Molly returns to the Terror with information about the map—and with Bobby Peabody, whose desire for adventure mirrors her own.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What similarities do Molly and Bobby share in their reasons for wanting adventure?
2. What does it tell us about Bobby's character that he follows Molly back to the Terror despite her protests?
3. How does Bobby's arrival change the idea of what Shadowcloak's "crew" might become?
4. Is Molly acting more like a passenger, a recruit, or a leader by the end of this chapter? Why?

Chapter 13: Skull and Crossbones

Focus: The mysterious jar releases Nana, Shadowcloak learns that the Great Divide is headed for Terodyn, and he reveals why returning there troubles him before naming Molly his first mate.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. Why does learning that the Great Divide is bound for Terodyn trouble Shadowcloak, and what does his explanation reveal about his past?
2. What moments suggest there is sadness beneath Shadowcloak's frightening appearance and reputation?
3. Why is Molly's promotion to first mate important to her development?
4. What associations come with the skull and crossbones, and how does the novel complicate those associations?

Chapter 14: Of Ships and Shanties

Focus: The growing crew sails onward as Molly experiments with conjuring, learns more about maps, and hears Nana turn their adventure into song.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How does the atmosphere aboard the Terror change now that Molly is no longer its only recruit?
2. Why would copying a map be more difficult for Molly than conjuring an ordinary object?
3. What does Nana's shanty suggest about Molly's doubts concerning Shadowcloak?
4. What do songs and wordplay add to the tone of the story?

Chapter 15: Shore Leave

Focus: Molly and Bobby prepare to enter Terodyn, and Molly uses her conjuring abilities to help them look the part.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What expectations has Molly formed about Terodyn before she arrives?
2. How does Molly use clothing and appearance to express identity—for herself and for Bobby?
3. What does Nana contribute to the group's personality and humor?
4. What new dangers might ghosts face in a city ruled by powerful sorcerers?

Chapter 16: Kitty Cap

Focus: In dazzling Terodyn, a cat steals a cap and unexpectedly helps point Molly and Bobby toward the Grubadub Pub.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. Which details make Terodyn feel magical, wealthy, and larger than life?
2. Why is the encounter with the cat more important than it first appears?
3. Molly notices the cap resembles those worn by the crew of the Great Divide. What does this tell us about her?

4. How does the chase balance worldbuilding with comedy and forward momentum?

Chapter 17: The Grubadub Pub

Focus: Molly and Bobby search the strange pub for Lawrence Peabody and discover that some people in Terodyn may be able to sense far more than ordinary mortals can.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What makes the Grubadub Pub memorable as a setting?
2. What evidence suggests that Molly and Bobby may not be as safely invisible in Terodyn as they expected?
3. Why does their search become dangerous?
4. Which details increase the tension as Molly and Bobby try to escape?

Chapter 18: Late and Later

Focus: After another plunge into the sea, Molly and Bobby race back toward the Terror while pursuers close in—and Nana finds room for a joke even then.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How does Molly handle falling into the water differently now than earlier in the book?
2. What does the escape reveal about the growing partnership between Molly and Bobby?
3. How does Nana’s joke about Molly being “late” work on more than one level?
4. Why might the author place humor in the middle of a dangerous chase?

Chapter 19: Horn of the Unicorn

Focus: The Terror comes under cannon fire, and Molly attempts to use the ship’s unicorn horn to help defend it.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What responsibilities does Molly take on during the battle, and which moments show her beginning to act like Shadowcloak’s first mate?
2. What makes aiming and using the unicorn horn difficult?
3. How does Molly adjust after her first attempt with the unicorn horn, and how do Bobby’s advice and the limits of the Terror’s cannons affect what she does next?
4. Compare Molly during this battle with the Molly who was frightened to board a ship in Chapter Three.

Chapter 20: Dead Man’s Cave

Focus: With daylight approaching and the Terror damaged, the crew seeks safety while Shadowcloak’s body literally begins to fall apart.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What disadvantages does the Terror’s ghostly crew face as sunrise approaches?
2. How does Shadowcloak’s damaged body create both tension and dark comedy?

3. What does Molly's willingness to help repair him reveal about how their relationship has changed?
4. Explain Nana's joke about losing a hand and being "hooked." Why does it fit this story?

Chapter 21: Treasure and Trash

Focus: Searching the Terror's chaotic hold for a way to remove the Revelation Powder reveals clues to Shadowcloak's past and makes Molly increasingly aware of how much their relationship has changed.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What does the condition of the Terror's cargo hold tell you about Shadowcloak and the ship's history?
2. How does the search through old objects turn "trash" into clues about someone's life?
3. Why does Molly react differently to Shadowcloak's hook than she once did to his skeletal hand?
4. How can objects preserve memories even after the people connected to them are gone?

Chapter 22: A Skull Can Only Grin

Focus: As Shadowcloak teaches Molly to steer the Terror and use more of the ship's magic, their conversation deepens and he prepares her for the mission to retrieve his map.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. Why does Shadowcloak insist that Molly keep her eyes on the star while steering?
2. What does learning to steer symbolize about Molly's changing role aboard the Terror?
3. How can Molly tell what Shadowcloak is feeling when his skull cannot make ordinary facial expressions?
4. Why is retrieving the map a particularly suitable—or risky—job for Molly?

Chapter 23: Chat and Checkers

Focus: Molly confronts Bobby's worries, and an honest conversation helps the two young ghosts understand each other better.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What is troubling Bobby, and why has he withdrawn from Molly?
2. How does Molly encourage Bobby to talk instead of simply leaving him alone?
3. What does Bobby's confession reveal about guilt, trust, and his relationship with Shadowcloak?
4. Why is the checkers pouch meaningful at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 24: The Map

Focus: Under cover of darkness and fog, Molly crosses secretly to the Great Divide to obtain Shadowcloak's map and encounters Larry Peabody.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. Why is Molly uniquely suited to the mission aboard the Great Divide?
2. What risks does Molly take while crossing between the ships and searching for the map?

3. How does Molly handle her encounter with Larry Peabody, and what does that show about her sense of empathy?
4. Is Molly justified in asking Larry to give her Shadowcloak's map? Defend your answer using Larry's family instructions and Molly's circumstances.

Chapter 25: Dragon Island

Focus: With the map recovered, the Terror reaches Dragon Island, where Molly and Shadowcloak head toward the buried treasure—and encounter something enormous.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. What changes do you notice in the way Molly and Shadowcloak speak to each other on Dragon Island?
2. How does the setting build anticipation before the treasure is found?
3. Why does the cave entrance seem especially threatening?
4. Based on the clues at the end of the chapter, what kind of creature has found them?

Chapter 26: The Boy and the Pirate

Focus: A dragon encounter, Bobby's arrival, and Molly's insistence on honesty force Shadowcloak to confront the way he treats his young crew.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How does the dragon challenge your expectations of what a dragon in this story might be like?
2. Why does Molly push Shadowcloak to speak directly to Bobby?
3. How does Molly use her relationship with both Shadowcloak and Bobby to help them address their conflict?
4. How has Molly become a mediator or leader within the crew?

Chapter 27: Shadowcloak's Tale

Focus: Inside the cave, Shadowcloak finally tells Molly the story behind his past and leads her to the small chest he buried long ago.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. Why does Shadowcloak choose this point in the journey to tell Molly more of his story?
2. How does learning about Shadowcloak's past change the meaning of the treasure hunt?
3. What assumptions about Shadowcloak are challenged by what Molly learns?
4. Why is the small size of the buried chest an effective surprise after such a long search?

Chapter 28: The Treasure

Focus: The chest is opened, revealing that Shadowcloak's true treasure is bound up with memory, love, loss, and the life he once lived.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How does the actual treasure compare with what Molly—or you—expected to find?

2. Why are the objects connected with Shadowcloak's and Kitanya's lives valuable even if their monetary value is uncertain?
3. How does the discovery change your understanding of the word "treasure"?
4. What does this chapter suggest about the things people choose to hold on to?

Chapter 29: The Girl in the Looking Glass

Focus: After the treasure hunt, Molly looks at herself again and discovers that three centuries of apparent sameness may finally be ending.

Discussion and Response Questions

1. How does the final looking-glass scene echo Chapter One?
2. What physical changes does Molly notice, and what explanation does Shadowcloak's earlier advice suggest?
3. How has Molly changed internally since leaving Crownsworth?
4. Why is the idea that a ghost's outside reflects "who she is on the inside" an important way to end Book One?

Whole-Book Discussion

1. Molly begins the novel by insisting that she is "over" being dead. By the end, what has she actually learned to accept?
2. How does Molly's idea of adventure change from the beginning of the novel to the end?
3. Compare the legend of Shadowcloak with the character Molly eventually knows. Why is the gap between reputation and reality important?
4. In what ways do Molly, Bobby, Shadowcloak, and Nana become a found family or chosen community?
5. The novel repeatedly uses physical objects—clothing, maps, bones, keepsakes, a looking glass—to explore identity and memory. Choose two and explain their importance.
6. What does the novel suggest about growing up? Is growth mainly physical, emotional, social, or some combination?
7. How does humor change the way the novel handles death and the supernatural?
8. Why is the final return to a looking glass an effective way to complete Molly's first adventure while opening the door to more?

Writing and Creative Extensions

Character Journal

Choose Molly, Bobby, Shadowcloak, or Nana. Write a one-page journal entry from that character's point of view about an important event in the novel. Include details the character would notice and feelings the character might not say aloud.

Reputation vs. Reality

Create two short descriptions of Shadowcloak: one based only on his legend and one based on what Molly learns by traveling with him. Then explain why the differences matter.

What Is Treasure?

Choose an object that would be “treasure” to you even if it had little monetary value. Write a paragraph explaining the memory, person, or experience that gives it value.

Build the World

Design another place in Molly’s world that could be inhabited or visited by supernatural beings. Describe its rules, inhabitants, dangers, and one detail that would surprise Molly.

Humor in the Dark

Find three moments in which the novel uses humor during a frightening, sad, or dangerous situation. For each, explain what the humor accomplishes.

Vocabulary and Language Study

Rather than memorizing a fixed vocabulary list, readers can collect unfamiliar or unusually used words while reading. For each word:

1. Copy the sentence or briefly describe the context in which the word appears.
2. Predict the meaning from context.
3. Check the meaning in a dictionary.
4. Explain why the author’s word choice works particularly well in that scene. Words and expressions connected with sailing, piracy, ghosts, magic, and Molly’s older- fashioned speech are especially useful to collect.

Suggested Culminating Projects

1. Theme essay: Explain how Molly’s search for adventure becomes a search for belonging and growth.
2. Character map: Show how Molly’s relationships with Shadowcloak, Bobby, Nana, and Nicholas influence her choices.
3. Book-club presentation: Choose the three most important turning points in Molly’s journey and defend your choices.
4. Creative sequel prediction: Based only on Book One, predict one way Molly might continue to change and one problem that change could create.
5. Alternative cover concept: Describe or design a cover that communicates the novel’s mixture of supernatural mystery, high-seas adventure, humor, and heart without revealing the ending.

Educator and Discussion-Leader Note

The novel lends itself particularly well to conversations about identity, loneliness, chosen family, reputation, grief, personal growth, and the difference between material and emotional value. Some students may also wish to discuss Molly's death and the losses experienced by other characters. These subjects can be approached through the fantasy framework without requiring students to share personal experiences. This guide intentionally favors open-ended questions over a fixed answer key. For assessment, readers can be asked to support interpretations with specific events, dialogue, or descriptions from the novel.