

Discussion Guide for the Dead Girl Series: Dead Girl Walking, Dead Girl Dancing, & Dead Girl in Love

By Linda Joy Singleton

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Series Summary: Seventeen-year-old Amber Borden makes a wrong turn and ends up in the position of a Temp Lifer. She temporarily inhabits other people's bodies to give the Host Soul time to rest. Her assignment is clearly defined by the Guidance Evaluation Manual: assume the Host Soul's life without interruptions. Amber, however, takes her job one step farther and tries to help solve the Host Soul's mysterious problems.

About the Author: As a child, **Linda Joy Singleton** dreamed about writing a mystery series. Her dream came true in 1994 when she sold *MY SISTER THE GHOST*, the first book in a series about spooky twins. She has since published over 25 books for kids, tweens, and teens, including *THE SEER* series. You can learn more about Linda Joy at www.lindajoyingleton.com.

Discussion Questions

Dead Girl Walking

- How did you visualize Amber when you were reading the story? Did your mental image of her change as she changed bodies?
- Amber gets to talk to her beloved Grammy Greta who died over a year before Amber was hit by the mail-mobile. Think of someone who has died who you would like to have a conversation with, (it can be someone you knew or someone you've heard about.) What would you say to that person?
- Cola works as a comforter. What is it about pets that can be so comforting to people. Have you had pets in your life that you especially loved?
- Amber's friends recognize her because she shares memories of things that only they would know. If you were suddenly switched to another body, what could you do to convince your closest friends that you were really you?
- After the girls return to their own bodies they will see each other at school. How do you think Leah and Amber might feel towards each other after all that they've been through? Do you think they will become friends?

Dead Girl Dancing

- The Guidance Evaluation Manual outlines the Nine Divine Rules for Temp Lifers, (see pages 20-21 of *DEAD GIRL DANCING*.) Which rule would be the hardest for you to follow if you were in Amber's position?
- Why do you think Amber went with Warren into the bike rental shop? What would you have done if you were in her situation? Why?
- Amber discovers that Sadie has been shoplifting. Do you think it's a friend's responsibility to address another friend's problem? What would you do if you saw

- a friend steal something? What would you do if you saw someone who you didn't like steal something? What about a stranger?
- What did you think about Hannah? Would you want Hannah to be your friend?
 - At the end of the book, Amber is given the opportunity to take on another assignment to help one of her best friends. Can you think of someone important to you that you could temporarily occupy so that you might help them solve a problem or take some much-needed rest?

Dead Girl in Love

- What did you think about Gabe when he found Amber. Did you trust him? Why or why not? Why do you think Amber met with Gabe again after Cola warned her that he was dangerous?
- When Amber is in Alyce's body she experiences a migraine headache for the first time and is surprised by how debilitating the headaches are for Alyce. Is there a medical or physical condition that challenges someone you know? Would you be willing to experience that condition one time to see what it's like?
- In order to contact Alyce, Amber needs to tap into her innermost passion, which is chocolate. What would you choose as your innermost passion?
- How do you think Melonee recognizes Amber?
- Look at the cover of the book. Who do you think the male figure is: Gabe or Eli? Why?

Dead Girl Series

- Amber learned a lot about her host souls during her job as a Temp Lifer. What did she learn about herself?
- What do you think happened to Amber after she graduated high school? Do you think she followed through with her original plan of becoming an entertainment agent or do you think her Temp-Lifer experiences may have moved her into another direction?
- Imagine that Amber writes her own Self-Help book? What would it be about? Can you think of a catchy title for her book?
- Do you think Grammy will ask Amber to be a Temp Lifer again? Why or why not?
- If you were going to read another Dead Girl mystery, whose body would you like Amber to occupy? What would her experience be like?

Response Activities

What if Amber Spent Time in Your Body?

Imagine that Amber spent time as a Temp-Lifer in your body. Think about what she might learn about your body and your life. Amber wrote a letter to Leah and Alyce at the end of her stay in their bodies telling them about things that she thought they needed to know. What do you think Amber would write about your life? Write a letter from Amber to yourself.

California State Universities

In DEAD GIRL WALKING, Amber receives a scholarship to the California State University of her choice. Visit <http://www.calstate.edu> to learn about the different California State University campuses. Which ones do you think Amber would most like

to attend? Make a list of her top three choices. Write down the pros and cons of each of the three campuses. Which do you think would be her first choice?

Halsey Hospitality Club Welcome Basket Collage

Amber is known for her hospitality baskets. If you were to create a basket to welcome someone to your school or community what items would it include? Use pictures from magazines, newspapers, and the Internet to create a collage of what you might include in your welcome basket.

Dark Lifer Hands

Amber is able to identify Dark Lifers by their hands. Draw a before and after picture of a pair of hands. In the first set, draw hands as they normally are. In the second set, illustrate the hands so that they give away the Dark Lifer's identity. Experiment with pastels, charcoals or even crayons to play with the colors, lines and shadows on hands.

Make A Friendship Bracelet

Grammy gave Amber a rainbow-woven lucky bracelet and tells her to "Twist it three times and repeat the magical chant. <...> Twist the bracelet twice to the right then once to the left and seal the luck with a kiss." Make your own lucky bracelet and create a little ritual to wish your friend or yourself good luck.

Materials

- 9- 12 inch strands of embroidery floss or yarn (use three strands of three different colors)
- scissors
- tape

Directions

1. Line up each strand of floss on a flat surface so that they are even. Group like colors side by side.
2. Tie a knot about two inches from the end of the strands. Tape knot to flat surface.
3. Separate strands into sets of like colors.
4. Braid the three sets of colors until have enough braid to go almost around your wrist.
5. Tie a knot at the end of the braid.
6. Tie bracelet around wrist and use scissors to snip of the remaining thread.

See video directions for making other styles of friendship bracelets here:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Friendship-Bracelet>

http://www.metacafe.com/watch/1040697/how_to_make_braided_friendship_bracelets

Salt Water Taffy

Amber and Gabe bond over Chocolate salt water taffy. Create your own salt water taffy and share with a friend.

Materials

- saucepan
- wooden spoon

- candy thermometer
- plastic wrap or waxed paper
- greased cookie sheet
- greased butter knife or cooking scissors

Ingredients

- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1/8 cup corn syrup
- 2 ounces unsweetened cocoa
- 1 teaspoon glycerin (optional, will make taffy softer)
- 4 cup water
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Directions

1. Mix sugar and cornstarch together in saucepan.
2. Add corn syrup, cocoa, glycerin, water, butter, and salt to the saucepan and stir with wooden spoon. Place saucepan over medium heat.
3. Stir constantly until mixture begins to boil. Let mixture cook until it reaches 260 degrees.
4. Remove saucepan from heat and add vanilla.
5. Pour onto greased cookie sheet and let cool.
6. When taffy is cool enough to handle, grease your hands with oil or butter and pull taffy for ten-fifteen minutes until it's light and glossy. (Pulling the taffy adds air to the taffy, making it lighter and chewier.)
7. Roll the taffy into a long rope and use knife or scissors to cut the rope into 1 inch long pieces.
8. Let pieces sit for about an hour before wrapping in plastic wrap or waxed paper.
9. Enjoy!

Interview with Linda Joy Singleton

How long did it take you to write the first book in the series, Dead Girl Walking? How much did the finished story change from your earliest drafts?

From idea to published book, it took 20 years. The original title was TURN LEFT AT THE MILKY WAY. With only a proposal written (3 chapters and synopsis), I started submitting to publishers in 1988. Rejections led to my putting the story aside for many years. Many times I pulled it out and tried again. In June 2007, I changed the title to DEAD GIRL WALKING and offered it to my Llewellyn/Flux editor. One

month later it he offered me a contract, suggesting a series about body-switching; the ultimate identity crisis. And DGW was published in Fall 2008.

Did you know how the series would end when you wrote the first book?

When I wrote the first book, it wasn't going to be a series. Amber was going to be stuck in Leah's body forever, but make it her own. When my editor suggested a series, I changed the ending and switched Amber in multiple bodies. The ending happened organically. I was excited when I realized the story would begin and end with a party at Jessica Bradley's house. I love full circle endings.

Amber is a unique character in many ways. Not only does she inhabit other people's bodies, she also has a thing for math and chocolate. What inspired you to give her those particular qualities?

I wanted her to be like me but different, too. Math was always difficult for me, although I did manage to get decent grades. And I love chocolate. It was fun to mix my likes and dislikes in Amber's personality.

What were the challenges in writing about a person who had a different body in each book?

The books could only be through Amber's point of view, so I couldn't tell readers what was going on with Amber's family or friends who missed her. I had to weave that information in through conversations. I loved the challenge of imagining what it would be like to live in someone else's body. It's something I wonder about a lot – wishing I could experience all that life has to offer but limited by my own fears and only one body. Imagining how other people live and what they feel is fascinating. And I think that understanding what others' feel is a good step against prejudice and towards acceptance. For instance, someone like Leah who may seem to have it all—beauty, popularity, wealth—also has inner demons that lead her toward suicide. And someone ordinary like Amber may seem boring on the surface but getting to know her, she's smart with a great sense of humor and a lot of ambition. In the end, what Amber wanted most was to be herself.

Gabe Deverau really had Amber fooled. Was he really as bad as Grammy thought? Did you like writing about him?

Gabe became the villain he was accused of being. It was his choice to turn from the light and toward dark acts. But he had a good side, too, the side that recognized beauty in people and poetry. I don't believe that anyone is all bad or all good; that most behavior is subjective. Even when people commit crimes, they rationalize their behavior and don't consider themselves bad. Gabe saw himself as a gentleman, a rescuer and convinced himself that his crimes were all for the greater good of humanity. He was definitely fun to write.

Cola is such a fun character. Was he modeled after any real long-loved pets?

I've loved and lost many pets. Cola isn't like any particular one, but represents all lost pets. I've heard many psychics say that our beloved pets are waiting for us on the other side. I don't know if this is true but I would like it to be. Also, I've heard of a cat who would jump on a dying person's bed and comfort them as they passed on. So I gave this trait to Cola.

On your website you talk about writing your first short story at age 8. Have you always known you wanted to be a writer? Has all of your writing been for young adults and kids?

When I was a kid, I thought I was born to be a writer because I just wrote with a passion unlike anyone I knew. I didn't meet another writer until I was 17. I didn't have teachers pushing me to write. I just did it because of something inside me. But I stopped writing from 17-27, living life and making mistakes to grow on. When I rediscovered my writing dreams, after going to a local writer conference, I worked on adult romances for nearly a year before I realized I loved to read and collect juvenile mysteries, so that's what I should write. And that's what I still do.

What do your own kids think about your writing? Have they read all of your books?

My kids are adults now and mostly they aren't interested in reading my books. When they were young they read MY SISTER THE GHOST series but nothing after that for a long time. I'm just Mom to them and they aren't interested in writing. Lately, instead of giving me gifts for holidays, my daughter gave me the gift promise to read my books. She's read two of my DEAD GIRL books and says they kept her interest. From her that's a compliment (g).

What is the best piece of advice that you've been told about writing?

It was some early advice from a screenplay writing workshop. It was simply to think of a book in three parts: beginning, middle and end. Basic advice, but it clicked in my head and influences how I plot books.

What is the worst piece of advice that you've been told about writing?

Not actual advice, but I cringe when I hear writer's complain about Writer's Block. Too often I hear this used as an excuse for not writing. I don't allow myself that excuse. If I'm procrastinating and not writing, I admit it to myself and deal with the guilt. Usually I push myself harder another day. Writing needs to become a habit, even if you just write a paragraph a day, that's writing. Writer's block is usually an explanation for fear of the blank page. It takes discipline to keep writing, even if you know it's not good writing. You can always fix it later.

Do you enjoy hearing from fans? What is the best way for fans of the DEAD GIRL SERIES to contact you?

I love hearing from fans! I try to answer every letter and email personally. The best way to contact me is through my website www.LindaJoySingleton.com. There's an

email link there and I check my email often. I usually answer fan mail within a few days.

What do you imagine happened to Amber? Do you think she went on to become an entertainment agent?

Amber would have tried many jobs on the way to being an entertainment agent. She would have interned at agencies until given her shot at representation. Then she would have used her connections to the other side and her understanding of people to sign the most promising clients. She'd be super busy, attending A-list parties. But she'd also make time to spend with her parents, sisters, friends and especially her husband, Eli.

Will we ever hear from Amber again?

On my website there will be a short story combining my most popular heroines, Sabine and Amber. It's called SABINE MEETS DEAD GIRL. Otherwise I have no more future plans for Amber, although I am writing a spin-off from THE SEER starring Goth Girl Thorn.