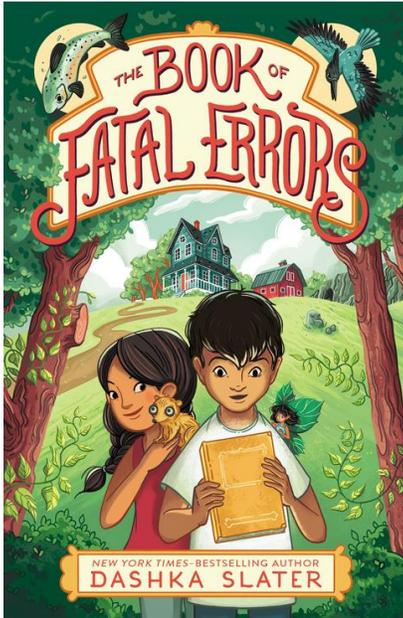


# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

## About the Book



Award-winning and bestselling author Dashka Slater spins a tale of friendship, magic, and eternal life in *The Book of Fatal Errors*, an evocative and witty middle-grade fantasy.

Rufus doesn't just make mistakes—he makes fatal errors. Clumsy and awkward, he feels entrapped by his teasing classmates and their constant laughter. But now it is summer. Rufus is free. He roams the wildlands of his grandfather's mysterious homestead, blissfully unaware of the danger ahead.

And there is much danger. Rufus and his snooty cousin Abigail soon become entangled in the tantalizing world of the feylings, mischievous fairylike creatures desperate to find their way home. In helping the feylings, Rufus tumbles down a dark path that is rich with age-old secrets and difficult truths. Any move he makes might be his final fatal error. Or perhaps his most spectacular beginning.

## About the Author

Dashka Slater is an author and journalist who has made many errors, only some of which became books. She is quite good at falling down, spilling things, staining her clothes, and calling people by the wrong name. Her books for young people include the *New York Times* bestseller *The 57 Bus*, which won the Stonewall Book Award and was a finalist for the YALSA Excellence in Young Adult Nonfiction Award, among many other honors. She also wrote *Escargot*, which won the Wanda Gág Read Aloud Book Award; *A Book for Escargot*; *The Antlered Ship*, which was a Junior Library Guild Selection and received four starred reviews; and *Dangerously Ever After*. She lives in California.

Find her at [dashkaslater.com](http://dashkaslater.com).



Praise for

# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

By Dashka Slater

“[A] fun, emotionally driven fairy story . . . recommended for any young fantasy fans.”

—*School Library Journal*

“With mischievous feylings, goblins, and magic, this is an exciting, fast-paced middle-grade fantasy. A delightful read for anyone who loves magic.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“[A]n entertaining, fantastical summertime story. . . Sassy feylings and other rambunctious magical creatures make the tale feel fresh . . . Rufus’s self-confidence grows with every chapter, and realistic tension between his family members works itself out in a satisfactory, but not simplistic, way.”

—*The Horn Book Magazine*

“A seamless combination of fantasy and mystery wrapped around a classical coming-of-age narrative, Dashka Slater’s *The Book of Fatal Errors* grabs the readers hand from the first page and tugs them along at a breakneck pace through twist after twist.” —*BookPage*

“With a dash of imagination and a heap of adventure, Slater’s middle grade fantasy debut, starring 12-year-old biracial cousins Rufus and Abigail, is certain to appeal to readers of varying ages. . . [A] twisting slide into human-versus-other politics, rebellion against authority, and wrestling with consequences.”

— *Publishers Weekly*

“A brilliant story teller, Slater has filled *The Book of Fatal Errors* with unexpected twists, an engaging mystery and endearing characters, both human and magical. Oh, I do hope for a sequel!”

— *Kiss The Book*

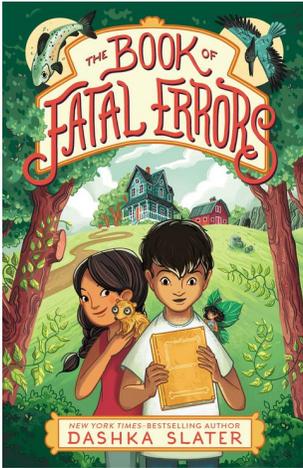
Scan this QR code to watch Dashka Slater discuss  
*The Book of Fatal Errors!*



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*The Book of Fatal Errors* audiobook!

# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

## General Discussion Questions



1. The world of *The Book of Fatal Errors* is a lot like our world, and some of the magical creatures are familiar from other books and fairy tales. How are feylings like or unlike fairies you've read about? How are the goblins similar or different?
  2. What was your favorite scene and why?
  3. If you could visit Feylawn, where would be the first place you'd go?
  4. Who do you identify with in the book? Are you more like Rufus or Abigail, or someone else?
  5. How are the two main characters alike? How do they differ?
6. Describe how Rufus's relationship with Abigail changes throughout the book. What prompts the change?
  7. What misjudgments does Rufus make about Abigail?
  8. What misjudgments does Abigail make about Rufus?
  9. Think of the magical creatures in the book—feylings, goblins, umbrals, cotters, horses. Which one do you think would be the most fun to have around? Which is the scariest?
  10. Why do you think the book is called *The Book of Fatal Errors*? What are some of the fatal errors Rufus makes? What about Abigail, Iris, Carson Collins, Grandpa Jack, and Rufus's father—do they make fatal errors as well?
  11. How do Rufus's feelings about mistakes change over the course of the book?
  12. Throughout the book Iris uses her own version of many common expressions, saying "two pets in a puddle" instead of "two peas in a pod" and "I foreign I" instead of "an eye for an eye." Choose one of these mangled expressions and make the case for using it instead of the usual one.
  13. How did you feel about Carson Collins? Do you understand why she cut down the Roving Tree and hid the train? Was she right or wrong to do what she did?
  14. What do you think about Rufus's relationship with his parents? Do you think they try hard enough to understand him? Does he try hard enough to understand *them*?
  15. How does Rufus grow and change in the course of the book? What about Abigail? Does Iris change? What about Rufus's father, Grandpa Jack, and Carson Collins?

# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

## Chapter by Chapter Discussion Questions

### Chapters 1 - 3

- Rufus feels that he made three fatal errors in sixth grade. Why does he think they were fatal? Do you agree? Can you think of a “fatal error” that you or someone you know has made?
- What is your first impression of Rufus’s father and Grandpa Jack? How are they different from each other? Do they get along with each other? Do they get along with Rufus?
- What is your impression of Feylawn? Why do you think it’s so hard to find? What do you think Grandpa Jack means when he says that Feylawn has been “cantankerous”?
- Is there a place that you love as much as Rufus loves Feylawn?
- Why do you think the Steller’s Jay tries to steal the train?
- What is foreshadowing? Why do you think authors use it? What are some examples of foreshadowing in these chapters?

### Chapters 4 - 6

- Rufus’s father wants Rufus to “excel” and have “a Turnaround Summer.” What does he mean by these things? Why does he think Rufus should go to summer camp? What kinds of expectations does he have of Rufus? Are those expectations realistic or unrealistic? Fair or unfair?
- Rufus has a very different feeling about Feylawn than his father does. Why do you think that is? Why is Feylawn so important to Rufus? Why doesn’t his father like it?
- The feylings don’t look much like the fairies in Carson Collins’s Glistening Glen books. Why do you think that is? What’s your impression of Carson Collins? Why do you think she left the note inside the engine of the train?
- Iris tells Rufus of a common feyling saying: “Clear eyes, clear lies.” What does this mean? What does it tell you about the relationship between feylings and humans?
- Rufus thinks that helping Iris might be another fatal error. Do you think he’s right? What would you do if you were him?

# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

## Chapter by Chapter Discussion Questions

### Chapters 7 - 9

- Why is Rufus's mother so eager for him to be friends with Abigail? Have you ever had the experience of an adult wanting you to be friends with someone you didn't like? How did it turn out?
- Rufus's father says that Rufus marches to the beat of a different drummer. What does he mean by that? Why does Rufus hate it when his dad says this? Is there something other people say about you that you don't like—even something they mean as a compliment?
- Why is Great Aunt Biggy so afraid of feylings? Why doesn't she want to admit that she can see them? If you could see feylings, would you tell people?
- Why do you think Great Aunt Biggy gives Rufus the jump rope?
- What's your impression of Abigail? Why do you think she stops speaking to Rufus after he turns down her offer of help?

### Chapters 10 - 12

- How does Rufus act when his mom is leaving? Have you ever had a parent go on a long trip without you? How did that make you feel?
- Why are the All-Outers trashing the house? Why do they attack Rufus and refuse to listen to him? Does this change the way you feel or think about feylings?
- Characters in stories usually have a series of obstacles that they have to overcome. What obstacles must Rufus overcome?
- We meet our first goblins in chapter 11. What do you think of them? Do they seem threatening? Why do you think the feylings have a "goblin patrol"?
- What happens to Rufus in the barn? Why do you think it happens?
- What does Garnet do that is so frustrating? Why do you think she's doing it? Do you think she's trustworthy?

# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

## Chapter by Chapter Discussion Questions

### Chapters 13 - 15

- In chapter 13, Rufus sarcastically thinks that his father's superpower is to take something fun and make it sound boring. What's your "mundane superpower"?
- Authors subtly describe characters to give readers a subconscious impression of them. What is it about the descriptions of Ray, Mr. Gruen, and Mr. Diggs that helps you form a positive or negative impression of them? What do you think of their names?
- How does the author build tension in the scene in Mr. Gruen's store?
- In chapter 15, Rufus discovers that he can tell the difference between "fake" Abigail and "real" Abigail. Do you act or speak differently when talking with adults? Is one version of you more "fake" or "real"? Why do you think Abigail has two different ways of behaving?
- How does Abigail get Rufus's parents to agree to let them spend time in Feylawn? Can you think of a time where you were able to manipulate adults into letting you do something by making them think you were doing what they wanted?

### Chapters 16 - 19

- How is Rufus's dad different in chapter 16 than he was in earlier chapters?
- Authors sometimes use scenes to convey a feeling as well as describing a location. What about the description of the store when Rufus and Abigail are there affects how you feel about it?
- Do you think Rufus and Abigail are justified in taking the coach car from Mr. Gruen's shop? Isn't it "stealing"? Explain why you think taking the car is ethically right or wrong. Does Mr. Diggs's explanation of how he got the coach car change your answer? Why or why not? Are there situations in real life where you think a person would be justified in taking something away from someone?
- In chapter 19, Rufus and Abigail learn about Carson Collins's life from Grandpa Jack. Did anything about her story surprise you? Do you know any interesting stories about your older relatives or neighbors?
- What does Grandpa Jack mean when he calls his mother "a true child of Feylawn"? Why does he say that Abigail has the "Feylawn bug"? What is it about Feylawn that some people like and some people don't?
- Grandpa Jack's refusal to believe that the "fairies" Carson Collins wrote about were real is frustrating to Rufus and Abigail. Why won't he even entertain the idea that they might be real? Have you ever had a similar experience with an adult?

# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

## Chapter by Chapter Discussion Questions

### Chapters 20 - 22

- When Abigail is dimpsied, she runs away and says, “I’m sorry.” What do you think she was sorry for?
- Do you think dimpsy smoke is a good means of defense for the umbrals? Why do people tend to run away from it?
- What do you think of Bobalo? Why do Trillium and Quercus keep telling Abigail to break the bond with him? Why doesn’t she listen?
- Why do the All-Outers fail to condemn the attempted murder of Grandpa Jack? What do you think of their argument that “We’re dying, why not Jack Collins?”
- Nettle calls Iris a “glomper-lover” as an insult. Do you think it is an insult? Why or why not?
- Rufus has to speak to the whole crowd of feylings in order to get their help. Have you ever had to give a public speech? What kinds of approaches does Rufus use to try to get the feylings on his side?
- Most of the feylings vote to help Rufus and Abigail find the train, but the All-Outers vote against it. Should they be bound to follow the majority? Have you ever had an experience where a majority of your group voted to do something and you objected? Did you go along with the majority or not?

### Chapters 23 - 25

- When Rufus learns of his father’s plan to sell Feylawn, he accuses his father of not knowing how he feels about Feylawn. His father says that as an adult he has to think about the future. Who is right in this situation? Do you think Rufus understands how his father feels about Feylawn, or why his father might need to sell it?
- Why can Rufus hear the seeds talk?
- Why won’t Iris tell Rufus what happened between her and Carson Collins?
- What is your very first impression of Ms. Thorpe, the librarian? How does that change?
- The Steller’s Jay makes another appearance in chapter 24. What do you think that means?
- What do you think about the news articles about Mr. Gruen? What do you think really happened to him?
- Ms. Thorpe says that the dancer poem is about the “unstoppable march of time.” What does she mean? What do you think the poem is saying?
- Is there anything else that Ms. Thorpe says to Rufus that helps explain why Carson Collins wrote the poem?

# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

## Chapter by Chapter Discussion Questions

### Chapters 26 - 27

- When Rufus and Abigail run into Garnet again, she talks about how she never helped her brother find the train tender Mump had. Why do you think she didn't? Whose side do you think she's on?
- Garnet also mentions several things the feylings never told Rufus and Abigail, but she doesn't go into detail or answer their questions. Why do you think the feylings never told Rufus or Abigail about their Queen? Why won't she tell them what the Green World has that's so important?
- Rufus's dad is trying hard to be nice to Rufus. Why do you think he's acting differently toward Rufus? Why isn't Rufus being nice back?
- Rufus and Abigail face one obstacle after another in their attempt to save the feylings. Can you list at least six obstacles that they've had to overcome so far?
- What is unusual about the way Jack reacts to the Boulder Dude? Why do you think that is?
- Once again, Abigail uses her skills to solve a problem. Can you think of other times in the story where her skills—both the way she talks to grown-ups and the classes she's taken—have come in handy?
- Why do you think Carson Collins told the Boulder Dude she wouldn't die?

### Chapters 28 - 30

- Were you surprised by what Grandpa Jack tells Rufus in the hospital? What do you think he means when he says that he has a habit of not looking Feylawn square in the face? Is there anything you don't like looking square in the face?
- Why didn't Iris want to tell Rufus the real reason feylings need to return to the Green World? Do you think that she was right to keep it secret?
- Mr. Gruen tells Abigail that his plan isn't evil because it will help people. Iris thinks differently. Who do you think is right and why?
- Iris tells Rufus that "you can't save someone who won't save themselves." Do you agree?
- Rufus has a choice—betray the feylings but save his father, or try to save the feylings but risk his father's death. What do you think he should do?

# THE BOOK OF FATAL ERRORS

## Chapter by Chapter Discussion Questions

### Chapters 31 - 35

- Why doesn't Grandpa Jack trust Iris to help Rufus's father? Would you trust her if you were him?
- What does Rufus have to do to use his powers of seed speech at the hospital? What techniques work for him? Have you ever had to do something similar?
- What's the very first thing Avery Sweete asks for? Did that surprise you? What kind of person is he? How does he react when he learns where he is?
- What seeds are inside the engine of the train? What seeds are inside the caboose? Why do you think each one sounds the way it does? What are they doing inside the train?
- In chapter 35, Carson Collins screams that this isn't how the story ends. What does she mean? How does she want the story to end?
- Carson Collins keeps changing shape. Why do you think that is? What do we learn about her in each of her different shapes?
- What does Abigail tell Carson Collins? What does Avery Sweete tell her? What do you think she needs to hear?

### Chapters 36 - 38

- In chapter 36, Mr. Diggs says that Nettle has served his purpose. What purpose did he serve? Why do you think Nettle did what he did?
- What does the dimpsy smoke show Rufus and what does he learn from it? Do you think he would have been able to understand those things at the start of the book?
- How does Abigail explain the importance of Bobalo's love in chapter 37? How does Rufus make her feel better? Do you think there's a difference between loving someone for a reason and just loving them? Do you love different people for different reasons or in different ways? Do some kinds of love feel nicer to you than others?
- What do Quercus and Trillium think should happen to Nettle? What does Iris decide and why? What would you have decided if you were Iris?
- What does Rufus say at the end of the book about mistakes?
- How has his attitude changed over the course of the story?
- What do you think will happen next?