

# Book Club Discussion Guide: Clara Thorn, the witch that was found

**Author:** Don Jones **Genre:** Young Adult Fantasy, Magical Realism **Series:** Book 1 of the Clara Thorn Trilogy **Target Audience:** Young Adult (Ages 10+)

This guide is designed to help your book club explore the novel's unique blend of mathematics and magic, its strong focus on family (both found and biological), and the thrilling mystery at its core.

## I. Character and Motivation

1. **Clara Thorn's Identity:** At the beginning of the book, Clara struggles with constantly moving, bullying, and feeling like she doesn't belong. How does the revelation of her magical heritage and her entry into Underhill immediately challenge or affirm her sense of self? When did she truly start to *find* herself?
2. **The Two Families:** Discuss Clara's relationship with her adoptive parents (the Ordinaries) versus her biological parents (the legendary Counter-Hunters). How does the author manage to make both sets of parents feel authentic and important to Clara's life, even though one pair is absent?
3. **Friends and Foes:**
  - What qualities do Clara's new friends (like Mateo) possess that make them trustworthy companions in a dangerous magical world?
  - Even in Underhill, there are bullies. Why do you think the author chose to include familiar "school tropes" like cliques and jealousy in a magical setting? How does this make the magical world more relatable?
4. **The Villains:** What are the motivations of the Paladins? Are they purely evil, or do they genuinely believe they are protecting the Ordinary world? How does the mystery surrounding the internal threat in Underhill (the Borders scheme) complicate the external threat of the Paladins?

## II. Themes, Tropes, and the Magic System

1. **The Link Between Math and Magic:** Clara's unique, once-in-a-generation power is seeing magic as "glowing, rainbow-colored mathematical equations" that she can manipulate.

- How did this concept change your perception of magic? Is math really the universal language of the world?
  - Do you think this system makes magic more logical, or simply more complex?
2. **Found Family:** The novel clearly leans into the "found family" trope (as noted in the reviews). Who, outside of Clara's adoptive parents, forms this new family structure for her in Underhill, and why are they essential for her survival and growth?
  3. **The Nature of Underhill and Borders:** Underhill is the legendary home of the Fae and witches.
    - How does Underhill compare to the Ordinary world (Las Vegas)? What are some details that make its atmosphere feel unique (e.g., the direbunnies, the magic users)?
    - Discuss the concept of "Borders." What do these hidden passageways represent metaphorically in the story? Why is their protection so vital?
  4. **Destiny vs. Choice:** Clara is quickly revealed to have a pivotal, possibly destined, role in Underhill. How much of her journey is fate, and how much is based on the choices she actively makes? Is she "found" by destiny, or does she choose to accept it?

### III. World-Building and Style

1. **Pacing and Lore:** The reviews mention that the author reveals the lore "in dribs and drabs." Did you find the world-building to be well-paced, or were there moments where you wished for more immediate explanation?
2. **The American West Setting:** The novel begins in Las Vegas, Nevada. How important is the setting of the American West to the overall story, compared to the entirely magical realm of Underhill? Does the contrast between the two settings enhance the magical realism?
3. **Aesthetics and Tone:** The author's note mentions a "more steampunk vibe" for the magical school. Did you pick up on this aesthetic? If so, where did you notice it most? What kind of atmosphere does the mix of traditional magic school tropes and a steampunk aesthetic create?

### IV. Beyond the Book

1. **Open Threads:** What major questions were left unanswered at the end of *The witch that was found*? Which plotline are you most eager to see resolved in the next books, *The witch that fought* and *The witch that won*?

2. **Comparative Reading:** If you've read other fantasy novels featuring a magical school (like *Harry Potter*, *The Magicians*, or *Akata Witch*), how does Liginbaum's School for Witches compare? What elements are familiar, and what feels "completely and utterly unique," as one reviewer suggested?
3. **Final Thoughts:** If you were Clara, knowing the danger, would you have chosen to stay and train in Underhill, or would you have retreated to the safety of the Ordinary world with your adoptive parents?