

## The Midnight Palace

Carlos Ruiz Zafón

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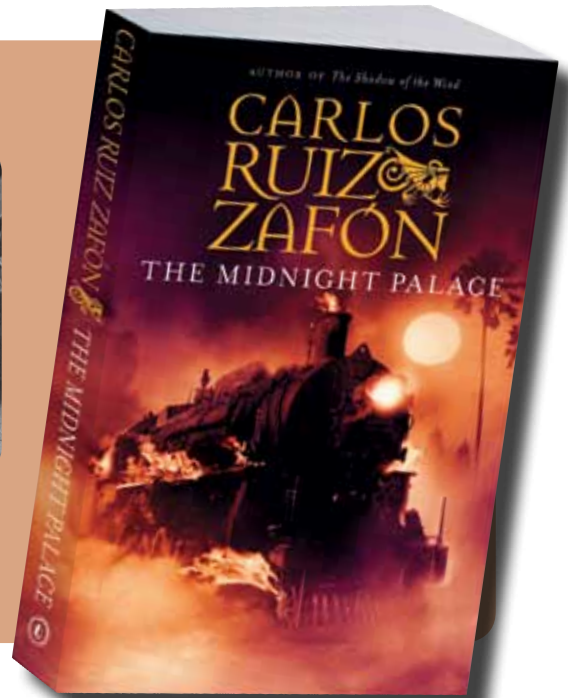
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Recommended for Lower Secondary

Resource Kit Contains

- Synopsis
- Author information
- Pre-reading activities
- Reading activities
- Debate, essay and discussion topics
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### Synopsis

Calcutta, 1932. A train in flames crosses the city, a fire spectre sowing terror in the shadows of the night. But that is only the beginning of the horror for siblings Ben and Sheere.

Twins separated at birth and kept hidden for their safety, they have grown up unaware of the secrets of their past. Now, on their sixteenth birthday, their paths meet and they will confront the most terrible and deadly enigma in the history of the city of palaces.

**The Midnight Palace** is a spellbinding tale of heroism and tragedy set in the dark mysterious streets and alleyways of an ancient Indian city.

### About the Author

Carlos Ruiz Zafón was born in Barcelona and is the author of six novels, including **The Shadow of the Wind**, the most successful novel in Spanish publishing history after **Don Quixote**. His work has been translated into more than 35 languages and has received numerous international awards. His books have sold over 15 million copies worldwide and **The Angel's Game** was the fastest selling book of all time in Spain.

### Pre-reading Activities

1. Before starting: Look at the cover of the book. What genre do you think it will be? Read the blurb on the back of the book. Do you think you will enjoy it? Why or why not?
2. The book is set in India. Do some research into India in one of the following areas: Politics, Religion, Life under British rule, Arts, Geography, Economy. Write a report based on your research.

3. The author of this book is Carlos Ruiz Zafón. Do some research into the life of the author and write a report based on your findings.

### Reading Activities

1. As you read the book, keep a blog or visual diary of your thoughts on the events of the story. At the end of each chapter, write a short review, looking at the events that have occurred, the characters you have encountered, and your insights into the mysterious happenings going on. You can illustrate your blog with pictures that you think are relevant to what has occurred in that chapter.
2. Pretend you are a Calcutta police officer investigating the events of the book. Keep a policeman's notebook, detailing the crimes committed and the mysteries presented in order to come to a conclusion about what has occurred and who is guilty.
3. Make an illustrated timeline of all of the events of the novel. Present your timeline as a poster, using images to illustrate the major turning points in the story.
4. This novel is about friendship. Write a short piece examining the importance of friendship in your life.

### Debate, Essay or Discussion Topics

- P. 3: What is your reaction to the introduction? What impressions does it give you of the story to come?
- P. 3: Do you think the narrator is young or old, male or female? What makes you think this?



- P. 6: The narrator calls the city “a jungle of marble mausoleums”. What is a mausoleum? What impression does this give you of the city?
- P. 19: What does the incident with the melting bullet and the closing bullet wound do to change your perception of the genre of this story? Write a short piece describing your perceptions of the story before and after this event.
- P. 33: Debate topic – Sixteen is an appropriate age for a child to be considered an adult.
- P. 39: Debate topic – “Male only” societies and clubs are sexist and should be banned.
- P. 42: Debate topic – It would be better for an orphan never to know their parents than to go through the trauma of losing them.
- P. 69: Debate topic – Carter should have gone to the police after the visit from Jawahal.
- P. 72: Seth says, “We’re not a church – we don’t want your money.” Write a short piece about your thoughts on this line. What do you think Seth means by it? Do you agree with the point he is making? Give reasons for your answer.
- P. 99: Carter is likely to lose his eyesight due to the injuries caused by Jawahal. If you were to lose one of your senses, which would it be and why?
- P. 102: Ben says of Bankim, “If his mind couldn’t explain it, his eyes couldn’t see it.” Write a short piece on your reaction to this line. Do you think there is more out there than what we can see? Give reasons for your answer.
- P. 106: Debate topic – If your parents forbid you to speak to a particular friend, you should obey them.
- P. 110: Do you believe that dreams can predict future events or tell us something about ourselves that we don’t know? Have you ever had a dream that seemed much more important than mere dreaming? Write a piece about this dream and your thoughts on its importance.
- P. 113: Aryami says of her husband, “Even so, fate was generous to me, or at least that’s what I thought at the beginning: it joined my life to that of a man about whom the best and worst you could say was that he was a good person.” Would you be content to have the best and worst of you be that you were a “good person”? If someone was to identify the best and worst things about you, what would they be? What would you like them to be?
- P. 115: Debate topic – Arranged marriage is never acceptable.
- P. 127: Debate topic – The Chowbar children should not have made the risky decision to help Ben and Sheere.
- P. 138: When the Chowbar children need information the first place they go is the library. Where is the first place you go for information now, and why? How do you know you can trust this information?
- P. 212: Debate topic – Angels and demons are simply mythological creatures that do not exist in the real world.
- P. 248: Debate topic – “Maturity is simply the process of discovering that everything you believed in when you were young is false and that all the things you refused to believe in turn out to be true.”
- P. 249: Debate topic – “The difference between a crime and a deed usually depends on the point of view.”
- P. 257: Why do you think Jawahal says that black is the colour of the future? What colour would you use to symbolise the future? Write a short piece explaining your choice.
- P. 281: What are your thoughts on the ending of **The Midnight Palace**? Write about your reaction to it.

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### Art and Drama Activities

1. P. 5: Draw a picture of the following scene, based on the description in the text: “Shortly after midnight a boat emerged out of the mist that rose like a fetid curse from the surface of the Hooghly River. The faint glow of a flickering lantern attached to the mast revealed the figure of a man wrapped in a cape, rowing with difficulty towards the distant shore. Further to the east, under a blanket of leaden clouds, the outline of Fort William in the Maidan – a sort of Hyde Park carved out of tropical jungle – stood out against an endless expanse of street lamps and bonfires that spread as far as the eye could see. Calcutta.”
2. P. 13: Act out the initial scene between Aryami Bose and Lieutenant Peake. Use props and costume to bring the scene to life for your audience.
3. P. 13: What do you imagine the house of Aryami Bose to look like based on the descriptions on this page? Draw a picture of it using the description as a guide.
4. P. 21: How do you imagine Jawahal to look? Draw a picture of him.
5. P. 37: Find a piece written by either Dante or Virgil and recite it to the class.
6. P. 48: Write and perform your own version of “The Spectres of Calcutta”. Make it as melodramatic and silly as you like!
7. P. 51: Draw a picture of the members of the Chowbar club using the descriptions in the book and your imagination to guide your depictions.
8. P. 61: Perform Aryami Bose’s speech on page sixty one as a monologue.
9. P. 163: Find pictures that illustrate each of the architectural styles that make up Ben’s father’s house: “a mix of architectural styles, from



Edwardian lines to Palladian extravaganzas and features that looked as if they belonged to some castle tucked away in the mountains of Bavaria." Use these pictures to get an idea of what the house might look like. Draw a picture of what you imagine the house to look like. You might also like to create a poster displaying your picture along with the other pictures you have found.

- P. 175: Draw a picture of the flame thrower based on the description given on this page.

### Creative Writing Activities

- P. 6: If your city was a "jungle" of anything, what would it be? Write a poem about the jungle that is your city or town.
- P. 6: The line "fury of the monsoon" is what is known as personification. Find a dictionary definition of personification. Write a poem personifying an object of your choice.
- P. 6: "Like watercolours dissolving in a pond" is a simile. Find a dictionary definition of what a simile is. Keep a record of other similes in this book as you read. At the end of the book, pick your favourite simile and use it as the basis for a short story.
- P. 10: What do you imagine has happened prior to the events of the opening chapter? Write a short story based on your ideas. Who is Lieutenant Peake? Who are the assassins? Who are the children and why are they being chased?
- P. 19: What do you imagine Jawahal might be? Is he a kind of monster? Write a paragraph describing the kind of monster you imagine him to be.
- P. 44: Write a poem about the loss of friendship.
- P. 45: Write a short ghost story, set in an exotic location.
- P. 46: The author uses the metaphor of a blank book to describe the lives of the children leaving the orphanage. Can you think of another metaphor to describe the progress of childhood into adulthood? Write a poem featuring this metaphor.
- P. 99: Write a short story about a character who is questioning his or her sanity.
- P. 149: Write your own poem beginning with the line, "The city I love is ..."
- P. 151: Write a poem where the first word of each line gives a clue to a secret location.
- P. 185: Find a dictionary definition of an "epigram". Look at the two epigrams about hearts and stomachs. Do you agree with either above the other? Write your own epigram about hearts and stomachs.
- P. 231: Do some research into haiku poems. Write a haiku poem with fire as the central motif.
- P. 231: Write a poem comparing a human with another animal the way Jawahal does with the snake.
- P. 234: Write a short story based on the line, "We always kill what we love the most."
- P. 277: Research the history of your area and make up a ghost story based on what you discover.
- P. 281: Write an alternative ending to the novel.

### Research Questions

- P. 1: Where is Calcutta? Find it on a world map. Find out its population, land area, some details about its climate and ten interesting facts about the city.
- P. 8: Lieutenant Peake is taken "along the same stretch of open fields that had been levelled by Lord Clive in 1758." What can you find out about who Lord Clive was and his role in the colonisation of India? What happened in 1758?
- P. 9: Who is "Kali"? Do some research and write a report based on your findings.
- P. 9: What is "The Ganges"? What importance does it have in the lives of the Indian people?
- P. 22: Do some research into what a Hindu funeral would be like in Calcutta. Write a report based on your findings.
- P. 25: Do some research into the "Hippocratic Oath". What is it and where and how did it originate?
- P. 30: The girl in Jawahal's story is a Muslim and Jawahal himself is described as looking Hindu. India is a country of many religions. Do some research into the history of religion in India. Pick one of India's major religions for more thorough research and write a report based on what you discover.
- P. 32: Find out more about the spice trade in India. Do some research and write a report based on your findings.
- P. 35: Where is Liverpool? Find out some facts about the city. What is it famous for?
- P. 36: Who is Benjamin Franklin? Do some research and write a report based on your findings.
- P. 37: Who are Dante and Virgil? Research and write a short biography of each of them based on what you find. Which of them do you find the more interesting? Give reasons for your answer.
- P. 38: Who was Homer? Why was his work considered "gory"?
- P. 40: Who was Sarah Bernhardt? Find some pictures of her and use these to make into a poster. Research her life and pick ten facts to add to your poster.
- P. 41: Find out more about the "black hole of Calcutta". Write a report based on your findings.
- P. 64: Do some research into railways of India. Write a report based on your findings.
- P. 71: Who is Voltaire? Do some research into his life and work and write a short report based on your findings. You might also like to find some quotes that



are attributed to him. Write a short piece about a quote and how it makes you feel.

17. P. 88: Who is "Morpheus"? Do some research and write a report based on your findings.
18. P. 105: What is a "relief" and what is a "gargoyle"? Do some research and write a short report on your findings.
19. P. 115: What is "arranged marriage"? Is it still common in India? Do some research into the practice and write a report on your findings.
20. P. 146: Can you find out the difference between tactics and strategy? Is Ben's definition a good one? How would you define the difference?
21. P. 154: What is an effigy? What is their significance in Hindu culture? Do some research and write a short report on your findings.
22. P. 165: See if you can find at least one of the alphabets used to unlock the doors and work out how to write "Dido". Then work out how to write your own name. See if you can write a whole sentence!
23. P. 175: Who was Emperor Nero? Do some research and write a short report on your findings.
24. P. 212: Do some research into the "Hindu pantheon". Pick one god for more detailed research. Present your findings to the class.
25. P. 231: Fire is a central image in this book. Do some research into the symbolism of fire and write a short report based on your findings.
26. P. 277: Are there ghost stories where you live? Do you believe these stories exist because there is a history of sadness and misery there? Perhaps it is a convict history or there was a disaster near where you live. Do some research into ghost stories in your area and write a report based on your findings.