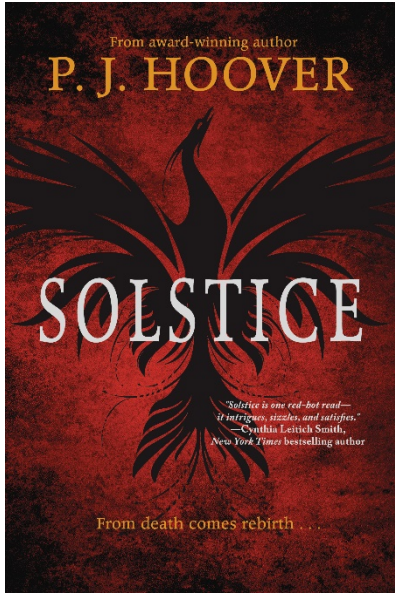


Reader's Guide for *Solstice* by P. J. Hoover



About this guide

The activities and discussion questions that follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Solstice*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

I. SOLSTICE

- A. Piper's Earth is experiencing an extreme "Global Heating Crisis." Go to the library or online to research current scientific studies of global warming trends in our world and efforts being made to combat them. Informed by your research, create a brochure for visitors to your own city or town in 2030. Include information about the climate and landscape, heat-related technologies and government ordinances (such as the cooling gel spray and private car ownerships restrictions in *Solstice*), and additional details about tourist attractions, cooling resources and activities as you imagine them.
- B. Early in the novel, it is clear that Chloe and Randy have never experienced winter. In the voice of one of these characters, write 2-3 paragraphs describing what you imagine a winter day would be like and what activities you might do on your first day of winter.
- C. What does the word "solstice" mean? Create a collage, poem, song lyrics or other performing, visual or literary artwork that shows your interpretation of "solstice." Write a short paragraph explaining ways P. J. Hoover's novel helped you interpret the term in a creative way.

- D. From heat bubbles to hail storms, the elements play key roles in *Solstice*. Make a list of other books and/or films in which weather is a critical thematic or plot feature, such as John Steinbeck's *THE GRAPES OF WRATH* (drought); Ann Turnbull's *MAROO OF THE WINTER CAVES* (blizzard); director Wolfgang Peterson's *THE PERFECT STORM* (hurricane); and *THE X-MEN* film franchise (Storm's control of the weather). Choose one book or film from your list as the perfect "companion read/watch" for *Solstice*. Write a paragraph explaining your choice.
- E. You are a fashion designer in Piper's Austin. Sketch a design for a soccer team uniform, prom dress, or trend-setting high school student's outfit, taking into consideration the weather and conservation/resource situation.

II. MYTH AND MEMORY

- A. Slowly, a mythological world is revealed to Piper. She comes to realize her place therein and the fact that other "ordinary" people are also tied to the mythological world. Make a chart or annotated poster listing all of the mythological characters from *Solstice*. Include their traditional roles in Greek mythology, their names in Piper's Austin world, and the way they are reimagined by P. J. Hoover in the novel.
- B. Go to the library or online to learn more about the "phoenix." Create a PowerPoint or other multi-media presentation examining the phoenix as a central image in *Solstice*, both in terms of the novel's theme and plot structure
- C. In the character of Piper, write a poem or song lyrics beginning, "I am Persephone." Or, in the character of Shayne, write a poem or song lyrics beginning, "Persephone has remembered."
- D. In William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the character Gloucester comments, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods/They kill us for their sport." (Act IV, scene 1). In the character of Piper, Chloe, Randy or Zeus, write a journal entry reacting to this "ordinary human" observation.

III. HELL

- A. With friends or classmates, role-play a conversation in which Piper confronts her mother about killing of the phoenix and ending of her past life as Persephone. If desired, expand the role-play to include Zeus, Hades, Ares, Aphrodite or other characters from the novel, to the confrontation scene.
- B. In the character of Piper's mother, write a speech defending your actions and explaining why you feel it is best for the world for Piper to stay out of Hell. Or, in the character of Piper's father, write a speech explaining your absence from Piper's life—despite your power—and your thoughts on what choices you hope

your daughter will make for her future. Present your speech to friends or classmates.

- C. In P. J. Hoover's interpretation of the mythical world, Hell is a complex place full of both beauty and horror. So, what might be in Hoover's "Heaven"? How would Zeus be in charge? Create a world-building outline or multi-paragraph description for a "Heaven" that complements the "Hell" of *Solstice*.
- D. Once Piper realizes the truth about her identity and rebirth, she must decide how to continue her new life. Write an essay about a difficult choice you have had to make in your own life and the outcome of your decision.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think it is important that Chapter 2 begins on Piper's eighteenth birthday? Why or why not? What unusual gift does Piper receive and what does she do with it?
2. What are the "Domes"? What is the "Global Heating Crisis"? Do you think our world is heading toward a super-hot landscape like the one depicted in *Solstice*? Explain your answer.
3. How does Chloe help Piper develop a sense of independence from her mother? Do you think you could handle living with a parent as strict as Piper's mom? Why or why not? What is important about the twin tattoos Chloe and Piper get in the Drag?
4. Compare Piper's first encounter with Shayne to her first meeting with Reese. What qualities do you like and/or dislike about each of these male characters?
5. Who is Tanni? What terrible warning does she give to Piper? Do you think Piper believes her? Is her encounter with Tanni your first clue that Piper may not be an ordinary eighteen-year-old? If not, what are your first clues? What were your first surmises about Piper's identity?
6. How is Chloe's brush with death a critical turning point in the novel? When Piper first visits Hades, do you think she already knows she belongs there—or has a sense of having visited before? Why or why not?
7. Was choosing to keep Chloe alive a selfish act on Piper's part? Do you see a parallel between Piper's choice and her mother's killing of the phoenix?
8. What is your opinion of Piper's father? Do you think he is a better parent than her mother? What argument might you make to Piper to encourage her staying with her mother? Or to suggest she visit her father?
9. Do you feel that Piper is (or will be) able to forgive her mother's actions? Would you be able to forgive Lucia? Why or why not?
10. Which is Hell: Life aboveground on a super-heated, violently ruled Earth, or below in the Underworld? Is Hell a state of mind, a state of memory, or can you explain the term in another way?

11. A “solstice” can refer to the longest or shortest day of the year, a time when the sun “stands still.” How might this notion be interpreted in terms of Piper’s eighteen years of life, her previous life as Persephone, or the movement of time more broadly in the novel?
12. At the end of the novel, Piper chooses to return to Shane/Hades. Do you agree with this choice? If Piper had asked for your advice about making the choice between Reese, Shane, and her mother’s wishes, what pros and cons might you suggest she consider? What decision would you recommend Piper make and why?
13. In what ways can *Solstice* be read as a novel that explores choices—between love and responsibility, between personal desires and the troubles of the world, between sending people to Tartarus or the Elysian fields, between life and death? Has the story made you think differently about the way you make choices in your own life? Explain your answer citing examples from the book.