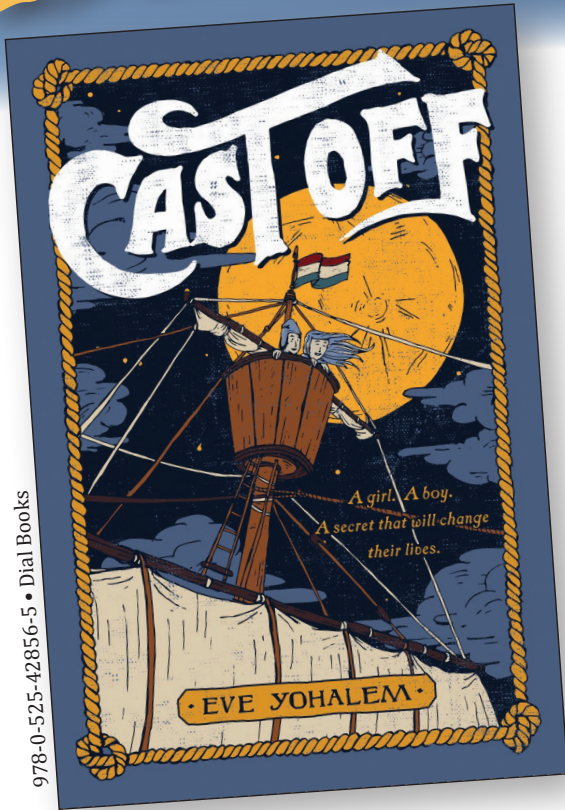


# Discussion Guide



## Cast Off

The Strange Adventures of  
Petra De Winter and Bram Broen

by Eve Yohalem

**I**t's 1663, AND TWELVE-YEAR-OLD PETRA sees only one way to escape her abusive father—she stows away on a merchant ship bound for the East Indies. But surviving for months at sea will be impossible without help. So when Bram, the illegitimate, half-Dutch, half-

Javanese son of the ship's carpenter, finds her hiding spot, Petra convinces him to help her stay hidden . . . and help disguise her as a boy.

If Petra is discovered and exposed as a girl, she could be flogged, tossed overboard, or worst of all, returned to her father. And if Bram is exposed for helping her, he could lose the only home and family he has. And so as tensions rise on the ship, with pirates attacking, deadly illness, and even mutiny, Petra and Bram must make impossible decisions about friendship, loyalty, freedom, and survival.

Told in alternating voices, this action-packed, richly researched novel is historical fiction at its best.

"Pirates, illness, mutiny, and storms on the high seas are the backdrop of an adventure that will have readers alternately breathless and cheering. Perfect for those who loved *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*." —*Booklist*

"Yohalem's thorough research, authentic nautical jargon, and sailors' dialect brings this riveting tale to life. A thoroughly satisfying high seas adventure." —*School Library Journal*

"As the ship faces illness, pirates, mutiny, and other hazards, Yohalem explores the limited options for women and minorities through Bram and Petra's first-person narratives. An absorbing, informative read." —*Publishers Weekly*

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Common Core State Standards addressed by the materials in this guide are noted throughout. For more information on the Common Core, visit [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org).

# Discussion Questions



Petra's spirit and personality are defined in the first scene of the novel where, when faced with the impending arrival of her father, she takes time to help an injured boy, Cor, the baker's assistant. What is your first impression of Petra? What adjectives would you use to describe her? Cite evidence from the first scene of the story to support your choice of adjectives.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Petra's nervous anticipation of her father's arrival hints at what type of man he might be. Describe how her father behaves when he arrives home for dinner. What life events may have sparked his behavior?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Early in the novel Petra is faced with a life and death situation. What hasty decision does she make to escape from her Father's rage? What immediate risks are involved with her decision?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Bram, another main character in the novel, is introduced in chapter 2. What information is presented about Bram's life and his struggles?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Piet points out several trunks bound with lead as he and Lobo load livestock onto the ship. Piet shares that the trunks contain the payroll for their employer, the Dutch East India Company. How do these trunks of gold, silver, and copper come to play an important role in the novel?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Once on board the *Golden Lion*, Petra is faced with the challenge of finding another hiding place. Where does she hide first? How does Bram figure into Petra's plan to hide on the ship?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Petra brings many skills to her time on the *Golden Lion*. What tasks does she take on to help Bram? What eventually becomes her most important role on the ship?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Petra realizes that to exist on a ship full of men she will have to adopt a new identity. How does she go about creating a new image of herself?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



There are several instances aboard ship when Petra's true identity might be discovered. What are these situations, and how did Petra manage to continue to conceal her gender?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Life on board a ship in 1663 poses many dangers—from pirates and sharks to lack of fresh water and injury. What danger do the trunks of gold, silver, and copper on board pose for the crew? What plan are some of the sailors hiding from the captain? How do Bram and Petra react to the sailors' plan once they discover what is in store for the VOC payroll?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Bram's greatest desire was to receive a letter from the captain that would secure a certificate of legitimacy so that Bram would have greater rights. How is Petra involved in the captain's decision to finally write the letter for Bram?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Though Petra becomes a useful member of the *Golden Lion's* crew, she still must face a consequence for being a stowaway on the ship. What punishment does the captain give to Petra for sneaking on the ship? What happens to Petra as she has to find her way in a new place as a result of her punishment?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



Petra, still disguised as Albert, returns to the ship to help the doctor when a terrible sickness infects the crew. After nursing many back to health, she, too, becomes ill with the fever. How does her illness undo her disguise?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



When Petra was still in hiding, she revealed herself as a stowaway to help the doctor when Barometer Piet was brought to the sick bay with an iron spike sticking out of his belly. Petra's kind care of Barometer Piet saved his life. How does Barometer Piet return the favor once Petra's true identity is revealed and she mistakenly mentions the planned mutiny to Van Plaes?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



As the crew's plan for mutiny moves into action, a new side of the fierce cook, Happy Jan, is revealed. What role does Happy Jan play in rescuing Bram and Petra from a terrible fate? Why do you think Happy Jan risked helping the pair when the crew began to turn on them?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1**



When Bram sought out Petra in the Cape of Good Hope in Africa to bring her back to the *Golden Lion*, as the two made their way from the Van Meerhof's home, they saw a large group of elephants. Petra asked Bram if the animals were related to one another. The author described them as "A family by choice. Linked together, none could get lost or left behind." How does this quote sum up the relationship between Petra and Bram?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5**



# Activities



Petra's cat in Amsterdam is named Henry Hudson, after a famous explorer. How is the name of Petra's cat significant to the setting of the story in 1663? Research what was happening in the world of exploration during the time period of the story's setting.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7**



The *Golden Lion* encounters a ship at sea and soon discovers that it is a pirate ship. The *Lion* is weighed down with cargo and the payroll of the VOC and is not as quick to maneuver as the pirate ship. The captain has to quickly make a plan to evade the pirates. Imagine that the battle between the pirates and the crew of the *Lion* is told in the format of a graphic novel. Use dialogue and details from the novel to recreate the battle with illustrations and speech bubbles.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3**



Consider Petra's talents, skills, and personality and imagine what her life would be like if she were to live in the present time. What could she accomplish in the modern world? Make a T-chart and label one column "Petra in 1663" and label the other column "Petra today." In the first column, list details of what her life was like in Amsterdam in 1663—her responsibilities at home as well as her future prospects. In the other column, given what you know about Petra from the events of the novel, list what the possibilities would be for Petra if she lived today. Based on the information in your T-chart, write a paragraph that compares and contrasts a Petra from centuries ago to a modern Petra.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2**



The author leaves the tale of Petra and Bram unfinished. The two have escaped the mutiny on the *Golden Lion* and have made it to a tropical paradise. Petra and Bram consider their options. They could wait for a ship to pass by,

"Or maybe we don't wait for a ship to pick us up," I said. "Maybe we stay here awhile."  
We both thought about that. Pictured us two here on this island. Not a mixed-race boy and a lone girl, but just us. Bram and Petra.

Write the first chapter of a sequel to *Cast Off*. Imagine what life on the island might be like for Bram and Petra. What happiness and freedom might they experience? What challenges might they face?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.B**



The discussion questions and activities in this guide were written by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both masters' and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Medicine Then and Now

Medical treatment for injury and illness has come a long way since 1663. Look at the list of ailments that characters in *Cast Off* faced. Describe how Clockert, the ship's surgeon, and Petra handled these medical problems. Describe how modern day doctors would treat the same ailments and injuries.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2

<i>Ailment/ Injury</i>	<i>Clockert or Petra's Solution</i>	<i>Modern Day Medical Treatment</i>
Burn from a hot stove or canon		
High fever		
Broken arm		

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



# Friends for Life (Literally!)

Bram and Petra's friendship begins awkwardly when he discovers her hiding in a trunk on board the *Golden Lion*. The two soon move from a tense introduction to relying on one another to survive their lives at sea. Locate instances in the story where Petra and Bram demonstrate their friendship. In the chart below, list the actions each character offers the other to show support and, at times, life-saving friendship.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1

<i>Bram's kind acts towards Petra</i>	<i>Petra's kind acts towards Bram</i>