

# THE LOST GIRL OF ASTOR STREET

## STEPHANIE MORRILL

### EDUCATOR'S GUIDE FOR YOUNG ADULTS, AGES 13 +

*“You would have given your life for Lydia,” I say in a quiet voice. “At least you’ve been cleared of murdering her.” (346)*



#### SUMMARY

Set against the glitz and grit of 1920s Chicago, *The Lost Girl of Astor Street* follows Piper Sail, a spirited and headstrong young woman, as she defies societal expectations to uncover the truth behind her best friend Lydia’s mysterious disappearance. What begins as a desperate search for answers plunges Piper into the city’s dangerous underworld, where secrets, lies, and corruption lurk around every corner. As she navigates speakeasies, gangsters, and forbidden romances, Piper must rely on her wit, courage, and determination to unravel the mystery and protect those she loves. With its rich historical backdrop and a heroine who refuses to back down, this gripping tale is a blend of mystery, drama, and heart.



#### PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Prepare your students for an engaging and enriching experience with these pre-reading activities designed to connect their existing knowledge to the novel’s themes, setting, and characters.

##### 1. 1920s Research Project

Have students research key aspects of the 1920s, such as Prohibition, the rise of organized crime, flapper culture, and advancements in technology. Students can create a short presentation or visual collage to share their findings, helping them understand the historical context of the novel.

## 2. Character Prediction Exercise

Provide students with a brief description of Piper Sail and her role in the story. Ask them to predict what challenges she might face as a young woman investigating a mystery in 1920s Chicago. Encourage them to consider societal expectations and gender roles of the time.

## 3. Map of 1920s Chicago

Provide students with a map of Chicago and have them locate key neighborhoods, such as Astor Street and areas known for Prohibition-era activity. Discuss how the city's layout and history might influence the story's events.

## 4. Personal Connection: Friendship and Loyalty

Ask students to reflect on the importance of friendship and loyalty in their own lives. Have them write a short journal entry or participate in a group discussion about what they would do if a close friend went missing, drawing parallels to Piper's determination in the novel.

---

## PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What do you know about American life in the 1920s? How do you think the culture and events of that time could influence a story set in this era?
2. How do societal expectations for women in the 1920s differ from today? How might these expectations affect a young woman investigating a mystery?
3. Have you ever had to stand up for a friend or fight for what you believed was right? How did it feel, and what challenges did you face?
4. How do you think living in a big city like Chicago during the 1920s might be different from living in a smaller town or rural area during that time?
5. What would you do if someone close to you went missing? How would you handle the situation?

---

## DURING READING

### Historical Connections Journal

As students read *The Lost Girl of Astor Street*, have them keep a journal where they document and reflect on historical elements they encounter in the story. This activity helps students connect the novel's events to the real-world context of 1920s Chicago.

## STEPS FOR THE ACTIVITY:

- 1. Identify Historical Elements:** Ask students to note any references to historical events, cultural norms, or societal issues (e.g., Prohibition, organized crime, gender roles, fashion, or technology).
- 2. Reflect and Research:** For each historical element, students should write a short reflection on how it impacts the story and, if possible, do a bit of research to learn more about it. For example, they might explore how Prohibition influenced crime in Chicago or how women's roles were evolving during the 1920s and the possible causes behind that shift.
- 3. Make Connections:** Encourage students to draw connections between the historical elements and the characters' actions, motivations, or challenges. For instance, how does Piper's independence clash with what was expected of young women during that time, especially ones born to wealthy families?
- 4. Share Insights:** Periodically, have students share their journal entries in small groups or as a class to discuss how the historical context enriches their understanding of the story.

---

## POST-READING QUESTIONS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION

1. How does Piper Sail grow and change throughout the story? What events or relationships contribute most to her development?
2. What did you think of Piper's decision to investigate Lydia's disappearance on her own? Was it brave, reckless, or both? Why?
3. How did the author use clues, red herrings, and suspense to keep the mystery engaging? Were you able to predict the ending?
4. What themes stood out to you in the novel? How were these themes developed through the characters and events?
5. How did Piper's relationships with her family and friends shape her actions and decisions?
6. What role did organized crime and Prohibition play in the story? How did these elements add to the tension and stakes of the mystery?
7. Were there any characters you found particularly suspicious or untrustworthy? How did your perception of them change as the story unfolded?
8. How does Piper's friendship with Lydia influence her throughout the novel, even after Lydia's disappearance?
9. What did you think of the ending? Did it resolve the story in a satisfying way? Why or why not?
10. If you could ask the author one question about the story, what would it be?

11. How does the novel explore the idea of justice? Do you think justice was served by the end of the story?
12. What lessons can readers take away from Piper's determination and courage?
13. How does the author use dialogue to reveal the personalities and motivations of the characters? Can you point to a specific conversation that stood out to you?
14. What role does loyalty play in the story? How do different characters demonstrate loyalty, and how does it impact their decisions?
15. How does Piper's perspective as the narrator shape the way the story is told? Do you think the story would feel different if told from another character's point of view?

---

## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

### **1. Create a 1920s Newspaper**

Have students work in groups to create a newspaper set in 1920s Chicago. They can write articles about the events of the novel, such as Lydia's disappearance, Piper's investigation, or the involvement of organized crime. Encourage them to include period-appropriate advertisements, editorials, and illustrations to bring the era to life.

### **2. Character Trial Role-Play**

Organize a mock trial for one of the characters involved in the mystery. Assign roles such as lawyers, witnesses, and jury members, and have students use evidence from the book to argue their case. This activity encourages critical thinking and helps students analyze character motivations and actions.

### **3. Write an Alternate Ending**

Ask students to imagine what could have happened at the end of the story if one element had occurred differently. For example, if Piper had not followed a certain lead or if a different person kidnapped Lydia. Have them write a short chapter that explores these alternate events and how they might change Piper's overall plotline and what comes next for her, staying true to the tone and style of the book.

### **4. Design a Book Cover or Movie Poster**

Have students design a new book cover or movie poster for *The Lost Girl of Astor Street*. Encourage them to include key symbols, themes, or moments from the story in their artwork, along with a tagline that captures the essence of the novel.

### **5. Debate Piper's Choices**

Host a class debate about Piper's decisions throughout the story. For example, was it wise for her to keep her investigation secret from her family? Divide students into teams to argue for or against her actions, using evidence from the text to support their points.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**STEPHANIE MORRILL** writes books about girls who are on an adventure to discover their unique place in the world. She is the author of several contemporary young adult series, as well as two other historical young adult novels, *The Lost Girl of Astor Street* and *Within These Lines*. *Within These Lines* was a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard selection, as well as a YALSA 2020 Best Fiction for Young Adults pick. Since 2010, Stephanie has been encouraging the next generation of writers at her website, GoTeenWriters.com, which has been on the Writer's Digest Best Websites for Writers list since 2017. She lives in the Kansas City area, where she loves plotting big and small adventures to enjoy with her husband and three children. You can connect with Stephanie and learn more about her books at [StephanieMorrill.com](http://StephanieMorrill.com).

---