

**Teacher's Guide**, written by Taylor ffitch  
Aligned to Common Core State Standards

## ***Bloody Seoul***

By Sonia Patel

*Bloody Seoul* doesn't pull any punches, literally or figuratively. This is an engaging, fast-paced book that deals with rich issues of family, identity, forgiveness, and trust led by a flawed protagonist who is full of nuance. Teachers should be aware that it includes scenes of violence, drug use, and self-harm, so it is most appropriate for older high school students. These Common-Core aligned questions are intended as a starting point for writing and discussion.



### **Whole-text Questions:**

1. What is the role of food and eating in this novel? Pay particular attention to how food intersects with family. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4
1. How do characters in the novel use cigarettes and smoking? How does their significance for Rocky change over the course of the book? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4
1. Trace the color yellow through the story and analyze its significance. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4
1. This could be called a coming-of-age novel because Rocky matures and gains a more adult perspective. However, he also significantly changes his vision of what adulthood will mean for him. What are the main factors that propel this change? How do they compare to the instigating factors in other coming of age novels you have read? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5
1. There are several physical objects that are very important to Rocky. These include his knife, the embroidered handkerchief, the three-star necklace, and others. Choose one of these objects to follow through the story. What symbolic significance does it have for Rocky? How does it change over time? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3
1. Analyze the role and significance of the Han River. What does it mean for Rocky? How does Patel use it structurally and symbolically? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

## Reading Questions

### Chapter 1:

1. After reading Chapter 1, what do we know about our main character? List as many details as you can. Who is in his family? What is important to him? What is he interested in? Use specific details from the text to show how you know. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3
1. This book is written in the first person. What can we infer about Rocky based on what he notices and focuses on in his surroundings? Give a specific example from the text. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3
1. “Maybe, I thought, when I grow up I could be a walking masterpiece too,” (12). What do tattoos mean to Rocky? Why are they important to him? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1
2. The first chapter of the book is the author’s chance to draw in her readers. What has Patel done to make you want to keep reading? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

### Chapter 2:

1. Patel uses several flashbacks in this chapter. Why would an author use flashbacks instead of presenting the story in chronological order or simply giving background information? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5
2. How does Rocky feel about his father? Use a quote from the text to support your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1
3. Rocky counts the broken pieces after he smashes a bowl: “One, two, three, four shards. Unlucky four, the number that in Korean and Japanese sounds like the word for death” (19). Later he counts his knife throws. What else does Rocky count in this chapter? What does the counting indicate about his state of mind? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

Connections:

1. You can listen to Plácido Domingo sing “Nessun Dorma” [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GucXt7eaWRI&feature=youtu.be).<sup>\*</sup> What emotions does this song evoke when you listen to it?<sup>\*</sup>Nessun Dorma: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GucXt7eaWRI&feature=youtu.be>

### Chapter 3:

1. In this chapter we see Rocky behave violently and cruelly. How does this change your image of the character? Do you think you would feel differently about the character if Patel had opened the book with this scene? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

### Chapter 4:

1. “Why didn’t I smile? I never did. Not even at the best times—Dad’s private knife lessons in the park and Mom’s weekly haemul pajeon dinners. Not even the one

time the best times happened in the same day” (30). After reading this chapter, why do you think Rocky doesn’t show his emotions? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

**Connections:**

1. Look up pictures and recipes for haemul pajeon.

**Chapter 5:**

1. Many novels and movies about high school students have a scene in the cafeteria that establishes the cliques and social groups in the school (For example, [this](#)\* scene from *Mean Girls*) How is the opening scene of this chapter similar to that type of scene, and how is it different? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3  
\*Mean Girls: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZ\\_qXmxdgGM&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZ_qXmxdgGM&feature=youtu.be)
2. Consider the way this chapter is structured. What connects the flashbacks to the main scene in the cafeteria? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3
3. After reading this chapter, do you still find Rocky to be a sympathetic character? If so, how has Patel achieved this? If not, why not? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

**Chapter 6:**

1. How does Rocky feel about his father? Use a specific quote from the text to support your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1
2. What is Rocky’s relationship with his “boys” like? Use details from the text to support your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1
3. What does Rocky count in this chapter? Continue to pay attention as you read. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

**Chapter 7:**

1. At the end of the chapter, Patel writes, “Dad’s hovering over me like a raging bull” (64). What other animal imagery appears in this chapter? How does Patel use it to set the tone? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4
2. Why do you think Rocky feels guilty about accepting the car from his father? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

**Chapter 8:**

1. Why do you think Rocky has such strong feelings about Ha-na? Use details from the text to support your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1
2. How does Rocky use counting in this chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
3. “That means I get to use a knife, or rather a tiny scalpel, to cut once living flesh for an hour and a half” (66). What can we infer about Rocky from this piece of inner monologue? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

### Chapter 9:

1. Rocky's mom tells him, "One day you're going to have girlfriend, maybe someday a wife, [...] Be kind. Don't hurt her..." (77). Why do you think this piece of advice is so important to him? Has he followed it? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2](#)
2. There are three flashbacks in this chapter. How do they relate to each other? What do they reveal about Rocky? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5](#)
3. Rocky repeats, "*Handshakes like jumper cables to jump-start me,*" (84) when talking about his friends. Consider this simile. What does it tell us about his relationship with them? Why is it repeated? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4](#)

### Connections:

1. What is the history between Japan, the U.S., and South Korea that Strike is referencing when he says, "Boss, how about only selling to the Japanese when you're in charge. Let them suffer the way they made us suffer all those years" (78)?

### Chapter 10:

1. At the beginning of the chapter, Rocky notes that his dad is "not angry" (85). How is Rocky feeling at the beginning of the chapter? How can you tell? Include details from the text in your answer. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#)
2. Why does Rocky order "the traditional" instead of what he initially wanted at the restaurant? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#)
3. In this chapter we learn more about both Older Uncle and Younger Uncle. What details do we know about Younger Uncle? What is Rocky's relationship with Older Uncle like? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#)

### Chapter 11:

1. Like Chapter 1, this chapter begins with Rocky walking. Compare the first few paragraphs of the two chapters. What do they share? How are they different? Pay particular attention to the colors and visual details in each chapter. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4](#)
2. The chapter ends, "But then my mind starts picking at itself. *How could I ever...*" (100). What do you think Rocky is referring to here? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#)

### Chapter 12:

1. How does Rocky feel after his boys beat up the juniors? How can you tell? Find some specific quotes from the text to support your answer. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#)
2. How does Rocky feel after he finds out about Woo-jin? How can you tell? Find

some specific quotes from the text to support your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

### **Chapter 13:**

1. What connections does Patel make between Rocky and his mother in this chapter? How are they alike? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. How do you think Ha-na feels after seeing what Rocky does for the two girls in the restaurant? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

### **Chapter 14:**

1. This chapter begins with a description of flowers and trees. What other chapter or chapters begin with a description of nature? What effect does Patel create by starting the chapter this way? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5
2. Compare Rocky's reaction to seeing the scars on Ha-na's arms to the reactions of the popular girls. Why do you think the scars are such a shock to Rocky? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1
3. Patel writes, "That's when it bubbles up inside me, a new voice. It erupts. 'SHUT UP!' I holler, pushing my way into the circle" (119). Look closely at Patel's word choice here. Why is it a "new voice"? What does it mean that the voice "bubbles up"? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4
4. Do you think Rocky would have reacted the same way earlier in the book? Why or why not? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

### **Chapter 15:**

1. Why do you think Rocky chose to go to Nolda Land at this particular time? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. What effect does Patel create by alternating between the present and brief flashbacks in italics? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5
3. "Then something kind of weird happens. We all let out long, barely audible breaths at the same time, like we're balloons with a slow leak, deflating as the tension that had been making us float gets released. And we're crumpling to the ground, only in relief" (126). Why do you think Rocky and his friends feel relieved? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

### **Chapter 16:**

1. How does Patel use images of nature to set the tone for this chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5
2. This chapter is the first time we hear Ha-na speak any significant amount. What can we infer about her from the way she responds to Rocky's attempt to apologize? Did her reaction surprise you? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

### Chapter 17:

1. Rocky says the song “Brindisi” “also makes me feel. Feel anything and everything with my entire being” (130). Why is that so important in this chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3
2. How does the way Rocky is attempting to handle his painful emotions compare to the way his father does? His mother? Ha-na? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

#### Connections:

1. Listen to “Brindisi” [here](#).\*

### Chapter 18:

1. What is the tone of this short chapter? What specific structure and word choice does Patel use to create it? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

#### Chapter 19:

1. What do you think motivates Rocky to go to the club where he knows he will find his dad? How does this connect to the previous chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. Analyze the role and effect of the simile, “The tension is thick and sticky like the spicy rice cakes I buy at the food cart down the street” (143). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

### Chapter 20:

1. “We decided that what I’d seen was actually a horror film disguised as a gangster action film that my dad happened to star in” (146). Do you think Rocky actually believes this? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6
2. How has Rocky’s relationship with his father changed since the beginning of the novel? What finally drives him to confront his father? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

### Chapter 21:

1. What symbolic meaning does the willow tree take on for Rocky’s mother? What does it mean to Rocky? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. What is the meaning behind attaching a love lock to the tower? Why do you think it is important to Rocky to check if his family’s is still there? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
3. How is Rocky’s relationship with Ha-na changing? Use specific evidence from the text to support your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

#### Connections:

1. Look for pictures of the Namsan Seoul Tower online and research the practice and meaning of attaching love locks.

#### **Chapter 22:**

1. In this chapter, Rocky realizes that his father is abusive. Was this a surprise to you as a reader? Why might it be harder for Rocky to see than for an outsider? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. When Rocky puts on the three-star necklace, “It feels more like a neck shackle than boss jewelry” (165). What does this line tell us about how Rocky is changing? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

#### **Chapter 23:**

1. Rocky’s mother tells him, “A silvery cloud or two makes the perfect sky more like real life—imperfect” (168). How does this lesson apply to Rocky’s life? What examples of this idea are there in the story so far? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

#### **Chapter 24:**

1. How do Rocky and his friends behave differently on the island than they have been in Seoul? Why do you think they might be acting differently? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3
2. There are no flashbacks in Chapter 23 or 24. What effect does this create? Why might Patel have made that choice at this point in the novel? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5
3. What new information have we learned about Braid, Strike, and Patch? Note facts and inferences about each using details from the text. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

#### **Chapter 25:**

1. What do you predict will happen now that Rocky has met his uncle? Will the meeting be positive or negative? Use details from the text to support your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

#### **Chapter 26:**

1. Throughout the early part of the book, being part of a gang has meant being tough and getting perks for Rocky. How are his ideas about being tough and getting preferred treatment being challenged? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. Strike asks, “Does that make your dad like...North Korea?” (183). Besides not following the eye for an eye rule, how else is Rocky’s dad like North Korea? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4
3. Rocky’s uncle tells him, “The problem isn’t most people in the North or South. It’s some of the leaders, they’re just like a gang. Only thinking of themselves and

how they can get wealth and power” (185). How does this apply to Rocky’s own experiences? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

**Connections:**

1. Look for background information on the Korean peninsula. When was it divided into North and South, and why? What has the relationship between the two countries been like since?

**Chapter 27:**

1. What do we learn from this chapter about Rocky’s dad, Younger Uncle, and Rocky’s mom? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. How does the way Younger Uncle sees his tattoos and star necklace compare with the way Rocky sees them? Are they more different or similar? (See Chapter 1 for earlier descriptions of Rocky’s tattoos.) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
3. What details foreshadowed the revelations about Rocky’s mother? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

**Chapter 28:**

1. How does Patel create tension and illustrate how Rocky is feeling in this chapter? Look for specific details in the text and explain how they are used. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

**Chapter 29:**

1. What is the significance of Rocky confronting his father at the Willow Tree Spa? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3
2. Rocky’s dad repeatedly calls Rocky’s mom “weak.” What is Rocky’s dad’s idea of strength? What are other ways that characters have shown strength that contrast with that idea? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

**Chapter 30:**

1. What is the significance of Rocky losing count of the cracks as he walks? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. How do Rocky’s friends help him? What specific things do they do that help him calm down? What does this reveal about the four boys’ relationship? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
3. What realization does Rocky come to in this chapter? What brings him to that realization? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

**Chapter 31:**

1. Pay attention to details of setting as you read. How does the setting connect to the events of the chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

2. Patel writes, “for a second her hand and pencil are like my feet on the streets of Seoul” (227). What is the significance of this comparison? What do they have in common? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4
3. What is Ha-na drawing? How might it be meaningful? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

#### **Chapter 32:**

1. How does Rocky separate himself from his father here, besides giving back the knife? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

#### **Chapter 33:**

1. What was happening last time we saw Rocky checking the door like he does in this chapter? How are the two scenes related? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

#### **Chapter 34:**

1. Why do you think Patel chose to present Rocky’s apology letter as an illustration? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5
2. What do you think of Rocky’s apology? If you were Ha-na, how would you respond? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

#### **Chapter 36:**

1. How does Patel use the setting to establish that Rocky’s life is different now? Look for specific details. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

#### **Chapter 37:**

1. How does Ha-na’s picture relate to what she was drawing in Chapter 31? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

#### **Chapter 38:**

1. As you read, keep track of the metaphors Patel uses to describe how Rocky is feeling both emotionally and physically, as well as those used for Ha-na. How do they change over the course of the chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7

#### **Chapter 39:**

1. Younger Uncle tells Rocky, “Look, change is possible” (257). Do you agree? What evidence is there that Rocky has truly changed? Use specific details to back up your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2
2. As they talk, Younger Uncle “pauses to thump his chest once” (258). When have we seen characters thump their chests before? How is this gesture similar or different? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

### Chapter 40:

1. Rocky plays the made-up game *What is this Traveler Searching For* with the people in the airport. What would be the answer to that question for Rocky? What about Ha-na? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2](#)
2. The beginning of this chapter makes clear that Rocky still struggles with obsessive urges despite the fact that many other parts of his life have improved. Why do you think Patel made this choice? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2](#)

### Chapter 41:

1. How is Rocky's choice to start going by Kyung-seok significant? What does it imply about how he has changed as a character? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2](#)
2. How has the balance of control and power changed between Kyung-seok and Ha-na? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2](#)
3. Why do you think Kyung-seok stops himself from tapping his leg a third time at the end of the chapter? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#)

## Standards Used in this Guide:

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1](#)

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2](#)

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3](#)

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5](#)

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

### **Mental Health Resources:**

**Self-harm 24-hour text hotline:** Text CONNECT to 741741

**Resources on Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder:**

<http://beyondocd.org/ocd-facts/what-is-ocd>