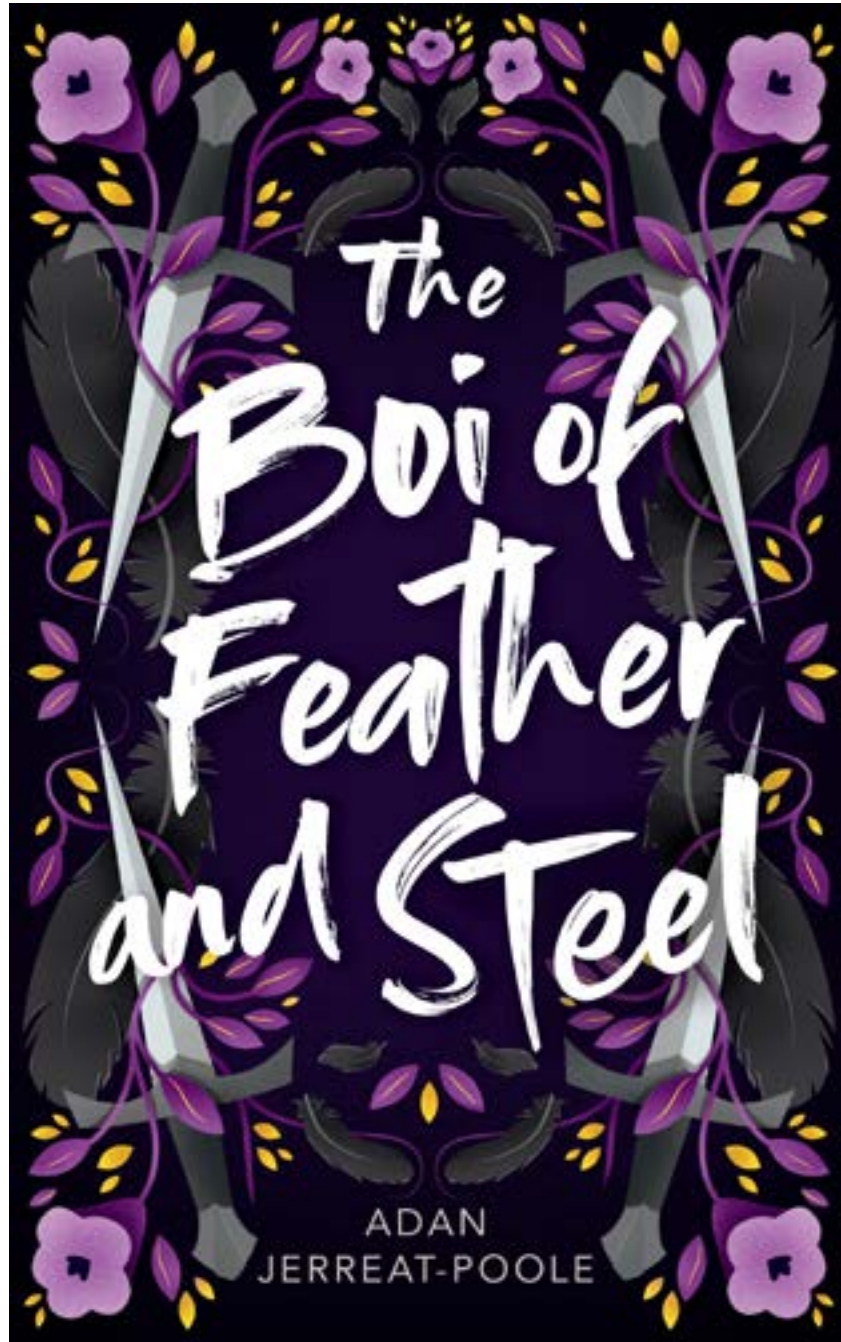


TEACHER'S GUIDE



By Alison Isaac






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I • OVERVIEW

Summary

NOTE: *The Boi of Feather and Steel* is book two of the Metamorphosis duology.

The novel opens in the City of Ghosts with a nightmare: Tav is dreaming of a violent confrontation with their friend and roommate Cam, in which Cam is holding Eli — the girl of hawthorn and glass and Heart of the Coven — captive. Tav orders Cam to give Eli to them, but instead, Cam snaps Eli in half. Tav then attacks Cam. When Tav sees their own reflection in the ice, they see a witch looking back at them. Tav awakens and forgets about the dream in the morning.

In the living room of Tav and Cam’s apartment, Eli has had her own nightmare and is unable to fall back asleep. She’s still adjusting to her new body with the powerful Heart of the Coven and trying to separate her own memories from the Heart’s.

Back in the City of Eyes, Kite — the Heir Dormant to the Witch Lord throne and Eli’s former friend — is summoned by her mother, the Witch Lord. When Kite goes to see her, the Witch Lord announces that it is time to declare Kite the Heir Rising. The Witch Lord then gives Kite the task of bringing back the Heart of the Coven, with the promise of more power than Kite can imagine if she accomplishes the mission. Kite leaves and finds Clytemnestra, the bloodthirsty leader of the child witches who wants to start a rebellion against the Coven. She tells Clytemnestra that she knows what the children are up to, and she wants to help.

In the City of Ghosts, Eli and Tav disagree often, and Eli continues to flicker in and out of being. The magic Cam received from the City of Eyes’ Labyrinth is also changing. The three are still on a mission to heal the world’s wound, which was brought on by the Coven’s greed. They need to mend the wound and transform it into a door that works both ways and allows the two worlds to live in harmony, resuscitating the human world. When they try to create a door, it doesn’t work the way they intended, and Eli is left in great pain, as she has what appears to be a seizure. Meanwhile, the gaping hole in the sky continues to widen. Tav helps Eli regain consciousness, and the two of them fight against the brutal witch-crafted magic that tore open the galaxy.

Eli notices that Tav becomes a little less human every day. The group of friends are attacked by vultures, but Tav opens a door and sends the vultures away before anyone is killed. Eli loses a lot of blood, and when Tav saves her, they are given the nickname The Healer.

Kite and Clytemnestra make a plan in which Kite agrees to betray the Witch Lord as long as Eli is spared. Clytemnestra says she will not kill Eli, but she cannot guarantee their world will not.

Tav decides to visit the Hedge-Witch, and Eli insists on joining them, even though Tav wants Eli to rest. Tav takes off, leaving Eli behind. Once at The Sun, Tav suggests they use the Hedge-Witch's network to save the world — to heal the damage the City of Eyes caused by feeding on the City of Ghosts. She laughs it off as a conspiracy theory and reminds Tav that there are enough problems in the human world. Tav considers giving the Heart over to the Hedge-Witch but reminds themselves that the Heart is also a person — it is Eli. Instead, Tav lies and says they failed at their mission to retrieve the Heart from the Coven. The Hedge-Witch tells Tav she knows they're lying and she's disappointed. Tav asks the Hedge-Witch to trust them, and she tells them she will help. When Tav leaves, Cam is waiting to pick them up outside. At a distance, Eli looks on with the ghost who had once saved Tav from bigots at a bus stop. Eli does not trust the Hedge-Witch and plans to return and kill her another day.

After helping wage an attack on the Coven, Clytemnestra declares Kite one of them. She wants to burn down the library (part of the Coven), but Kite will not allow it. When she touches the walls of the library, she feels no pulse and knows it needs the Heart.

They make a plan for Kite to enter the Coven. Recognizing her as the Heir, the Coven leads Kite to the graveyard of assassin daughters. One emerges, back from the dead, to ask about the other assassins. Kite tells her she has not found them yet.

It becomes increasingly obvious to Tav that Eli is dying. Carrying the power of the Heart is too much for her. Eli, Tav, and Cam are confronted by an army of armoured beasts, and during the battle, Eli dematerializes again. Left alone with Cam, Tav tries to use their magic to escape and smells freshly ground coffee and burning vegetation — the Hedge-Witch. Humans gifted with spells, trained to fight, join them. The Coven's made-army is outmatched thanks to back up from the Hedge-Witch, and Tav and Cam survive. Eli materializes, wondering what happened. The vortex closes, and they realize Cam is gone and they have no way of tracking him.

Back in the City of Eyes, Kite introduces the assassin daughter to Clytemnestra and tells her the assassin will work with them on the condition that she and her sisters around the world are freed. Kite and Clytemnestra continue to build their army and arsenal of weapons, including a sword (a legendary relic of the moon war) found in the junkyard of discarded things.

While out on a ride, Tav and Eli make love in a field of purple petals, but Eli disappears again afterward. Tav rides home alone and sees Eli at the apartment. Eli tells Tav that the Hedge-Witch wants to see them — she lost people in that last battle, which she sees as a failed attempt to save the world. Tav says that was not the deal, but Eli reminds them that is what happens when you make a deal with a witch.

Kite sets off and stumbles across Cam in the Witch-Killing Fields. She notices that Cam has one of Eli's blades and asks him if Eli sent him to kill her. He says no and recognizes the sword she has as the item he found on his first trip to the junkyard. Kite tells him it did not want to be found and resented being traded like currency, and that they will return to the junkyard and give it a choice. Cam says he is not going anywhere with her because the last time he saw her, she betrayed him, Tav, and Eli to the Coven. Kite clarifies that she didn't betray them, she saved them. Kite gets Cam to trust her, and she tells him about the plan to build an army and overthrow the Witch Lord.

Tav and Eli head to The Sun to meet with the Hedge-Witch, and Tav presents Eli as the Heart. The Hedge-Witch tells Tav that she'll have to destroy Eli's body to access the Heart, and she gives them a moment to say goodbye. Tav stabs Eli with the obsidian blade, turning it like a key and making a hole in her body. Tav tells the Hedge-Witch to take the Heart as they keep their hand and blade in Eli's body while the lifeforce drains out of her. Tav withdraws the blade suddenly, closing the hole, and when the Hedge-Witch falls back, her hand is severed at the wrist. The Hedge-Witch's succulent shreds itself, revealing Tav's former comrades, ready to attack Tav.

Tav tries stalling for time as Eli starts to recover. A witch-killing obsidian arrowhead is aimed at Tav, whom Eli suspects is part witch, but she manages to save them. Tav takes Eli's obsidian blade and kills the Hedge-Witch.

Eli later tells Tav that the Heart is repurposing her because it is not meant to be in a flesh-and-blood body. She is falling apart, and that is why her blades have been rejecting her. She worries that they might not fulfill their mission, because she might vanish for good next time she disappears. Tav tells her they will return the Heart to the City of Eyes.

Tav says their magic is getting stronger and thinks they'll be able to heal the tear between the worlds without the Heart, but Eli says they need to heal the world first. She says they need to go to the source, the Coven, because the Heart's power is weakening in the human world; it doesn't belong there.

Cam and Kite spend time getting to know each other in the junkyard. They eventually find a portal, which takes them to the Labyrinth and back to the Children's Lair. The walls want something in exchange for their magic, so they absorb Cam. Kite tells herself he will be okay there. When she sees Clytemnestra again, she tells Kite many abandoned daughters have joined their army.

Kite feels that Eli has returned to the City of Eyes and figures the Coven must have felt the return of the Heart, as well. But before they go in search of Eli, Clytemnestra shares a card from the Coven: they are invited to a masquerade. Kite heads off to find Eli.

Back in the City of Eyes, the Heart has taken over Eli's body, subsuming her body into light and suspending Eli between corporeal and incorporeal states. She is asleep, and Tav and Kite worry she will die if they let her sleep long enough for nightmares to appear, knowing how dangerous nightmares are in the City of Eyes. In her dream, Eli reunites with Kite, and Kite reaches in to pull the Heart out of her, which jolts Eli awake.

Clytemnestra and Kite continue planning. The invitation they received will open a door for the delegate, and while the Witch Lord is distracted, Kite will open a door through the library for the others in the army. The two think Tav will be the better delegate, and Kite tells Clytemnestra not to let Eli near the Witch Lord. Clytemnestra promises.

Tav agrees to meet the Witch Lord, relieved that Eli won't have to. When Eli learns about the plan through Clytemnestra, she worries Tav was sent as an offering and decides to follow them.

Tav crosses over from the Children's Lair to the Coven, and the Witch Lord makes them wait. When the Witch Lord finally appears, she looks just like Kite.

Eli follows the magic silverblack threads that would lead her to Tav. Tav remembers Clytemnestra's advice that the Witch Lord likes to play games, so Tav tries to keep her entertained and interested. When that doesn't work, Tav resorts to grovelling while waiting for Kite and her army to arrive. Keeping their eyes downcast in a show of reverence, a single tear falls from Tav's eyes, and they watch the trajectory of a teardrop, which eventually transforms into a feather. The Witch Lord is surprised. Tav and the Witch Lord dance while she tries to figure out what Tav is — human, witch, or something else.

Eli makes her way to the Coven in her immaterial state and wonders why Clytemnestra has sent two sacrifices to the Witch Lord (Kite and Tav), and considers the consequences of surrendering the Heart.

Eli sees Tav first, then the Witch Lord. Upon seeing the face she recognizes as Kite, she's flooded with memories and emotions, which causes her to materialize. Tav manages to hold on to the Witch Lord to keep her away from Eli, even though she transforms into her essence. While other witches descend on Eli, a wall opens and Kite arrives. The Witch Lord says Kite cannot hurt her because their destinies are tied, so if the Witch Lord dies, so does Kite. Tav's grip slips for a second, and the Witch Lord escapes and stabs Kite in the heart with a blade. Kite survives the attack.

Chaos ensues, but because the Coven is also Kite's home, she convinces the library to fight with them. Tav heads off deeper into the catacombs of the Coven to find the Witch Lord.

In the library, Eli decides to return the Heart. She is confronted by a made-girl assassin who has been hunting her, but they speak and realize they are on the same side. Eli tells the Heart to go home and feels energy draining from her body. In her mind's eye she sees the forest regenerating and the forgotten pit that was the junkyard beginning to heal. The seam between worlds has unravelled. Both Tav and Kite recognize that something has changed. They're both transported to a river of black ice back in the City of Ghosts, where they face off with the Witch Lord again.

Tav, transformed with steel wings, challenges the Witch Lord to a duel and defeats her. Kite watches the Witch Lord's body shatter, but Kite herself does not die. The Coven accepts Tav's defeat, but Tav rejects the throne. Tav tells them all creatures, made or born, will live free.

Tav tells Kite they dreamt that someone was under the ice. They go look, melt some of the ice, and Cam emerges, his body partially transformed into stone from the Labyrinth. Just as in Tav's dream at the beginning of the book, Cam holds a limp, unconscious Eli in his arms. The voice of the Labyrinth tells them they have waited a long time to be remembered. Tav thinks the Labyrinth is seeking revenge, but Cam says no, they had actually tried to heal Eli. Kite says Eli needs blood and offers some of her own. Eli eventually opens her eyes.

Eli reminds the crew that they still need to heal the rift. They consider returning to the City of Eyes but decide it's not necessary. The group unites in a powerful ritual, and Tav manages to heal the wound, turning it into a door that opens both ways.

II • PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

On Genre

The Boi of Feather and Steel is a fantasy novel. Before getting started, it's important to review literary genres to ensure all students are starting with the same context. Novels are, by definition, works of fiction. Fantasy novels may be inspired by mythology and incorporate magical elements and invented worlds. Fantasy novels may also be referred to as speculative fiction, similar to science fiction, and dystopian novels. These terms are not mutually exclusive.

Tips for reading fantasy:

- Be patient through the confusion
- Figure out how the setting and the characters work together
- Take note of the “rules” of this new world

Reading Is Thinking: Journaling

Journaling is a great way for students to actively engage with the text, and one of the ways in which teachers can see evidence of the thinking work that happens while students are reading. Encourage students to keep a reading journal where they will track their thoughts. Before starting the novel, set up a journaling routine with some guidelines so students are clear on the expectations. Periodic check-ins (having students submit journals at different points during the reading or scheduling occasional supervision meetings with students) is a good way to keep everyone on track and set students up for success.

At this level, students should go beyond summarizing. Students should be evaluated on the quality of their thoughts: the questions you pose and answer, etc. Here are some examples of reading strategies that may be used in journaling:

- Making predictions
- Making connections
- Asking and answering questions
- Making inferences
- Synthesizing information

There will also be discussion questions (see the During-Reading section) that you may choose to incorporate.

Key Terms and Definitions

The purpose of this section is to familiarize students with key literary and sociological ideas that may be useful in understanding and analyzing *The Boy of Feather and Steel*. It may also be used to springboard a discussion about how to talk about certain topics in a way that is respectful and welcoming to all students.

- Social justice
- Equity
- Activism
- Literary lenses
- Literary criticism
- Literary theory
- Sociology
- Social constructs
- Feminism
- Gender
- Gender identity
- Gender performance
- Gender binary
- Transgender
- Sexual orientation and sexual identity
- Queer (as it relates to sexual and gender identity)
- Intersectionality
- Climate justice
- Non-binary
- Enby
- LGBTQ (find two initialism variants and explain them)
- Boi
- Discrimination
- Racism
- Anti-oppression theory
- Critical race theory
- Metamorphosis
- Ideology
- Norms
- Stereotypes
- Matriarchy
- Patriarchy
- Homophobia
- Transphobia

Go over the terms as a class, ensuring all students have the same understanding. This may also be a good time to talk about/revisit class agreements and expectations (i.e., respectful language, etc.) going forward.

Suggestions for Students

Include quotes from the book with page numbers to support your thinking. Good journaling goes beyond summarizing, so don't just provide a summary of events. The following is a list of ideas you may want to consider for your journaling:

■ **GENERAL:**

- Describe some conflicts in the book. Are they internal or external conflicts? Why would you label them that way?
- How do you feel about the focus shifting between characters and character headings in the text? Does it help your understanding of the plot or detract from it? Explain.
- In what ways does this story help you better understand your world? What are some other connections you can make between the book and your own life?
- What patterns do you see in the text?
- What questions does this book raise for you? What issues are addressed or ignored in the text?

■ **SETTING:**

- Where does the story take place? Create a sketch or another piece of art that represents the setting of the book. Label the different areas or create other annotations you find helpful.
- In what ways is the setting of the book different from the world you live in? In what ways is the setting similar?
- Write about your reaction to a particularly interesting passage where the author creates an image of the setting.
- What questions do you have about the setting? What is unclear?

■ **CHARACTERS:**

- Consider a character's specific actions or general behaviour and discuss whether or not you agree with them. What frustrates you? What do you admire?
- Create lists of character traits for characters in the novel. What evidence can you find to support your thinking?
- Which characters are you most rooting for? Why? How does the author's writing encourage this?
- Pick a few minor characters and consider their roles in the story. Why did the author choose to include them? What difference might their absence have made?
- Do any of the characters remind you of other characters you have read about in other stories or in real life? In what ways?
- What changes have you noticed in specific characters?

Literary Theory: An Introduction

Literary theory is a way of conducting literary (or cultural) analysis through certain perspectives. Different theories provide us with tools to interpret literature and culture.

The Purdue Online Writing Lab offers this explanation:

A very basic way of thinking about literary theory is that these ideas act as different lenses critics use to view and talk about art, literature, and even culture. These different lenses allow critics to consider works of art based on certain assumptions within that school of theory. The different lenses also allow critics to focus on particular aspects of a work they consider important.

For example, if a critic is working with certain Marxist theories, s/he might focus on how the characters in a story interact based on their economic situation. If a critic is working with post-colonial theories, s/he might consider the same story but look at how characters from colonial powers (Britain, France, and even America) treat characters from, say, Africa or the Caribbean.

Some schools of literary theory include:

- Moral criticism, dramatic construction (c. 360 BCE–present)
- Formalism, new criticism, neo-Aristotelian criticism (1930s–present)
- Psychoanalytic criticism, Jungian criticism (1930s–present)
- Marxist criticism (1930s–present)
- Reader-response criticism (1960s–present)
- Structuralism/semiotics (1920s–present)
- Post-structuralism/deconstruction (1966–present)
- New historicism/cultural studies (1980s–present)
- Post-colonial criticism (1990s–present)
- Feminist criticism (1960s–present)
- Gender/queer studies (1970s–present)
- Critical race theory (1970s–present)
- Critical disability studies (1990s–present)

Have students research and write definitions for five of the schools listed above using the attached table.

SCHOOL OF THOUGHT	DEFINITION	NOTABLE NAMES (OF THEORISTS)	THEMES AND QUESTIONS WITHIN SCHOOL	OTHER IMPORTANT NOTES

Review the most relevant schools of thought with students in class to ensure common understanding and give them time to edit their table. Then have students write a short summary explaining their understanding of what literary theory is and why it is used.

III • DURING-READING ACTIVITIES

Initial Questions for Understanding

The following questions are meant to lead students into the story and help them establish the connection between characters, setting, and the rules of the fantasy world. They may be answered orally or in writing as part of students' journaling activity.

Who is telling this story?

- Who seems to be telling the story at the start?
- What elements and pronouns help the reader figure out the point of view?
- How full or partial is the narrator's point of view?

Who are the characters?

- Who is the protagonist?
- Who are the other major and minor characters?
- What are the characters like and how do we know?

Where are we/they?

- Where does the action take place?
- What does the narrator tell us about this place?
- What are the rules? How is this world similar to ours? How is it different?

Reading Comprehension and Discussion Questions

The purpose of the following questions (divided into the two main parts of the book) is to help comprehension by encouraging active, critical thinking. These questions may be answered in reading journals, they may be explored in book clubs, or they may be asked and answered orally during class.

■ **ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS:**

- Encourage students to read as writers, which means noticing the techniques the writer has used and the choices the writer has made.
- Encourage students to go beyond these questions and make notes on any moments in the text that feel significant to them.
- Give students time to review their notes before class discussions to pick out their most interesting ideas.

- Suggest using a graphic organizer where relevant. Graphic organizers are a useful way to help students organize their thoughts and visualize complex ideas. Some examples are sequence chart, story map, biography graphic, and Venn diagram.

For example, students may **use a Venn diagram to show** one or more of the following:

- The ways in which Eli is human/made-thing
- Comparison between the world in the book and our world
- Comparison between characters

Part One: Exile (p. 1–248)

1. What might you infer about the book based on the title (and considering *The Girl of Hawthorn and Glass*, if you read it)?
2. What might the dedication tell us about the author and the text?
 - On page 12: “The shelter was covered in posters for suicide hotlines and band stickers and blocky marker lettering spelling out catchy phrases like LIVE LIKE NO ONE IS WATCHING and DANIELLE IS A SLUT.”
 - On page 13: “The vice-principal had just announced that the GSA was being cancelled due to lack of funding — as if the kids didn’t know it had everything to do with the provincial government and anti-LGBTQI legislation being put in place. Teachers acted like all teenagers were stuck in the 1950s with only a crappy radio or smudged black-and-white newspapers to learn about the world. Tav had been on social media since they were a kid — and damn, the kinds of information they had been able to access. ”
3. What do the following two passages tell us about the setting?
4. On page 14 it says, “‘How heavy it must be, to live with so much hate,’ said Tav’s mother. Tav had guiltily stashed away their own hate and anger, wondering if it would ever be useful.” In what ways might hate and/or anger ever be useful?
5. On page 17 it says, “Tav had come to an understanding that everything and everyone was dangerous — and that didn’t mean they deserved to be dead.” Give two examples of this in the real world.
6. Consider the following, from page 20: “They had both been tied by bloodlines and expectations and the stories told about their bodies. They were like balloons tethered to the land by pretty ribbons.” Write a short reflection about this passage, with thoughts on how and who in our world might be affected in this way.
7. In chapter 5 it’s clear that Eli and Tav disagree about the Hedge-Witch and her intentions. Who do you side with and why?
8. On page 25 there is mention of both Eli and Cam becoming “less human.” In what ways is this true for Eli and Cam? In what ways could someone become “less human” in our world?
9. What is happening to Eli in the “The Heart” section that begins on page 26?
10. At the start of chapter 7, and in other sections of the novel, nature is anthropomorphized. What does this mean and what might be the author’s purpose?
11. Do you agree with Kite’s secret mission to destroy her own “mother”? Explain.

12. On page 43 it says that stealing another witch’s magic was taboo. What is a taboo? What are some taboos in our society?
13. On page 44 it says, “A revolution needs more than bodies, more than a charismatic leader.... It needs information. It needs connections.” In what ways is this statement true in our society? Use an example from our world to support your thinking.
14. The library is described as a “sentient” building on page 52. What does this mean? What effect does a sentient library have on the story?
15. Witch children are not raised by parents nor taught in school. In what ways might this affect who they become as adults?
16. Why does Tav’s mom tell them not to make Kraft Dinner on page 77? What does this scene tell us about Tav and their mom? What might be inferred about their social status and is it justified?
17. On page 80 it describes the crew at The Sun as being those “who lived on the edges of society.” What does that mean? Who lives on the edges of our society?
18. What type of position or person might the Hedge-Witch represent in our world? How so?
19. Describe The Coven.
20. Describe The Heart.
21. On page 119 it says, “Sometimes the dead don’t stay buried.” With the exception of actual exhumations, in which ways is this true?
22. What are your thoughts on Clytemnestra?
23. Describe Eli and Tav’s relationship.
24. In what ways do the author’s depiction of Eli challenge the way women and girls are usually depicted in media in our society?
25. Describe the relationship between Tav and the Hedge-Witch.
26. Explain what happens in chapter 35. What is its significance?
27. On page 215 it says, “The smell of hatred made Kite’s eyes water.” Write a few sentences describing what hatred might smell like.
28. What’s happening in the conversation between Eli and Tav on pages 219–20? What does Tav want?
29. True or false: *How* you do something is just as important as *what* you do. Explain your reasoning with information from the text.
30. How does someone “sacrifice” a future?
31. Interpret and explain the following passage from page 241: “Witches were not the only creatures who could cobble together a life from scraps. Kite saw in the tremble of Cam’s throat that he had crafted a life out of bits and pieces, and this mosaic of identity had become strength, flexibility, and survival. So many bodies struggling to survive. It was time for them to *live*.”
32. What role does blood play in the story?

Part Two: Homecoming (p. 249–429)

1. On page 255 Kite says, “Names have power.” Explain what she means. How does this relate to the names in the novel?
2. What role does coffee play in the book?
3. Considering the conversation on pages 263–64, do you agree that Eli is a “broken thing”? Can we still find value in things that are “broken”?
4. On page 291 Kite thinks about “loyalty, luck, and lineages.” What are some connections you could make between those ideas?
5. How does the author create suspense? Find some examples that illustrate this.
6. On page 333 it says, “The witches were soft feminine, butch, androgynous, hard femme, hipster masculine, and genteel dandies.” What does this mean? What might this tell us about the City of Eyes and/or The Coven?
7. On page 347 Tav mentions the Middle Passage. What are they referring to? What was the Middle Passage?
8. Explore the idea of safety. What does it mean to be safe?
9. Consider the following passage from page 357: “(Gods were stories humans told each other to make sense of the chaos and beauty that shaped and unravelled their pieces of dirt. Eli was often more human than she liked to admit.)” What does this mean? Do you agree or disagree? Why was it written in parentheses?
10. On page 365 the Witch Lord tells Kite, “Your mistake was thinking you were a person.” Kite responds, “I am a person.” What does it mean to be a person? What do the Witch Lord and Kite mean?
11. What does “paradoxical” mean? How is Eli’s character an example of this?
12. Write a reflection on the following passage from page 391: “There might not be sides, but there was always change; and sometimes there had to be winners and losers; although winning could look an awful lot like losing. Tav knew that. The Witch Lord, raised in the crypt of her own self-importance, taught to treat life like it didn’t matter, had tried to make a universe as brutal as her heart and as razor-sharp as her teeth. She did not know that simple truth, had never learned to recognize failure as beauty and power as self-harm. In many ways, she was like a child herself, still waiting for knowledge to deepen into understanding.”
13. What does it mean to be “born into struggle”?
14. View the text through a literary lens/theory. What do you see?
15. How does Tav change over the course of the story?
16. Describe Eli and Kite’s relationship.
17. Based on the information we’re left with in the book, what are some predictions you have for the future of the main characters?
18. How do you feel about the way the book ends?
19. What do you think was the purpose of the book? Was there a message? How does this align with or differ from your own ideas and perspectives?

20. How do you feel about the way Cam was written and used in the novel?
21. Describe the relationship between Eli, Kite, and Tav.
22. What is the role of nature in this book? What might we infer about the author's views regarding the environment?
23. What did the author do that worked well? What did not work well? How did the author create action, suspense, and drama?
24. Where do you see the author's interest in disability studies in the novel?
25. Now that you have read the entire book, how do you make sense of the nightmare Tav had at the beginning of the book?
26. What questions remain unanswered?

IV • AFTER-READING ACTIVITIES

Book Club Meeting

A book club meeting is an opportunity for readers to discuss their ideas and questions about the book with peers. It's always interesting to hear how another person interpreted the same text. Put students in groups (of approximately four students) and plan a book club meeting. Go over some guidelines and how to prepare for the meeting in advance. When they meet, have students record audio of the meeting so the quality of their discussions can be assessed.

Short Writing Activity

The summary on the back cover is one interpretation of the story. Have a discussion with students about the purpose of the summary and its limitations. Ask students if they think the summary is accurate. What was left out or misleading?

Have students write their own summary for the back cover.

The Hero's and Heroine's Journeys: Long Essay

American writer and professor Joseph Campbell is most famous for his work on the Hero's Journey.

The Joseph Campbell Foundation notes:

In this study of the myth of the hero, Campbell posits the existence of a Monomyth (a word he borrowed from James Joyce), a universal pattern that is the essence of, and common to, heroic tales in every culture. While outlining the basic stages of this mythic cycle, he also explores common variations in the hero's journey, which, he argues, is an operative metaphor, not only for an individual, but for a culture as well. The Hero would prove to have a major influence on generations of creative artists — from the abstract expressionists in the 1950s to contemporary filmmakers today — and would, in time, come to be acclaimed as a classic.

Grand Valley State University offers an overview and examples of the “Monomyth,” commonly known as “The Hero's Journey,” along with an updated feminist “The Heroine's Journey.”

■ **THE HERO’S JOURNEY**

The Hero’s Journey is a myth-based framework. Incredibly flexible, it has three main parts. Firstly, the separation, where the hero sets out on his journey, seeking (possibly reluctantly) adventure. Secondly, the initiation, where the majority of the journey happens — the hero arrives. Finally, the return. The hero has finished whatever they set out to do and has obtained the object (treasure, love, or knowledge). Now he must return home. These are the basic elements of every hero’s journey and can be used in a variety of ways to improve, analyze, and create narratives.

■ **THE HEROINE’S JOURNEY**

The Heroine’s Journey more closely examines the inner journey of discovery; specifically from a feminist lens. Originally created by Maureen Murdock, a therapist working with women, its use as a writing tool is debated. While written with a specific gender in mind, many of the stages share common goals with the hero’s journey and are reflections of an inward journey.

Campbell outlined eight archetypes in this work: hero, mentor, ally, herald, trickster, shapeshifter, guardian, and shadow.

***The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* has this to say about “archetype”:**

“Archetype” has specific uses in the fields of philosophy and psychology. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato, for example, believed that all things have ideal forms (aka archetypes) of which real things are merely shadows or copies. And in the psychology of C.G. Jung, “archetype” refers to an inherited idea or mode of thought that is present in the unconscious of the individual. In everyday prose, however, “archetype” is most commonly used to mean “a perfect example of something.”

Have students explore the various sections of the Grand Valley State University Monomyth website (libguides.gvsu.edu/monomyth) and consider the following in the form of an essay:

■ **INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS**

Using specific evidence from the text, in what ways does *The Boy of Feather and Steel* align with the Monomyth (either The Hero’s Journey or The Heroine’s Journey)? Consider plot as well as characters (and possible archetypes) in your argument.

Include expectations for length, tone, and style.

Dangerous Readers and Safe Allegories: Social Justice in Fantasy

Read the following blog post by the author, from the publisher’s website (dundurn.com/blog_/t43181/p159262-dangerous-readers-and-safe-allegories--social-justice-in-fantasy):

In 1974, Ursula Le Guin published an essay entitled “Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?” In the article, Le Guin writes that fantasy “isn’t factual, but it is true” and celebrates “the use of imaginative fiction [as a way] to deepen your understanding of your world.” In my readerly experience, one of the most common ways the “truth” of the world appears in speculative fiction and fantasy (SFF) is through allegory (and the assumed relatability of every white male hero journey), through grand struggles against evil forces and stories of underdogs overcoming obstacles to achieve their dreams. Now, I have a lot of respect for Le Guin; on our first date, my forever partner and I bonded over our shared love for *The Dispossessed* and its articulation of an anarchist society. But after a decades-long passionate relationship with fantasy literature, I’m breaking up with allegory.

I can think of countless examples of historical and contemporary SFF that use allegory, and I’m sure you can, too. The villains are stand-ins for real-life dictators or colonizers, while the (inevitably white and cisgendered; unless coded as Indigenous, in which case blue or green alien) protagonist assumes the role of revolutionary or activist (but god forbid we support antifa). So many authors and fans of these franchises where good triumphed over evil, fascist regimes were overthrown, and metaphorical Nazis were defeated, did not stand up during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. They have not supported the Land Back movement. And they aren’t speaking up now for Palestinians who are suffering under an apartheid system and are being killed as I type this sentence.

I have to conclude that North Americans just aren’t that afraid of dragons anymore. After all, dragons aren’t real. (But white supremacists who love Tolkien are.)

I wanted to write a fantasy book with a secondary world and a strange, intriguing magic system — a book filled with wonder and fear. I also wanted to write a fantasy book that had social justice themes without falling back on allegory. The Coven in the *Metamorphosis* duology is not symbolic of capitalists or racists. Eli is not a white saviour — she’s a queer and disabled aspiring ally. The leader of our group of magical adventurers, Tav, is Black and non-binary, just as so many real-world leaders of social change are Black women and trans activists. And Tav wants to change both the secondary magical world and the human world. Canada, in *The Boi of Feather and Steel*, is recognizable as a settler colonial nation built on land dispossession, genocide, and slavery — a place of violence that needs to be transformed.

I don’t believe in allegory anymore. But I do believe in readers. I think readers want more than hero journeys and escapism, more than safe allegories that make them feel comfortable. I think they want to be challenged. I think they want to be called to action. And I know they’re ready to stand up against real-world injustice. As I wrote in *Boi* about Kite, our witchy librarian and reluctant Heir to a blood throne, “Readers can be dangerous.”

■ **READING RESPONSE QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**

1. What is allegory?
2. What is the author’s main argument?
3. The author writes that Canada is “a settler colonial nation built on land dispossession, genocide, and slavery — a place of violence that needs to be transformed.” What is the author referring to specifically? What are your thoughts on the author’s view of Canada? Where else in the world might this description apply to? How so?
4. Do you agree or disagree with what the author has written?
5. How does this blog change or support your understanding of *The Boy of Feather and Steel*?
6. Research the Black Lives Matter and Land Back movements. Write a one page profile for each movement that includes why they started, what their purpose or manifesto is, the types of activities they are involved in, and any other pertinent information.
7. If Tav were living in your city, what social movements or organizations might they be a part of? Where might they go for support?

Profile-Writing Activity

A magazine profile is an informative written portrait about a person. A well-written profile should give the reader a clear picture of who the person is. Profiles are usually non-fiction and a compilation of biographical information, observations, and interviews.

Have students write a profile about one of the characters in the novel. Students should select details (speech, actions, biographical information) from the story to create a full picture of the character, in the style of a magazine profile.

■ **SOME TIPS TO HELP STUDENTS:**

- **Read other profiles:** Reading other profiles will give you a feel for the tone, style, and format used.
- **Prepare:** Compile pull quotes, biographical information, and examples of the character’s behaviour and personality.
- **Create an outline:** Start with a strong lede and figure out how the other pieces fit together in a way that will make sense for your readers.
- **Incorporate direct quotes:** Including direct quotes that come from the character or that are made about the character will break up the text and make it more interesting to read.
- **Tell a story:** Get at the core of what makes this character tick. Who, in essence, are they? Can you identify or create a narrative around this character’s life?
- **Show us a picture:** Use sensory details to give the reader an immersive experience.

Social Justice in Speculative Fiction

The Boy of Feather and Steel is book two in the Metamorphosis duology, and social justice is a theme that runs throughout both books. Design your own fantasy or sci-fi social justice-themed story.

■ CONSIDERATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Who are the main and secondary characters? Come up with three of each and include the following information: names, characteristics, desires, and motivations.
2. What is the setting? What are the rules that the reader needs to make sense of the plot? Clearly describe the world of your story.
3. Create a plot/storyline that clearly demonstrates:
 - Exposition
 - Rising action
 - Climax
 - Falling action
 - Resolution/denouement

Once your story idea has been approved by the teacher, write a chapter based on what you plotted.

Planning a Film Adaptation

A storyboard is an important part of film production (both feature films and short films). A storyboard is a visual representation of everything that will happen in the film. It uses images to establish the sequence of events. A completed storyboard looks somewhat like a graphic novel or comic.

Have students create a storyboard for the film adaptation of the novel. By definition, the adaptation will not be exactly the same as the book. Students will have to decide what to keep in the film version and what to leave out.

For their first draft, students should use a sequencing graphic organizer to plot major events that will be included in the film adaptation. Students should conference with the teacher to ensure they're on the right track before working on a final draft. The completed storyboard can be hand drawn or digitally created. Provide students with other guidelines, such as length.

Literary Playlist

In this project, students will use music to communicate thoughts and feelings about characters and themes in the novel.

Students will act as curators for a music-streaming service that is producing a special edition collection of literary-inspired playlists. After identifying key themes or points of character or plot development, students choose songs to capture the essence of these moments. This project may be done individually or in pairs.

Students will publish their playlists, along with a detailed set of liner notes that provide an evidence-based analysis of the themes or character development throughout the written work and a rationale for the selection of each song. Students share their playlists and liner notes via the class website or a presentation in which small snippets of each song may be played.

Design a Beautiful New World

Using the best aspects from major world civilizations, students will design an ideal world, answering the question: If you had the magic to fix our world, how would you use it? Students should identify critical characteristics, design, resources, habits and attitudes, etc. This may be an interdisciplinary art project, or students may present their new world to the class in the form of an oral presentation.

Producing a Podcast

Working in pairs or small groups, students will create a professional-sounding podcast episode, drawing on themes or characters from the book to create content. This is an opportunity for cross-curricular connections, especially to sociology and psychology.

Start by having students listen to at least three podcasts, then have them fill out the table below. The purpose of the chart is to get students thinking about the considerations involved in creating a podcast.

	PODCAST NAME & EPISODE:	PODCAST NAME & EPISODE:	PODCAST NAME & EPISODE:
What is the purpose of the podcast?			
What is involved in the production of the podcast (to make it more interesting/informative)?			
What do you think the hosts had to do to prepare?			
What did you like about the podcast?			
What did you dislike about the podcast?			

What were some similarities between the three podcasts? What were some differences? Which podcast did you prefer and why?

■ INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. Identify the most interesting thing(s) about, in, or related to the book.
2. Work in pairs (or groups of three) to transmit your message via a podcast that you will create.
3. Help your listener(s) have at least one of the following experiences:
 - Learn something
 - Become motivated to do something
 - Experience emotional shifts (excitement, fear, joy, relief, etc.)
 - Better understand a person's experience (empathy)
 - See themselves within the story (it's relatable/relevant to your peers)
4. The podcast episode must also include:
 - An introduction of yourselves (the hosts) and the podcast (title)
 - An ad or message from a sponsor (what makes sense for your topic?)
 - Background music at least during the beginning and end sections
 - Academic dialogue
 - Smooth transitions
 - Credible sources referenced within your episode
 - Episode notes that include any important footnotes, glossary, references, etc.
 - Cover art

Long Essay

The purpose of the long-form essay is to have students apply what they learned about literary theory and criticism and how they help readers analyze a text, as well as to provide an opportunity for students to practise formal academic writing. Before beginning the essay, students should develop an outline. The following may be used as a guideline for the outline:

- Thesis statement
- Topic sentences for body paragraphs
- Quotations and other evidence from the novel used as examples
- Explanations of those examples

Expectations around the length of the essay and how to cite references should also be discussed with students.

V • ONTARIO CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Pre-Reading Activities

English: Grades 10–12 Curriculum Expectations

■ **READING AND LITERATURE STUDIES**

1. Reading for Meaning: read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning
2. Understanding Form and Style: recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning
3. Reading With Fluency: use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently

Applies to: On Genre; Key Terms and Definitions

■ **MEDIA LITERACY**

1. Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques: identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning
2. Creating Media Texts: create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques

Applies to: Producing a Podcast, Planning a Film Adaptation

During-Reading Activities

English: Grades 10–12 Curriculum Expectations

■ **READING AND LITERATURE STUDIES**

1. Reading for Meaning: read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning

Applies to: Reading is Thinking: Journaling; Initial Questions for Understanding; Reading Comprehension and Discussion Questions

After-Reading Activities

Gender Studies University/College Preparation Grade 11 Curriculum Expectations

■ **FOUNDATIONS**

1. The Social Construction of Gender: demonstrate an understanding of how attitudes, behaviours, roles, and norms relating to gender are socially constructed, and of the complexity of gender as a concept and as a lived experience
2. Power Relations, Sex, and Gender: analyze sexism and the dynamics of power relations with respect to sex and gender in a variety of contexts

Applies to: Producing a Podcast

English: Grades 10–12 Curriculum Expectations

■ **WRITING**

1. Developing and Organizing Content: generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience
2. Using Knowledge of Form and Style: draft and revise their writing, using a variety of literary, informational, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience

Applies to: Profile-Writing Activity; Social Justice in Speculative Fiction; Long Essay

