

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR THE LANGUAGE OF THORNS

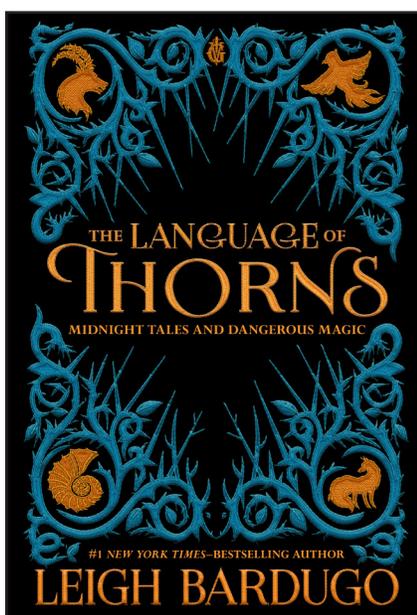
FOR  
USE WITH  
COMMON CORE  
STATE  
STANDARDS



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

LEIGH BARDUGO is a #1 *New York Times*–bestselling author of fantasy novels and the creator of the Grishaverse. With over one million copies sold, her Grishaverse spans the *Shadow and Bone* Trilogy, the *Six of Crows* Duology, and *The Language of Thorns*—with more to come. Her short stories can be found in multiple anthologies, including *Some of the Best* from Tor.com. Her other works include *Wonder Woman: Warbringer* and the forthcoming *Ninth House*. Leigh was born in Jerusalem, grew up in Los Angeles, graduated from Yale University, and has worked in advertising, journalism, and even makeup and special effects. These days, she lives and writes in Hollywood, where she can occasionally be heard singing with her band.

## ABOUT THE BOOK:



Ages 12–18 • HC 978-1-250-12252-0  
e-Book 978-1-250-12253-7

Travel to a world of dark bargains struck by moonlight, of haunted towns and hungry woods, of talking beasts and gingerbread golems, where a young mermaid’s voice can summon deadly storms and where a river might do a lovestruck boy’s bidding but only for a terrible price.

Perfect for new readers and dedicated fans, the tales in *The Language of Thorns* will transport you to lands both familiar and strange—to a fully realized world of dangerous magic that millions have visited through the novels of the Grishaverse.

This collection of six stories, including three brand-new tales, is lavishly illustrated throughout with each culminating in a stunning full spread as rich in detail as the stories themselves.

This guide is aligned with Common Core Standards for grade 8 but can be applied to grades 7–12. To attain specific Common Core grade level standards for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes’ needs. You know your students best!

Imprint

 **macmillan**  
children's publishing group

**GRISHAVERSE**  
grishaverse.com  
mackidseducators.com

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. As a class, describe and discuss fairy tales that you know well. Make a list that indicates how many students know each tale. Which fairy tales are best known in the class? Talk about where you got to know fairy tales—from books? Storytelling? Movies?
2. Take the tale best known to the class and compare different versions that students know. Is the main character always the same? The setting? The plot? What are the differences? Talk about why fairy tales have variations whereas novels don't.
3. Discuss common fairy tale motifs such as traditional structures, characters, settings, and objects. Examples include wishes; groupings of three; magical objects; talking animals; witches; royalty; and the youngest of three siblings. Brainstorm examples from familiar fairy tales and talk about why motifs are useful in the oral tradition.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the recurring theme of greed, identifying the role it plays in the stories. How does greed propel action? What does it prompt the characters to do? What role do you see greed play in the world around you?
2. Loneliness is another theme in these stories. Which characters are lonely, and why? How does it affect their choices? Do they succeed in overcoming their loneliness? If so, how?
3. Find examples in the stories of the power of words and of storytelling. When are words transformative? How do they relate to magic? What other kinds of magic appear in the stories? How is storytelling shown to be powerful?
4. Talk about the settings in the tales. How do they relate to settings in fairy tales you know? When are palaces central to a story and why? Talk about the importance of the woods and what happens when characters go into them. Discuss ways in which fairy tale settings are symbolic.
5. Which females in these stories are underestimated? What do the others around them expect? How do the girls or women prove to be different than expected? Which of them are stronger or smarter or more powerful than they were given credit for?
6. Why is the central female in fairy tales so often beautiful? Which characters are beautiful in these stories? What's the relationship, if any, between being beautiful and being good or evil in the stories?
7. In some of the stories, a character appears early on to be a villain but turns out to be good and trustworthy. The villain, who initially seems good, emerges late in the story as evil. Describe how the author creates this effect and talk about its impact on the reader. How do the villains hide their evil? Why does a good person appear to be bad?
8. Look closely at "Ayama and the Thorn Wood." What elements in the story resemble traditional fairy tales or a particular tale? How is the story untraditional? Answer these same questions for each of the stories that Ayama tells the beast.
9. In "The Witch of Duva," it says of Nadya, "No path could lead her back to the home she had known." (p. 98) In what ways is this true for her? How is it true for characters in the other stories? How are their lives transformed by journeys that they take?
10. Ulla, in the last story, longs for "the chance to be someone else for a time." (pp. 208–9) Why does she want this and what kind of person would she like to be? How does that desire shape her actions? What other characters in the collection want the chance to be someone else, and how do they pursue it?
11. In the "Author's Note," Leigh Bardugo talks about a sense of unease and about listening to a "note of warning" in fairy tales. (p. 278) What does she mean? How does she incorporate notes of warning into the stories in this collection? Discuss moments in reading her stories when you had a sense of unease, and why.
12. Discuss the book's title and why the author might have chosen it. Discuss the titles of each story and your reaction to them before you read each story. How does each title relate to the story? What does it emphasize about the story?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. In “Ayama and the Thorn Wood,” Ayama tells the beast familiar stories but changes the ending of each. Have students each choose a familiar fairy tale and rewrite it with a new and unexpected ending that makes sense but also surprises readers. Share the stories and discuss them in small groups. A good online source about fairy tales is [www.surlalunefairytales.com](http://www.surlalunefairytales.com).

CCSS.RL.8.5 Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

CCSS.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

2. Have pairs or small groups of students choose a scene from one of the stories that has at least two characters and some dialogue. They should edit the scene so that it can be performed with the actors either reading from the scripts or memorizing them. Costumes and props are optional. Have groups perform for each other.

CCSS.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

3. Certain stories in the collection have echoes of fairy tales or books. For example, the author alludes to “The Little Mermaid” and mentions *The Velveteen Rabbit*. “The Soldier Prince” shares elements with E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King” and the ballet *The Nutcracker*. Have students read the other works and write an essay that compares and contrasts them to the related Bardugo story. A full list of the author’s influences are listed below.

- ◆ *Beauty & the Beast*
- ◆ *One Thousand and One Nights*
- ◆ *Theseus & the Minotaur*
- ◆ *Hansel & Gretel*
- ◆ *Little Red Riding Hood*
- ◆ *Rumpelstiltskin*
- ◆ *The Nutcracker*
- ◆ *The Automata*
- ◆ *The Velveteen Rabbit*
- ◆ *The Little Mermaid*

CCSS.RL.8.9 Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.

CCSS.W.8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

4. As “When Water Sang Fire” illustrates, music figures in many fairy tales and magical stories. Have each student create a playlist of songs that tie in to the book’s stories. The tie-in could be a theme, such as loneliness, or a related fairy tale, such as “Beauty and the Beast.” The student should briefly annotate the playlist with the connections. Ideally each student will bring in one song to play and explain the connection.

CCSS.RL.8.7 Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

CCSS.W.8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

5. Have each student take any two stories in the collection and compare them using a chart. The chart should include basic story elements such as characters, setting, and plot. It should also include fairy tale motifs such as the number three; magical objects; talking animals; witches; and others discussed in the pre-reading activity. Once the charts are completed, have students share and compare them.

CCSS.RL.8.9 Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.

CCSS.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Kathleen Odean was a school librarian for seventeen years and now gives workshops for educators on new young adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Selection Committee and served on earlier Newbery and Caldecott committees.