

## Teaching Guide for *The Prophecy Keepers*

### Note to Teachers

The fast-paced plot, mysterious situations and characters, and vivid, highly imaginative descriptions of the world and its races make *The Prophecy Keepers* an excellent choice for reading aloud. Themes of good vs. evil, the struggle for power on various levels, trust and betrayal, family, friendship, and belief raise questions and opportunities for meaningful dialogue. Its rich literary background (influences such as Spenser, Dante, Homer, William Blake, W.B. Yeats, among others have been incorporated into Bryant's own broadly symbolic mythology) is an excellent starting point from which to explore those classic works further.

This guide offers thematic-based questions for discussion and includes suggestions for activities that connect the language arts, social studies, science, music, and art curriculum.

### About the Book

*The Prophecy Keepers* (the eponymous first in a series of five books) by Melaine Bryant begins the adventures of heroine Lisandra Ackart, who at age fourteen unhappily discovers that she is the Gifted One of ancient legend. When a series of strange events leaves her hundreds of miles from home, Lisandra is thrust unwillingly into the heart of an epic struggle that has spanned millennia, a conflict between the races of the Dark and the races of the Light. Now that struggle is nearing its end, and Lisandra must find the twenty-three Keepers of the ancient Prophecy, each of whom holds a single piece of the key to saving her world from the rising Darkness. But first she must find a way to stop the Dark Queen, Lucifæra—who the Light Ones believe is behind the sudden disappearance of thousands of fairies—and her mysterious hexagonal charm.

### Pre-Reading Activity

*The Prophecy Keepers* is traditional high epic fantasy. That is, it is set in a invented world; it involves fantastical or supernatural events and characters and an ancient prophecy; and it includes such themes as coming-of-age and good vs. evil. Most importantly, perhaps, it is centered around a hero on a quest to find a way to save her world.

Research, answer, and/or discuss the following questions: What makes a hero? Are there certain characteristics that all heroes have in common? Look at different heroes throughout the ages: Achilles and Odysseus, Beowulf, Bilbo Baggins or Frodo, Harry Potter, etc. What qualities do each of these heroes have that will help him succeed? Is a hero always successful?

### Connecting to the Curriculum

#### Art

Arethus has a journal in which he writes and draws pictures of the various creatures and races of Earde. Chose a race or creature from the book (ie, an onwher onsyn, panotti, goblin, any type of fairy, etc.) and create a journal page about it. Draw its picture and then describe what it looks like, where it lives, its magical abilities, etc. If this information isn't included in the text, make it up.

### **Language Arts**

Melaine Bryant employs a great deal of imagery, simile, and metaphor in her writing. Find examples in the text. Use these elements of descriptive language in a descriptive paragraph or story.

It is quite common for writers of fantasy to create their own vocabularies. Vocabulary, including the names of characters, is often symbolic of the underlying themes and messages of the story. Use Bryant's Dictionary and Pronunciation and Origins lists and think about Lucifæra Archimago, Arethus, Æscere, etc. What do their names tell us about who they are? Do their names fit their characters?

### **Science**

Earde is not technologically advanced, as our world is. There are no cars, electricity, computers, etc. The empyreals, however, seem to be more advanced than the humans. What evidence of "technology" can you find in the book?

### **Social Studies & Geography**

Describe the terrain of Niwengeard. Does it change as Lisandra continues on her journey? Is it similar to the terrain in which you live? What parts of our world does it remind you of. Can you pinpoint them on a map? Can you find pictures that reflect what you think the various locations look like?

Lisandra and Arethus are traveling by themselves throughout Middengeard. Lisandra is fourteen and Arethus is thirteen. What would happen to children on their own like that in our world? Lisandra's mother is searching for her, but when she goes to the King's Men (the law enforcement) in her area, they can't help her. She then goes to the head of the King's Men in Dryhtendale. The first knight she talks to dismisses her, but eventually Sir William agrees to help. Would the police dismiss a mother in this world who says her child is missing? Research what happens in our world when a child goes missing. What type of methods do we use to find a child? What types of law enforcement or other organizations get involved?

**Economics**—What type of government does Niwengeard have? What do you know about the feudal system? Is it similar to that? How is it the same, how is it different? Compare and contrast the two systems.

**Music**—There are only a few references to music in the story of *The Prophecy Keepers*. Music is especially important for movies. Teachers, play music of books that have been made into movies and discuss how the music enhances the story line, or distracts from it? Have students find music they think would fit a movie based on the Prophecy Keepers

### ***Discussion and Thematic Connections***

#### **Characters**

- *The Prophecy Keepers* follows a number of different characters and their individual storylines. We see the action from the perspectives of both the Light Ones and the Dark

Ones. In some ways, this allows us more knowledge of the Dark Ones than the Light Ones have, and vice versa. Do you think this help us get to know the characters and the world better, or is it confusing?

- Can you empathize with one or more of the characters? Are their voices genuine, believable? The story is set on a different world, during a different time, but can you identify with the characters and their situations? For example, does Lisandra talk and act like fourteen-year-old girls talk and act? What about Arethus and Loki and the others? Do you know anyone like any of the characters? Do their voices “fit” the time and place in which the story is set?
- Are the characters’ actions believable? How does Lisandra react when she sees goblins—supposedly imaginary creatures—and finds herself in Ærestgeard—a supposedly imaginative place? How does she act and feel when she learns she is the Gifted One and is forced to set off on her journey? Would you act in similar ways in similar situations? If not, how would you react differently? Do Lisandra’s experiences cause her to grow? If so, how? What about the other characters: Arethus, Æscere, Archimago, Lucifæra. Are their actions consistent with their characters? Is there such a thing as consistency in a character or real person? Does everyone generally act as you expect them to, or are there times that people surprise you?

### Style

- The Prophecy Keepers is written in the third person. What are the pros and cons of this voice. How does it allow the reader to get acquainted with the characters? Can we understand what they are thinking or feeling even though we’re not in their heads?
- Fantasy for Young Adults is a very popular genre. Is it something you read a lot or not at all? What are the main attributes of this type of genre (set in a different world, made-up words, names, languages, a hero, quest, and ancient prophecy). Does this book “break the mold” in anyway?
- Would you like to live on Earde? Why or why not? Melaine Bryant says the world is similar to the middle ages of our world. What do you know about the middle ages? How is Earde like the middle ages of our world? How is it different? Is it an appropriate setting for the story? Why or why not? Is it intricately related to the story, or is it just a backdrop.
- Descriptive language: did the author’s descriptions of people and places help you “see” everything take place?

### Content and Themes

- There are a number of themes within the book: the struggle for power, trust and betrayal, friendship, family, belief? What do you believe is the central theme that ties (or will tie) the story together. How do the other themes interlink? Do they blend naturally with the story, or is the author simply using the characters and themes to prove a point? If so, is this distracting, and what point do you think Bryant is trying to make?
- **The struggle for power** runs deep throughout the series. What different levels does it exist on? Can you give a few examples (ie, how do we see it playing out on a cosmic or supernatural level; on a political level; on a societal level; on a family level, and on a personal level).

- **Good vs. Evil** is a common theme, and it ties in here with the struggle for power. How would you define “good” and how would you define “evil”? Is it always clear who/what is good and who/what is evil. Are there degrees of good and evil, or is it always black and white? Are the “evil” characters purely evil? Are the “good” characters purely good?
- **Courage:** who do you think is the most courageous character. Must a hero have unwavering courage? What creates courage in a character, and what causes her/him to lose it. How do fear and trust influence the amount of courage a character displays. Describe some of the instances in which the central characters in *The Prophecy Keepers* show courage.
- **Trust and betrayal:** Look up the different meanings of trust and betrayal. How are they intrinsically linked? Is it always apparent in the book whom Lisandra can trust? Who Arethus and Æscere can trust? How do various characters destroy the trust others have in them. Think about the following characters and how the theme of trust applies to each of them and to Lisandra: Loki, the Redcrosse Knight, Cærwyn, Archimago, Lucifæra, Arethus, Argante, and Æscere. Some examples: when Lisandra first meets Arethus, she trusts him enough to follow him to the Redcrosse Knight? Why does she trust him? Does she have a choice? In Chapter Three, Arethus no longer trusts Lisandra. Why? Does Lisandra deserve his lack of trust? What can she do to win it back?
- **Friendship:** describe the relationships between Lisandra and Eladri; Lisandra and Arethus; Æscere and Arethus; and Cærwyn and Lisandra. What do these relationships say about each of the characters. Do the relationships change over the course of the book, and if so, how? What do the characters in each of the relationships like or dislike about each other? What do they admire in each other?
- **Separation and Loss:** Arethus, Æscere, and Lisandra all experience separation and loss: Arethus with the Redcrosse Knight, Lisandra with her family and best friend, and Æscere with her sisters. How do each of them deal with it? How do their reactions differ, and how are they the same?
- **The Importance of Family:** how important is family in the book? Are there different types of families, and if so, what are they? What is the quality that makes a group of people a family—is it always blood ties, or does something else tie a family together?
- **Belief:** among the humans of Niwengeard there are the “believers.” What are some of the things they believe in. How is the belief system set up? Is it similar to any religion or other belief system on our world? How willing are the characters to stand behind their beliefs. For example, Eladri is a believer. What does her refusing to believe that the time of the Darkness and the Gifted One have come say about her beliefs?

### Follow-up

- The Prophecy Keepers came out at the end of 2008. Do you think it will date well or badly? For example, does it deal with themes, values, character relationships and personalities that are timeless? Will people still be able to identify with it in 10 years, 50, 100?
- Did you enjoy *The Prophecy Keepers*? Is it possible to find a book interesting without “enjoying” it? If you didn’t enjoy it what sort of person do you think would? Do you think you might have enjoyed it more or less if you’d read it when you were younger or perhaps waited to read it when you were older? Did you have expectations of the book? If so did it live up to them? Had you read reviews before reading it? If so, do you find

yourself agreeing with the ‘official’ reviewers or not? Do you think the book jacket synopsis and jacket illustration do a good job of indicating the type of book it is? Would you give it as a gift? If so, who would you give it to? Can you see yourself reading it again? Is this book a “keeper” - if you had to halve the size of your book collection would this be one of the books that stayed or went.

- How did the book affect you? Do you feel ‘changed’ in anyway? Did it expand your range of experience or challenge your assumptions. Did you learn something new? Did reading it help you to understand a person better—a friend, relative, or even yourself?
- The Prophecy Keepers is the first of the series of five. What do expect to happen in the subsequent books? How might the characters change and develop?