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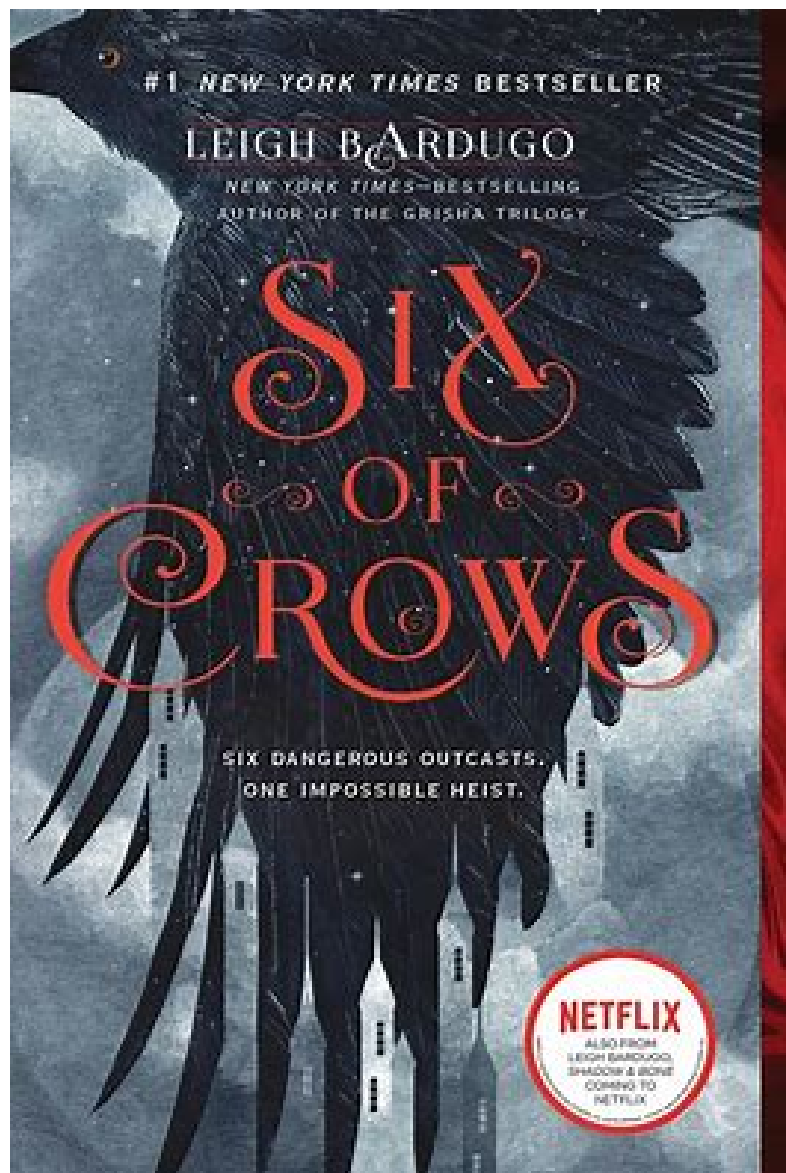
ENGL 112B Sec 01

Dr. Mary Warner

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## *Six of Crows*

By Leigh Bardugo



## About the Author:

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Bardugo was born in Jerusalem and then moved to Los Angeles where she was raised by her grandparents. To this day, she still lives in Los Angeles and is an associate fellow of Pauli Murray College at Yale University. She is best known for her YA novels that are apart of what she calls the Grishaverse including:

- Her first trilogy: *Shadow and Bone*
- Spin off duology: *Six of Crows*
- Spin off duology: *King of Scars*

This Grishaverse has gotten a Netflix show called “Shadow and Bone,” but the show features characters from all three book series. She also is in the middle of another book series called *Ninth House* which is her first adult fantasy trilogy.

### **Summary**

*Six of Crows* is set in a fictional fantasy universe where magic is real and it’s in jeopardy. Those who were given the gift of magic are called the Grisha. A scientist named BoYul-Bayur made a drug called *jurda parem* that can amplify a Grisha’s power to an unprecedented degree, the only eventual cost being their life, after the addiction to the drug becomes so severe a Grisha dies without it. Kaz Brekker, also known as Dirtyhands, is the king of the Barrel, and he is given the job to break BoYul-Bayur out of the Ice Court stronghold (that has never been breached) and bring him back to the merchants of Ketterdam. What they want with Bayur doesn’t matter to Kaz as long as he gets his 30 million krugre reward. To pull off the impossible heist, he assembles an unlikely team: a Grisha Heartrender, an adrenaline obsessed sharpshooter, a runaway with a privileged past, a spy known as the Wraith, and a soldier with a thirst for revenge. Kaz and his crew are the only ones who stand between the destruction of magic and possibly the world-if they don’t kill each other first.

### **Quote #1**

Kaz had been courted by any number of gangs who liked his way with his fist and his cards. He’d always said no. He’d come to the Barrel to find Hertzoon and punish him, not to join some makeshift family...He’d start as a grunt, but the Dregs would become his army” (316)

A large theme in *Six of Crows* is revenge and redemption and the lengths someone will go to in order to fulfill these wishes. Kaz was betrayed as a young child and he lost his older brother because of it. At just 17 years old, he became one of the most feared figures in the Barrel and

leader of the Dregs in order to seek his revenge. This thirst for revenge becomes Kaz's identity. On one hand, with revenge as his driving force, it allows him to survive a life on the streets of Ketterdam as a young child and become the dangerous leader he is. On the other, the revenge he seeks comes at the cost of emotional connection with people he cares about. He views this emotional intimacy as a weakness, and something to be exploited by his enemies. He conceals and bottles his trauma within himself causing a tremendous emotional burden to fester within him. His inability to confide in others becomes a crutch on the mission, as memories of his past are struck up by people they encounter along the way. Kaz must walk with a cane because of an injury from childhood, and this is a symbol for the emotional weight that he must carry. Kaz also never reveals his skin to others besides that of his face, which is another metaphor for the wall he keeps up emotionally. It is also ironic that Kaz directly states he doesn't want to join some "makeshift family," but in creating the Crows, that's exactly what he did.

### **Quote #2**

"And yet, they hesitated. The knowledge that they might never see each other again,... 'If we don't survive this night, I will die unafraid, Kaz, can you say the same?' (334).

Connection is such a strong theme in this book. All members of the crew grew up in such a way that found them fending for themselves. They all suffer from their own personal traumas- kidnapping, witnessing death, disownment, betrayal, etc. These events robbed them of their sense of self and left them powerless. If anything binds them together, it's that they all have loved and lost. Each of them found ways to cope with their pasts, doing away with a healthy choice often in exchange for something more destructive, but they moved forward nonetheless. The Crows, despite claiming themselves to be heartless, selfish people, seem to show a lot of

feeling and care, especially towards each other. The mission brought them together for a common goal of 30 million krugs, but the connection they gain with each other is priceless. The banter within the crew is intoxicating and it's fun to watch them interact as they try to keep each other at arm's length, but without much success. Throughout the book, the crew realizes that they all have more in common with each other than they originally thought.

### **Quote #3**

“Inej turned to go. Kaz seized her hand, keeping it on the railing. He didn't look at her...Inej left Kaz with the wind howling and dawn still a long while away” (434).

The mission allowed a lot of walls to break down within the Crows. The reader sees major developments between Nina and Matthias, Wylan and Jesper, and Kaz and Inej. This quote highlights a key moment for Kaz and Inej. The simple fact that Kaz can even express that he wants Inej to remain in his life is important, considering before the mission he didn't value anything besides his hunt for revenge and even refers to Inej as an “investment.” His declaration even takes Inej by surprise and despite her wishes to accept his love, she knows that she deserves more than a relationship an arm's length away. In order for Kaz to earn Inej's love, he must learn how to view his past not as a weakness, but as a strength. On the same note, letting in the people he loves most and becoming more vulnerable to those he trusts can open up an emotional side of himself that may make the difference in his life. But, this is only if he can get over his obsession with his search for revenge.

### **Classroom Use**

If I were to use this book in my classroom, I would have students do the reading on their own instead of in class so that they have a chance to personally connect with the characters.

Considering this is a fantasy book, I would have the purpose of reading this book to be about

imagination and immersing oneself into a book. After reading the book I would ask the students to write about who they felt they would relate to the most. As part of a writing assignment, I would have the students write a letter to whoever they wanted from the story, whether that was someone they related to, someone they wished acted differently, someone they really admire, etc. because I think it is really easy to become attached in some way to at least one of the characters. I would also provide an assignment where students would map out the various key symbols and motifs of the novel. For example, like I mentioned earlier, Kaz's gloves and their representation of his inability to open up to others and his wishes to keep himself a mystery. Another example would be tattoos. The tattoos represent the characters and their desire to belong, as each member of each respective gang has some kind of tattooed mark. Something fun we could do as a part of the unit would be to have the students create a crew of their own to break into the Ice Court consisting of 6 people in the class and assign people based on the characters in the story.

### **Why Give This Book to Teens?**

This book represents that family isn't always found in blood, but the people we meet along the way. *Six of Crows* is a beautiful story detailing elements of found family, bravery, love, and sacrifice, which are all valuable lessons to be taught to teens. The Crows are all teenagers themselves, so teen readers are able to relate to the characters on a deep level. They are young humans who demonstrate realistic flaws. The story is fast-paced and action packed with witty banter and character development to really care about. The imagery in this book immerses the reader, whether that's in the slums of Ketterdam, or within the unforgiving ice walls of the Ice Court. The book allows the reader to surrender to their imagination, and picture themselves right there amongst the crew. I think teens reading fantasy novels is important because while the characters within the books are often highly skilled in some outlandish way, whether that be with

magic or in combat for example, they always show very human qualities that teens can relate to. It takes a being that otherwise would probably be set on a pedestal, and makes them human and flawed.

### **How it fits best in chapters 4-8 in *Adolescents and the Search for Meaning***

#### *Chapter 4: Books About Real Life Experiences*

- Falling victim to our prejudices and letting what we've always been taught blind us to the truth (Matthias and Nina)
- Falling in love with someone you know that you shouldn't
- Making friends in strange places

#### *Chapter 5: Books About Facing Death and Loss*

- Kaz loses his brother Jordie after being betrayed by a family he thought he could trust. His driving force in life is to seek revenge and avenge his brother.
- Inej was kidnapped and taken away from her loving family and home country, forcing her to start a life in debt to others
- Nina was a Grisha Soldier in the Second Continental Army and has witnessed countless deaths of her Grishan friends and fellow soldiers. She has also been a witness to the persecution of the Grisha by the Fjerdans and anyone else who view them as a threat
- Matthias was aboard a ship with his Fjerdan soldier crew that went down and he was the only survivor
- Wylan was disowned by his father and outcasted as a mistake

#### *Chapter 6: Books about Discrimination, Identity, and Struggles with Decisions*

- The Fjerdans persecute the Grisha because they worship their god, Djel, and have a deep reverence for nature, and a deep hatred for the "unnatural." Thus, their hatred for the

Grisha as Fjerdans view them as monstrous for corrupting what they view is natural and sacred. Matthias is a Fjerdan soldier who has fallen in love with Nina, who is a Grisha Heartrender, and therefore he must decide which love is stronger: the love for his country or for the woman who saved his life.

- All six of the Crows have a difficult time finding their place in the world
- Kaz must decide if his mission for revenge is more important than connecting with and getting closer to those he loves. He wants to keep his guard up to remain tough against his enemies, but in doing so he keeps Inej and the others out

*Chapter 7: Books about Courage and Survival*

- All members of the crew demonstrate courage and survival skills

*Chapter 8: Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable*

- Ravka is based off of 19th century Russia
- The book is set in a fictional world with fantastical elements like magic and spells
- The characters of the book worship their respective deities, whether those are the Saints for Inej, or Djel for Matthias and so on

**Quantitative**

Dale-Chall: 5-6 Grade

Flesh-Kincaid: 6 Grade

Lexile: Ages 10-11

I would recommend this book to either middle school or high schoolers and above as there are a lot of dark topics and violence.

**Qualitative**

*Structure:*



- Told in third person POV
- Each chapter is from the perspective of a new character
- Occasionally, within a character's chapter, the author will jump to their backstory-but it is easy to follow along
- The events occurring in the book all have to do with the heist, with the exception of the backstories I mentioned

#### *Language Conventions and Clarity*

- Word choice is fairly simple and the dialogue is easy to follow
- The author creates words relevant to the fantasy world, like their word for currency: krug
- Symbolism, allegory, similes, metaphors, parallelism, imagery are all examples of the main literary devices used in this book

#### *Knowledge Demands*

- This book is a duology following the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy, so there are many elements that a reader may not be caught up on if they haven't read that book. People claim that you don't have to read *Shadow and Bone* before you read this book, but I recommend it for Grisha background, as well as background information regarding the motives of certain characters

#### *Levels of Meaning*

- The surface level meaning: a group of teenagers try to complete a heist without getting killed while also trying to keep themselves at arms length from one another-both are tasks that prove to not be as easy as they wish

- The dynamics between allegiance and love: Matthias has a hard time navigating his love for his country and his love for Nina, who his country has orders to kill on sight; Kaz's driving force in life is to get his revenge and become the most powerful person in the Barrel, but he can't deny the love he has for Inej
- The characters also represent how easily one can be consumed by the thirst for revenge as it takes them and their loved ones down with it