

Chloe Davis  
Book Talk  
10/4/20201

## ***Cinderella is Dead***



### **About the Author**

<https://www.kalynnbayron.com/>



Photo Credit: author website

*Cinderella is Dead* is Kalynn Bayron's debut novel. Her second novel, *This Poison Heart*, was released on June 29th, 2021. She has two upcoming book releases, *This Wicked Fate*, the sequel to *This Poison Heart*, and *The Vanquishers*. Both of these books are scheduled for release in 2022.

She is described on her website as "a classically trained vocalist" who enjoys "listening to Ella Fitzgerald on loop, attending the theater, watching scary movies, and spending time with her kids."

### **Summary**

Cinderella found her prince at the ball two centuries ago. Now it's Sophia's turn to attend the mandated ball and be chosen by a suitor, but she has a secret--she doesn't want a prince, she wants a princess. After an aggressive suitor claims her and the king kills her friend, Sophia

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flees the kingdom and meets Constance, the last living relative of Cinderella. Together they decide to put an end to the ball for good, and in the process discover secrets never meant to be unearthed.

What would you do if you learned that everything you thought you knew was a lie?

### Quotes

“‘I don’t just want equal footing in Lille. I want much more than that.’...‘I think we need to burn the whole thing to the ground and start over. The entire system, the ideals that have been woven into this society. It all has to go.’”(161-162)

In this quote, Constance, the deuteragonist of *Cinderella is Dead*, discusses how the misogyny and queerphobia present in Lille (the kingdom within which the story is set) are systemic issues which do not have simple solutions. The idea that these issues are systemic is a concept that is repeatedly brought up throughout the novel, and serves to make the oppression depicted more realistic, as well as to deepen readers’ understanding of the systemic root of real world oppressions.

This quote also addresses how people can be pushed to extreme measures, as is best encapsulated when Constance says, “‘[t]he palace underestimates the resourcefulness of women forced into a dark and dangerous place’ “ (162).

“‘I don’t like her one bit,’ Amina says.

‘I like her very much,’ I say. ...‘It will be me,’ I say. ‘I will find myself.’”(235-236)

The main themes expressed through this quote are authenticity and self-determination. This is first seen in Sophia’s admittance to Amina that she is romantically interested in Constance; Amina is one of the first characters outside of Sophia’s family and close friend group that Sophia opens up to about being romantically attracted to women.

After opening up to Amina, Sophia thinks to herself, “[t]oo many people have lied to me, spouting the same rehearsed lines over and over” (236) which shows the lack of authenticity in Sophia’s life. Sophia appreciates Amina and Constance’s “rough, unapologetic” (236) language, providing Sophia with her first authentic interactions with others.

Finally, the conversation shifts to Sophia’s desire to “be found” (236). When asked by Amina who Sophia thinks will find her, Sophia answers, “‘[i]t will be me.../ I will find myself’ “ (236). This very clearly demonstrates Sophia’s desire for self-determination, which she successfully achieves by the end of the novel.

“‘We did everything exactly as we were supposed to.’...Why was that an acceptable price to pay for being chosen? She’s worth more and deserves better.”(305-308)

This quote deals with issues of cultural indoctrination and internalization. Mr. and Mrs. Preston cannot accept that the stories they have been taught from childhood are false and that they are not at fault for the king killing their daughter. Mrs. Preston goes so far as to say, “‘I wish I knew what we did wrong’ “ (306).

There is also a discussion about how no one questions the way things are, with Mrs. Preston saying, “‘[e]veryone wants to be chosen, but they don’t think about what that really means’...‘I sometimes think they don’t even understand that they are doing anything wrong’ “ (307-308). While talking about Erin (Sophia’s friend) and the abusive relationship she is trapped

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in, Sophia thinks, “[h]ow being married to a man like Edourad, who beats her, could make them [Erin’s parents] proud is beyond me” (308). These quotes demonstrate how the people in Lille have so accepted the societal values passed down to them that they don’t even think to question the objectively terrible things that happen to themselves and those around them.

## **Teaching**

### **Why teens should read it**

*Cinderella is Dead* is an engaging and action packed story that uses simple language to convey important ideas. The themes of acceptance and self-determination are important for all teenagers to learn, and the story’s handling of queerness is important for queer and cishet students alike. *Cinderella is Dead* provides valuable representation for queer students, and provides an insightful look into the oppression queer people face that helps broaden cishet students’ understanding of the queer community.

*Cinderella is Dead* meets all the Honor List qualities as well as all the Exeter Study qualities, making this a high quality book for young adult readers.

For students who might otherwise not be interested in the retelling of the Cinderella fairy tale, it could be pointed out that necromancy is performed on Cinderella’s corpse, which would likely prove to be entertaining.

### **Presenting in the class**

Some ideas for presenting in class include tying in on a unit on questioning and reevaluating history; tying in on a unit about the importance of representation of marginalized, or otherwise underrepresented, groups; tying in on a unit about the dichotomy of progress versus tradition; and tying in on a unit about oppression, either specifically on queerphobic and misogynistic oppression or more broadly on oppression in general and the various forms it takes. It could also be used as supplemental material for a unit on fantasy in the literary canon.

### **Adolescents in the Search for Meaning**

*Cinderella is Dead* could fit into Chapter 6 “Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions,” Chapter 7 “Courage and Survival,” and Chapter 8 “Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable.”

*Cinderella is Dead* ties into Chapter 6 through Sophia’s queer identity and the discrimination she faces on the basis of her gender and her sexuality. The society Sophia finds herself in is deeply misogynistic and heterosexist--there are strict rules dictating the behaviors and freedoms of all women and the existence of ways of living outside the cisheteropatriarchy is consistently denied and opposed.

*Cinderella is Dead* ties into Chapter 7 because Sophia repeatedly finds herself in need of courage and bravery and her biggest struggle throughout the novel is her attempts to carve out a space where she can survive and thrive.

*Cinderella is Dead* ties into Chapter 8 because the setting is a fantastical, medieval-esque, world where magic exists. Additionally, the plot, while too explicit to be an allegory, serves as a hyperbolic representation of the misogyny, heterosexism, homo/queerphobia, and heteropatriarchy of the real world.

### **Age Level**

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*Cinderella is Dead* is best for students in grades 9 and 10. (Further discussed in Text Complexity)

### Text Complexity

#### Quantitative

Lexile: ages 12-17; HL710L

AR: ATOS book level-4.9; interest level-grades 9-12; AR points-13

Readability: 5th grade-ages 8-9

Flesch-Kincaid-5th grade

Coleman-Liau-6th grade

SMOG-5th grade

Linsear Write Formula-6th grade

Flesch Reading Ease-84.1 (easy to read)

#### Qualitative

1. Structure
  - a. First person POV for the entire book--all from Sophia's POV
  - b. Linear chronology
    - i. Discussions of the past occur but no flashbacks happen; the closest thing to a flashback is Sophia finding and reading Cinderella's diary
    - ii. One flashforward occurs, but is due to divination and was achieved via linearly presented events
2. Language Convention and Clarity
  - a. Vocabulary not overly complex
  - b. Written in first person and has the conversational tone of something actually written by a teenager
  - c. Metaphor, foreshadowing, and descriptive language are the dominant forms of literary techniques utilized
3. Knowledge Demands
  - a. Primarily cultural/societal knowledge needed
    - i. Familiarity with the Cinderella fairy tale
    - ii. Awareness of gender and sexuality based oppression
      1. Misogyny, homophobia, queerphobia, heterosexism, cisheteropatriarchy, etc
      2. General awareness that these are systemic issues
    - iii. General understanding of domestic violence; particularly physical domestic violence and how the victim can become trapped in the relationship
    - iv. General awareness of cultural indoctrination and internalization
      1. i.e. why only Sophia resisted the societal expectations; why Liv's parents couldn't accept that Liv's death was an unnecessary tragedy that they were not responsible for; why Erin repeatedly resisted her sexuality and desires
    - v. Awareness of necromancy as a fantastical concept

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4. Levels of Meaning

- a. Two main levels of meaning: the literal meaning of the story, and the hyperbolic meaning of how it reflects real life

Overall, *Cinderella is Dead* is more qualitatively complex than it is quantitatively, which is not uncommon for narrative fiction, as Appendix A points out. Because of this, it is best to evaluate this book based on its qualitative textual complexity as opposed to its quantitative textual complexity. Qualitatively, this book is probably best for students in grades 9 and 10. This decision is largely based on the knowledge demands of *Cinderella is Dead* because they are essential to getting the full story and are the most complex of the various qualitative dimensions of the novel. Grades 9 and 10 are best because students are less likely to have a full understanding of the knowledge demands while in middle school. In addition, the other qualitative dimensions of complexity are too simple for *Cinderella is Dead* to be a meaningfully challenging text for students in grades 11 and 12.