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 English 112 B
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An Inheritance of Ashes by Leah Bobet

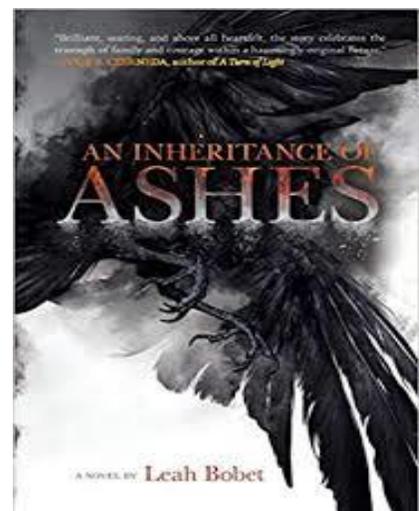


Photo courtesy: Scholastic Canada
 Website: <http://www.leahbobet.com/>

Leah Bobet is a writer, editor and reviewer of fantasy, literary fiction, horror, and spaces in between. Her novels have been recognized by Canadian Children’s Book Center, the Ontario Library Association’s Best Bets List, the Canadian Library Assoc., and the Kirkus Reviews Best of the Year. Her short fiction has been reprinted in multiple Year’s Best anthologies, transformed into choral work by American composer Timothy C. Takach (“The Wings of Our Children”), included in high-level textbooks in Australia and New Zealand, and taught at Toronto’s York University and Kennesaw State University in Georgia. Her novels have won many awards: Aurora Award, the Sunburst Award, and the Copper Cylinder Award. She lives in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, where she makes jam, climbs mulberry-trees, plants gardens in back alleys, and contributes to access-to-democracy initiatives.

Summary

Leah Bobet’s *Inheritance of Ashes* is a stark, beautiful fantasy explored in first-person narrative by the protagonist of the novel, Hallie Hoffman, with settings of a farmland – ‘Roadstead Farm’ in the town of Windstown, taken care by two sisters. The world in which the two sisters, dealing with the trauma of an abusive father and broken family, live is a world after the crash of modern civilization. Bobet braids together the themes of war, family, and nature of home, segmented in the seasons – Autumn, Winter, The



Quiet Place and Spring. Hallie and her sister Marthe own the farm together, which is unusual in their family as only the eldest of all gets the will. Her uncle had advised her to have a good relationship with her sister so that she is never thrown out of the land and since then Hallie constantly fears her right on the land and strives internally in an unsaid war for land. Marthe is pregnant and her husband – Thom, who has been missing since he went South to fight in a supernatural war against ‘gods and monsters’. The war is presumed to be over and won against the wicked God’s hybrid animal-monsters aka ‘twisted things’ that scorch and smoke against anything they touch, until one day a ‘twisted thing’ falls on Hallie’s window. This incident and more happen post the arrival of a veteran soldier carrying the holy knife, that killed the wicked God, discreetly – Heron who *is* John Balsam – one who killed the evil God. The politics of families, cities, and armies come crashing to Marthe and Hallie’s land. Hallie and Tyler discover a hole between the two worlds, she tries to rescue Thom using John Balsam’s unique knife. She not only has to rescue his brother, but also close the door from another world to this world post that.

Significant Quotes

“I couldn’t tell what Marthe wanted: my sister, who’d fought tooth and nail for my right to half of this farm, knowing full well that one of us would have to buy the other out someday. Declining would just rub it in, their minds: *selfish, childish Hallie*. But I couldn’t tell if saying yes would be another treachery.” (72)

Analysis: Hallie is six years younger to her sister and has always been protected by her. This time, now when she is grown up, she wants to do things her way, but she also wants to please her sister – so that she doesn’t end up losing half of the farm to her sister. These lines incline towards the insecurity of losing the farm, her irritation for being scolded every now & then and acceptance of betrayal towards her sister. This quote is important as it is the first time that Hallie confronts the scope of betrayal in sinking relationship with her sister. Here, we see the family dispute coming upfront in front of others – Tyler, Heron and Nat.

“They aren’t,” Tyler said, his eyes squinted against a light that wasn’t there. He poked his shepherd’s crook into the air, waving it like a dowser through that shimmer of heat. It wandered through the patch of sky just in front of us and the knobbed wood smoked and vanished, inch by

inch, into empty air. "What the -" Heron muttered. Tyler pulled the crook back, and it was six feet long again, the last foot a browned, sparking mess. "That's how he saw us last night, Hallie. Now it makes sense." "No, it doesn't" I said, and my voice cracked. "What is that?". world." (190)

This is where the plot takes a twist and things begin to fall in places, mysteries unravel. Hallie, Heron and Tyler discover the hole to the other world – the world of evil god. A day before this, Tyler had seen a man on the beach, and it is him whom he is referring. This man is Thom, Marthe's husband – which they discover later in the novel. This quote is one turning point in the novel, it emphasizes on the unravelling of the mysterious world in front of them and then leading them to rescuing Thom.

"Marthe's not afraid of me," I protested. I couldn't even conceive of it. "She's *Marthe*. There's nothing I can do to her." James looked down his nose at me sadly. "There's plenty our children can do, or be, that makes us afraid we've failed them." "Failed?" As if Marthe could fail *me*. Marthe who'd shielded me from Papa's temper through the long, loney, hard years; who came home from Windstown with his will unproven and swore in the most frightening voice I'd ever heard that no one would tear this family apart. tell me *lies*." (238)

It is only after this conversation that Marthe comes into the big picture and is told the truth about her husband. This conversation between James and Hallie signifies importance of truth in family, acceptance of each other as it is and not doing everything out of pride. "Spite or pride?" is one question that Hallie and Tyler often ask each other, later does Hallie realize that all her actions in past towards her sister were not out of spite, but pride as has her father done. All her life, she had been trying to forget the abuses of her father and never be like him, only to end up pulling away from relations in all situations just like her father. This realization of importance and acceptance of her sister above all around her is brought upon her by James. She finds her sister of utmost superiority in comparison to her - "I'd spent years trying to repay her, run myself dry trying to live up to her." There are subtle hints of love and sisterhood in Hallie's dialogues with presence of guilt all over. James' conversation is full of hatred for Marthe's father and uncles, but he calls Marthe his "best friend", it seems like Marthe has grown up around James more and has cultured his

opinion more than that of Matthias, unlike Marthe. Bobet creates an atmosphere of tension and guilt by using expressive language and relating entire plot to the two sisters.

Using in classroom

I might use this book in classroom in following ways:

- Administering an outside reading project where students write a summary, character profile, song/poem related to the theme of the novel and rating the novel.
- Building up or backdrop for any sci-fi novel with two or more worlds, like Harry Potter series

Presenting the book - I will show students a poster of 'stranger Things' and ask if they have seen the series on Netflix. Stranger Things has a similar plotline and most of the teenagers have seen it. I will then ask them to work in groups and list the magical items as seen in the series. Also, we can have a discussion on the families of the protagonists in Stranger Things and then relate it to family of Marthe. This book is most appropriate for young readers of age 13 and above.

Why should young adults read it?

1. **Importance of family:** The novel portrays traditional views on courting and family bonding, people of various races and backgrounds sharing a culture with remnants of previous generations along with exploring the aftermath of battles in world and in families. Many teens today are not able to open up to their elders, brothers/sisters and have a constant fear of rejection by the elders of the family. They face an unsaid competition with their elder brother/sister in terms of academic achievements and success in career. Teens can relate to Hallie's insecurity and fear of never being able to live up to her sister's expectations.
 2. **Fast paced Sci Fi Fiction:** It is a fast-paced novel interspersed with scientific fictional animals, gods and evils – which definitely generate a lot of excitement & curiosity among young readers. *Inheritance of Ashes* celebrates the comfort, joy and belongingness of
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family post a strained separation and intense survival. The novel is filled with surreal wicked magic sprinkled with lessons on tolerance, bravery and friendship.

3. **Strong female protagonist:** All the female characters (Marthe, Halfrida and Nat) in the novel have been shown strong, powerful and leader-like. Halfrida, the female protagonist, is a 16-year-old young child with only her elder sister to look after her. Her thirst of knowledge and will power to “never-give-up” brings her into a lot of trouble, but all the mysteries are solved, and problems settled by her.
 4. **Love and courting:** Teens might be struggling with why they love someone has died or gone missing from their lives, lost sight of someone important in their lives. Hal is seen struggling with the loss of her brother – Thom and is not able to cope up with the notion that he might be dead and not just missing. She also faces loss of her Uncle Mattias, whom she was really connected to and struggles for the next six years to impress her sister. Hal is confused about the idea of love and courtship, like almost every teen is, she caresses every single touch and little kisses by Tyler. This aspect of the novel makes it more interesting for young readers, as they tend to be curious about dating rules and guides.
 5. **Adventure:** There are elements of fantastic magical world parallel to ours, adventure rushes past the middle of the novel, suspense ignites – boosting the creative juices in child’s mind. *An Inheritance of Ashes* is written in personal narrative with strong but straight-forward plot in the beginning chapters. The timeline is straight with rarely deviated sequences, introduction of characters is over-emphasized. It is after ‘Spring’ that the novel comes up with twists, an unimaginable love story and stories from the magical world. Bobet emphasizes on strained issues within a family by using poetic metaphors and similes. Emotions are highlighted by using a well-connected language which makes it easier to relate and empathize. The novel comes into following categories of *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource*:
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1. Chapter 4 – Books About Real-Life Experiences: making life choices, facing violence or abuse, and living through family and relationship issues
2. Chapter 5 – Books About Facing Death and Loss
3. Chapter 6 – Books About Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions
4. Chapter 7 – Books About Courage and Survival

Text Complexity

Quantitative complexity of the novel

Lexile - 610 L – 800 L

Dale-Chale - Final score – 6.1

Grade level – 7-8

Bobet's language in the novel is not too complex for any young reader to understand and hence the Lexile score, however her use of metaphors, imagery, syntax, and diction style can not be understood by a 3/4/5 grader. Grade level 7,8 students can explore the uniqueness of the language used by her, and also relate to diverted emotions of guilt, shame, tolerance, aftermath of war and love. *A Problematic Paradox* by Eliot Sappingfield, *5 World Series* by Mark Siegel and Alexis Siegel, *The Infinite Lives of Maisie Day* by Christopher Edge are some of the sci-fi novels with similar story line, female protagonist, black hole/emptiness and saving the world. *An Inheritance of Ashes* is different as it has story of war built in with the magical scientific elements along with family issues.

Qualitative complexity of the novel

The language of the book is full of vivid imagery, metaphors and alliterations which add up to its complexity. However, vocabulary used is not that complex, hence does not demand any high vocabulary knowledge. There is no such demand of any scientific knowledge or background in order to understand the concept of parallel world and alien-like figures as Bobet herself explains each concept in detail. The sentences are neither too long or too short and makes an easy read. This novel complies to a few Exeter qualities – the plot is imaginative, well-structured but with simple chronology and no time shifts. The plot includes secrecy, surprise and tension with fast-paced narrative and has a strong female protagonist. The language is lively and imaginative, but

not varied and simplistic. We see different perspectives on the issues of a family and aftermath of a war. The theme of 'home', 'unfailing friendship' and 'love' emerge throughout the novel allowing possibility of emotional and intellectual growth as they engage with personal issues of teens.

Introduction music - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jmv5pTyz--I>
