

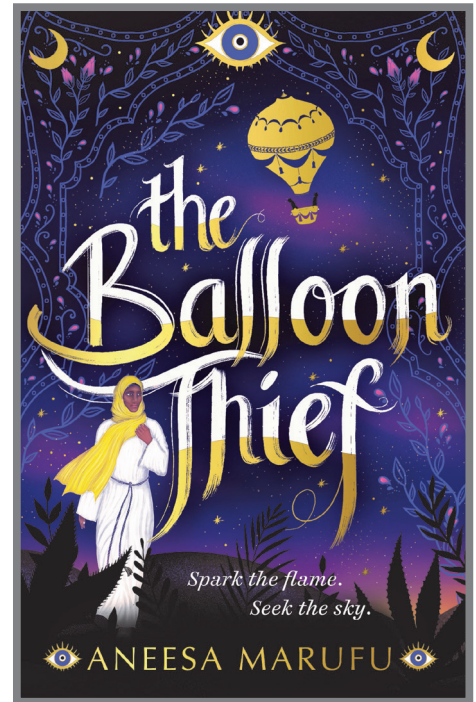
The Balloon Thief

AUTHOR
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Secondary



SYNOPSIS

For Khadija, the only escape from her father's arranged betrothal is the sky.

When she spots a rogue hot air balloon fighting against its ropes, she leaps at the chance for adventure. Khadija soon finds an unlikely ally in a poor glassmaker's apprentice, Jacob.

But Jacob is a hari, and Khadija a Ghadaean. The hari are oppressed and restless - their infamous terrorist group, the Hareef, have a new fearsome leader. And the ruling Ghadaeans are brutal in their repression.

Soon, a deadly revolution threatens their friendship and their world. The Hareef use forbidden magic, summoning jinn—wicked spirits made of fire—to enact their revenge, forcing Jacob and Khadija to choose what kind of a world they want to save...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aneesa Marufu lives in Manchester and was the winner of the Kimberley Chambers Kickstart Prize for underrepresented writers in 2019. Her debut novel, *The Balloon Thief*, is inspired by her South Asian heritage and her obsession with hot air balloons, though she is yet to fly in one! When she isn't dreaming up stories set in the clouds, she has both feet on the ground, running after her two children or hunting for her next fantasy book to escape into.

THEMES

- Radicalisation and extremism
- Belief and faith
- Mythology and religion
- The power of stories
- Flight and escape
- Friendship and enmity
- Gendered and racial oppression
- Revolution and societal change
- Magic and power

STUDY NOTES

- Hot air balloons are a hugely important symbol in *The Balloon Thief* and were clearly an inspiration to the author.

Separate into small groups and head to the library or the internet to do some research. Each group should be allocated a different research topic on hot air balloons and after which they should present their findings to the rest of the class. Research the following:

- When were hot air balloons invented and who were the inventors?
- How do hot air balloons work?
- Are there any famous hot air balloon flights?
- Draw a hot air balloon of your own on a large blank sheet of paper. You can be inspired by your research – or by the balloons in *The Balloon Thief*. Decorate your balloon generously. Around the side of the balloon, or perhaps incorporated into the decoration on the balloon itself, write key words to represent what balloons symbolise (eg. freedom or escape) as well as some of the facts you have discovered during your research. Create a class display with all your balloons.
- ‘Jinn were shape-shifting spirits residing in Al-Ghaib, a realm hidden to the mortal eye and ruled by various jinn kings and jinniya queens.’ (p 8) Jinn are a big fantasy element in *The Balloon Thief* as well as in the pre-Islamic mythology which inspired the novel. In the imaginative world of *The Balloon Thief*, jinn are hunted and captured by Exorcists.
- As a class, imagine you are a team of Exorcists, tasked with capturing and safely disposing of a jinn which is terrorising your neighborhood.
 - Create a mind-map with ‘Jinn’ at its centre, gathering together all of the information you know about Jinn from your reading of the novel in one colour of pen. The information can be grouped under different categories, such as ‘habits’, ‘appearance’, or ‘capture’. You may like to go through the book marking the relevant pages.
 - Now, using a different colour of pen, expand your research—what can you find out about the ancient lore of jinn or genies online? What prominent stories deal with jinn? What can you learn about the habits of jinn and how to control, capture and safely dispose of them?

Using all the information you have gathered on your mind map, formulate a plan of action for dealing with your pesky neighbourhood jinn!

- The characters in *The Balloon Thief* travel to lots of interesting locations in its richly imagined fantasy world. As a class, list and discuss the important locations of the novel—what are their distinctive features? Where are they in relation to each other? You may like to mark the passages of the novel which explore the world’s geography.
- Separate into groups and draw a map of the world of the novel, it’s up to your group how you achieve this and what techniques and materials you’d like to use. You might assign each member of the group a different section of the world to draw—you may even ‘zoom in’ on particular locations. Or, you could all work together on the whole world. Present your map to the class, tracing the journey the characters in *The Balloon Thief* take during the course of the novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In her author’s note, Aneesa says she wanted to explore the ‘push and pull factors of radicalization’ in the course of *The Balloon Thief*. What does ‘radicalisation’ mean to you? How did the author explore this theme throughout the novel? What are the push and pull factors of radicalisation for Jacob?
- *The Balloon Thief* tackles the theme of racism, however it does so by reversing the patterns we normally observe in our world; in this world, it is the fairer-skinned people who are oppressed. Why do you think the author chose to explore racism in this way? What does inverting racism for the purposes of the story achieve?
- Khadija is a member of the ruling ghadæan class—but she, like Jacob, doesn’t have the freedom to choose her own destiny under the laws of the state because she is female. Are Jacob and Khadija more similar than they are different?
- What does *The Balloon Thief* teach us about societal change and revolution? Is it a cautionary tale—or a call to action?
- Stories and myths are a huge theme throughout the novel—they inspire Khadija to think beyond the borders of her life. Do you think stories have the power to change the world? What stories inspire you?