

Once Upon A Fever

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary



SYNOPSIS

Since the world fell sick with fantastical illnesses, sisters Payton and Ani have grown up in the hospital of King Jude's.

Payton wants to be a methic like her father, working on a cure for her mother's sleeping fever. Ani, however, thinks the remedy for all illness might be found in the green wilderness beyond the hospital walls.

When Ani stumbles upon an imprisoned boy who turns everything he touches to gold, her world is turned upside-down. The girls find themselves outside the hospital for the first time, a dark mystery unravelling . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angharad Walker grew up on military bases in the UK, Germany and Cyprus. She studied English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Warwick and the University of California Irvine. Her first novel for older children, *The Ash House*, was published to critical acclaim in 2021.

THEMES

- Sickness and healing
- Sisterhood and family
- Ambition
- Emotion and control
- Alternative worlds
- Grief
- Loyalty and sacrifice
- Secrets and magic
- Institutions

WRITING STYLE

The novel is written in third person, past tense—a classic storytelling style that evokes both traditional fiction and fairytales, reflecting the title. The two Darke sisters are the dual narrators and their stories are told in alternating chapters that gradually narratively separate and then re-join at the end. The language is vivid, emotive, absorbing and sophisticated.

STUDY NOTES

- Although they are sisters, Ani and Payton are very different. In fact, in some ways they have entirely contrasting characters, as evidenced in this extract from the opening of the novel. Choose two highlighters—one for each Ani and Payton. Read through the first chapter, in which the sisters discover a hidden laboratory, highlighting Ani’s actions and dialogue in one colour, Payton’s in another. What differences do you observe? What language does the author deploy for Ani and for Payton? Discuss your findings as a class.
 - On a separate piece of paper write the following question: What does this character want more than anything else? Then, try to answer it for both Ani and Payton. Your answer may be either very specific or general.
 - Using what you’ve learnt on contrasting characters. Create some contrasting characters of your own. You may base your new characters on people you know in real life, characters from fiction, historical figures or simply characters you have invented. Once you’ve created your character sheets, write a scene which displays the traits of your two new characters.
- The world and setting of *Once Upon a Fever* is certainly unique. As a class, create a mind map describing the *Once Upon a Fever* universe, grouping the terminology into sections—for instance ‘illnesses and medicine’, ‘the guilds, ‘history’ and ‘places in Lundain’.
- In *Once Upon a Fever*, illnesses are caused by extreme emotions. What emotional illnesses exist in the novel and how do they work? As a class, create a list of the illnesses you can find in the novel along with their treatments, if mentioned.
 - Invent your own emotional illnesses and treatments. How could different emotions manifest as illnesses? And what would you expect the cure to be, based on the examples in *Once Upon a Fever*?
 - Write a poem about experiencing the emotional illness and its cure. You might write in formal verse—eg. rhyming couplets—or free verse. Engage all five senses in your descriptive language and think about the physical and mental sensations you might experience. Does the cure work—or does it go wrong? Read out your poems to the class, or share as a display.
- Which of the two sisters do you relate to more and why?
- What do you think the story has to say about grief, especially with relation to the sisters’ parents?
- What does the character Jenipher represent in the novel? Do you see her as a villain and if so, why?
- Discuss the ethical issues with the gwaidmesur—why might it be problematic?
- Why do you think the author decided to make the sisters so different and what purpose does this serve in the story?
- What do you think of the idea of emotional illnesses and the hospital setting of the novel? Did this intrigue you and if so, why?
- What do you think happens next, after the end of the story?