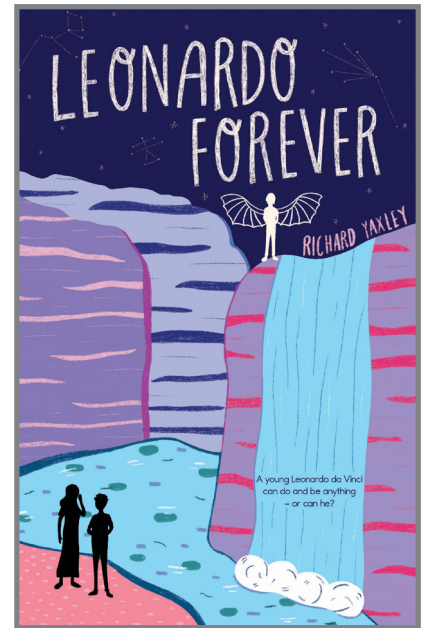


Leonardo Forever

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary

SYNOPSIS

In the summer of 1465, fourteen-year-old Annalisa de Torriano reluctantly travels with her family to her father's new estate near the village of Vinci.

Although she misses her privileged life, and the wealthy Matteo, in magnificent Florence, Annalisa is soon entranced by the freedom the countryside offers and by the brilliant and charming young King of the Forest, Leonardo da Vinci, who, alongside his beloved companion Dante, quickly befriends her. Mesmerised by Leo's intelligence and beauty, an infatuated Annalisa starts to dream of a different life. But her dreams are an illusion, and as her relationship with Leo unfolds, it is Dante who will change all their lives forever.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Yaxley won the 2018 Prime Ministers' Prize for YA Literature and has written novels for adults and young adults, plays, poetry, school musicals and many books for the classroom. His verse novel *Drink the Air* won the 2010 Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction. He lives and teaches in Brisbane, Australia.

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STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What can you see happening in the cover artwork?
 - Where and when do you think this story might be set, and why do you think this?
 - Who does the name Leonardo make you think of?
 - What do you think might happen in this story? What are you basing this hypothesis on?
 - What genre do you think this book might be?
 - Who do you envision would be the protagonist of this story?
- After reading the prologue and first two chapters, as a class, discuss what you have learnt about the characters and the world they live in so far. In pairs, or small groups, write a brief summary of the information that the author has managed to include in these first chapters. It might be helpful to write your summary in the format of answers to the following questions:
 - Who?

- Where?
- When?
- What?
- Why?
- How?

Can you write a sentence that directly addresses each of these questions in relation to the first chapters? Why/why not? How has the author's craftsmanship managed to convey so much information to you in such a short piece of writing? Consider whether they have shown you, or if they have told you, all the information you have learnt from their setting the scene that you need to understand the novel as a whole.

- Anna's father is described as giving her a 'glimmer of a smile, though it was more steel than silk.' (p 64). As a class, discuss this description, and consider what it tells us about Anna's father, and about her reactions to him. What is a glimmer of a smile? What are the associations we make with both steel and silk? How have these different components come together to paint such a clear picture of Anna's father, his facial expression, and his attitude? In small groups analyse how you think this has been done, and create a range of other descriptive phrases that share a person's attitude behind a stated facial expression.
- Why did Vanni ask Luca whether the final mask in Leonardo's first performance was 'Bold or stupid'? (p 35). What might have been causing the unease in the audience that Anna discerned?
- Dante dreams often that he is falling, and fears that he is the only person who ever dreams this. As a class, discuss Dante's dream and what it symbolises in the context of the book as a whole. What literary techniques is the author employing when he has Dante dream of falling?
 - How common are falling dreams? Who in the class has also dreamt of falling?
- Do you consider the fact that Dante has dreams of falling to be the important commentary on his personality, or would you consider his reaction to the dream to be more telling? Individually, expand upon your answer to this question, and write a reasoned response using evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- When Anna is bored, her mother suggests that she either study her Latin, or work on her embroidery. Anna instead reads for a while before sneaking out of the grounds to go for a walk. If you were in Anna's position with these as the only offered options, and very little else available to you, what would you choose to do, and why?
- Living in the countryside, Anna found that the world smelt different than when she was in Florence. Reread the descriptions of the scents of the countryside on pp 30 and 31, and as a class, consider what the description of scent adds to our understanding of a scene or environment in a written passage. What imagery does this scent-picture create for us? How strong are the aromas when you imagine the scene?
 - Individually, write two separate passages describing what it is like to go somewhere you know well. The first passage should be a description of what the place looks like, and the sounds you can hear there. The second passage should be near-identical to the first, but also incorporate descriptions of the scents, aromas and other smells that you associate with that location. In small groups share your work with each other, then as a class, discuss what the addition of descriptions of smells brings to a written piece. Why might an author choose to include or exclude these descriptions? How does having information about all the different types of sensory input affect the reader's comprehension?
- Leonardo talks to Dante about how 'The light-hearted water runs across the serious rocks.' As a class, discuss this language use. Is this merely an example of a flight of fancy by the young Leonardo, or is this a more productive metaphor that adds to our understanding of the nature of the interaction between rocks and water? What are some other pairings of natural phenomena, and how might you describe them so as to give them personalities? Using this speech of Leonardo's as your inspiration, write a descriptive passage detailing the interaction between two distinct objects or natural phenomena. Choose a specific location and consider what can be found there, and the different ways in which the various aspects of that environment interact with each other. Your chosen location can be rural or urban, and your interaction can be fuelled by nature or by animals or people. Assign attributes of personality or attitude to the different aspects, and write your description with these in mind as well as explicitly stating them at some point in your writing.
- As a class, discuss the inherent sexism implicit within the society that Anna and Leonardo live in. Some things you

might like to include in your discussion could be:

- What is considered to be a woman's role in life, and why?
- How does Anna attempt to defy or escape her allotted future?
- What would be the consequences for both Anna and her family of a more active rebellion on her part?
- How does Anna's mother respond to the announcement of Anna's marriage?
- Why is what Anna's mother says to her so different to what she says to her father?
- Consider the attitude of Dante's father when discussing Dante's future role in life. Why does Dante get no say in matters? How does this compare to what Anna and her brothers are facing regarding their futures? Who gets to decide what all the young people should do with their lives, and how and why do they have this power over them?
- Leonardo says 'there is a moment at the point of awakening when every dream seems real and all of the emotions that are attached to it also seem real.' (p 82) As a class, discuss this phenomenon—how often has this happened to you? Why do you think this might be the case? What is the lingering impact upon us when this happens? Have you ever had a dream where a friend or family member has acted badly, and upon waking up you struggle not to be upset with them in reality? Individually, write a short fiction piece where dreams and reality are intertwined and at times indistinguishable from each other.
- Leonardo tells Anna that 'an artist is the lord of all that he sees.' As a class, discuss the meaning of this statement both in the context of the story, but also in relation to daily life. Do you agree with this statement? Why/why not? How does Leonardo demonstrate the truth of this statement to Anna?
 - Individually, take an ordinary or unexceptional landscape or scene, and make it more intensely vivid and interesting. You can choose to paint or draw your chosen scene, or you might like to digitally alter a photo or other artwork. Display the two pieces side by side and caption them with a quote from the novel.
- Go fossil hunting and see if you too can find a fossil like Leonardo did.
- Florence is described as having streets filled with 'Notaries, shopkeepers and usurers'. What professions would you expect to see listed if the book were set in modern times?
- When Dante opens his eyes underwater for the first time, he sees a 'wavering world made of greens and yellows and other colours that he had never known.' (p 199) Taking this description as inspiration, create an artwork showing an underwater view using either oil pastels or paint.
- 'Anna's mother manufactured an appearance of joy with her usual expertise.' (p 218) How does one manufacture an appearance? How often does this happen? Write a description of a wedding from the point of view of an onlooker who has to manufacture an appearance. Be sure to include in your piece a description of the protagonist's actual emotional state, the appearance they have to maintain, why they feel they must do so, and the impact on them of having to act this way.
- How did the ending of the book make you feel? As a class, discuss your feelings surrounding both the conclusion of the book, and the final chapters that lead up to it.
- In pairs or small groups, create a line graph representing the plot throughout the novel, and label it with key events and pivotal interactions. How did the author create the different levels and layers of tension? How were you left feeling at the end of the book and how do you think the varying plot tension impacted your response?
- Read more about the life of Leonardo da Vinci, and share three interesting facts that you have discovered with the class.
- Choose an ordinary object and attempt to see it as Leonardo might have. Paint, draw or sculpt an image of your object, and write a detailed description of what you were attempting to show in your representation.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

RAE CARLYLE