

Blood Flowers

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary
(Drug and Alcohol References, Sexual References, Violence)



SYNOPSIS

Seventeen-year-old Bear lives in the walled town of Calleston—a place of stark divide between the rich and poor. Living down in Cobblestone, Bear is painfully conscious of the inequalities between him and residents of Roofside.

When the town's annual Field Day—an event during which those who've recently come of age test their Sinsenn growing capacities—shows Bear to have unprecedented abilities, he's hurtled into the upper echelons of society, and everything he's ever wanted is within his grasp. But it soon becomes apparent, that it's not all he expected it to be. He finds himself existing amidst an uncaring, callous people, concerned only with themselves, living in a society in which corruption is rife.

Finding himself unwillingly entangled with the Overlord's beautiful but spiteful daughter, Bear is forced to make decisions which may jeopardise everything he's dreamed of—or risk the lives of the people he once lived amongst.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Singer/songwriter Jay McGuinness is best known as a member of the international chart-topping boyband The Wanted. He won the thirteenth series of BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*, and in recent years, has forged a successful career as an actor, with several leading roles in the West End to his name.

Jay is an avid reader and his writing has been influenced by authors such as Philip Pullman, C.S. Lewis and Lauren Beukes. *Blood Flowers* is his first novel.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What can you see happening in the cover artwork of the novel?
 - What are the most intriguing aspects of the cover artwork in your opinion?
 - What do you associate with the different colours and imagery used within the cover artwork?
 - What genre do you predict this novel to be, and why do you think this?
 - What does the title bring to mind for you?
 - What do you think a 'Blood Flower' is likely to be? Why do you think this?
 - Where/when do you think this book might be set? What in the cover art and title leads you to hypothesise this?
- Having read the prologue and first chapter, discuss what you now know about the novel and characters. Some things

to include in your discussion might be:

- Where is this story set?
- What do we now know about the world in which this story is set?
- What genre would you categorise this story as being?
- Who do you think the main character/s of this novel is?
- Why do you think the author has chosen to switch viewpoints at multiple times?
- What do you know about the character of Bear?
- What is the sinsenn?
- What is the blood flower of the title, and why do you think it is called this? In small groups, discuss the different reasons why it could be rightfully called a blood flower. Think of at least three different possible meanings to the phrase, and share them with the class, being sure to explain the rationale behind each of them.
- What role does the existence of ruby brew, sinsenn for smoking, and truthwine play in the governance and management of the kingdom?
 - What do you think the lives of the common folk of Calleston, and in the rest of the kingdom, would be like without constant access to their sinsenn pipes and ruby brew?
- What is enlacing, and why is it considered to be good when it comes to growing sinsenn, and bad when it comes to enlacing with animals and other people?
 - In small groups, discuss the political motivations and pressures behind categorising the different aspects and uses of enlacing this way, and contrast them to the common understandings of the general populace.
- Who is responsible for the current hardship being experienced by Calleston and how do we know this? Re-read the scene where Noka explains matters to Bear while under the influence of truthwine, and consider his words and phrasing very carefully. Were you expecting this to be his explanation? Why/why not?
 - In small groups, discuss all the other scenes where Noka has appeared, and contrast his behaviour and speech during those to what is happening here. Most particularly, pay attention to his previous interactions with the Overlord. What agenda do you think that Noka is most likely to have, and do you trust that his explanation to Bear is entirely accurate in all respects?
- When they need to discover the truth of something, the people of the kingdom will on occasion use truthwine on a person being questioned. What are the benefits of having something such as truthwine available, what are its inadequacies, and what is the clear and demonstrated danger of using it to attempt to obtain an objective truth? Write a brief analysis of the benefits, restrictions and flaws of relying on truthwine when ascertaining the facts of a given matter. Consider who benefits the most from its habitual use in legal proceedings. Include in your assessment at least three pieces of evidence from the text that demonstrate different issues with its use, and expand upon the damage that can be done to both the individual and to society by relying too heavily on it.
- Who do you think is the true villain of this story? Why do you think this?
- Would you like to live in Calleston? Why/why not? Write a brief opinion piece on what it would be like to live there, and where you would most like to live if you were to wake up a citizen of the town one day. State whether you would prefer to be a roofsider or a cobblesider, and justify your choice with evidence from the text as well as your own personal reasoning.
- The fieldworkers and cobblesiders in Calleston have developed 'field talk', a signed language that they can use to communicate over distance and in silence. What are some of the signs that are described in the story, and are there any that would make intuitive sense to you?
 - Can you identify which of the 'field talk' signs used are the same as (or similar to) the Auslan sign for the same word? Why do you think this might be? As a class, research and learn several useful words or phrases in Auslan that you can use with your classmates, friends or any Auslan speakers who you might meet.
- Why do you think Meya opened the gates while under the influence of the drink from the black tower? Discuss what we know of her experiences and current emotional state, and what might have impelled her to take such a devastating and destructive course of action.
- What do you think happens between Percy and Meya after the conclusion of the novel? Why do you think this?
- Which scene, in your opinion, is the most tense and exciting? Write a two or three paragraph explanation of what

specifically makes this scene the most exciting for you, and what literary techniques the author uses to create tension in this particular instance.

- Create a coloured sketch of a scene from the novel. Use pen and ink for the linework, and colour it with watercolours. You can choose to illustrate an interaction between characters, or show a streetscape or landscape based on a description of Calleston and the surrounding lands.
- Once you have read the novel, re-read the prologue, and as a class, discuss what you now understand about the events and characters shown in this snippet at the very start of the novel. Consider in your discussion how the author has built your knowledge-base of people and events over the course of the story as a whole, and how much you might now understand if you re-read the first few chapters again.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE