

# The Harrowing

AUTHOR

**KRISTEN KIESLING**

ILLUSTRATOR

**RYE HICKMAN**

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Secondary  
(Violence)



## SYNOPSIS

Rowan Sterling should be worrying about normal teenage things like attending college and whether her best friend Lucas is maybe more than a friend . . . Instead, she's having terrifying visions of blood and violence. As the premonitions increase in number and intensity, Rowan seeks her father's help, but instead finds herself drugged, kidnapped and sent to a mysterious facility called Rosewood. It isn't long before Rowan discovers Rosewood isn't a boarding school or an asylum: it's a training centre for teens with special abilities who are known as Harrows.

Harrows can view the actions of would-be murderers before they commit crimes, and the scientists at Rosewood believe it is their duty to use the Harrows' powers to make the world a safer place. When they are apprehended by a Harrow, imminent criminals, known as imcrims, are captured and indefinitely detained in a state of sedation. At Rosewood, the Harrows are taught how to identify, track and apprehend imcrims.

Rowan is immediately drawn to Rosewood's mission; after all, she lost her mother to a random act of violence two years prior. However, some of the other Harrows question the treatment of imcrims—how can it be ethical to imprison people who haven't actually done anything yet?

Empowered by the skills she's acquired and ready to change the world, Rowan returns home, but when she reunites with Lucas, she has a vision of him shooting a man in cold blood. Now Rowan is questioning everything she learned at Rosewood—she refuses to believe Lucas is capable of murder—and sets out to protect him from the Harrows.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristen Kiesling grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and attended the University of Oklahoma. Early drafts of *The Harrowing* won the 2019 SCBWI Nevada Mentorship with author Heather Petty and was also a Top 20 Finalist for the Killer Nashville Claymore Award. Kristen's adapted graphic novel script under the same name was nominated for the 2020 SCBWI Cynthia Leitich Smith Award. Kristen also won the prestigious Sue Alexander Award for the national-level SCBWI 2020 Conference for her novel, *If I Tell*. She is an active member of the SCBWI and Houston Writers House and lives in Houston, Texas, with her husband and two boys.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Rye Hickman is a visual storyteller and a graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design's sequential art program. They are co-creator and artist on the graphic novel *Buzzing*. Past work include *TEST*, *Moth & Whisper*, *Bezcamp*, *Jem and*

*the Holograms*, the *Femme Magnifique* anthology, and more. They get really excited about dystopian fiction, good coffee and drawing hands.

### STUDY NOTES

- Consider the epitaph from the author, Kristen Kiesling:  
‘To my readers who were born curious. May you always question your assumptions.’  
What do you think the author means here? Why does she think it is important to question your assumptions?
- As a group, question the following common assumptions:
  - Successful people did X, so doing X will make me successful.
  - All teenagers are rebellious.
  - It will all work out.
  - If I ignore the problem, it will go away.
  - S/he probably deserved their misfortune.
  - Everyone celebrates Christmas.
- Have the students answer the following question individually and then share their responses with the group: If you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
  - As each student shares their response, facilitate a discussion about the potential drawbacks of each superpower.

### Comprehension

- What is a Harrow?
- What is the Harrowing?
- Why did Rowan’s mum teach her how to pick tomatoes with a light touch?
- What are the gloves for? Why do the Harrows wear them?
- How does the Harrow’s psychic ability work?
- What is an imcrim?
- What is the difference between the red and black aura’s that the Harrows experience?
- What is a handler? What is their role?
- What is the Sunshine Institute for?
- What does the serum do? What additional powers does it allow the Harrows?
- Why did Rowan’s mother leave Rosewood?
- Was Rowan’s dad correct to hand her over to Rosewood? Why/why not?
- What did Sam and Rowan discover when they are up at night in Rosewood?
- What vision does Rowan have about Lucas and why is it important?
- What is the Benson case? Why is it important?

### Genre

- Break students into small groups. Allocate each group one of the following genres:
  - Thriller
  - Horror
  - Romance
  - Science fiction.

Ask students to research each genre and answer the following questions:

- What are the expectations of each genre?
- How does *The Harrowing* fulfil these genre expectations?

Each group can then report their findings to the class.

### Narrative Structure

- Break students into small groups. Allocate each group one of the following characters:
  - Rowan
  - Carly
  - Sam
  - Simon

- Jackie
- Lucas
- Rowan's father.

Students are required to create a profile of each character. Using the following prompts (where relevant):

- Name
- Physical description
- Background/childhood
- Significant event in their life
- Job role
- What does this character want?
- Stick Rowan's character profiles on the left-hand side of the board. Ask the students to consider the relationship between Rowan and each character. Each group is to take turns placing their character on the board and creating a mind map of the characters relationships by drawing a line between the characters that relate to one another. Underneath the connecting line, have the students identify:
  - What the relationship between each character is.
  - How the characters wants/needs conflict with one another?
  - How the characters influence each other?

At the conclusion, you should have a mind map of the narrative structure of *The Harrowing*.

- Remove one of the characters (Sam or Jackie). How does the story change?

### Visual Storytelling

- Facilitate a discussion about the use of colour and images to convey *The Harrows* psychic abilities. How has the illustrator depicted the psychic experience?
- Ask students to reflect on the introductory activity where they chose a superpower. Have the students create a series of images that depict the experience of that superpower without the use of words.
  - Have the students share their images with the wider group or in smaller groups. Discuss how successfully the superpower is depicted—what is working within the images?
- Organise the students into teams. Have the students debate the following topics:
  - Simon's actions were/were not justified.
  - Free Will vs Determinism—definition: 'The deterministic view supports that human behaviour is predictable and governed by internal or external factors, making us somewhat akin to sophisticated machines. Free will, however, suggests that humans have the ability to make genuine choices that are not dictated by natural laws or environmental influences.' To familiarise the students with the concepts of free will and determinism, watch the following videos:
    - Determinism vs Free Will: Crash Course Philosophy #24 <<https://youtu.be/vCGtkDzELAI?si=y3h-BAmBM6WsTntM>>
    - Do We Have Free Will or Are We Predetermined? <<https://youtu.be/HYWilWpcCIM?si=z99nOGf6w6ZELapt>>

### Essay Prompts

- Being a Harrow is a gift and a curse. Discuss using examples from the text.
- Free will is an illusion. Discuss using examples from the text.
- Simon says: 'She didn't understand. Our cause is bigger than just one Harrow. I help keep the world safe.' Is he correct? Why/why not?
- Read *Minority Report* by Phillip K. Dick. Write a comparative essay on the similarities and differences between *The Harrowing* and *Minority Report* using the following prompts:
  - What happened in the end of *Minority Report*? How is this different or similar to *The Harrowing*?
  - Does this change how you think about free will vs determination? Why/why not?