

RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 12+ (lower secondary students)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **English:** Language; Literature; Literacy
- **General capabilities:** Critical and creative thinking; Literacy

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Studying the structure and conventions of fairytales, and how fairytales can be retold
- Examining dual narratives

THEMES

- Fairytales and fairy creatures
- Magic
- Power and authority
- War and peace
- The qualities of a hero

PREPARED BY

Sophie Masson and Random House Australia

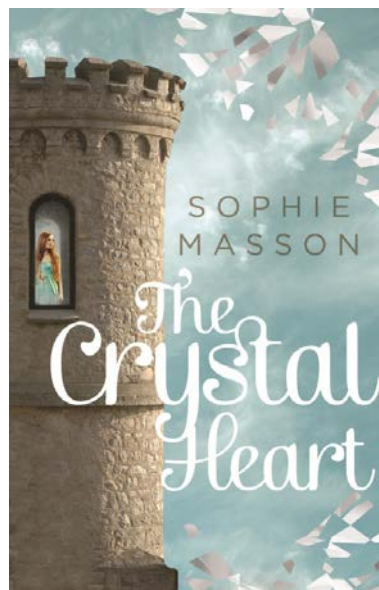
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The Crystal Heart

Sophie Masson

PLOT SUMMARY

A girl in a tower. An underground kingdom. A crystal heart split in two, symbolising true love lost . . .

When Kasper joins the elite guard watching over a dangerous prisoner in a tower, he believes he is protecting his country from a powerful witch.

Instead, the prisoner is a beautiful princess – and a prophecy says she must die on her eighteenth birthday.

Kasper decides to help Izolda escape. But their hiding place won't stay safe forever. When they are found, Izolda returns with her father to his underground kingdom, and Kasper is imprisoned, a traitor to his country.

He is given one chance to redeem himself – he must assassinate the Prince of Night. Will Kasper be able to accomplish his task and save his people – without destroying the girl he finds he still loves?

Meanwhile, Izolda has become resigned to her fate – being a princess in a golden cage, living without love, doing what her father wants. Deep inside her, though, hope still lives.

Can there ever be happily ever after ending, for all of them?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sophie Masson was born in Indonesia of French parents and was brought up in France and Australia. A bilingual French and English speaker, she has a master's degree in French and English literature.

Sophie is the prolific and award-winning author of more than fifty novels for children, young adults and children, many of which have been published internationally. Her most recent novels with Random House Australia are the YA fairytale novels *Moonlight and Ashes* (2012), *Scarlet in the Snow* (2013) and *The Crystal Heart* (2014). She has also written under the pen-names Isabelle Merlin and Jenna Austen.

Sophie is Chair of the Australian Society of Authors, Chair of the New England Writers' Centre, President of the New England and North West sub-branch of the Children's Book Council of Australia, and has served on the Literature Board of the Australia Council and the Book Industry Collaborative Council. She is also currently a writer ambassador for Room to Read Australia.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Sophie Masson says:

The Crystal Heart has two main literary inspirations: first of all, the classic fairy tale *Rapunzel*, where a girl is kept imprisoned in a tower by a witch and is rescued by a brave young man who suffers for his bravery, before there's a happy ending. Then another important inspiration is the beautiful but sad Irish myth, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, in which Deirdre, a young girl kept in a tower by the King of Ulster to whom she's promised in marriage, falls in love with a handsome young warrior called Naoisi, whom she sees one day from her window, and whose 'skin is as white as snow, lips red as blood, hair black as a ravens wing'. He falls in love with her too – and together they escape to Scotland, with the help of his two brothers. It all ends badly after the vengeful King tricks the homesick young men into coming back, and disaster ensues – thus fulfilling the prophecy made before Deirdre's birth. I've always loved the story of Deirdre, with its mix of myth, romance and fairytale elements, reminiscent both of *Rapunzel* and *Snow White*.

I have used elements of both *Rapunzel* and *Deirdre* to create the story, characters and atmosphere of my own novel, but of course have changed and adapted many things, including settings in both place and time. You won't find here the ancient Irish setting of

Deirdre or the medieval setting of *Rapunzel*: the world of *The Crystal Heart* is part of the world of my earlier fairytale novels, *Moonlight and Ashes* and *Scarlet in the Snow* – a kind of alternate-world version of the mid to late nineteenth century, with 'modern' technology such as photographs, trains and telegraphs, but with a good deal of added magic, supernatural events and supernatural beings.

The Crystal Heart is set in the military state of Krainos, a small country which is on a constant war footing due to its enmity with the underground realm of Night. But it's also partly set in Night itself, an amazing realm which is much more advanced than Krainos. Elements of Night owe their inspiration to two things: first, a magical, extraordinary place in the real world, the Wieliczka Salt Mines near Krakow in Poland, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wieliczka_Salt_Mine, which I visited in 2012. As soon as I set foot in this amazing underground world, with its huge caves, shining salt walls, fantastical statues carved out of grey and white rock salt, and its fairytale cathedral entirely carved out of salt, with glittering chandeliers made of salt crystals, I knew I had to use it in a book! By the time I had emerged from our magical journey underground, the characters of Izolda and Kasper were already whispering in my ear . . .

The other inspiration for the underground setting was one of my favourite childhood books, George MacDonald's classic fantasy novel for children, *The Princess and the Goblin*. I disliked the goblins but was fascinated by their underground kingdom! That fascination stayed with me, fuelling a somewhat spooked interest in the bigger kinds of cave networks, such as Jenolan Caves in Australia and Lascaux Caves in France. But it was when I saw the Wieliczka Salt Mines, where miners in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries had created such an imaginative world of fairytale, myth and legend, that my childhood fascination turned into the inspiration for a book. And those nasty goblins from George MacDonald's book morphed into even nastier ones in my world!

The names of characters and places in *The Crystal Heart* are based and adapted from Polish names, as a homage to that inspiration, but Krainos is no more Poland than Ruvenya is Russia, in *Scarlet in the Snow*, or the Faustinian Empire is the Austro-Hungarian Empire in *Moonlight and Ashes*, though those places have been inspirations, and elements of their culture run through my imagined lands.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- As a class, discuss and write down the aspects or versions of *Rapunzel* that you are most familiar with so you can compare these notes with *The Crystal Heart* once you've finished reading the book. Have you read any other stories about a girl imprisoned in a tower, or an imprisoned witch, or an underground kingdom?
- Keen students might like to read Sophie's books *Moonlight & Ashes* and *Scarlet in the Snow* first. The three books share the same world and a couple of characters from these books appear in *The Crystal Heart* (you might notice the cameo appearance of two minor characters, Olga Ironheart and the barge captain Andel) – but the story of *The Crystal Heart* is set in a completely different country, with new characters, so it can be enjoyed without reading the other books first.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Write a newspaper report about the victory of Krainos against Night in the war, and the imprisonment of 'the witch'.
- Write a letter from Kasper to his parents, about being accepted into the Tower Guard.
- Create a drawing that could have come out of Izolda's sketchbook, in the Tower.
- Write a story from Amadey's or Glarya's point of view, describing their journey to the Outlands.
- Write a travel guide to the realm of Night.
- Write a poem that Izolda might have written as a teenager locked in the tower.

EXPLORING THE NOVEL

- The conflict between treachery and loyalty is a theme that often recurs in the novel. Explore ways in which Kasper and Izolda struggle with it.
- Find out more about the Wieliczka Salt Mines, the main inspiration for the setting of Night.
- Look at the two main literary inspirations for *The Crystal Heart*: the fairy tale *Rapunzel* and the myth *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. What elements can you find in common with them and *The Crystal Heart*?
- Discuss three examples of symbolism in the novel – such as the pigeon, the crystal heart and the tower. What does each represent?

FAIRYTALE MOTIFS

There's a reason that fairytales have existed for hundreds of years – they often contain universal themes, moral lessons for the reader and recognisable characters and symbols that can be understood across different cultures. And as Sophie has shown in the notes on her inspiration (above), similar fairytales can be found in different countries and languages, but with variations that reflect that culture's own history and concerns.

Here are a few familiar fairytale elements that you can find in *The Crystal Heart*, and you might have seen elsewhere.

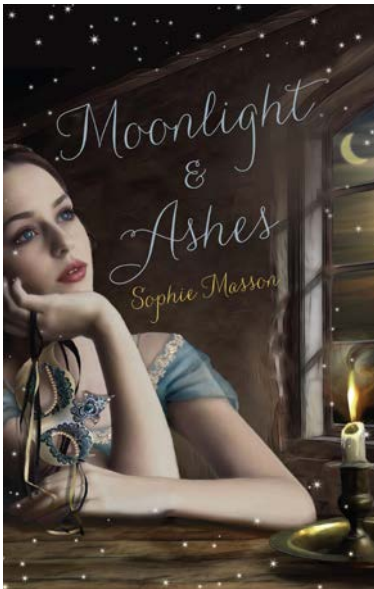
Identify how each element relates to *The Crystal Heart*, and discuss what other stories contain similar elements.

- Love at first sight / true love
- Goblins
- A princess trapped in a tower
- An object imbued with magic
- Happily ever after
- A test of character
- A prophecy
- A helpful animal
- A villain
- A hero
- A friend or companion

CHARACTERS

- What do you think were the key turning points in the story that had a major impact on Kasper?
- Would Kasper have assassinated the Prince of Night if he hadn't found Izolda?
- How did being locked in the tower affect Izolda?
- Why does Izolda choose to go back to Night with her father?
- How does your opinion of the Commander change over the course of the story?
- Sophie's stories usually feature a single protagonist. Why did she choose dual narrators for *The Crystal Heart*? How would the story have been different if it had been told by only Kasper, or only Izolda?

FURTHER READING FROM RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



Moonlight & Ashes
by Sophie Masson

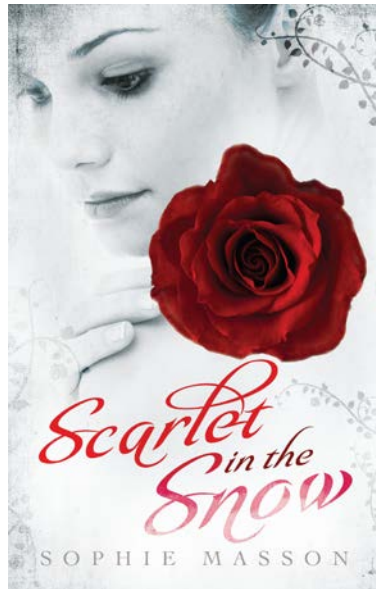
Why this story? The story of *Cinderella* as you've never heard it before . . .

A girl whose fortunes have plummeted from wealthy aristocrat to servant-girl. A magic hazel twig. A prince. A desperate escape from danger.

This is not the story of a girl whose fairy godmother arranges her future for her. This is the story of Selena, who will take charge of her own destiny, and learn that her magic is not to be feared but celebrated.

Pure fairytale – with all the romance, magic and adventure that goes along with it.

Teachers' resources available.



Scarlet in the Snow
by Sophie Masson

Why this story? Inspired by two beautiful Russian fairytales – *The Scarlet Flower* (the Russian version of *Beauty and the Beast*) and *Fenist the Falcon*, *Scarlet in the Snow* is a beguiling mix of magic, romance, adventure and mystery.

When Natasha is forced to take shelter from a blizzard, she sees a mansion looming out of the snow. Inside the fire is lit, the table set. But there is no one there. And on the walls, instead of paintings, are empty frames.

In the garden, she finds one perfect red rose about to bloom, a vivid splash of scarlet against the snow. Dreamily she reaches out a hand . . .

Only to have the master of the house appear – a gigantic creature who looks like a cross between a bear and a man – and demand vengeance on her for taking his rose.

Teachers' resources available.



Fairytales for Wilde Girls
by Allyse Near

Why this story? Shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year – Older Readers

There's a dead girl in a birdcage in the woods. That's not unusual. Isola Wilde sees a lot of things other people don't. But when the girl appears at Isola's window, her every word a threat, Isola needs help.

Her real-life friends – Grape, James and new boy Edgar – make her forget for a while. And her brother-princes – magical creatures seemingly lifted from the pages of the French fairytales Isola idolises – will protect her with all the fierce love they possess.

It may not be enough.

Isola needs to uncover the truth behind the dead girl's demise . . . before the ghost steals Isola's last breath.

Teachers' resources available.

WORKSHEET: Write a fairytale

Author Sophie Masson was inspired by the Wieliczka Salt Mines near Krakow in Poland. She says: 'As soon as I set foot in this amazing underground world, with its huge caves, shining salt walls, fantastical statues carved out of grey and white rock salt, and its fairytale cathedral entirely carved out of salt, with glittering chandeliers made of salt crystals, I knew I had to use it in a book!'

Using Sophie's photos for inspiration, write your own fairytale story set in this extraordinary underground world.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
The Crystal Heart	Sophie Masson	9780857982070	8 – 10	\$18.99		
Moonlight & Ashes	Sophie Masson	9781742753799	7 – 9	\$17.99		
Scarlet in the Snow	Sophie Masson	9781742758152	7 – 9	\$17.99		
Three Wishes	Isabelle Merlin	9781741662368	7 – 9	\$19.99		
Pop Princess	Isabelle Merlin	9781741663365	7 – 9	\$19.99		
Cupid's Arrow	Isabelle Merlin	9781741664379	7 – 9	\$17.99		
Bright Angel	Isabelle Merlin	9781864719635	7 – 9	\$19.99		
Fairytales for Wilde Girls	Allyse Near	9781742758510	10 – 12	\$19.99		
TOTAL						

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