

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR THE BONE GARDEN

FOR USE
WITH COMMON
CORE STATE
STANDARDS

ABOUT THE BOOK

“Remember, my dear, you do not really and truly exist.”

Made of dust and bone and imagination, Irréelle fears she’s not quite real. Only the finest magical thread tethers her to life—and to Miss Vesper. But for all her efforts to please her cruel creator, the thread is unraveling. Irréelle is forgetful as she gathers bone dust. She is slow returning from the dark passages beneath the cemetery. Worst of all, she is unmindful of her crooked bones.

When Irréelle makes one final, unforgivable mistake by destroying a frightful creature just brought to life, Miss Vesper threatens to imagine her away once and for all. Defying her creator for the very first time, Irréelle flees to the underside of the graveyard and embarks on an adventure to unearth the mysterious magic that breathes bones to life, even if it means she will return to dust and be no more.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Heather Kassner loves thunderstorms, hummingbirds, and books. She lives with her husband in Arizona, waiting (and waiting and waiting) for the rain, photographing hummingbirds, and reading and writing strange little stories. You can find her online at heatherkassner.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For all questions, students should cite specific examples and details from the text in their answers.

(RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1)

1. Irréelle's greatest fear is that she's not real. What does she think it means to be real at the start of the story? How does that compare to how she feels at the end of the story?
(RL 3.3, 4.3, 6.3, 6.6)
2. Irréelle thinks herself strange, in part, because she has always been told that she is. Is her perception of herself accurate? Why or why not?
(RL 3.3, 3.5, 4.3, 5.6, 6.3, 6.6, 7.3)
3. Irréelle also fears that she won't be accepted by others due to her differences. What does she learn about herself and about acceptance? How do you keep an open mind about people and accept them for who they are?
(RL 3.3, 3.5, 4.3, 5.6, 6.3, 6.6, 7.3)
4. Despite Irréelle's loneliness and her difficult life with Miss Vesper, she is filled with hope. What inspires hope in Irréelle? Why does she refuse to give up on finding a place to belong? What is something you refused to give up on?
(RL 3.3, 3.5, 4.3, 5.6, 6.3, 6.6, 7.3)
5. Belonging is a theme central to this story. How does Irréelle let go of the idea of earning Miss Vesper's approval and build true friendships with Guy and Lass (and even the Hand)? What do you think the author is trying to say about belonging?
(RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.2, 6.2)
6. In addition to belonging and friendship, what other themes can you identify in the story? Select a theme, and using specific examples, discuss how it developed throughout the book.
(RL 4.2, 5.2, 6.2, 7.2)
7. Irréelle, Guy, and Lass are given a seemingly impossible task. Citing specific examples, what role does teamwork play in helping them uncover the mystery of Miss Vesper's magic?
(RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1)
8. Irréelle longs for Miss Vesper's magic. What traits and talents do Irréelle, Guy, and Lass possess that may not be magical, but are just as special? What other special talents do you have that might seem 'magical' to someone else?
(RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 6.6)
9. Miss Vesper is cruel, which makes it hard for Irréelle to trust others. How do Guy and Lass gain Irréelle's trust? How do you show others you are trustworthy?
(RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 6.6)
10. In the final chapters, Irréelle releases Miss Vesper to a peaceful end. Why do you think Irréelle offers this kindness instead of seeking revenge? Would you have forgiven Miss Vesper? Why or why not?
(RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 6.6)
11. What was your favorite part of the story and why? Which character did you connect with the most and why?
(RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1)
12. Irréelle is made from dust and bone, and most importantly, imagination. Why do you think imagination was needed to bring bones to life? What inspires your creativity and imagination?
(RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.2, 5.3, 6.2, 6.3, 6.6)

WRITING ACTIVITIES

ELA Common Core Literacy Standards W 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4, 7.4 apply to all writing activities.

- N.M.H. loves reading and writing poetry.
 - Using one of the themes from the story (such as friendship, belonging, love, acceptance, bravery, trust, hope, being different), write a poem exploring what your chosen topic means to you.
(W 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3)
 - Visit the library (or your own bookshelf!) and select a book of poetry. Choose a poem, read it aloud to your class, and share your interpretation.
(RF 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3, RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1)
- Guy has a wild imagination and likes telling scary stories to his friends. Write a short and scary story that you'd like to share with a friend.
(W 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3)
- Together, Irréelle, Guy, and Lass solve a mystery that they might not have unraveled alone. Team up with another student/friend and write an essay analyzing the benefits of teamwork and collaboration in *The Bone Garden* and other stories or fairytales. (Online resources for fairy tales: <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/index.html> and <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html>)
(RL 3.1, 4.1, 4.9, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1; W 4.9, 5.6, 6.9)
- Using your own words, write a summary of *The Bone Garden*. At the very end, include a paragraph on what might come next for Irréelle and her friends.
(RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1; W 3.1, 4.1, 4.9, 5.1, 5.9, 6.1, 6.9, 7.1, 7.9)
- Irréelle imagines a different sort of life for herself. One where she might ride a bicycle or swim to the bottom of a lake or paint a picture, none of which she has ever done before. Write an essay about something you'd love to do that you've never done before, explaining why it interests you. Bonus: Draw or paint a picture of yourself completing your chosen activity.
(RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1; W 3.3, 4.3, 4.9, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3)

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- The book contains lovely illustrations that allow you to see the story unfold. Choose a favorite moment from the story that was not illustrated and draw or paint the scene.
- Miss Vesper creates 'little monsters' from dust and bone and imagination. With whatever supplies you have on hand (and most definitely using your imagination!), create a monster of your own.
- Music inspired the author as she wrote *The Bone Garden*. Write a brief essay arguing for the benefits of listening to music while writing, or arguing against it, highlighting the challenges. Or compare and contrast the benefits and challenges of listening to music while writing.
(W 3.4, 4.4, 4.9, 5.4, 5.6, 6.4, 6.9, 7.4)