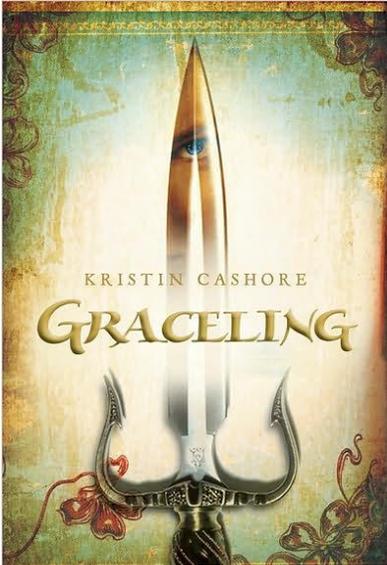


# Graceling Reading Guide



## Questions and Ideas for Consideration

**High Fantasy:** How does *Graceling's* setting in a mythical realm of kings and castles allow for a unique kind of message or social commentary?

**Grace:** In what ways does the text question the concept of a grace versus a curse in the special abilities of its characters?

**Power:** How does the story present the concept of power? Who has power in the text and how do they derive it? What power acts upon characters?

**Gender:** Consider ways that *Graceling* complicates gender roles, presents romantic relations, and comments on sexuality. How does the text approach these issues differently than other examples of YA fiction you've read?

**Choice and Control:** What commentary on the concept of control does the text make? How does choice play an important role in the story, and what does the text say about the limits of choice and control?

**Disability:** How does the story depict Po's disability at the end? Cashore later wrote that she had some regrets about her portrayal of this—why might it be problematic, and how might she have approached it differently?

## Daybook Possibilities

- If you were to write a fantasy story, what kind of world would you create? Describe what unique fantasy elements would occur in this world and how it would be different than the real world.
- Although the film rights have been purchased for *Graceling*, there is no movie adaptation in the works yet. How would you adapt the story? What actors would you use? How would you change it to fit length restrictions?
- Research other high fantasy stories and compare *Graceling* to them. How does Cashore fit a tradition of fantasy, and how does she break from it?
- Check out Kristin Cashore's other works, *Fire* and *Bitterblue*, and/or visit her blog. Connect what you discover to your reading of the text.
- Often, fantasy literature has connections (or can be connected) to issues relevant to the culture during the time it is written. What connections can you make between *Graceling* and contemporary social, political, or world issue?
- Create your own illustrations for *Graceling*.

## Suggested Critical Reading

"Helping Girls to Be Heroic?: Some Recent Arthurian Fiction for Young Adults" by Fiona Tolhurst

"'High Fantasy' in America: A Study of Lloyd Alexander, Ursula LeGuin, and Susan Cooper" by Lois R. Kuznets

"Form as Fantasy—Fantasy as Form" by Caroline Hunt

"Welding Brass Tits on the Armor: An Examination of the Quest Metaphor in Robin McKinley's *The Hero and the Crown*" by Anna E. Altmann

"Images of Evil: Male and Female Monsters in Heroic Fantasy" by Nancy Veglahn

## Background and Context

Published in 2008 by Kristin Cashore, *Graceling* is set in a land of seven kingdoms wherein some individuals are "graced" with special abilities. Controlled by the king, her tyrannical uncle, the story's protagonist, Katsa, believes she is graced with killing, only to find that her grace is far more complicated than it seems. A tale of adventure, romance, and Katsa's struggle to understand herself and claim her power, *Graceling* is Cashore's first book, and has been followed by two stories that take place in the same realm: *Fire* and *Bitterblue*.