

EMC Approaches to Reading



Reading Teachers=Reading Pupils

Acknowledgements

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Notes for Teachers

These teaching notes have been designed to support schools using *Young Hag* as part of the Reading Teachers=Reading Pupils project in 2025-26. The ideas in the sequence of sessions will support teachers in reading aloud and talking about the selected texts with their students, allowing students to respond to and understand the text in greater depth. As this is a graphic novel, the resource includes tips and prompts for reading images.

All the tasks are designed so that they can be completed with a partner or in a small group. However, they can easily be done individually. Instead of talking about the task pupils could make notes about their ideas.

All page numbers refer to the edition of the book first published in the UK by Jonathan Cape in 2024.

Content warning:

Drunkenness; rape; parental death.

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Reading a Graphic Novel

- **Slow down.** Reading a graphic novel is not like reading a prose novel, even one with illustrations. Everything on the page contributes to the story: the pictures, the words, the way the words and pictures work together.
- Look for places where the pictures are telling a part of the story which is not in the words, or, sometimes, even a story that is different from the story told in words
- Read from left to right, top to bottom. (Except manga which is read right to left)

Useful Terminology for Talking about a Graphic Novel

- ▶ Panel: frame containing images and text.
- ▶ Gutter: the gap or border between panels.
- ▶ Words are contained in
 - » Thought bubbles
 - » Speech bubbles
 - » Captions.



Useful Tips for Reading Images

Figures

- ▶ Facial expressions can show emotions clearly, or be drawn without much expression, leaving the reader to decide how the person is feeling.
- ▶ A person's body language gives clues to what they are thinking or feeling.
- ▶ Close-ups of different parts of a person can draw attention to that part, for example a gesture with the hands.

Point of View and Perspective

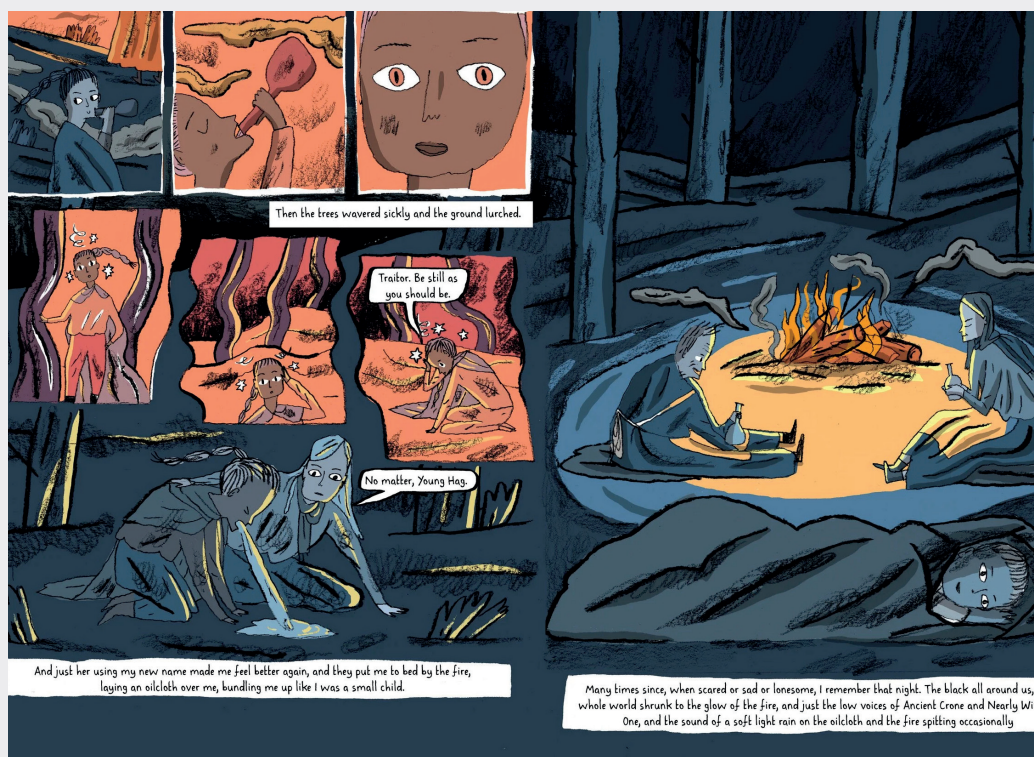
- ▶ When you look at an image, imagine a camera has been used to capture it. How does this affect the way we read the panel? For example:
 - » A 'high camera angle', looking down on someone, might make the person in the panel look vulnerable
 - » A 'low camera angle', looking up, might mean we are looking through the eyes of a child.

What's in the Frame?

- ▶ Sometimes what's in the background, or off to one side of the panel is important. Some panels on a page might be bigger than others. Think about what the author might be suggesting or drawing attention to.

Colour and Use of Shadow

- ▶ Colours and shadows can create a particular mood or atmosphere or connect themes throughout the book.



Before Reading

These tasks are designed to be completed in small discussion groups. However, they can easily be done on your own too. Instead of talking about the tasks, you can write down and keep a record of your ideas.

A first look

- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group, flick through the pages of the book. What do you notice? What different kinds of layout are there?
- Have you read any other graphic novels? If so, what were they and what did you think of them? If not, what are your thoughts about trying one?



Making predictions

- On page 7 you'll find activities on some of the elements from the start of the book. Explore at least two of them.
- Now think what predictions or expectations you have about the book, using these prompts to help you:
 - ▶ What kind of book might this be?
 - ▶ What types of characters or settings do you expect?
 - ▶ What might the book be about - themes, storyline and so on.

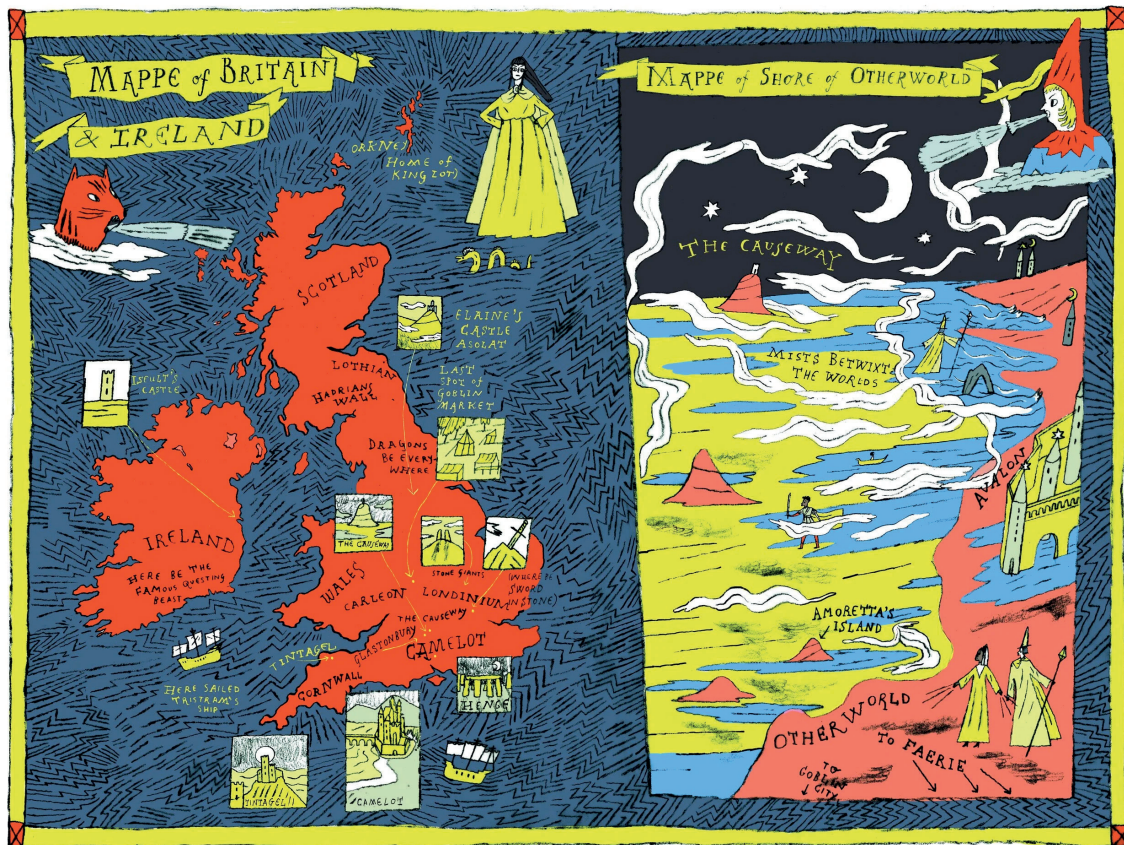
A. Title

Wikipedia says a hag is 'a wizened old woman, or a kind of witch, fairy or goddess who has the appearance of being such a woman. Hags are often found in folklore and children's tales.'

- What do you think about the title *Young Hag*?

B. Maps

- What do you notice about the two maps in the front of the book?



C. In this book you will meet

- What do you notice about the names in the 'cast list'? Do you recognise any of these names, for example Merlin?
- Choose one character frame to look at more carefully: name, clothing, facial expression, body language, anything in the background.

D. Prologue

A prologue is an introduction to the main story. It can provide background information, establish the context and hint at what is to come.

- What do you notice that's interesting about the prologue of *Young Hag*, for example the use of different tones?

During Reading

During reading questions

WARNING: TO AVOID SPOILERS DON'T READ THE QUESTIONS BEFORE READING EACH SECTION!

There are no page numbers in the book, but it is split into 5 sections. The questions are designed to be answered at the end of each section.

- Read each section and answer the questions, either in discussion or making a brief written record of your answer.

Part the First

1. What disappointing information does Young Hag discover shortly after the blood ritual which makes her part of the witches' coven with her mother and grandmother?
2. Why did the Lady of the Lake close the door between the world and Avalon/ Otherworld (the magic world)?
3. What deal does Merlin make with Gorlois?
4. What gets the three witches chased out of the village?
5. What's strange about the storyteller?
6. What do you think of the 'true' story of Igraine? What attitudes to women are represented in the story?
7. What is Morgan's first promise?
8. How does Morgan discover she can do magic?
9. What does the storyteller reveal about Ancient Crone?
10. Why does Young Hag say she doesn't want any more of her grandmother's stories?

Part the Second

1. What kind of relationship do Young Hag and Ancient Crone have at the start of this section?
2. What does Ancient Crone get Young Hag for her birthday? Why do you think she does this? What might it mean?
3. What does Young Hag find in the forest?
4. Why does the boy want to come with them to the Otherworld?

Part the Third

1. What three options does Merlin give Morgan? What does she choose?
2. What is Morgan's second promise?
3. What does Ancient Crone think is happening at the stone circle?
4. How does Young Hag react to what happens in the stone circle?
5. What more do we find out about Morgan's time in Avalon?
6. While Morgan is learning magic, what is her brother, Arthur, learning?
7. How is it made possible for Morgan to keep her two promises?
8. Why does Morgan hate Guinevere?
9. What signs of magic has Pellinore noticed?
10. What does Morgan discover about Lancelot and Guinevere?
11. What plan does Morgan make for Lancelot? Why does she end up regretting it?
12. Do you think Ancient Crone knows what will happen when she jumps into the pool?
13. What's surprising about Sir Britomart?
14. How does Britomart's quest link to Ancient Crone's past?

Part the Fourth

1. What do they find at Goblin Market?
2. What do they discover about the changeling?
3. What magic is Young Hag able to do?
4. How does the goblin get revenge?
5. The storyteller continues Ancient Crone/Morgan's story. What does she discover about Merlin?
6. What does Morgan do to Merlin?
7. What do we discover about what happened to magic?
8. What is the storyteller's advice to Young Hag?

EMC Approaches to Young Hag

Part the Fifth

1. How does Young Hag's magic come in handy when she is questioned at the causeway? What happens when it wears off?
2. How long has the woman been floating in her boat on the lake? Who is she?
3. What has happened to Ancient Crone? Who did the magic that made it happen?
4. How did the path between worlds get closed? What happened to Merlin?
5. How was the curse lifted?
6. How does Young Hag feel about her new responsibilities?
7. Why does Ancient Crone offer to stay in Avalon?
8. What is the last thing we find out about Young Hag?

Epilogue

The story has come full circle. What is similar and different in the ritual at the end of the book and the ritual at the start?

After Reading

Discussion Questions

- Use the questions, below, as prompts either to discuss the book with others or to do a short piece of writing about your response.
 - ▶ What do you like about this graphic novel?
 - ▶ What do you dislike about this graphic novel?
 - ▶ Why do you think Isabel Greenberg chose to present the story as a graphic novel?
 - ▶ What confused or puzzled you?
 - ▶ Which moments stick most in your memory and why?
 - ▶ Which images stick most in your memory and why?
 - ▶ What other stories does it remind you of and why?
 - ▶ Who do you think should read this book? Why?

Exploring the Book Further

Use one or more of these tasks to explore *Young Hag* further.

Stacking stories

You are going to explore the structure of *Young Hag*, which can be a bit confusing, with many stories within stories.

1. Sorting the stories

- Choose one of the characters who has a storyline in the ordinary world and a storyline in the magical world, for example: Ancient Crone/Morgan; Tom; Pellinore; Sir Britomart.
 - ▶ On a blank sheet of paper, draw a large circle with a smaller circle inside it.
 - ▶ In the outer circle: list the main events for that character's storyline in the ordinary world.
 - ▶ In the inner circle: list the main events for that character's storyline in the magical world.

2. What's the impact?

- Look again at the storyline in the inner circle/magical world and think about the impact it has on the reader, using the prompts below to help you if you wish.
 - ▶ How does the magical storyline change how we see a character in the ordinary world?
 - ▶ Does an idea, plot point or theme become clearer because of the magical storyline?
 - ▶ Does the magical storyline clarify, or complicate the ordinary world story?

EMC Approaches to Young Hag

Comparing panels

- Flick through the book noticing some of the different colour combinations that are used. For example: pale yellow, pink and grey; dark purple, yellow and orange.
- Open the book to a random panel and think about the questions below.
 - ▶ What storyline is this?
 - ▶ Is this a story about the distant past or is it happening in the present of the story?
 - ▶ What mood or atmosphere is suggested by the use of colour and shadow in this panel?
- Open the book to another panel with a similar set of colour choices. Ask yourself the same questions as before, but this time thinking about similarities and differences between the panels.
- Either discuss your thoughts with a partner or record them in a few written sentences.

Twisted tales

There are many 'twisted' versions of traditional tales and fairy stories. Ways to do this include:

- » Telling the story from a different perspective
 - » Changing it to modernise it
 - » Changing the genders of characters.
- Can you think of any twisted tales that you have read or watched?

Young Hag re-imagines the myth of *King Arthur*. The story of Arthur mixes a tiny bit of historical fact with a lot of myth and has been reinvented many times over the centuries. Greenberg mainly seems to draw on a 15th-century version called *Le Morte D'Arthur* ('The Death of Arthur').

- Read the summary of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, on page 13, and then answer the following questions:
 - ▶ Which elements of the story does Greenberg include as they were in the original?
 - ▶ Which elements of the story has Greenberg chosen to 'twist' or change.
 - ▶ Which elements of the story has Greenberg left out altogether?
 - ▶ Which new elements has she introduced?
- Think about Greenberg's choices using the prompts below as a starting point:
 - ▶ What impact do you think Greenberg was hoping to have with some of the choices she made?
 - ▶ Why do you think people continue to re-tell the Arthurian myths?

Le Morte D'Arthur, by Sir Thomas Malory

Arthur's origins

Arthur is secretly the son of Uther Pendragon and Igraine but is raised in hiding by another family to keep him safe. When Uther dies, Britain falls into chaos because no-one knows who the next king should be. A sword appears in a stone (put there by the wizard Merlin) which can only be pulled out by the true king. To everyone's surprise, young Arthur draws the sword out easily. He is crowned king. Arthur establishes his court at Camelot.

Camelot

Arthur gathers a group of trusted knights including his friend Lancelot, the bravest and best of them. Arthur marries Guinevere who brings a round table as part of her dowry. It can seat up to 150 people. The knights meet around the Round Table. A round table signals that the knights are considered equals. Guinevere is often present, acting as a moral compass. The knights take oaths of chivalry which bind them to protect king and country, defend the weak, show courage and honour and uphold justice. Camelot becomes a symbol of order, fairness and bravery.

Quests and conflicts

Arthur rules wisely, advised by the wizard Merlin and Guinevere. Nevertheless, he is often at war with other kings. The knights embark on many quests including defeating giants and dragons and trying to find the Holy Grail (the cup Jesus drank from at the Last Supper and in which some of his blood was collected at the crucifixion). Arthur's half-sister, Morgan le Fay can use magic and sometimes uses it to trick Arthur and his knights, but is also sometimes helpful.

Lancelot and Guinevere

Lancelot falls in love with Guinevere and they have a secret affair. Their secret is revealed at a meeting of the Round Table by Sir Mordred. Lancelot and Arthur's friendship collapses. Lancelot sets out in search of adventure. He kills a dragon and sees the Holy Grail. He's tricked into sleeping with Elayne, daughter of Pellas. They have a son together. When she hears of Lancelot's affair, Guinevere banishes Lancelot from Camelot. Lancelot wanders in grief until he is eventually allowed to return.

Arthur's death

While Arthur is away fighting Lancelot, Mordred seizes the throne. Arthur returns to stop him, but the two fatally wound each other in battle. Knowing he is dying, he instructs Sir Belvedere to throw his magical sword, Excalibur, into a lake. When Belvedere does so a mysterious hand rises from the lake and takes the sword. (Excalibur may be the sword from the stone or may have been given to Arthur by the Lady in the Lake – it's a bit confusing!) Arthur is carried away to the magical isle of Avalon, a place of healing, by Morgan le Fay. The story ends with the idea that Arthur will return when Britain needs him most.

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Wordless

- Choose a page or double-page spread with minimal or no text.
- Look at it again more closely, taking your time. What draws your attention first? Next? What else do you notice? How do you respond/feel about this page? What can you infer?
- Write a few sentences explaining your response, for example:

'I think Greenberg chose not to use text here because...'

'Without words, Greenberg conveys emotion through...'

Changelings - responding as Isabel Greenberg

Changelings - a controversial history

The idea of the 'changeling' is common in folklore across Europe. Although the mythology is slightly different in different places, the essential idea is that a human baby has been stolen by a magical being and replaced with something not human.

In some folk tales a fairy replaces a healthy human baby with a sick or dying fairy baby, or an elderly fairy who wants to be looked after and pampered. In other stories a demon takes the baby, in others a troll.

Signs that a child was a changeling could include:

- ▶ The child doesn't talk
- ▶ The child has unusual strength or behaves in an unusual way
- ▶ The child doesn't grow well, or becomes weak or frail
- ▶ The child has unusual physical features.

Since Victorian times, people examining these myths have suggested that they were a way of explaining conditions not understood at the time such as genetic illnesses, Downs syndrome, physical disabilities, or neurodivergence.

'Ellis', reviewing the book on Goodreads, said:

The portrayal of disability is concerning. I am referencing the problematic history of changelings.

- Imagine that you are Isabel Greenberg and you receive the following email from this reader. Decide how you will respond and write your reply.

Dear Isabel Greenberg,

I really enjoyed *Young Hag*, apart from the story of the changelings. I wonder if you are aware that the changeling myth has a really problematic history as it has been used to justify real-life abuse of sick and disabled children. People believed that they could return the 'real' child by doing things like beating the child, holding them over a fire, drowning them or leaving them in the wilderness. For example, Michael Leahy, a four-year-old boy in Ireland who could not speak or stand was drowned by a woman who believed she was 'bathing the fairy out of him'. Nowadays we understand that Michael Leahy was almost certainly disabled.

Given this problematic history, I feel strongly that you should not have included a changeling story in your book. I would be interested to hear your views.

Yours,

E.Reader

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A key moment

- Choose one character.
- Select a double-page spread that captures something important about that character, for example their personality, their main challenge, or a key point in their story arc.
- Write a short monologue in the character's voice, imagining their internal thoughts at that moment.

Hags, crones and witches

The history of hags, crones and witches in folklore is a long and complicated one.

- Look at the statements below which give some information about some of the ways hags, crones and witches have appeared in folklore.
- Discuss/think about how some of these ideas appear in *Young Hag*.
 - A. In pre-Christian times, the 'mother goddess' had three aspects: the maiden, the mother and the crone, each of which symbolised a typical stage in a woman's life. The maiden represents birth, youth and growth. The mother represents fertility and power. The crone represents wisdom, rest and death.
 - B. In early folklore, hags tended to be wise with supernatural powers, usually drawn from nature.
 - C. Baba Yaga, a famous witch from Slavic folklore, is the guardian of Otherworld. She is sometimes tricky and mischievous, but sometimes gives help and wise advice.
 - D. Both hags and crones tend to be described as hideous in appearance. Sometimes a hideous hag later reveals herself to be a beautiful young goddess.
 - E. There is evidence that in pre-Christian Europe older women were highly respected by their communities and worked as healers, leaders, priestesses and midwives.
 - F. With the rise of male-dominated religions and political structures, terms like 'crone', 'hag' and 'witch' were deliberately twisted to become associated with evil magic to suppress female power. Crones, hags and witches started to be presented in folklore as manipulative and not to be trusted.
 - G. Male-dominated systems valued women for their ability to have children. This meant that older women, who could not have children, were less valued.
 - H. More recently, some women have sought to reclaim the idea of the crone as a symbol of the positive aspects of aging such as wisdom and experience.

Is *Young Hag* a feminist text?

Young Hag reverses a lot of the gender roles from the original *King Arthur* myths. Does this make it a feminist text?

- Read the statements below about what makes a text feminist.
- Discuss how far you think each of the statements applies to *Young Hag*.

What makes a text 'feminist'?

- A. Female experiences and voices are central to the story.
- B. Characters and the plot flip society's usual expectations of what women can be or do.
- C. The text shows women having (or taking) control over their own lives and bodies and making their own choices.
- D. The text takes a critical look at the power imbalance between men and women, both within personal relationships and political structures.
- E. The text highlights the ways women are pushed to the edges or oppressed in a patriarchal system.
- F. The text suggests ways things should change for the better to ensure equality for women.

Everything changes

- The themes of transformation, coming of age and becoming wise are important in *Young Hag*. Using your own artwork, found images, photographs, or a mix of these, create a panel on this theme. For example:
 - ▶ A panel which shows an important moment of change for one of the characters in *Young Hag*.
 - ▶ A panel which shows a moment from your life so far which you think was important in helping you to mature into the person you are today.
 - ▶ A panel which shows either you or an imaginary character transforming into something magical (or from something magical into something ordinary).

EMC Approaches to Young Hag

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of the book.

- Read all the reviews and discuss which comes closest to your own view.
- Working individually, write your own paragraph expressing your views about the novel. If possible, share your review with a group.

A. I love an Arthurian re-telling and this one was inventive and original. The art is scratchy and wild, with colouring done in a limited palette that suits the magically shadowed and misted landscapes of the world of the story.

Maia on Goodreads

B. Greenberg's art remains rough and rigid, which doesn't work for the few action scenes in this book, but which is fine for everything else. For the most part, she needs to get facial expressions, and she does a good job with that. She shows us Ancient Crone's weariness with the world, Young Hag's anger and disappointment after her mother dies, or Tom's hope that he can get his sister back.

<https://atomicjunkshop.com>

C. With a charming art style and a vibrant set of quirky characters, Young Hag is a fun and memorable tale. Its weakness is mostly structural: while it means to comment on the importance of stories, this heroine's journey relies so heavily on flashbacks and in-narrative storytelling that it hardly feels like a journey at all.

<https://www.theskinny.co.uk>

D. Loved the art in this one! I saw this on a display in our school library and was immediately drawn to the illustrations. The world of King Arthur and Merlin was one I'm not too familiar with, so it was a fun one to explore. The story wrapped up a bit too quickly, especially considering the pace of the rest wasn't particularly breakneck. Overall though, the art was amazing and I definitely want to read more by this author.

Mitts on Goodreads

Creative Activities

On your own, or with a partner, complete one or more of these creative activities to help you develop your thoughts about *Young Hag* further.

- Do some of your own research into the stories about King Arthur and Morgan le Fay. You could then:
 - ▶ Create a short presentation about the original myths.
 - ▶ Create a Venn diagram or other visual representation to show the similarities and differences between traditional stories about Morgan le Fay and how she is depicted in *Young Hag*.
 - ▶ Write a story of your own, drawing on part of the Arthurian mythology you found interesting.

- Write a short speech to give in assembly about something you feel passionately about related to the book. Some ideas to get you started:
 - ▶ Pressures on young people
 - ▶ Family traditions and values
 - ▶ Sexism
 - ▶ Whether books for young people should address important but difficult topics such as rape, drunkenness and parental death.

- Select a moment or idea from *Young Hag* and imagine it from a different perspective (e.g. a villager, one of the magical characters, the landscape).
 - ▶ Use graphic-novel-style frames, text boxes and speech bubbles to plan 3-6 panels (stick figures are fine!).
 - ▶ Annotate your plan to show how you will use image, layout, or colour to create atmosphere, show emotions or convey the relationships between characters.

- Traditional tales often have out-dated or stereotypical elements. Choose a fairy story or traditional tale that you are familiar with and update it. You could write your story or present it graphic-novel-style. Some suggestions to get you thinking:
 - ▶ Retell the story from an unexpected perspective such as through the eyes of the villain or a minor character.
 - ▶ Reverse the traditional roles. For example, a 'Cinderella' in which the stepsisters are kind, a 'Rapunzel' in which a young man is waiting to be rescued.
 - ▶ Update the moral or message for a modern reader.
 - ▶ Update the setting or genre. For example, move the story to a modern-day city, a sci-fi future, or a historical period.

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The image below illustrates a poem called 'Goblin Market' by Christina Rossetti. The poem seems to have provided inspiration for the Goblin Market in the story.

- Write your own description of a 'goblin market', using the image as a starting point. If you wish you could turn it into a poem or a story.



Further Reading

If you enjoyed *Young Hag*, you might like the following titles.

King Arthur and Her Knights (First in a series)

By K.M. Shea

There are seven books in this series about Britt, who finds herself pulled back in time by magical summons from the young wizard, Merlin.



Legendborn (First in a series)

By Tracy Deonn

'A King Arthur reimagining that adds seats to the roundtable, inviting new readers to find themselves within its lore, Tracy Deonn's *Legendborn* braids southern folk traditions and Black Girl Magic into a searing modern tale of grief, power and self-discovery.'



King Arthur: Excalibur Unsheathed (Graphic novel)

By Jeff Limke (author) and Thomas Yeates (illustrator)

This action-packed graphic novel draws on a range of Arthurian myths.



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The Other Merlin

By Robyn Schneider

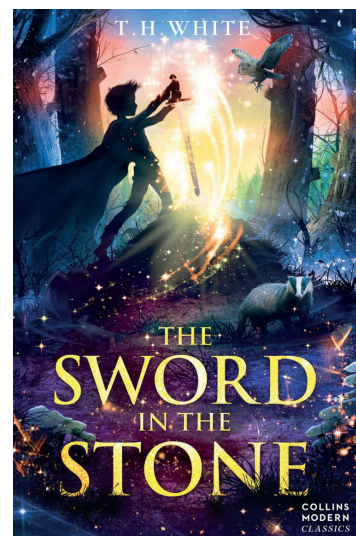
The story of Arthur retold from Merlin's perspective.



Sword in the Stone (Essential Modern Classics)

By T.H. White

The extraordinary story of a boy called Wart. He is ignored by everyone except his tutor, Merlyn, but goes on to become King Arthur.



Gwen and Art Are Not in Love

By Lex Croucher

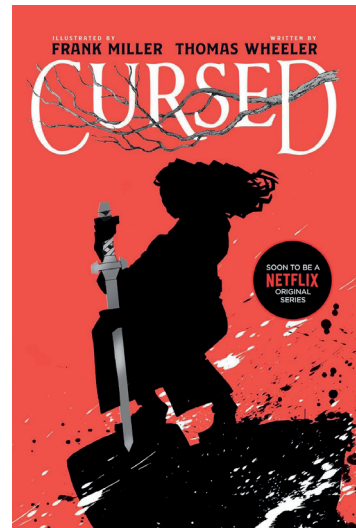
'I loved it.' ALICE OSEMAN, bestselling author of *Heartstopper*.



Cursed

By Frank Miller (illustrator) and Thomas Wheeler (author)

Illustrated novel told through the eyes of Nimue, the Lady of the Lake. Now a Netflix series.



Spear

By Nicola Griffith

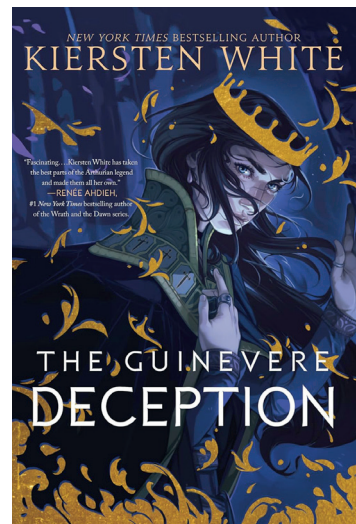
The Arthurian myth updated for the modern era. (LGBTQ+ representation).



The Guinevere Deception

By Kiersten White

The story retold from the perspective of Queen Guinevere (Arthur's wife).

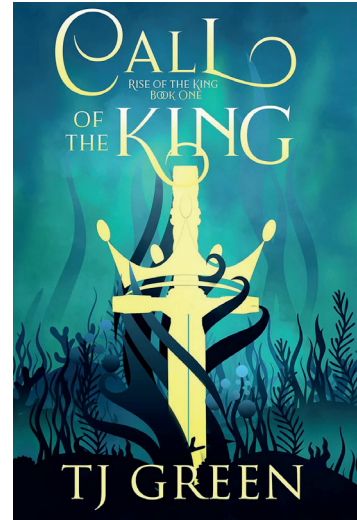


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Call of the King (Rise of the King Book 1)

By T.J. Green

When sixteen-year-old Tom's grandfather mysteriously disappears, Tom stops at nothing to find him, even when that means crossing to a mysterious and unknown world.



The Sword of Ice and Fire

By John Matthews

Young Arthur lives with his guardians in a mysterious castle, inhabited by magical creatures and ruled by the Nine, supernatural women who watch over the world.

