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9 Dec. 2024  
ENGL-112B, Sec 01

## Escaping Escapism: A Deeper Dive into Fantasy's Importance for Teens - An Annotated Bibliography

Fantasy has long been regarded as a form of escapism—a way to retreat from the pressures of everyday life. As a young reader, I found comfort in the fantastical worlds that allowed me to momentarily forget my struggles as a teen. However, as I grew older, I realized that fantasy offers much more than temporary relief—it serves as a vital tool for navigating adolescence, fostering self-discovery, empathy, and growth. In this annotated bibliography, I aim to explore how fantasy literature not only provides an escape, but also encourages teens to confront real-world issues, ultimately helping them to develop into self-aware individuals.

The theme of my project, *Escaping Escapism: A Deeper Look into How Fantasy is Important for Teens*, seeks to demonstrate that fantasy literature can serve as both a refuge and a roadmap for adolescents facing personal and societal challenges. While fantasy worlds offer respite, they also act as mirrors to the real world, allowing teens to engage with the timeless, universal topics of identity, friendship, self-worth, morality, and loss—all of which are crucial for adolescents to grasp as they navigate the complexities of growing up.

This bibliography will examine various works of fantasy that each provide unique perspectives on these themes. From the allegorical symbolism in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, which encourages readers to find meaning in everyday experiences, to the personal transformations in *Howl's Moving Castle*, which highlights the importance of inner strength, the works I have chosen showcase how fantasy empowers teens to make sense of their lives. Each

book reflects a different facet of personal growth, demonstrating that fantasy is not merely an escape, but a tool for deeper understanding.

Through this annotated bibliography, I aim to highlight fantasy literature as an essential educational resource. By focusing on works that blend the fantastical with real-world issues, I want to show future educators how fantasy can captivate students' imaginations while encouraging critical thinking and emotional exploration. These works align with many of the Exeter Study Qualities, as they feature imaginative plots, characters who go beyond typical experiences yet reflect experiences of teen readers, themes that inform truthfully about the wider world, and themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth. Characters like Jude in *The Cruel Prince* and Harry in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* navigate challenges that reflect the experiences of teen readers, whether they're questioning authority, dealing with loss, or forging their own identities, while also being immersed in worlds that go beyond typical experiences.

Ultimately, I hope this bibliography inspires future educators to teach fantasy literature in their classrooms, and for them to recognize the inherent value of the genre—not just as a tool for escapism, but as a means of promoting intellectual and emotional growth. Fantasy novels help teens explore difficult topics with bravery and resilience from the safety and comfort of their own homes and classrooms, ensuring that the genre remains a valuable resource for developing thoughtful, empathetic individuals.

1. Black, Holly. *The Cruel Prince*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018. **Read.**

*The Cruel Prince* follows Jude, a mortal girl living in the dangerous realm of Faerie, where she and her sisters were brought after their parents were murdered by Madoc, a faerie general. Jude is determined to earn a place at the Faerie Court, where she hopes to gain power and prove her worth, despite being treated as inferior by the faeries. She becomes entangled in the political intrigue of the Court, vying for power alongside the brutal and charismatic Prince Cardan. As Jude navigates betrayal and manipulation, she must decide how far she is willing to go to achieve her goals and survive the treacherous world she inhabits.

*The Cruel Prince* is a powerful YA fantasy that explores the topics of power, loyalty, and identity, with Jude emerging as a strong female protagonist who grapples with the complexities of authority and personal integrity. The dynamic between Jude and her sister Taryn—both orphans in a world of faeries—reflects the challenges of navigating familial relationships when trust is in constant flux. As they struggle to survive in a corrupt world, their bond is tested by betrayal and differing values, mirroring the real-world struggles of teens finding their own identity and place in the world. The novel critiques authority figures who cannot be trusted, highlighting the difficulty of distinguishing between loyalty and manipulation—an issue teens can relate to as they learn to question the world around them. By setting the story in a world where power shifts constantly, the text uses the faerie realm to parallel real-world dynamics, encouraging readers to engage critically with the topics of authority, power, and social structures. Through Jude's journey, the novel offers a poignant reflection of personal growth and the challenges of making morally complex decisions. *The Cruel Prince* provides both an emotionally engaging and intellectually stimulating narrative, making the text an invaluable tool for teachers to discuss

personal integrity and societal concerns with teen readers.

2. Capetta, A. R., & McCarthy, C.. *Sword in the Stars*. Jimmy Patterson, 2020. **Read.**

*Sword in the Stars* continues the story of Ari and her companions from *Once & Future* as they navigate time travel, Arthurian legend, and their roles in a fight to save humanity. Tasked with stealing Excalibur from its place in the past, Ari, the reincarnated King Arthur, and her queer, diverse found family must balance their identities and relationships while confronting historical challenges and modern prejudices.

*Sword in the Stars* offers an exciting and fast-paced reimagining of Arthurian legend, making it a valuable addition to the fantasy genre for teen readers. The novel exemplifies the Exeter Quality of exciting plots through its intricate timelines, high-stakes heist to steal the Holy Grail, and the tension of modern characters navigating the challenges of the Middle Ages. Ari's companions—Lam, Val, and Jordyn—embody the archetype of the friend and embody her found family, showcasing how chosen bonds provide strength and resilience. The characters' experiences go beyond the ordinary, inviting readers to explore identity, self-discovery, and societal defiance. Ari's struggle with her destiny as a queer hero resonates with teens who face similar challenges of belonging and self-acceptance; meanwhile, the dynamic between Merlin and his ruthless older self deepens the story's themes of personal growth and accountability. The novel's blend of secrecy, surprise, and moments of triumph keeps readers engaged while prompting reflection on larger social issues. By combining Medieval fantasy with science fiction, the novel blends traditional mythology with contemporary concerns, making the story both timeless and relatable. For educators, *Sword in the Stars* is an engaging way to explore identity,

chosen family, and how myths evolve to meet the needs of today's readers.

3. Cooper, Susan. *Over Sea, Under Stone*. Jonathan Cape, 1965. **Have not read**; summary and content derived from *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*.

In *Over Sea, Under Stone*, siblings Simon, Jane, and Barney Drew are on vacation in Cornwall with their mysterious adoptive uncle, Merriman Lyon. During their stay, the children uncover an ancient map that may lead to the Holy Grail. Barney, an avid fan of King Arthur legends, persuades his siblings to join the search. As they embark on their quest, they begin to suspect that their uncle is not in Cornwall by chance, and that he may be hiding a deeper, more enigmatic purpose. As they delve deeper into their journey, the children discover the existence of a battle between the Light and the Dark, encountering dangerous forces who also seek the Grail for sinister reasons (Warner).

*Over Sea, Under Stone* introduces themes of loyalty, family, and the eternal struggle between good and evil, making it a meaningful resource for exploring real-world challenges. The Drew siblings' teamwork and trust exemplify the Exeter Quality of themes that inform truthfully about the wider world, demonstrating how unity can help overcome even the most daunting obstacles. Their journey resonates with adolescents who are navigating family dynamics and learning the value of collaboration. Mentioned in "Chapter 8: Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable" in *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, the novel also addresses the complexities of authority, as the siblings question their uncle's motives, mirroring teens' own growing awareness of adult fallibility. The risks the characters face in their quest for the Grail underscore the importance of courage and sacrifice for a greater

good, teaching lessons about personal responsibility and ethical decision-making. By blending history, morality, and relatable family dynamics, the text encourages young readers to reflect on their own roles within larger societal struggles. *Over Sea, Under Stone* provides a lens through which students can explore trust, courage, and the complexities of morality in both personal and global contexts.

4. Hardinge, Frances. *A Face Like Glass*. Pan Macmillan Children's, 2001. **Have not read;** summary and content derived from Darleen Patton's Book Talk.

In *A Face Like Glass*, the protagonist Neverfell has grown up in the twisting, mysterious tunnels of Cheesemaker Grandible, unable to recall the first five years of her life. Living in the underground city of Caverna, where the residents must learn to craft their "Faces" to hide their emotions, Neverfell is different—her face constantly shifts to reveal her every thought. As she embarks on her journey, she becomes entangled in the complex political schemes of the Court. The city's upper levels are shrouded in mystery, where even a few minutes in the dangerous sunlight can burn a person alive. As Neverfell delves deeper into Caverna's secrets, she uncovers alliances, hidden motives, and an inner yearning for something she cannot remember. In her pursuit of answers, she uncovers the reality behind Caverna's false, painted sky and reveals to its inhabitants that there is more to life than they've ever known (Patton).

*A Face Like Glass* by Frances Hardinge, as discussed in Darleen Patton's book talk, aligns with the Exeter Quality of presenting themes that truthfully inform readers about the wider world, engaging them with challenging issues. The novel explores identity, autonomy, and societal manipulation through the journey of Neverfell, a girl whose expressive face symbolizes emotional transparency and the search for authenticity. Teens navigating self-image and

emotional complexity can relate to Neverfell's struggle to understand herself in a society where appearances dictate power. The political intrigue within the city of Caverna mirrors real-world societal structures, encouraging readers to question authority and the impact of deception and control. Neverfell's determination to uncover the truth behind Caverna's carefully maintained illusions highlights the importance of seeking personal freedom and resisting societal expectations. This exploration of power dynamics and autonomy challenges teens to critically reflect on their roles within larger systems. By combining rich world-building with a nuanced examination of identity and resistance, *A Face Like Glass* provides a meaningful way for readers to engage with both personal and global concerns. The novel's blend of imaginative fantasy and insightful themes ensures it is both an entertaining and thought-provoking resource for teens.

5. Jones, Diana Wynne. *Howl's Moving Castle*. Harper Trophy, 2001. **Read.**

*Howl's Moving Castle* follows Sophie Hatter, a young woman who is cursed by a witch to appear as an old woman. Sophie leaves her quiet life in the small town and ventures into the magical land of Ingary. She eventually finds herself in the moving castle of the eccentric and mysterious wizard Howl, who has a reputation for being vain and heartless. Despite Howl's volatile personality, Sophie becomes involved in his magical and political troubles. As she navigates Howl's bizarre life and the many strange challenges that arise, Sophie discovers the true nature of her curse and uncovers hidden truths about herself, Howl, and the land of Ingary.

*Howl's Moving Castle* exemplifies the Exeter Quality of fostering emotional and intellectual growth through its exploration of personal issues. Sophie's curse forces her to confront her self-doubt, transforming her perception of beauty and power as she learns self-acceptance and resilience. Her journey illustrates how adversity can lead to personal growth,

resonating deeply with teens navigating self-image and identity. Howl's transformation from a vain and self-centered individual into someone capable of love and sacrifice complements Sophie's development, showing the power of redemption and change. Together, their journeys highlight themes of self-discovery, love, and adaptability, encouraging readers to reflect on their own growth. The castle, ever-changing and unpredictable, mirrors Sophie's evolving inner strength, symbolizing the fluid nature of personal development. Through these characters, the novel engages teens with issues of self-worth and emotional maturity, illustrating the potential for growth even in flawed individuals. Its blend of magical realism and introspection provides a compelling framework for understanding the challenges of adolescence. *Howl's Moving Castle* thus becomes a powerful tool for teaching the importance of perseverance, transformation, and embracing one's true self.

6. Le Guinas, Ursula K.. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Parnassus Press, 1968. **Have not read;** summary and content derived from "Roots and Leaves" by Dr. Chris Crowe in "Dr. Bickmore's YA Wednesday" and Ursula K. Le Guinas's website.

*A Wizard of Earthsea* follows Ged, a young boy with a natural aptitude for magic, as he trains at a wizarding school and learns to wield his immense power responsibly. After unleashing a shadow creature in an act of arrogance, Ged must embark on a journey of self-discovery to confront and defeat the dark force he unleashed. Set in a richly imagined archipelago, the novel explores the topics of balance, identity, and the cost of power.

*A Wizard of Earthsea* offers teens a nuanced exploration of growth and responsibility, aligning with the Exeter Quality of presenting themes that truthfully inform readers about the wider world. Ged's journey—marked by mistakes, pride, fear, and eventual



self-acceptance—encourages readers to reflect on humility and accountability in their own lives. The novel’s richly imaginative plot, featuring dragons, mystical islands, and the shadow Ged must confront, challenges readers to think beyond their immediate experiences. The central theme of balance, both within oneself and in the world, resonates deeply with global concerns like identity, power, and environmental harmony. Ged’s journey highlights the connections between personal growth and broader societal issues, making it an ideal tool for classroom discussions on moral and philosophical challenges. By teaching *A Wizard of Earthsea*, educators can engage students with a compelling narrative that equips them to navigate their own journeys with ethical awareness and self-discovery.

7. Lewis, C.S.. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Geoffrey Bles, 1950. **Read.**

This classic fantasy novel tells the story of four siblings—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy—who discover the magical land of Narnia through a wardrobe in an old professor’s house. Narnia is ruled by the White Witch, who has cast the land into eternal winter. Guided by the noble lion Aslan, the children embark on a journey to overthrow the Witch and restore peace and balance to the kingdom. The narrative explores themes of sacrifice, redemption, and the triumph of good over evil.

*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* provides teens with relatable characters and meaningful themes, aligning with the Exeter Quality of featuring protagonists who reflect their experiences—particularly strong female characters like Lucy. The sibling dynamics among the Pevensies resonate with teens, offering insights into loyalty, courage, and growth through family bonds. Aslan, embodying the archetype of the Sage, serves as a mentor and guide, helping the Pevensie children confront challenges with wisdom and moral clarity. Mentioned in “Chapter 8:

Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable” in *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, the novel’s rich allegory invites readers to explore the topics of hope, redemption, and the battle between good and evil, can help teachers teach what allegory is. Aslan’s sacrificial leadership contrasts with the White Witch’s tyranny, offering parallels to real-world struggles for justice and freedom. Through Narnia’s imaginative world, teens are encouraged to reflect on universal values such as community and empathy, making the story both engaging and instructive. Teaching this book allows educators to connect allegorical symbolism with students’ personal growth, fostering resilience and a deeper understanding of their own lives.

8. Paolini, Christopher. *Eragon*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. **Have not read**; summary and content derived *Goodreads*.

*Eragon* introduces readers to a young farm boy who discovers a mysterious blue stone that turns out to be a dragon egg. When the dragon, Saphira, hatches, Eragon is thrust into a world of danger, magic, and rebellion. Eragon learns the ways of magic, swordsmanship, and his destiny as a Dragon Rider. He confronts the forces of the evil king Galbatorix, embarking on a perilous journey filled with battles, betrayal, and self-discovery.

*Eragon* is a compelling example of fantasy that engages teens through exciting plots and relatable character growth. Eragon himself embodies the archetype of the orphan, a figure whose resilience and journey of self-discovery resonate deeply with adolescents. As he navigates his new identity as a Dragon Rider, he faces challenges that mirror the struggles teens encounter, such as taking on responsibility, making ethical decisions, and defining his place in the world. His extraordinary experiences allow readers to reflect on their own growth, courage, and

resilience in the face of adversity. The novel's topics of loyalty, identity, and resistance to tyranny provide valuable insights into real-world concerns, offering a framework for teens to explore their own values. Through teaching *Eragon*, educators can generate discussions about moral dilemmas and personal growth.

9. Rowling, J.K.. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Scholastic Inc., 2004. **Read.**

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry returns to Hogwarts for his third year to face a new threat: the notorious Sirius Black, an escaped prisoner believed to have been responsible for betraying Harry's parents. As the school year progresses, Harry learns shocking truths about his family and the past, including the revelation that Sirius may not be the villain everyone thought him to be. Alongside his friends, Ron and Hermione, Harry embarks on a dangerous journey of self-discovery, uncovering the layers of deception and uncovering new magical abilities. Ultimately, Harry learns that love, loyalty, and friendship are his greatest weapons in facing his fears.

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* resonates with teen readers as it reflects experiences of grief, anxiety, and the challenges of growing up—making the text an invaluable resource for the classroom. The setting of Hogwarts—a school with its familiar struggles of homework and rebelliousness—mirrors the common complaints and frustrations teens feel about their own school environments, fostering relatability. Through Harry's confrontation with the dementors, the book addresses mental health challenges like depression and fear, while offering hope and resilience as key responses—vital lessons for emotional growth. Mentioned in “Chapter 8: Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable” in *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, the archetype of the Sage, embodied by Albus

Dumbledore, provides timeless wisdom; his teachings on loss emphasize the importance of holding onto positive memories as a source of strength, which is a profound lesson in managing personal challenges. The Friend archetypes of Ron and Hermione also showcase the value of loyalty, trust, and mutual support—all of which are concepts that are essential for teens to learn in order to foster positive relationships. Teaching *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in the classroom encourages emotional intelligence, offers relatable examples of navigating hardships, and fosters a deeper understanding of the transformative power of love and trust.

10. Tolkien, J.R.R.. *The Hobbit*. Allen & Unwin, 1937. **Read.**

*The Hobbit* follows Bilbo Baggins, an unassuming hobbit, as he is reluctantly swept into a quest to help dwarves reclaim their treasure and homeland from the dragon Smaug. Along his journey, Bilbo faces trolls, goblins, a treacherous forest, and a cunning dragon, transforming from a timid homebody into a resourceful and brave hero.

*The Hobbit* is a prime example of the Exeter Qualities of exciting plots, going beyond typical experiences, and emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues, making the story a valuable teaching tool for fostering imagination and self-discovery. Bilbo Baggins' transformation from a reluctant homebody to a courageous hero also exemplifies the archetype of the hero, allowing teens to see their own potential for growth and resilience reflected in his story. The novel's suspenseful moments—such as Bilbo's escape from Gollum and his confrontation with Smaug—are captivating with their imaginative structure woven with problem-solving and bravery, and encourage adolescents to embrace unexpected challenges and develop resourcefulness in their own lives. By grappling with topics like courage, greed, and community, teens are inspired to think critically about their own values and decisions. Tolkien's

accessible—yet richly vivid—language invites students to engage deeply with the text while building their analytical skills. Through Bilbo’s journey, teachers can use *The Hobbit* to help their students confront real-world fears, exemplifying how fantasy literature offers lessons that extend beyond escapism.

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