

Educator Discussion Guide

GEEKERELLA: A FANGIRL FAIRYTALE (ONCE UPON A CON)

by Ashley Poston

Louisiana Teen Readers Choice Nominee 2019-2020

Grades 9-12

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Cinderella meets Comic Con. Ashley Poston crafts a tale that has all of the typical parts of a fairy tale story, while still involving it in the 21st century. The book is an ode to fan culture and contains references to everything from cosplay to slash fiction. Poston truly understands the connection that fans feel towards certain characters and stories, while still not shying away from the parts of fan culture that become invasive. Poston's references to real shows make the story come alive, and all who read it can feel like they too can be a part of this world.

The story switches between the point of view of the two main characters, Danielle and Darien, who are this story's Cinderella and Prince Charming. Danielle is convention royalty, but unfortunately her step-mother and step-sisters do not see it the same way. As she struggles to find new ways to connect to her deceased parents through her favorite show *Starfield*, Darien struggles to fill the shoes of a fan-favorite in the new *Starfield* reboot. Both Darien and Danielle feel helpless in their own lives, and use *Starfield* and its main characters Prince Carmindor as inspiration to be brave. Of course it would not be a fairy tale without conflict. This story is rife with destroyed clothes for the ball, locked towers, miscommunication, and a desperate race to get to the ball. This book does not disappoint, and is an excellent addition to the Cinderella lexicon.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashley Poston graduated with a degree in English from the University of South Carolina, and remains living in the state today. She states that she began writing with fanfiction, and allowed her love of it to develop over time. She enjoys gaming and anime in her free time as well. She is the author of *Geekerella*, *Heart of Iron*, *The Sound of Us*, and *We Own the Night*. More information can be found at her website, www.ashposton.com.

BOOK AWARDS

- Spring 2017 Kids Indie Next List Pick
- 2017 Goodreads Choice Award finalist for Best Young Adult Fiction
- Named to *Seventeen's* 2017 "12 Life-Changing Books You Have to Read This Summer" List

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

What Is A Con?

Begin by asking your students if they have ever heard of conventions, or if they have attended one. If they have, give them this time to talk about the experience and start off the class discussion. If they have not, you can begin the discussion. Start the discussion with defining the word convention, which Merriam-Webster states is “an assembly of persons met for a common purpose.” Once this is done, show the students a few short videos that discuss cosplay, which features very prominently in the story. Here are two examples of short videos to use:

1. “Why Do You Cosplay?: Comic-Con | Los Angeles Times”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M2AHj2AhIM>

2. “What Is Cosplay?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CodbHTIt3xQ>

When this is done, ask your students to consider something that they love that they would cosplay. Would they be willing to spend a lot of money and time to do so? How would they go about making a costume? Do they think that cosplay is different from being an actor or a sports fan? Then give the students time to discuss this either as an entire class or in small groups.

Perils of an Iconic Role

Ask your students to consider what it would be like to be famous and achieve your dream job, while everyone around you keeps comparing you to the previous person. This can be as an actor, singer, or athlete. Have them imagine being compared to Michael Jordan, Meryl Streep, Whitney Houston or other celebrities they are familiar with. Would they be scared? How would they handle criticism? Have they ever seen discussion around an actor or actress taking a role in a reboot? What was that discussion like? Did they think that was fair to the actor or actress? Here are a few links to examples of actors and actresses being recast:

1. “Does Star Trek’s Enterprise Crew Measure Up?”

<https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/article/does-star-treks-enterprise-crew-measure-up/>

2. “The ‘Spider-Man: Homecoming’ Trailer Just Dropped – here are all the changes to the character since 2002”

<https://www.thisisinsider.com/all-the-changes-to-spider-man-2017-3>

3. “Here’s what the critics said about each Doctor Who’s debut at the time”

<http://www.digitalspy.com/tv/doctor-who/feature/a858727/doctor-who-classic-series-reviews/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What elements of the classic Cinderella tale do you see in the introduction of Danielle? Are there any elements that make this book seem like an interesting retelling, or does the book seem like the same Cinderella story with different character names?
2. Do you find it interesting that we get to see the story from Darien’s perspective as well? Do you think other Cinderella retellings would have been interesting with Prince Charming’s perspective as well? Why or why not?
3. How do Darien’s chapters give you insight into being a movie star? Does it seem more difficult than you thought? What about the relationship between actors and their fans? Does that seem like a difficult relationship to navigate?

4. Do you think Elle is being unfair in her reaction to Darien being cast as Prince Carmindor? Does your opinion change after you read Darien's reaction to Elle's article?
5. Compare and contrast Darien's description of the morning show and Elle's reaction to it. Do you understand why Darien behaved as he did and the way Elle reacted to it?
6. What do you think of the introduction to Catherine, Chloe, and Calliope? Do you think they are interesting villains? Is their behavior realistic?
7. Compare and contrast Elle's and Darien's interactions over the phone with Elle's article and Darien's thoughts on the article's writer. What do you think is the biggest reason for the difference between the two?
8. What role do you think Sage will play in the story? Do you think Elle should give her the benefit of the doubt, or do you think she is right to be worried about Sage's reactions to her love of *Starfield*?
9. When Darien's costar Jessica is introduced, she gives him advice about being an actor and not a fan. Look at Darien's chapters you read previously and find examples that either support or discredit her statements.
10. What do you think of Chloe and Cal's reason for getting into cosplay? Do you think their reason is just as valid as Elle's reason for cosplaying?
11. What do you think of the characters who work with Darien? Do any of them seem as if they will be villainous characters like Elle's family? Why or why not?
12. Catherine seems to have misunderstood Elle's father's love of *Starfield*. Does this discussion between her and Elle make Catherine more or less sympathetic as a character? Do you see any similarities between Catherine's misplaced anger at Elle's father and Elle's incorrect belief that Darien does not care about the *Starfield* reboot?
13. Do you think that Elle's and Darien's reactions to texting a stranger are normal? Do you think this might play into the "missing shoe" element of most Cinderella stories? Why or why not?
14. When we meet Darien's other costar Calvin, he reacts negatively to Darien. Do you think this is common on movie sets? Do you think Calvin and Darien are being fair to each other?
15. In the book we have been introduced to Elle's, Sage's, and Darien's families. What are the differences between the three? What are the similarities?
16. What would be a television series you would introduce to a friend? Is there a particular order in which you would show it to someone, or would you show them the episodes in the order in which they aired?
17. Compare and contrast the attitudes of Chloe and Cal in the scene where Elle discovers that Chloe is wearing her mom's dress. Are there any previous scenes where the twins have given differing reactions to something? If so, give an example.
18. Do you think Darien should be more worried about the person leaving him odd messages? Why or why not? Who do you think it is, and what is your evidence for thinking that?
19. Now that Chloe has ruined Elle's costume and stolen her tickets and money, how do you think Elle will attend the convention? What would you do if you were in this situation?

20. What was your reaction to Elle and Darien meeting for the first time? Do you think Elle was right in saying that Darien should do the signing, or was she too harsh? Do you think Darien has valid reasons for not wanting to do so?
21. Elle is considered royalty at the con. Do you see a difference between how people there treat Darien and Elle? How does this twist the usual elements in Cinderella stories?
22. Darien and Elle finally get a chance to talk and dance, but are both verbally and physically attacked by some of the story's villains. Do their reactions to these attacks show character growth? How do the truths brought to life during these arguments change your view of the different characters involved?
23. In this Cinderella tale, both Cinderella and the Prince know who the other person is and the evil stepmother does not know enough to deliberately keep them apart. Do you think this makes the final conflict easier or harder to overcome? Given at least three reasons for your answer.
24. Do you find the story's happy ending realistic or a bit too unlikely in today's world? How would you change the story? If you don't wish to change the story, give your reasons for why not.
25. The story ends with a *Starfield* script. After reading it would you watch the show? What elements in the script are similar to other movies and shows you have seen before?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Math:

- In the story Elle and Sage spend time and money creating a cosplay for the ExcelsiCon competition. Come up with your own cosplay for a competition. Then calculate the amount of each material you will need to successfully create your costume, as well as the amount of money you will need to purchase all of the materials to make your costume. You will also need to come up with a timeline for how long it will take you to complete your costume. Write it all out in a short report, presenting your findings, and include at the end of the report all of your calculations.

Art:

- Sage and Elle have to look for special materials to create the crown for Elle's cosplay. Create your own crown using any of the different materials found in the classroom.

English:

- At the end of the story there is a script of Episode 54 of *Starfield*. Write your own television episode script. Further examples can be found here: <https://screencraft.org/2016/01/05/the-screenwriters-guide-to-formatting-television-scripts/>.
- Pick a scene from the book and write it from another character's point of view.
- At the end of the book we get to read Danielle's review of the *Starfield* movie. For the assignment, take the time to watch a movie. This can be a new movie in theaters or one at home. After watching the movie write a critical film review, using Danielle's as an example.

Science:

- The book focuses on the recreation of an older Sci-Fi television show. There are many real life experiments that have been inspired by fiction. Research and create a short presentation about an actual experiment that was inspired by science fiction.
- Here are several webpages that give lists of example experiments.
 - <https://www.bustle.com/p/11-real-life-inventions-inspired-by-science-fiction-novels-9090688>
 - <https://boredomtherapy.com/inspired-by-science-fiction/>
 - <http://whatculture.com/scitech/8-science-experiments-inspired-by-superheroes>
 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-38026393>

Vocabulary:

Nebula

Convention

Calibrate

Intergalactic

Ignite

Franchise

Federation

Soundstage

Protocol

Forum

Ordinance

Fandom

Loquacious

Capacitor

Fritter

RELATED WEBSITES

The Author's Website

<http://www.ashposton.com/index.html>

Further information about the author, her life, and her books.

Comic Con: San Diego

<https://www.comic-con.org/>

The homepage for one of the largest comics conventions in the world.

Cosplay Examples

<http://www.cosplay.com/>

This website gives examples of actual cosplay and includes a forum that answers the many cosplay questions that students could have.