

Educator Discussion Guide

THE FEMALE OF SPECIES

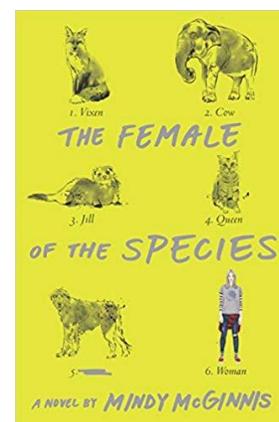
By Mindy McGinnis

Louisiana Teen Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2018-2019
Grade 9-12

Submitted by Elizabeth Hadwin & Sheryll Anderson
School of Library and Information Science, LSU, Baton Rouge

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Female of the Species focuses on the trauma caused by the murder of Anna Cross. When the justice system fails to punish Anna's attacker, her younger sister Alex plans and executes vengeance. Now aware of her capacity for violence, she labels herself a danger to others and spends her life blending in to the shadows. This works well until the fateful day she shows up for her school community service project at the animal shelter. Her animal shelter experience is shared with Peekay, a preacher's kid working through a breakup and trying to figure out her life. Shared volunteer time leads to true friendship, pulling Alex out into the social world of her school. Despite his reputation as the popular, smart and athletic "king of high school," Jack Fisher carries guilt for his behavior the night Anna's body was found. When Alex is presented as competition for valedictorian, he can't ignore her anymore. McGinnis's novel takes on rape culture and the trauma it leaves in its wake through recognizable and interesting characters facing realistic situations.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mindy McGinnis is a graduate of Otterbein University with a degree in English Literature and Religion. Winner of the Young Adult Edgar Award for *Madness So Discreet* (2015), Mindy works as an assistant teen librarian in Ohio. When she isn't writing stories or working at the library, she runs a website for aspiring writers and hangs out with her cats and dogs.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at

www.mindymcginnis.com

Accessed September 22, 2017

BOOK AWARDS

2017 Tayshas List Selection

YALSA Top 10 Best YA Fiction of 2017

School Library Journal Best of 2016

Junior Library Guild Selection

The Globe and Mail Best Books of 2016

Bustle's Best Young Adult Books of 2016
Mashable's 8 Best YA Books of 2016
Seventeen's 10 Best YA Books of 2016
CCBC Choices 2017

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Journal Prompt

Read the poem, "The Female of the Species" by Rudyard Kipling. Why does Kipling conclude that females are deadlier than males? Do you agree or disagree with his argument?

Revisit this journal entry after reading the novel to see if the students have altered their opinion.

The poem is housed online at Poem of the Week: <http://www.potw.org/archive/potw96.html>

Think-Pair Share

Have students individually brainstorm answers to the following questions:

What do you think of when you hear the word revenge?

What do you think of when you hear the word vengeance?

In what ways are these words the same? In what ways do they differ?

After they complete their individual brainstorm, have them pair with a nearby student to discuss their ideas, then have the groups come together to discuss as a class. Create a list or mindmap of their answers. As they read the book, they can refer back to the initial discussion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Peekay and Alex don't really know each other before their senior year experience, but they quickly become friends. Why do you think a loner like Alex is able to open herself up to friendship with Peekay?
2. What character in the book did you most identify with? Why?
3. Do you feel Alex is justified in her actions? Why or why not?
4. How do you think the family dynamics of Alex, Peekay, and Jack have shaped them as individuals?
5. Over the course of the story, we discover vulnerabilities in all the characters. How did your opinion of Alex, Jack, Peekay, and Branley change over the course of the book based on the new information?
6. Alex's mother seemingly extends an olive branch at one point. Do you think she is sincere at that moment or is there an underlying attack on Alex? Explain why you chose that interpretation of the scene.
7. Alex's father, who might share the same impulses as Alex, left the family. Her mother drinks to deal with her trauma. Both ignore Alex. Do you think that Alex could have been helped, if her parents had not withdrawn into dealing with their own issues or do you think she was destined to meet a tragic end? Why do you think that?
8. Peekay comes from a religious background and struggles to combine her behavior with her beliefs. Alex also ignores her personal belief system at points in the book. Compare and contrast the girls' beliefs and the way they navigate breaking their own rules.
9. How would you describe Branley and Jack's relationship? Do you believe they will go back to a romantic relationship or do you think they are destined to be friends? Why do think that?
10. Jack is ambitious. He is both an athlete and a scholar. What drives his need for success?

11. Alex is also an excellent student, but does not care if she is valedictorian and has no plans to continue her education. Why do you think she strives for excellence, even as she wishes to remain in the shadows?

12. Jack becomes aware that Alex has committed a crime and opts not to tell anyone. How does he justify this to himself? Do you think he regrets that choice later?

13. Peekay's friend Sara is seemingly very different from Peekay. Describe their relationship and why you think they are friends. How do you think their relationship holds up after the events of the book?

14. The title of the book comes from the poem of the same name by Rudyard Kipling. Based on this novel, do you agree or disagree with the idea that "the female of the species is more deadly than the male"?

15. Many people in this story use drugs or alcohol to cope with their unhappiness, however, our focus characters use other methods to deal with their fears and unhappiness. What does the book indicate they do to cope? Are these healthy coping mechanisms?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Social Studies:

- (Psychology) After reading the book, the students will read the following article and work in small groups to brainstorm ways each character presents the effects of trauma.
"The Aftermath of Trauma: Four Common Characteristics"
Anastasia Pollock, LCMHC - Different people respond to experiences differently, but four parallels are commonly drawn among those with posttraumatic stress.
<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/aftermath-of-trauma-four-common-characteristics-0904135>
- Mock trial: Pretend for a moment that Alex did not get away with her crimes. We will be holding a mock trial for Alex at various points in the story. Groups who draw an A will be trying her for her first killing. Group B will try her for assault on Ray Parson at the church. Group C will try her for burning down the world when a child was attacked. Each student will be randomly assigned a letter. If you receive a blue letter, you are her defense lawyer. If you receive a red letter, you are a prosecutor. Use information from the story and research from the legal reference database, available on the State Library Database (<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lir&AN=111643893&site=lirc-live>), to make your case. You may brainstorm in small groups, but you will submit your own written work.

Language Arts:

- The End: Ask the students to rewrite the endings for Alex, Peekay, and Jack. What would they change and why?
- Students will design a vision board for the character of their choice. The vision board can be a physical one using old magazines, or a digital board created by using Pinterest or similar blogging software.

Health:

- Students will use the character's experiences in the book to participate in a small group discussion regarding peer pressure. For more information check out this website: <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/teachers/free-lesson-plans/sexual-pressures.cfm>.
- Partner with the local YMCA to facilitate class discussions on peer pressure and safety.

Art:

- Inside their head: Students will create an abstract painting illustrating what the inside of a character’s head looks like or demonstrating the theme of the book.
- Storyboard the scene the student finds most impactful. Using a storyboard layout, they will sketch out how they envisioned the scene taking place. Where was each character positioned? How would it look if you filmed it? A free template can be found at the following website for download. Scroll down to the Free Editable Storyboard Template. <https://www.template.net/business/storyboard-templates/education-storyboard-template/>

Vocabulary:

Arbitrary	Emanate	Mired
Asinine	Encapsulated	Molecular
Asphyxiation	Exuberant	Nonsensical
Cede	Goading	Residually
Combative	Indifferent	Ruff
Contingent	Insignificant	Sanctimonious
Decrepit	Intimate	Trudged
Derision	Melodious	Wallowed

RELATED WEBSITES

Mindy McGinnis on The Female of the Species | 2016 Miami Book Fair

<https://youtu.be/2ERuaSIMINI>

A video interview with author Mindy McGinnis as she discusses her book writing process with PBS Books.

The Female of the Species by Mindy McGinnis | Official Book Trailer

<https://youtu.be/7AiLXqm6u-c>

This trailer gives you a glimpse of what to expect from the book.

Medline Plus-National Library of Medicine

<https://medlineplus.gov/childrenshealth.html>

MedlinePlus is the National Institutes of Health's Web site for patients and their families and friends.

RAINN

<https://www.rainn.org/>

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization.

Anger Management for Teens

<http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/deal-with-anger.html>

Kids health website focuses on help teens cope with anger management.