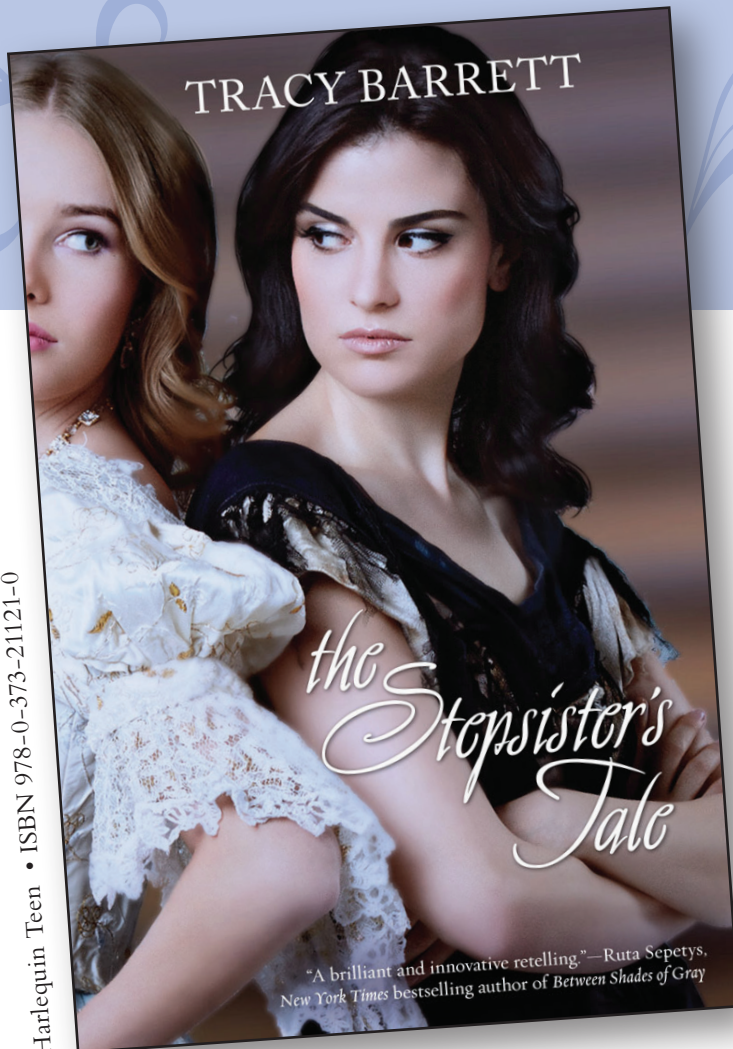


Discussion Guide

The Stepsister's Tale

By TRACY BARRETT



EVERYONE KNOWS THAT Cinderella was horribly mistreated by her ugly and wicked stepsisters. But what if the storybooks got it wrong?

Jane Montjoy is tired of pretending to live up to the standards of her mother's noble family—especially now that the family's wealth is gone and their stately mansion has fallen to ruin. It's hard work tending to the animals and finding a way to feed her mother and her little sister each day. Jane's burden only gets worse after her mother returns from a trip to town with a new stepfather and stepsister in tow. Despite the family's struggle to prepare for the long winter ahead, Jane's stepfather remains determined to give his beautiful but spoiled Isabella her every desire.

When her stepfather suddenly dies, leaving

nothing but debts and a bereaved daughter behind, it seems to Jane that her family is destined for eternal unhappiness. But a mysterious boy from the woods and an invitation to a royal ball are certain to change her fate

Readers will be thoroughly captivated by award-winning author Tracy Barrett's imaginative retelling of the Cinderella story from an unexpected perspective. They'll never think about fairy tales the same way again!

"Tracy's stories are always unique, her prose always lovely. *The Stepsister's Tale* is no exception. A brilliant and innovative retelling of a classic that gives entirely new meaning to the term 'Cinderella story.'"—**Ruta Sepetys, New York Times bestselling author of *Between Shades of Gray***

★ "Highly imaginative as well as insightful, this outstanding revision has the power to entrance and provoke thought."—**Kirkus Reviews, starred review**

★ "A provocative inversion of the tale of Cinderella. . . . Barrett cleverly upends traditional notions of happily ever after."—**Publishers Weekly, starred review**

Discussion Questions

-  What does Jane think the Halsey name signifies? What about her mother? What power do you think is in a family's name and reputation, and should children feel a responsibility to live up to that ideal? Is it ever wrong to take pride in your heritage?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2
-  What is the difference between living up to an ideal and closing your eyes to reality? Where in the text do you find evidence of the different characters doing one or the other of these?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
-  Retelling a classic fairy tale is a very popular storytelling strategy. What are some other *Cinderella* retellings in today's literature and film? What do you think makes a retelling particularly successful or interesting? Why do you think *Cinderella* is the most popular tale to retell?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9
-  The story of Cinderella is familiar, but Tracy Barrett brings new life to the tale by shifting the perspective from Cinderella to her "evil" stepsister, Jane. What other perspectives might be interesting from a narrative standpoint? How would Maude tell the story that Jane tells in *The Stepsister's Tale*? How would Will tell it?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.6
-  Are Jane and Maude unfairly predisposed to resent their new sister, Ella? What about vice versa? What defines a family, if not simply blood relations?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2
-  Mamma is too stuck in her family's past to be an effective parent, and Harry spoils Isabella. Find some examples (not always human!) of good parenting in the text that the author uses to serve as a contrast to these characters' poor parenting.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1
-  In *The Stepsister's Tale*, outsiders believe Ella's claim that she is a victim because she is charming and beautiful. What typical signals does a storyteller use to relay information about which characters are "good guys" versus "bad guys," and how does the author use these signals for other purposes in this retelling?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3

Why does Jane change her mind about trying to get Ella married to the prince? When do you start seeing a shift in her thinking about this?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

Jane thinks that Will is scornful of her because their families belong to different social classes. Will thinks the same of Jane. Find places in the text that show why they think this, and where one of them has misinterpreted an action or words of the other.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1

In many Western societies of the past, people usually married for money or to improve their social standing, as Mamma and Harry do, and no one thought anything was wrong with this. Do you think these are acceptable reasons for marrying today? Does Jane? How do you know how she feels about this?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.6

Do you think that a fairy godmother (or some other supernatural being) told Isabella to go to the stable and find the carriage and the ball gown, or did the suggestion come from some other person, or from Isabella's imagination? Find evidence in the text to support your opinion.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3

One theme of *The Stepsister's Tale* is the importance of the difference between appearance and reality. Find examples in the text of places where appearance and reality don't mesh.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1



Jenny Mandeville, Vanderbilt University

Tracy Barrett is the award-winning author of twenty books for teen and tween readers; *The Stepsister's Tale* is her tenth novel. She holds a Bachelor's Degree with honors in Classics-Archaeology from Brown University and a M.A. and a Ph.D. in Medieval Italian Literature from the University of California, Berkeley. She taught Italian and other subjects at Vanderbilt University before retiring in 2012 to

devote all her time to writing. Her scholarly interests in the ancient and medieval worlds definitely inform her fiction and nonfiction works.

Her young-adult novel *Anna of Byzantium* (Delacorte) was named a *Booklist* Editor's Choice selection, a Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People, a *Booklist* Top Ten Historical Fiction title, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, and an ALA Quick Pick, among other honors. More recently she penned *King of Ithaka* (Henry Holt), a retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*, and *Dark of the Moon* (HMH), a re-visioning of the myth of the Minotaur.

Tracy Barrett lives with her family in Nashville, Tennessee. She's active in the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, serving as Regional Advisor for the Midsouth (Tennessee and Kentucky) chapter from 1999–2009. She is now SCBWI's Regional Advisor Coordinator.

Common Core State Standards addressed by each discussion question are noted in bold type. For more information on the Common Core, visit statestandards.org.