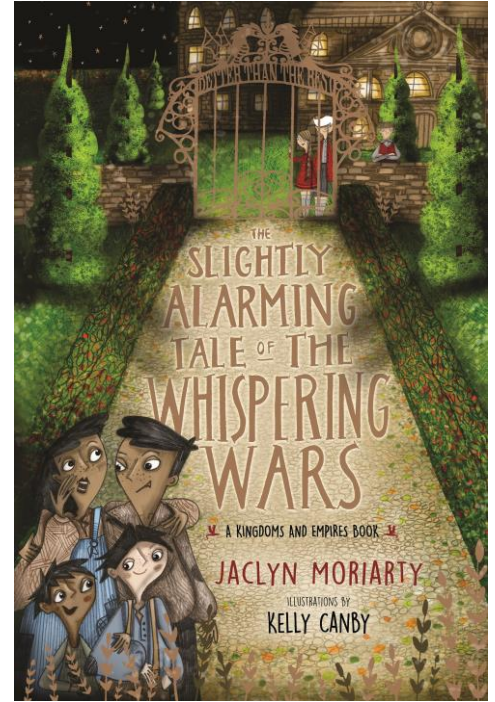


# The Slightly Alarming Tale of the Whispering Wars

By Jaclyn Moriarty



November 2018

ISBN 9781760297183

Paperback

Recommended for 10-14 year olds

## Summary

The town of Spindrift is frequented by pirates, Shadow Mages and charlatans. It's also home to the Orphanage School, where Finlay lives with Glim, Taya and Eli. Just outside town is the painfully posh Brathelthwaite Boarding School, home to Honey Bee, Hamish and Victor, Duke of Ainsley. When the two schools compete at the Spindrift Tournament, stakes are high, tensions are higher, and some people are out to win at any cost. Before long, the orphans and the boarding school are in an all-out war.

And then Whispering Wars break out, and Spindrift is thrust onto the front lines. Children are being stolen, Witches, Sirens and a deadly magical flu invade the town, and all attempts to fight back are met with defeat.

Finlay, Honey Bee and their friends must join forces to outwit the encroaching forces of darkness, rescue the stolen children, and turn the tide of the war. But how can one bickering troupe outwit the insidious power of the Whisperers? And who are the two mysterious figures watching them from the shadows?



Although engaging with some pretty hefty themes—war, refugees and persecution—this story is wholly enchanting, whimsical and appropriate for younger readers. One of its many charms is its short, sharp chapters (one chapter has only 8 words), while another is a story arc that gallops along at a cracking pace. But it is the book's unusual dual (and sometimes triangular) narration that will win young readers over from its first chapters. That's because its two main narrators—Finlay and Honey Bee—have distinctly different and equally winning voices that alternate between humorous bickering between themselves and addressing the reader directly.

Visit <https://www.allenandunwin.com/resources/for-teachers> for free down-loadable teachers notes, reviews by teachers, extracts and more. And sign up to the Allen & Unwin e-newsletter to receive monthly updates on new resources!

Contact Carolyn Walsh, Education Marketing Manager,  
Ph: +02 8425 0150 Email: [education@allenandunwin.com](mailto:education@allenandunwin.com)

## Themes

- war
- persecution
- fantasy
- time travel
- friendship
- school adventures
- competition and cooperation
- child heroes
- self-doubt
- courage

## Discussion questions and activities

### 1. Cover

Before reading the story, examine the image on the front cover of the novel and write a short paragraph to explain your reaction to it.

- How does the cover make you feel; what genre of book do you expect; and what sort of things do you think might occur in the novel?
- Consider elements such as light and shadow, perspective, colour and font. What differences can you pick between characters in the foreground and background? (Hint: look at the difference in clothing.)

After finishing the novel, go back to this paragraph to see whether your predictions of genre and events were correct.

### 2. Title and Prologue

- i. How do the words *Slightly Alarming Tale* contrast with the word *Wars* in the book's title? Why do you think the author chose to put them together in the title? Does it make you want to read the story more or less?
- ii. What purpose does the prologue serve in this story? Why do you think the author decided to not identify the narrator here until the very end? Did you find the first line of the prologue intriguing, 'I was taken by Whisperers at 2pm, so I never pulled the lever for the laundry chute.'?

### 3. Dual Narrative

- i. Describe what a *dual narrative* is, and...
- ii. describe how it is used in *The Slightly Alarming Tale of the Whispering Wars* and whether you enjoyed the story more or less because of it.
- iii. While the book is predominantly a dual narrative, Glim does offer her perspective on occasion, too. Why do you think the author chose to include her at those points in the story?

### 4. Vocabulary

Both Finlay and Honey Bee's vocabulary give us clues to their personalities and backgrounds: for instance, Finlay puts the word *see* at the end of sentences, such as, 'Royals need the *better* sort of children, see?' (p. 3) and peppers his story with *crackerjacks* and *daft gits* throughout. Honey Bee, on the other hand, happily admits she doesn't have a clue what *crackerjack* means (p. 9) and uses words such as *suffice* (p. 12) and *abide* (p. 26).



## In the classroom...

- Can you find other examples of words or phrases used by either Finlay or Honey Bee that are peculiar to either and tell the reader something about the type of person they are and what their differing backgrounds might be?

### 5. Characters

Victor, Hamish, Glim and the Twins all undergo surprising transformations by the end of the novel.

- Choose your favourite from these characters and write a paragraph describing how their character changed over the course of the story and what event caused this change.

### 6. Show, Don't Tell

Chapters 1 and 2 are packed full of information about the Orphanage School and Sir Edgar Brathelthwaite Boarding School. Some of that information is told directly; for instance, Finlay says that the Orphanage School wins the Spindrifft Tournament every year, while Honey Bee describes lots of marching, chanting and horsewhippings at her school.

But some information is **inferred**, meaning you, the reader, can form your own opinion based on evidence read. For instance, what does the way Finlay and his friends look after Jaskafar say about the Orphanage School, and what does Honey Bee's description of her Uncle Dominic's behaviour say about her school?

- Divide a page in your workbook into two columns, one with the word *Told Directly*, and the other with *Shown*. Now read Chapters 4 through to 13 and decide which events at the Tournament go in which column.

### 7. Themes

War is a theme throughout this story, whether it is a skirmish like that between the Orphanage School and Sir Edgar Brathelthwaite Boarding School, or all-out war between kingdoms.

- Read the scene in which Finlay visits a town in the Whispering Kingdom (pp. 374-376) and begins to question who is really to blame for the Whispering Wars and who is suffering the consequences of it.
  - What do you think the author is saying here about war, powerful people and ordinary people?
- Re-read Chapter 11 and the announcement that Sir Edgar Brathelthwaite Boarding School won the relay and the overall championship.
  - Which powerful person/s convinced the organisers to disqualify the Orphanage School and which characters ultimately suffered the consequences of the war between the students?

### 8. Language

- Read Honey Bee's description of resisting a super-Whisper in Chapter 79 (p. 327) and find examples of metaphor, simile, capitalisation, punctuation and foreshadowing being used by the author to intensify a sense of torture.
- Compare the imagery used in this scene with the way Finlay describes riding a dragon in Chapter 99 (pp. 422-423). What literary techniques are used in the second scene to emphasise the excitement that Finlay is feeling?

## 9. Breaking Conventions

Jaclyn Moriarty uses many unusual techniques to get your attention and emphasise a particular scene or conversation. One example is the way Honey Bee describes her disturbing dream (pp. 134-135) by running single words down a page, and immediately after, Finlay makes fun of her by copying her.

- Can you find examples of other things that surprised you in the story? Look for changes in font and font size, chapter length and capitalisation.

## 10. Bronte and Alejandro

- Bronte and Alejandro are characters from which other book by Jaclyn Moriarty?
- Why do you think the author decided to include them in this story?
- What role did they play early in the story (before we knew who they were) and how did that role change after we found out who they really were?

## 11. Genre

- What subgenres of fantasy are there? (For example, high fantasy, urban fantasy, magic realism, comic fantasy, historical fantasy, dark fantasy, fairy tales, supernatural fantasy...)
  - In pairs or small groups, choose one subgenre to investigate further, considering its archetypes and prominent authors and their works. Gather your findings on a poster and present to the class.
- After completing the previous exercise, talk as a class about what subgenre (or subgenres) of fantasy *The Slightly Alarming Tale of the Whispering Wars* could be classified as.
  - What expectations might you have about the book if you consider it as part of this subgenre/s?
  - How has the author fulfilled or subverted your expectations?

## 12. Creative Writing

- Imagine that the Time Travel Hedge appeared in your backyard. Where would you go and what adventures would you have?
- If you had a magic bottle that could make you 'dream the dream you are supposed to dream' what do you think you might dream?

## Author's inspiration

'After I wrote *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone*, I wanted to return to Bronte's world. Bronte travelled throughout the Kingdoms and Empires but never stayed in one place for very long, and her story was about her visits with aunts, with the dangers and rivalries of her world as the backdrop. With this book, I wanted to settle down in one part of the Kingdoms and Empires, get to know the children who live there, and let them tackle the dangers and rivalries head-on.

'While I was writing Bronte, I consulted a book of old nautical terms for the section on the cruise ship. I especially liked the words 'spindrifft' (for the froth on top of waves) and 'glim' (for a candle)—so I named a town Spindrifft and kept Glim in the back of my mind as a future character name. This book is set in Spindrifft, in the





Kingdom of Storms, and its central characters are Finlay, Honey Bee, and Glim. As with *Bronte*, I wrote the book in various different cafes in my neighbourhood, but I was less strict about varying the cafes and accepted that my heart was in Coco Chocolate.'

— Jaclyn Moriarty

## The author

Jaclyn Moriarty is well-known as the prize-winning, bestselling author of novels for young adults (and sometimes for slightly older adults). A former media and entertainment lawyer, Jaclyn's books include the Ashbury-Brookfield series and the Colours of Madeleine trilogy. The first two books in that trilogy were both awarded the NSW Premier's Literary Award and the Queensland Literary Award. *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone* was shortlisted for the Readings Children's Prize, the Aurealis Award and was a CBCA Notable Book in 2018. It was the first book she had written for younger readers.

Jaclyn was born in Perth, grew up in Sydney, lived in the US, the UK and Canada, and now lives in Sydney again. She grew up in a family of six children, two dogs, two horses, 12 chickens, a duck and a cat. Most of the children liked to tell stories and three have grown up to become authors.

About the writing life, Jaclyn says:

'I love having author sisters and we share our writing with each other all the time... Before I had a child, I used to do most of my writing between 10 p.m. and 3 a.m., and then sleep for most of the morning. I would wake up about 11 a.m. and stay in bed in a half-dreaming state for another hour or so, thinking about my next chapter and making plans for it. Now that I have a child, Charlie, I have to work regular hours. I take him to school in the morning, then I walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge to the other end, turn around and come back across the bridge again. I think about my writing while I look across at the boats on the harbour. Next, I spend the morning in a cafe writing down ideas in a big notepad using coloured textas, or maybe typing at my laptop. I come home, eat lunch on the floor (if it's winter-- there is a patch of sunshine that hits a certain part of the living room floor around lunch time so that's where I eat), and work at my study computer until it's time to collect Charlie.'

Visit her at [www.jaclynmoriarty.com](http://www.jaclynmoriarty.com).

