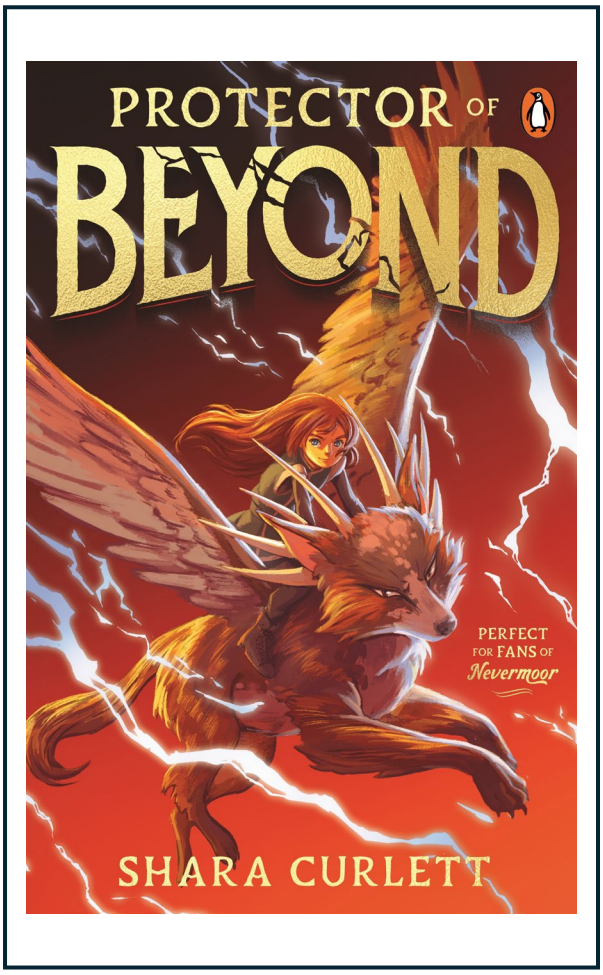
Teachers' Resources



PLOT SUMMARY

The moment you enter the Arbiter, your fate is sealed. If you spark, you fight!

Twelve-year-old Elder Triss never expected to produce a spark so rare – and so dangerous. But when she is torn from everything she knows and thrown into the mysterious world known as Beyond, she learns there is only one path forward: survive the trials and earn a place at the Academy of Protectors.

To get there, Elder must train for battle, face terrifying magical creatures and outlast friends who are quickly becoming rivals. But Beyond is more dangerous than it seems, and someone is trying to stop Elder from reaching the academy – and making it out alive . . .

RECOMMENDED FOR (ages 10+; years 4 to 8)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

• Learning areas: English • General capabilities: Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

• New fast-paced magical series by New Zealand author Shara Curlett • Great for fans of fantasy and adventure

THEMES

• fantasy • magical creatures • friendships • trials and adventure

PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9781761357329 (paperback); 9781761357336 (ebook); 9781761624735 (audiobook).

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Protector of Beyond by Shara Curlett

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shara Curlett grew up surrounded by stories, from her mum's bedtime reads to her dad's whimsical space adventures. She wrote her first 'novels' at ten and rediscovered her passion for writing in 2016, completing two full-length manuscripts. A lifelong fantasy fan, she now writes to spark imagination in young readers, believing creativity fosters resilience. Shara lives on Auckland's Hibiscus Coast with her husband, two kids, two dogs, and a dragon (bearded, but she's still claiming it).

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Shara says:
Protector of Beyond came from five distinct ideas: 1) The idea of the spark. Of it being that special part of you, deep within yourself, that ignites when you discover your true potential. 2) The concept of the Arbiter, as a representation of transformation, came from an unpublished picture book I had written (although that one was much more whimsical!). 3) I came up with the idea of the lunar singularity, because my daughter was born on the night of a rare lunar phenomenon. 4) My husband mentioned the word 'gloaming' in a conversation we were having, and the word stuck with me. And 5) the words, 'You spark, you fight,' appeared loud and clear in my mind.

The ideas behind a story really are just a starting point. I then had to take these five elements and find a way to bridge them together. That's when the idea of the Gloaming ceremony formed, because it really was a connecting point for all five ideas. What came next – Elder, Beyond, the magical creatures and everything else – simply flowed on from there.

I knew I wanted the Fiercers to be different to creatures in other books, and they *had* to be fierce (hence the name!). Having four creatures to match with naturally led to the idea of four distinct gards. And because each of the creatures was different and complex in their own ways, this meant that the gards would be different as well. I wanted the gards to be dynamic, to each have their strengths and weaknesses, as well as advantages and disadvantages. But most of all, I wanted every reader to 'find their gard' – to be drawn to *any one* of the gards. (Side note – While our main antagonists ended up in a particular gard, it's not because of their attitudes. It's because of their strengths – e.g. leadership, confidence, socialness.)

In regards to themes, I never go into my books with an intention of a message. All I want to do is write an exciting story that makes children want to keep turning the page. However, themes naturally do emerge throughout the writing process, and 'found family' is one, as Elder tries to find a place where she belongs, not just in Beyond, but in the world. This is really a metaphor for growing up, because children go through a similar journey as they get older, finding their own place in the world and figuring out where they belong. Another theme that emerged is bullying, and the characters each navigate this differently, depending on their own personalities. The theme of influence also emerged, and the idea that it is important to stay true to your own values and beliefs and not be swept up to do things against your will by other more dominant personalities, or by what they tell you to do. Lastly, the theme of bravery is throughout this entire book, along with the idea that every person's 'brave' is different – and that's absolutely okay.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

1. Look at the cover of the book. What do you think the story will be about? Which elements make you think this?
2. How has the cover designer and the illustrator used typography, placement of illustrations and colour to communicate a sense of drama and excitement?
3. Would the cover be as effective if a different font was used for the title? Why or why not?
4. Based on the blurb, draw your own cover illustration.
5. Look at the quotes on the first page of the book. Based on these quotes, what do you think the book will be like? Does it sound like a book you will enjoy?

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WRITING STYLE

Questions and activities

1. How would you describe Shara Curlett's writing style?
2. Why do you think Shara chose to write this story in first person and present tense?
3. How does the author use language to ensure that the reader will be engaged in Elder's experience?
4. Often authors will attribute certain tics or word choices or clothing options to characters to help develop and round them out for the reader. Pick two characters from the story and list how the author has done this for those characters. (For example, Bear is friendly and funny and enjoys dinner!)
5. Try rewriting a passage from the book from a different character's perspective. Eg you could pick another rook like Braids or Carter. Or one of the older characters like Reverence or Scar. You could even choose one of the Fiercers. What changes about the story when it's from someone else's viewpoint?
6. How has the author used sound throughout the story? Find a section of text where she's made good use of sounds that Elder is hearing. How has this been emphasised in the text?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Fantasy

Questions and activities

1. What elements of this story place it within the fantasy genre?
2. Write a list of all the elements you would expect a fantasy story to have.
3. How has the author used worldbuilding to create tension in the narrative? Find examples of this at three different points in the story.
4. The rooks are faced with some very dangerous situations. Why do you think this is allowed within the mentor programme? What does this tell you about the enemy that they are up against?
5. Fantasy stories often use names that aren't common in the real world. Look at the names the author has used for the characters in *Protector of Beyond*. (For example: Elder Triss, Reverence, Scar etc.) Do you think these have been carefully chosen? Do their names reflect who they are as characters? Why or why not?
6. The rooks are placed into one of the four gards. Which gard do you think you would be in? Why do you think that?
7. Symbols are often used to represent 'houses' or 'groups' in books. The symbols for the four gards are based on the Fiercers' heads, but sometimes symbols can be simple shapes. As an activity, redesign the four gard symbols based on what you know about them.

Family and friends

Questions and activities

1. Elder says on page 5 that it would be better to go to Beyond if she sparked with a friend. Why does she think this? How would the first few chapters be different if Elder had gone to Beyond with her best friend from Solara?
2. Azalea tells Elder that they can't tell anyone that they are related. Do you think this was the right decision?
3. Write a chapter from Az's point of view seeing Elder step out of the Arbiter and describe the next few moments.
4. Can you pinpoint the moment Elder decides to become friends with Bear and Carter? Can you find evidence of this in the text?
5. How does the author show us more about Elder's personality through the way she treats other people?
6. Elder has a difficult relationship with her mother. Why do you think this is the case? Do you think you have enough information to know the whole story? Do you think Elder and her mother could ever reconcile and have a good relationship?
7. Elder, Bear and Carter have very different personalities. What function do each of them play within the narrative?
8. Why do you think Elder doesn't tell anyone about the visions she has? How would the story be different if she'd told Carter and Bear about them from the start?

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9. Is Reverence a friend or a foe to Elder? Why or why not?
10. Is there a moment when Roc goes from being a partner to a friend? When does this occur in the text?
11. How would you describe the relationship between Roc and Brite in the first half of the story? Are there hints about their actual relationship in the text that you can pick out once you've finished reading the whole story?
12. There are a lot of secrets in the story. How do secrets impact the friendships of the characters?
13. Choose three characters from the book. Ask yourself what each character is keeping secret. How do the secrets these characters are keeping affect the story?
14. One of the themes of this book is bravery, however each character shows bravery in a different way. What does bravery mean to you? Describe a moment when each of our three friends – Elder, Carter and Bear, shows their own individual forms of bravery.

Magical creatures

Questions and activities

1. The Fiercers have come to Beyond because of the threat of the Scourgelings. Not much is said about their original home. What do you think it was like? Based on the characteristics and physical attributes and skills of the Fiercers, draw a map of what you think their original home might look like.
2. Magical creatures are a common element in fantasy novels. What are some other creatures that can appear in fantasy novels? What makes the Fiercers in *Protector of Beyond* different?
3. The mentors make it very clear that the Fiercers are just as sophisticated and smart as humans and are not animals and are to be respected by the rooks. Why do you think people like Arron don't listen to this advice?
4. Create your own type of Fiercer – give them their own name, traits and abilities and motivations. Using the format of the bestiary in the back of the book as a guide, create a page for your Fiercer to go in the bestiary.
5. There are four main types of Fiercers in the story – Pterawolf, Five-tail, Drakon and Feonix. In groups of four, write a short script or play featuring the leaders of the four groups (Khaan, Baring, Aisling & Fillion) discussing the new batch of human rooks. Perhaps your scene could be set just after the new rooks come through the Arbiter?
6. Why do you think the Screamer was following Elder, Carter and Bear and their Fiercer matches for so long? How has the author given hints to this throughout the narrative?
7. Create a bestiary for the other creatures and dangers that Elder and her friends come across in Beyond (and over the Bulwark). For example, the Screamer, Crawler, jagleaf plant.

QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

1. Look at the map at the front of the book. Did you flick back to look at it as you were reading the story? What does having a map add to the narrative? Does it hint at things that might come into play in book two?
2. Pick a book you have read recently and enjoyed. Create a map for this book. It could be a map of the whole 'world' in the book you read, so you could include the bigger geographical elements like mountains, cities, roads, buildings and oceans. Or it could be a more focused map, like a neighbourhood, town or even something like a house.
3. The Arbiter is described as a 'smooth white booth'. Why do you think the author chose to make it plain? If you could redesign the Arbiter, how would you make it different? Try drawing one, with a spark erupting out the top.
4. What do you think the Factory is like? Imagine you have been sent to the Factory. Write a diary entry of someone who has just been transferred there from the Manor. Write about what the Factory is like, what the people are doing and how they feel about what is happening in the rest of Beyond.
5. Why do you think Az teaches the rooks meditation as well as the other lessons? How does this end up helping Elder, especially in controlling her power? Have there been times in your life when you've used

meditation or mindfulness to get you through a tough time?

6. Create a mindfulness technique or a guided meditation for yourself – it can be a short one that you can use throughout the day, or a longer more detailed practice to go through when you're about to go to sleep at night.
7. Create your own detailed cross-section map of the Manor. Don't forget to include the dormitories, dining room and the areas that are off-limits to the rooks.
8. In groups of three or four, design your own version of the Rook Trials.
9. The leaders of Solara use the catchcry 'You spark, you fight' as a rally to arms. Research whether there have been conflicts in human history where a catchcry like this has been used.
10. Write a book review of *Protector of Beyond* for your school newsletter or newspaper. (Don't forget to give it a rating!)
11. Below is a list of personality traits. Try to assign these traits to one of the four gards in the story, based on what you know about the Fiercers in those gards, and the rooks who were assigned to them. You may repeat a personality type in multiple gards:

    Motivated. Anxious. Confident. Jealous. Kind. Relaxed. Playful. Thoughtful. Brave. Considerate. Friendly. Loyal. Strategic. Adaptable. Adventurous. Caring. Sensitive. Driven. Self-belief. Hardworking. Trustworthy.
12. Some of the characters experience bullying throughout the story. Can you identify which ones? How do they each respond to being bullied? Is it the same, or different? List the different ways they responded, then explain why they have acted this way. How would you handle a similar situation?
13. Influencers are not just on social media. Who do you think could be considered an influencer in this novel? Who did they influence, and do you think this aligned with their own values and beliefs, or were they convinced to do something that went against who they are? Why do you think those who were influenced allowed it to happen? What could they have done differently?

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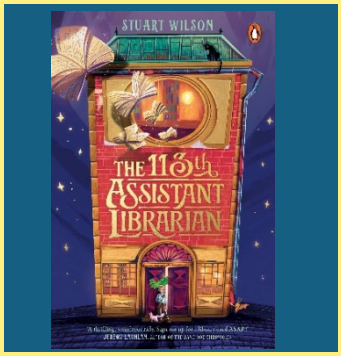
Further reading from Penguin Random House



The 113th Assistant Librarian by Stuart Wilson

Oliver Wormwood is sure his new job in the library will be boring. Until he learns that books hold great power – and danger.

By the end of his first day, Oliver has witnessed a death, been frozen by a book, met a perplexing number of cats, and fought off a horde of terrifying creatures.

With only a mysterious girl called Agatha to show him the ropes, Oliver needs to learn fast . . . if he wants to live longer than the 112 assistant librarians before him.

Teachers' Resources available.

Time Lions and the Chrono-Loop by Martin Seneviratne and Krystal Sutherland

Twins Pearl and Patrick are no ordinary twelve-year-olds. They're geniuses who pull heists all over the world to further their scientific and historical research. Their criminal activity has made them a regular nuisance to both the CIA and MI6. But it's all been worth it. They've finally achieved their greatest triumph: time travel. Their first stop: ancient Egypt, where they even get to see King Tut!

When the twins' escapade attracts the attention of TIME (The Interdimensional Misconduct Enquiry), a secret organisation charged with maintaining the timeline, will they have what it takes to be recruited as agents, or will they be sentenced to one hundred years in the Eternal Abyss?

The Lost Defenders by Sam Summers

Jace Tanner has always been different – he can see monsters no one else can. As if fitting in at school wasn't hard enough! All he wants is to be normal ... and maybe make it through his final year of primary school without getting expelled!

But when you can see monsters, trouble follows you everywhere – and things are about to get worse. A lot worse. When strange happenings begin to unfold, Jace uncovers a secret world hidden behind museum walls and a mysterious curator who knows more than he's saying. Drawn into an ancient mystery, Jace soon realises he's not as alone as he thought.

But with a prophecy threatening to tear down the Veil that separates Earth from the Monster Realm, can Jace and his newfound allies come together, face their fears, and unlock their forgotten inheritance in time to save the world?

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Order form

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Protector of Beyond	**Shara Curlett**	**9781761357329**	**4–8**	**$18.99**		
The 113th Assistant Librarian	Stuart Wilson	9781761342257	4–8	$19.99		
Time Lions and the Chrono-Loop	*Martin Seneviratne and Krystal Sutherland*	9780143779377	4–8	$16.99		
The Lost Defenders	Sam Summers	9781761355059	3–6	$17.99		
				TOTAL		

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