

"An astonishing
miracle of a book."

—KATHERINE
APPLEGATE,

NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER
FOR *THE ONE AND
ONLY IVAN*

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

WITH ART BY
ASHLEY
MACKENZIE

THE #1 INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER
KATHERINE RUNDELL

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

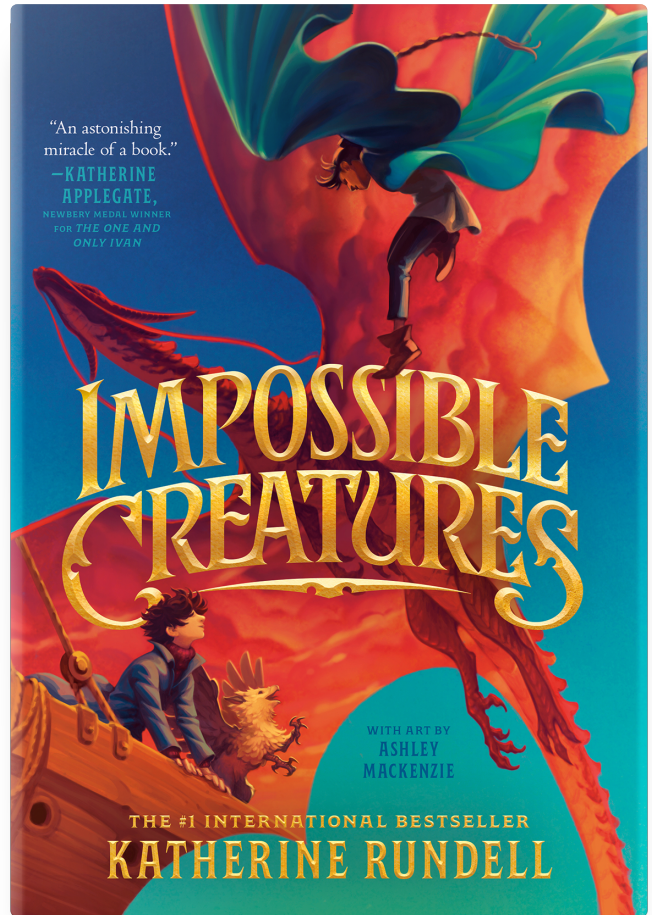
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ABOUT THE BOOK

The day that Christopher saved a drowning baby griffin from a hidden lake would change his life forever.

It's the day he learned about the Archipelago—a cluster of unmapped islands where magical creatures of every kind have thrived for thousands of years, until now. And it's the day he met Mal—a girl on the run, in desperate need of his help.

Mal and Christopher embark on a wild adventure, racing from island to island, searching for someone who can explain why the magic is fading and why magical creatures are suddenly dying. They consult sphinxes, battle kraken, and negotiate with dragons. But the closer they get to the dark truth of what's happening, the clearer it becomes: no one else can fix this. If the Archipelago is to be saved, Mal and Christopher will have to do it themselves.



Themes: Fantasy, Friendship, Adventure, Myths, Legends & Folklore, Courage & Honor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo credit: Nina Subin

Katherine Rundell is the author of *Rooftoppers* (an ALA-ALSC Notable Book, winner of the Waterstones Children's Book Prize), *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms* (a *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* winner), *The Wolf Wilder*, *The Explorer* (winner of the Costa Children's Book Award), and *The Good Thieves*.

She grew up in Zimbabwe, Brussels, and London, and is currently a Fellow of St. Catherine's College, Oxford. Her books for adults include *Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne* (winner of the Baillie Gifford Prize) and *Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise*.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. The cover for *Impossible Creatures* was illustrated by Ashley Mackenzie, who also created the interior illustrations for the story. The cover is our first introduction to a book. What clues does the cover of this book offer readers about the tale? What predictions would you make about the characters based on the cover? How does the color palette make you *feel*?
2. *Impossible Creatures* takes place in two worlds, one real and one fictional. At the beginning of the book, an illuminated map by Virginia Allyn details the islands of the Archipelago. Before you begin reading, study the map. Why would a story need a map? What places or illustrative details on the map stand out to you? What do you predict about the story based on what you see?
3. Sneak a peek at the back of the book—*Impossible Creatures* includes pages from the Guardian's Bestiary, "an account of some of the wild creatures of the Archipelago," illustrated by Virginia Allyn. (p. 50, p. 336–355) What is a bestiary? When did they gain popularity, and what historical purpose did they serve? This illustrated bestiary is a family heirloom offered to a main character by his grandfather. Why might the author include a bestiary in this book? As you come across various creatures during your reading of the story, check the bestiary to see if you can find the animals there!

READING ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before you begin, create a three-column reflection chart to accompany your reading of the book: What do THINK, what do FEEL, and what do you WONDER? What do you notice about the text and its accompanying illustrations? Think about how the book makes you feel as you are reading. Make note of questions you hope will be answered by the book's end. Use the final column to make predictions for what you think might happen later in the series.
2. *Impossible Creatures* begins with three short quotes, or *epigraphs*, excerpting writing from three very different (and quite old) time periods. How do these quotes relate to one another? What can you predict about the story based on the author's choice of epigraphs?
3. As you read, can you make a connection to any other stories you've read, podcasts you've listened to, or shows you've watched? Create a mind map of these associations—links to familiar characters, plots, or settings—that you can update as you continue reading *Impossible Creatures*.
4. Orient yourself to the world of *Impossible Creatures* using the map at the story's start. Begin by locating Atidina, where Mal's hometown of Icthus sits. Chart the children's journey from island to island as their story progresses. Locate Christopher's home, North London, on a real-world map, then approximate the location of his grandfather's estate in Scotland. Roughly figure out where these Otherworld locations would sit in relation to the four real locations on the Archipelago map.
5. Our names hold power. There is a scene in the story when Christopher and Mal discuss the "prophetic" nature of her name and how families' naming choices differ between their cultures. (p. 123–124) Many proper names in *Impossible Creatures*, including Mal's, offer readers insight about that character or beast. Make a list of names that catch your attention while reading and research the etymological origin of those names. What languages and cultures do you find represented? What do you think the author hoped to accomplish with her name choices? Your research list might include Christopher Forrester, Malum Arvorian, Frank Aureate, Fidens Nighthand, Adam Kivil, Galatia, Irian Guinne, Anja Trevasse, Marik, Naravirala, Jacques, Erato, and Francesco Sforza. Do you know where your name comes from etymologically, or why it was chosen for you? Journal privately about this if you wish: If you could choose a different name for yourself, what would you pick, and why?

6. Before she even introduces herself to Christopher, Mal “spoke the most powerful and exhausting, the bravest, most exasperating and galvanic sentence in the human language.” Mal says, “I need your help.” Can you think of a time when you asked for help, or perhaps a time when a friend asked *you* for help, and it felt like a big turning point? Mal’s request “[had] the power to change everything.” (p. 59) Did you see yourself or those around you differently after asking for help, or did the ask somehow alter your perspective of the situation you were in?
7. Fantastical tools including the casapasaran, glamry blade, and a dryad wood boat play critical roles in this adventure story. If you could design your own magical artifact, what purpose would it serve? Sketch a prototype of your magical device and explain its use—and its potential limitations.
8. The hero’s journey is a common narrative archetype in middle grade literature. At a basic level, Mal and Christopher each go on an adventure, face challenges, and are transformed. Look more closely at common stages of the hero’s journey—there are at least a dozen commonly cited. Chart either Mal or Christopher’s arc along the steps of their hero’s journey.
9. *Impossible Creatures* includes strong themes of bravery and sacrifice, even in the face of fear. What helps you feel brave when you are afraid? As a class, create a list of comforting people, reassuring rituals, or fortifying experiences that help you face your fears. These could include calm breathing techniques, listening to a favorite song, self-affirmations, or receiving support from a loved one or pet.
10. Which scene of the story is so cinematic you can picture it in your mind? Create a four (or more!) panel comic re-creating the moment in a graphic novel format.
11. Author Katherine Rundell’s writing style is lush, vivid, impish, and action-packed. How did the narrative voice make you *feel* as you read this book? Create a mood board or design a playlist inspired by the book’s tenor and pace.
12. Rundell’s writing is also highly descriptive and uses sophisticated vocabulary choices. Make a list of new-to-you or particularly delightful words you come across while reading *Impossible Creatures* and look up the definitions of those you cannot discern from context. This word list might include *voluble* (p. 151), *sardonic* (p. 153), *thrum* (p. 167), *charlatan* (p. 177), *inscrutable* (p. 214), *insolent* (p. 225), *gymkhana* (p. 229), or *delectation* (p. 266).
13. Throughout the book we encounter creatures representing mythologies from around the world, some of which may be familiar to readers but others may not. Keep a log of impossible creatures the children encounter and identify the mythological origin(s) of those beasts. This list may include the griffin, kludde, ratatoska, longma, kraken, twrch tryth, sphinx, karkadann, and manticore. Remember to check the Guardian’s Bestiary to see if the creature is featured there!
14. Animals of all kinds are drawn to Christopher in both the magical and real worlds, and Rundell writes, “[Christopher] knew that the attention and love of animals were no gentle thing. It often involved a certain amount of blood.” (p. 5) Many of the impossible creatures who appear along Christopher and Mal’s journey are peaceful, while others have more aggressive temperaments. Sort mythical creatures from the list you made while reading by their various qualities, including perhaps by their size, their willingness to help humans, or their viciousness. If you had to assemble a team from among the impossible creatures to be on your side against an unknown enemy like the one pursuing Mal, which animals would you pick, and why?
15. The myths and folklore of many cultures feature a tree as a central motif; the tree often connects spiritual planes and serves as a bridge between humans and that culture’s divine power. Research a few of the cultures that include trees in their mythology. How does Rundell’s description of the Glimourie Tree (pp. 301–302) fit into your understanding of the mythical tree of life or a tree of wisdom? Sketch the Glimourie Tree as you imagine it.
16. At the end of the book, in a chapter entitled, “The Beginning, Again,” Rundell writes of a baby being born. (p. 331) We are told the baby’s exclamation was the same words Mal spoke as she rocketed toward the Somnulum. Work individually or in small groups to write a chapter introducing this new character to the story world on the basis of those words, either as a newborn or once the child has grown to adolescence or adulthood. Do you predict this baby and a guardian will meet? Which guardian? What might that encounter look like, and where does it take place in your version of the story? Where else in the story did we see life cycles or birth, death, and new beginnings discussed, for animals or for humans?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. The author of *Impossible Creatures* credits books and manuscripts in three British libraries as particularly helpful in her research of mythical creatures: the Bodleian, the Taylorian, and the British Library. Invite students to explore the resources available through those online collections and then search specifically for images of mythical creatures that appear in the story. In small groups, select four to six primary documents from the libraries' databases or from the Library of Congress's online resources to interpret, and offer a narrative that connects the images together or connects them to this story. Encourage students to present their discoveries to the class.
2. Time has almost run out for the magic of the glimourie and the animals under its protection; "An entire ecosystem is ruptured." (p. 98) *Impossible Creatures*, as well as Katherine's adult book *Vanishing Treasures: A Bestiary of Extraordinary Endangered Creatures*, includes a strong call to action for humans to protect the Earth's environment and keep its actual creatures from further harm, calling it "currently a chaos that humans are able to ignore" while animals cannot. (p. 99) What real-life animals teeter on the brink of extinction? Work as a group to research a list of endangered animals and compile your own bestiary of these endangered creatures.
3. Naravirala, the wise sphinx, notes to Christopher that "great power must never reside in only one person. It must be shared. . . . It must be spread, among as many good women and men as can be found; not because it is kind or polite or fair, but because it is the only way to beat back against horror." (p. 322) Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why could it be important for power to be shared among many rather than resting in the hands of few? Can you think of real-world examples of times when power in the hands of only one person was problematic, misused, or abused? What about situations in which power in the hands of one or a few was (or theoretically would be) helpful, such as when there's a need for expediency or there's difficulty reaching consensus? How do we reconcile Naravirala's statement with the Archipelago's consolidation of responsibility in the Immortal?



Kit Ballenger, JD/MLIS, is a Washington, D.C., area youth services librarian and literary consultant. You can find her on Instagram @KitonLit and at HelpYourShelf.com.



PRAISE FOR IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES



★ “AN EPIC FANTASY WITH TIMELESS THEMES AND UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

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—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ “A QUINTESSENTIAL FANTASY THAT WILL DELIGHT READERS OF ALL AGES.”

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “RUNDELL HAS DELIVERED A **WELCOME REMINDER OF WHAT MAKES THE GENRE GREAT**.”

—*Booklist*, starred review

“AN INSTANT CLASSIC FROM ONE OF THE MOST GIFTED STORYTELLERS OF OUR TIME,
IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES IS AN ASTONISHING MIRACLE OF A BOOK.”

—Katherine Applegate, Newbery Medal winner for *The One and Only Ivan*

“AN ABSOLUTE **WOW** OF A BOOK.

UTTERLY ENCHANTING AND FULL OF WONDER, READERS ARE IN FOR A TREAT!”

—B. B. Alston, author of *Amari and the Night Brothers*

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READERS WHO ALREADY KNOW HER BOOKS WILL SEIZE THIS WITH DELIGHT, AND
NEW READERS WILL LOVE IT AND DEMAND ALL HER OTHERS AT ONCE.”

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