

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

BOOK TWO

THE POISONED KING

WITH ART BY
ASHLEY
MACKENZIE

THE #1 INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER
KATHERINE RUNDELL

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

RHCBTeachersLibrarians.com



ABOUT THE BOOK

Christopher Forrester woke to find a dragon chewing on his face—and his heart leaped for joy! He'd been dreaming of going back to the Archipelago, the secret cluster of islands where all the creatures of myth still live, and here was his summons.

But there is a poison spreading in the Archipelago. Rooting it out will involve a daring rescue mission on the back of a sphinx, a stealthy entrance to a dragon's lair, and a death-defying plan to save a prisoner held in the heart of a castle. At the center of this storm is Anya: a small girl with a flock of birds at her side, a newly hatched chick in her pocket, and a ravenous hunger for justice.

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



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nina Subin

Katherine Rundell is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Impossible Creatures* and *The Poisoned King*. Her other books for children include *Rooftoppers*, *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms*, *The Wolf Wilder*, *The Explorer*, and *The Good Thieves*. For adult readers, Rundell has written *Vanishing Treasures: A Bestiary of Extraordinary Endangered Creatures* and *Super-Infinite:*

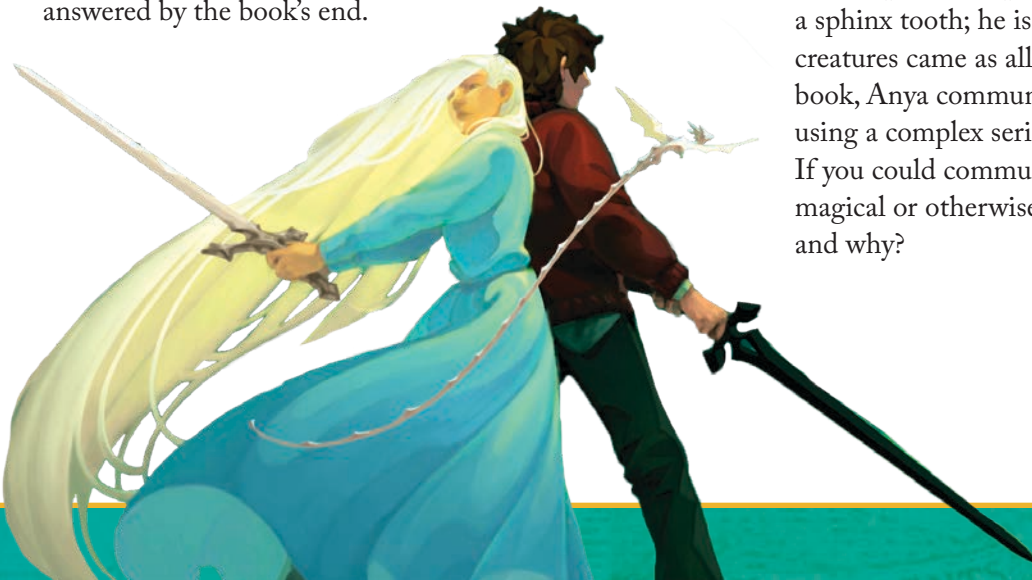
The Transformations of John Donne, which won the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction. She was the recipient of the British Book Award for Book of the Year and Author of the Year. She grew up in Zimbabwe, Brussels, and London, and is currently a Fellow of St. Catherine's College, Oxford.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. *The Poisoned King* is a sequel to the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Impossible Creatures*. Take a moment to read a quick summary of the first book in the series before you jump into this one, to familiarize yourself with its plot or refresh your recollection.
2. Look closely at the various elements that illustrator Ashley Mackenzie included on the cover of *The Poisoned King*. What clues does the art offer you about the story you're about to read? What predictions can you make about the characters, the setting, or the plot based upon the cover illustrations? How does the color palette make you feel? What does the title—and its font—make you wonder?
3. *The Poisoned King* takes place almost entirely in the fictional world of “the Glimouria Archipelago: a cluster of thirty-four islands in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean.” (p. 274)
 - a. What is an archipelago? Can you find any real-world examples of one, for reference?
 - b. There is an illuminated map representing the Archipelago at the beginning of the book, illustrated by Virginia Allyn. What does it mean for a manuscript to be “illuminated”?
 - c. Study this map before you begin reading, and familiarize yourself with its geography. How does a map prepare a reader for a story? Consider charting the characters’ travels among the islands as you read, to help you follow their movements.

READING ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before you begin reading *The Poisoned King*, create a three-column reflection chart: What do you THINK, what do you FEEL, and what do you WONDER? Use this chart to make notes about your questions and your emotional response to the story as you are reading. What do you notice about the text and about the accompanying detailed black-and-white illustrations? Think about the problems Anya and Christopher face as the story progresses, and the steps they take to solve them. Would you have made the same decisions if put in their position? Use your curiosity as inspiration and keep track of questions you hope will be answered by the book's end.
2. Sneak a peek at the back of the book—*The Poisoned King* includes pages from the Guardian's Bestiary, which features some of the “thousands of magical creatures” that thrive across the Archipelago (p. 274).
 - a. What is a bestiary, when did they gain popularity, and what historical purpose did bestiaries serve?
 - b. You will encounter these “creatures of myth” (p. 274) throughout *The Poisoned King*—do the animals look how you imagined them as you were reading?
 - c. Christopher can speak with the animals using a sphinx tooth; he is “a boy to whom all living creatures came as allies” (p. 244). Throughout the book, Anya communicates with the gagana by using a complex series of head shakes and nods. If you could communicate with any animal, magical or otherwise, which would you choose, and why?



3. Plants like rascovnic play a key role (pun intended) in Anya and Christopher's survival. Create a horticulture guide, structured like the Bestiary or organized by your own system, as you read. Research these magical herbs and try to identify the cultural origins of their mythical properties.
4. How did the narrative voice make you feel as you read this book? Build a playlist that matches the action and tenor of the story, or craft a collage or mood board inspired by the book's energy.
5. Rundell's writing is highly descriptive and often uses sophisticated vocabulary choices. Make a list of unfamiliar or intriguing words you come across while reading *The Poisoned King* and look up the definitions of those you can't figure out from their context. This word list might include *suppurating* (p. 7), *excrescence* (p. 7), *scarum-feathered* (p. 17), *hoyden* (p. 27), *conscripted* (p. 75), *augury* (p. 97), *amanuensis* (p. 101), *misanthropes* (p. 164), or *scudded* (p. 218).
6. The book features dynamic black-and-white illustrations by Ashley Mackenzie.
 - a. How would you describe the artwork? Make a quick list of descriptive words that pop into your mind when you look at the images.
 - b. Can you see this book as a TV show or video game? What qualities of the story are particularly cinematic? Which unillustrated scene of the story is so evocative you can picture it like a movie in your mind? Create a full-page drawing of that scene, or sketch four (or more!) panels of a comic retelling the moment in a graphic novel format.
7. Notice the chapter titles. There is an artful device throughout the book where words at the end of one chapter connect to the title at the start of the next: "Courage" into "Rage" (p. 52–53), for example, or "Anya ran" and then "Run" (p. 86–87). The stylistic term for this is a doozy: *anadiplosis*. Can you find other examples of anadiplosis as you read? What does the author accomplish with this purposeful repetition?
8. Discuss the power of biding one's time and find three examples in the story of when "waiting, waiting, waiting for something to change" (p. 33)—or taking time to change it!—was a more effective course of action than launching an immediate response.
9. Why do you think the librarian of Glimt is a harpy? In her acknowledgments, Rundell thanks librarians, calling them "the guardians of knowledge" (p. 292). Aellope has a fairly brutal reputation in Greek mythology, but she takes this job seriously and believes in her task. She says, "A library is a precious thing: it must be protected." (p. 170) Do you agree or disagree with Aellope's statement? Why? She also threatens "anyone who folds the pages over or writes in the books" with having "their liver plucked out." (p. 170) On a lighter note, are you Team Bookmark or Team Dog-ear?
10. Anya prefers the forest to palace finery, but her grandfather admonishes her that, as a princess, she "exists to be looked at" (p. 29). She is hardened by the trials she faces, and by the end of the book, there is no doubt: "Anya might look like a doll the world had chosen to play with, but that was deceptive." (p. 237) We can all contain secret lives within us, and, yes, sometimes looks can be deceiving. Journal privately about a time when you may have mistakenly judged someone incorrectly based on your initial impression of them. (If this is too uncomfortable for you, choose an inanimate object—something that looks totally ordinary!—and assign it a special, secret power that isn't obvious from its outward appearance. Journal about that instead.)
11. We are warned with the very first chapter that there is a darkness pervading this story and "a thirst for revenge" (p. 1). We see in the loquillan's vision of "one possible future" (p. 158) that Anya's desire for revenge can change the trajectory of her life: "Hatred was a poison. It had poisoned [Claude], and it would poison her." (p. 254) Think about the title of this book again with the added context you have upon finishing it. Who do you think the title refers to, and why?



12. Katherine Rundell crafts some exquisitely meaty and philosophical phrases that invite the reader to deeply ruminate. Respond to your favorite of the following quotes, or choose another that made you pause and ponder as you were reading:
 - a. "They have seen too many beginnings to believe in anything so final as an ending." (p. 55)
 - b. "It is one thing to say you will not go; it is another thing entirely to resist." (p. 80)
 - c. "Bravery is an unpredictable beast. The human animal is often startled by its own unexpected, unsuspected cowardice. But once or twice in every lifetime, we are surprised by our own courage." (p. 85)
 - d. "It would have been a glorious thing, Anya thought, to take shelter behind the magnificence of a dragon. But she must be her own dragon now." (p. 222)
 - e. "It made a difference to have someone to move through the world with again. A friend changed the feel of the universe." (p. 228)
13. At the end of *Impossible Creatures*, a baby is born who makes only a brief appearance here, at "not yet a year old" and named Teren (p. 270). What are your predictions for the new Immortal's return? Where do you think the story will turn in the next book of the series?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. In the first book in this series, *Impossible Creatures*, Naravirala, the wise sphinx, warns 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." (*Impossible Creatures*, p. 322) *The Poisoned King* builds on that message about greed and the dangers of corruption. At the start of this book, the Argens are "the last royal family left in the Archipelago" (p. 22), and the monarchy is dissolved by the book's end: "It is neither an easy nor a simple thing, to abolish one system of government and establish another; but that doesn't mean it isn't possible." (p. 258) Research real-world examples of countries that transitioned from monarchies to democracies, or to republics with constitutional monarchies. What factors—social, economic, etc.—might contribute to such a transition?
2. Anya steals a tiny book from her uncle that had been banished to the Outerlands hundreds of years prior and was believed to be lost: "[T]he book ended by being kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the City of New York in the nation of America." (p. 178) This is a real museum, in a real place.
 - a. With a grown-up's permission, visit the museum's website. Find the "Search" tab and explore the Met's vast collection of artwork related to poisons.
 - b. The Met Cloisters, a branch of the museum dedicated to the art and architecture of medieval Europe, is home to seven Unicorn Tapestries. What are they? Do you see similarities between the tapestries and the painting Anya describes on p. 165?
 - c. The Cloisters also boast extensive gardens, some of which replicate those seen in the tapestries. Browse the current plant list, and research poisonous plants (such as belladonna and mandrake) that may have had medicinal or "magical" uses in medieval times.
3. Riddles appear several times in the story (p. 15, 90, 173). Work in a group to pose and solve riddles to one another like Naravirala.



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

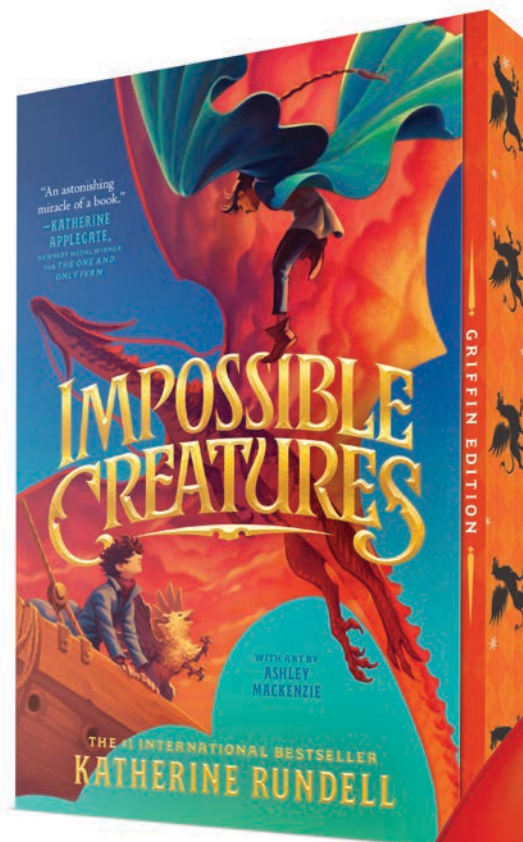
PRAISE FOR *IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES*

- ★ “It’s hard not to fall in love with the Archipelago.” —*BookPage*, starred review
- ★ “Bold and unforgettable.” —*Shelf Awareness*, starred review
- ★ “An epic fantasy with timeless themes and unforgettable characters.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
- ★ “Tender and devastating.” —*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*

“I love Katherine Rundell’s writing . . . Readers who already know her books will seize this with delight, and new readers will love it and demand all her others at once.” —Philip Pullman, author of *The Golden Compass*

“I heartily recommend it to readers of all ages—especially animal lovers, lovers of magic, fans of fairy tales, and anyone who needs the comfort of an optimistic, healing story in turbulent times.”
—Rick Riordan, author of the Percy Jackson and the Olympians series



Visit RHCBTeachersLibrarians.com,
your online destination for all the resources
you need for your classroom or library!



Follow Us on Social
@RHCBTeachersLibrarians

Random House Children's Books • School & Library Marketing • 1745 Broadway • New York, NY 10019