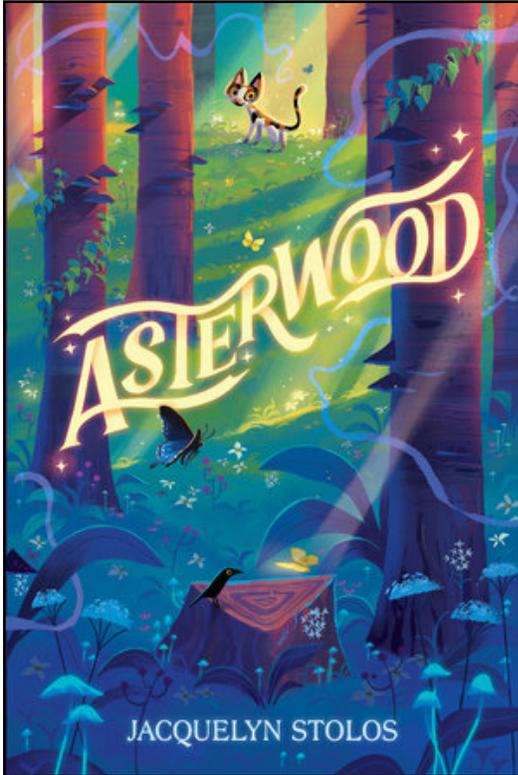


# CLASSROOM & LIBRARY GUIDE



## Asterwood

by Jacquelyn Stolos

### The Book

*Asterwood* is a dark and creative fantasy that explores themes of family, friendship, and the environment. Readers will root for ten-year-old Madelyn and The New Hopefuls, a rag-tag band of child activists, as they fight to save the magical forest of Asterwood. *Asterwood* is a great choice for late-elementary and early middle school reading book clubs and reading groups interested in identity, the environment, and interpersonal relationships.

### The Author

**Jacquelyn Stolos** is the author of *Edendale*, a literary finalist in the 2020 Forward INDIES Book of the Year Awards, and *Asterwood*, her middle-grade debut. Her short stories and book reviews have been published in magazines like *Joyland*, *No Tokens*, *Necessary Fiction* and more. She holds a Bachelors in English from Georgetown University and an MFA in fiction from New York University.

Jacquelyn is an arts educator with fifteen years of classroom experience who aims to inspire and affirm her students and readers through deep empathy, close attention, and radical understanding.



### How to use this guide

This guide has been designed to enhance reading skills and comprehension, build literary vocabulary and enrich the social-emotional learning that comes from engaging deeply with fiction. You can use the “Reflect” section of this guide for individual reflection or to facilitate meaningful conversations between readers. The “Create” section is designed at a springboard for young writers eager to create their own masterpieces!

# Reflect

1. In Chapter 1, readers are introduced to Madelyn's love of daydreaming. What does Madelyn like to daydream about? Why do you think Madelyn like to spend so much time in her imagination?
2. Asterwood's forest setting is an important element of the novel. Find and list some sensory details—details that draw upon our five senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste—that bring the setting to life for you.
3. When Madelyn first tells Ezra about her encounter with Calle, he doesn't seem to believe her. "He thought she was making it all up. Even though Madelyn knew she was telling the truth, shame flooded her body." Misunderstandings happen all the time. It's hard. It's a part of being a human. Think of a time you were misunderstood or not believed. How did it make you feel?
4. On page 28, Stolos uses figurative language, which mean words or expressions used in a fun, imaginative way to make writing come alive, to describe Dots' tail. "Sometimes Madelyn lost sight of the cat for what felt like five minutes straight, only to see her question mark of a tail appear from behind a dark thicket." Why does Stolos call the tail a question mark? Use a similar strategy to describe something you can see right now.
5. In Chapter 9, Madelyn decides to stay in Asterwood with the New Hopefuls instead of going home. Why do you think she makes this decision? What does this tell you about Madelyn as a character? What would you do?
6. Liam observes that Madelyn is just like her alleged mother: fierce, righteous, and not a person to be underestimated. How does Liam's description of Madelyn compare with how she thinks of herself? How does it compare with how you think of Madelyn?
7. Madelyn expresses frustration that, after teaching her about "big, bad things happening in the world" like wars where children are harmed and the destruction of the environment, the adults in her life continued as normal instead of stopping everything to fix these things. How does learning about crises and tragedies make you feel? Is there anything you wish the adults in your life would do differently? (page 95)
8. What are Aine's thoughts about greed? What is Anne Cedarblossom's attitude toward greed? How does Madelyn react to their ideas? What's your reaction?
9. Celia knows that harvesting violet root will harm the forest but explains that, because she's just one of many Tree Eaters: "What I do or don't do won't make any difference" (page 146). What do you think of Celia's argument?
10. Madelyn and Fern are slow to become friends. Why do you think this is? How does their friendship change over the course of the novel?
11. Repetition is a literary device where an author uses the same word or phrase over and over. Find a place in Asterwood where Jacquelyn Stolos uses repetition. What effect does it have on the story?

12. What is the lie that Madelyn tells Calle and Fern in Chapter 29? Why do you think she tells this lie?
13. Who is Madelyn's mother? Did this surprise you?
14. On page 208, Stella says that "Sometimes you have to do little bads to get a big good." Do you agree with her argument? Why or why not?
15. In Chapter 37, Ezra admits that he has made mistakes and asks for Madelyn's forgiveness. How does this make her feel? How does it make you feel when people you are counting on make mistakes? How does it feel when they apologize?
16. On page 244, Ezra tells Madelyn "...no one else's actions are your fault. You're just one person. You're a single thread in a tapestry of cause and strange, unpredictable, effect. You can't take the weight of the world on your shoulders." Does Madelyn agree with this? Do you?
17. Madelyn finishes the novel where she began, on the mossy rock in the woods behind her house. How has she changed? How has she stayed the same?

## Create

1. Chapter One opens with Madelyn "on her back on a big mossy rock in the woods behind her backyard, her face in a perfect patch of sun" (page 5). This is one of Madelyn's favorite places. What are yours? Go to one of your favorite places and make note of your sensory experience. What do you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste? How does being in this place make you feel? What does it make you imagine? Write it down.
2. Ezra's legend of The Path of No Return is based off a story author Jacquelyn Stolos's own father made up about a trail in the woods behind their house when she was a kid. Do any of your adults like to make up stories for you? How about your friends? Try writing one of these stories down. How can you add to it? How can you change it?
3. Asterwood's cannibals were inspired by the man-eating trolls in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Who is your favorite monster from a book or movie? Write a story inspired by that monster. What can you add or change to make that monster your own?
4. Asterwood is written in a close, third-person point of view. This means that the story follows one character very closely, seeing the world through their eyes, ears, and minds while using she, he, they pronouns. Most of the chapters follow Madelyn closely. In chapter 24, we switch to Dots' point of view, seeing and smelling the action of the story through the eyes and nose of the cat. In chapter 30, we switch to the Violet Aspens' point of view. Are there any other parts of the book that might be interesting through a different set of eyes? Choose a different chapter and rewrite it from a new, creative point of view.
5. What did you think of the end of the story? Can you imagine a different fate for Madelyn and her friends? Write your own alternate ending to Asterwood!