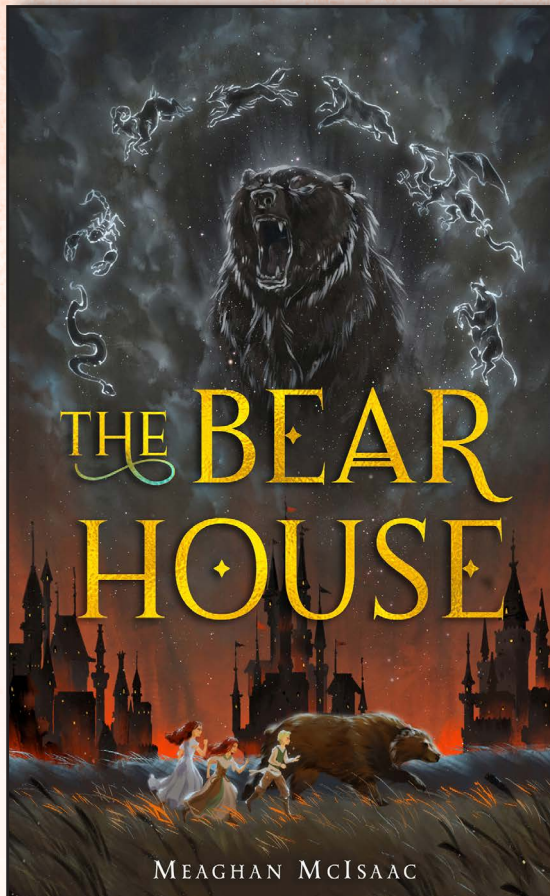


# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



## *The Bear House*

by Meaghan McIssac

First in a Series!

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

### ABOUT THE BOOK

In this gritty medieval world where the ruling houses are based on the constellations, betrayal, intrigue, and a king's murder force the royal sisters of the Bear House on the run!

Moody Aster and her spoiled sister Ursula are the daughters of Jasper Lourdes, Major of Bears and lord of all the realm. Rivals, both girls dream of becoming the Bear queen someday, although neither really deserves to, having no particular talent in . . . well, anything.

But when their Uncle Bram murders their father in a bid for the crown, the girls are forced onto the run, along with lowly Dev the Bearkeeper and the Lourdes's half-grown grizzly Alcor, symbol of their house. As a bitter struggle for the throne consumes the kingdom in civil war, the sisters must rely on Dev, the bear cub, and each other to survive—and find wells of courage, cunning, and skill they never knew they had.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Good vs. evil is a common theme in works of fantasy. What is the first evidence that good vs. evil is an overarching theme in *The Bear House*? How does this theme give rise to the conflict of the story? Identify the “evil” characters. Which characters represent “good”?
- Explain the following words from The Writings of Thuban: “It is in these times of peace that the Bear Highen should take careful stock of its friends. For the gravest of danger can be found lurking behind smiles” (p. 38). How do these words foreshadow scenes and relationships between characters as the novel progresses?
- Symbolism is when one object or thing stands in the place of something else. Explain the symbolism of the Shadow Dragon egg. What is the egg's power? Discuss the significance of the egg in the war that is waged between Jasper (Major) and Bram (Minor). Discuss why Jasper is known as the “Death Chaser.”



- Ursula and Aster Lourdes are the daughters of Jasper (Major). Explain why Jasper thinks that his daughters aren't prepared to be named Major. Cite evidence that Ursula wants power, but not the responsibility that comes with it. Discuss Aster's personality and disposition. How is the Major chosen? Debate whether the right sister is chosen at the end of the novel.
- Fantasy novels involve journeys and quests to solve a novel's conflict. Ursula, Aster, and Bernadine Lourdes leave the Manor on a quest. What are they searching for? Why do they feel it's up to them to embark on such a quest? How do they get sidetracked along the way? What do they discover as they get deeper into their quest? Debate whether their journey opens their eyes to the good and the evil factions in their kingdom.
- Religion typically plays an important role in works of fantasy. Discuss the role of religion in this novel. Identify On-High. How is the job of the keepers connected to religion? Ursula doesn't fully understand that the keepers work for a higher power. Why does she think that her father is the higher power? What is Bram's view of On-High? Bernadine's mother was a "Pious believer." Why is Bernadine worried that On-High won't let them join her mother in the stars? Explain why Bram is so willing to risk his soul for power.
- Bram sends Ursula a gown covered in frost pearls. What is the significance of the frost pearls? Discuss why Bram sends the dress to Ursula.
- What are the characteristics of a warrior? At what point does Bram's daughter Bernadine begin to see her father as a warrior? When does she start to question his motives? Her father asks her to trust him. Cite the scene in the novel when Bernadine realizes that he cannot be trusted. Explain what Bernadine means by "Maybe I can save him [Bram] from himself" (p. 275).
- Describe the eight Sacred High Beasts of the Highen and their kingdoms. Mizar, the Hemoth Bear, is the mightiest creature in all of the Bear Highen. Who is Alcor? What do these beasts contribute to the plot? Discuss their role in the resolution of the conflict.
- Fantasy deals with universal truths and helps readers understand reality. What are the universal truths in this novel? What do you understand about reality from reading *The Bear House*?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo credit: McIssac

**Meaghan McIssac** is the author of several books for young readers, including *The Boys of Fire and Ash*, which was shortlisted for the Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Award; and *Movers*, which was a Shining Willow Finalist for the Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards. *The Bear House* is the first in an exciting new fantasy series. Meaghan lives in Toronto, Ontario, with her two dogs.

