



Genre: fantasy

Readership: Upper primary to lower secondary

The Strangers of Paragor:

Book 1 — Arrival

By Charlotte McConagh

About the book

Written by a teenager, expressly for a similarly-aged audience, *Arrival* has a central cast of teenage characters along with an array of fantastical beings and Gods. Readers will be enthralled.

In this action-packed fantasy tale of adventure and romance, six teenage school friends have the same recurring dream. They decide act on the dream by making a daring leap of faith through a portal. Surviving the Crossing, they find themselves in the land of Paragor. The coming of the six Strangers has been foretold so news of their arrival is welcomed. Unknown to them, they are to be saviours in a time of looming war due to the dark forces at work across the land. The book's climax, the war between the forces of good and evil, reveals the Strangers' power not only to others but to themselves.

A big ambitious novel, epic in scope and dense with detail, it is a multi-layered story with strong classic themes providing many teaching and learning opportunities.

Learning activities:

In introducing the book, have students read the blurb on the back cover and, most important, alert them to the invaluable list of characters on the last two pages (pp.426-7).

English:

Themes:

Class discussion: What are the main themes in the book? Make a list.

Love and Hate

The mermaid told Jane that *Love will overcome* (p. 77).

Based solely on your reading of the novel, do you think this is true? Discuss.

Leostrail said *There is hate in everyone* (p. 299)

Based solely on your reading of the novel, do you think this is true? Discuss.



Satine both loved and hated Leostrail, her mother's husband. She betrayed him just as she betrayed her lover Accolon. In the end she killed Leostrail and yet afterwards professed to have loved him (pp. 419-420). Did you find this complex relationship believable?

Duty:

A sense of duty was uppermost in the minds of the royals of Paragor.

For example:

- Satine asked herself the question: *Can you overrule your desires and hopes...all because of a sense of duty?* (p. 230)
- Elixia said *we are all servants of duty* (p. 169)
- Satine told Accolon *We can't always have everything we wish for* (p. 175)
- Fern told Jane *I must do my duty* (pp. 236-237)

Make a list of the pros and cons of choosing duty over love.

Betrayal

There are many acts of betrayal in the book – for example, by Vizzet, Satine, Accolon, and Columba.

Discuss which act of betrayal you found the most shocking? Why?

Vengeance, retribution and war:

- In the book there are examples of lost love leading to deadly retribution. For example, Leostrail wrecked havoc on Paragor all because he was rejected by the woman he loved as a young man - the Goddess Artemis (pp. 49, 300-301).
- In response to this revelation, Satine asked *did the end ever truly justify the means?* (p.359)

Debate: In war, the end justifies the means.

Good and evil:

- Is there a sharp divide between good and evil in *Arrival*, or is the line blurred? For example, consider the different actions of Accolon throughout the book.
- Discuss and decide.



The power of music:

- The power of music is another theme in *Arrival*. First, there is Ria who sings and plays the harp. Abused as a teenager (p. 83), she speaks of how music comforted her and eased her heart (p. 118). During the final battle (p. 402), her song of lamentation for the dead stops the enemy in their tracks. Second, there are the Sirens - sea nymphs, whose irresistible *calling song* made sailors leap into the sea to their doom (pp. 292 -294).
- Discuss: Does music have the power to move you? How does it make you feel?
- Be prepared to explain why your favourite song (instrumental or with lyrics) has such a big impact on you. Is it the music, the lyrics or the singer's voice that touches you, or a combination of all three? Play the song for the group. Do others respond in the same way? If not, what do you think is the reason for the different responses to the song?

The power within (belief in oneself):

- During the final battle, the Bright Ones discover powers they did not know they possessed. (Anna, pp. 404-405, Anna, Luca, Harry and Jane pp. 418 and Jane pp. 423-424).
- Magical powers aside – what is the power that enables people to achieve great things or survive extreme adversity? Where does this strength come from?

Story writing:

- What happened to Jack and Mia after the Crossing? (p, 75)
- Write your own short story as either Jack or Mia.

Book review:

- Write a 400 - 500 word review of *Arrival*
- (teacher: remind students that a book review is a commentary, not a summary)
- For tips on how to write a book review go to: <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/bookrev.html>

Reflection: Where did the author get her ideas and inspiration?

Charlotte McConagh was 14 when she began to write *Arrival*, a fantasy novel that is a testament to her incredibly vivid imagination. What were the outside sources that fed her



fertile imagination?

- Reflect on the book, its characters, creatures and storylines.
- Make a list of any films, books and characters – anything, that you think may have given the author inspiration and ideas for her fantasy novel.
- You must be able to relate your list to specific examples in the book.
- Does the rest of the class agree with you?

Other learning activities:

Media: (also a drama activity)

Meanwhile back home...

Divide class into groups allocating each group a different media activity.

1. Present a breaking TV news story about the disappearance of the six friends including comments from a police spokesperson
2. Write a newspaper article, with headline, about the disappearance
3. Conduct live interviews with students outside the missing six's school. What do they think has happened?
4. Interview the parents for a current affairs TV program on the disappearance of their children.
5. Re-enact the last sightings of the six for TV's *Crime Stoppers* program

Leaps of faith (p. 17)

The novel opens with a daring, even reckless, leap of faith.

- Discuss what it means to make a leap of faith. Have you ever made a leap of faith? Did it pay off or did you regret it? What is the opposite to a leap of faith? (rational, reasoned decision making, weighing up the pros and cons). Is one approach preferable to the other?

Dreams (pp. 1-3, 12, 162)

In *Arrival* the six friends all had the same recurring dream.

- Discuss your dreams. Have you had the same dream more than once? What do you



think the dream, or any dream you've had, might mean?

Extension study: Research and briefly describe what Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung had to say about the meaning of dreams.

(For a concise, easy to understand description go to: http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/155112/dream_analysis_according_to_freud.html Note: put underscore between word spaces)

Creative Arts

Art:

Create a folio of hand-drawn pencil or charcoal sketches or computer graphic images of at least five of the following:

- The leap of Faith through the portal (p. 17)
- A black unicorn (pp. 47-48)
- Sitadel, the capital of Cynis Witron (pp. 63-64)
- The mermaid (pp. 75&77)
- Locktar the dragon/wival (pp. 117,120) flying with Ria captured in its talons (p. 403)
- Fey's Sacred Blade of the Queen (p.212)
- Freyja the Goddess of Love (p. 216)
- Odin, the God of War on his chariot of fire (pp. 352, 409)

Drama:

Refer to media activity.



About the author:

Charlotte McConaghy is a remarkable young woman. A prolific, passionate writer with a an imagination that can only be referred to as epic, she has already written a number of fantasy stories and a screenplay for a teenage audience. She began writing *Arrival* when she was fourteen and completed it by the time she was sixteen – no small feat by any stretch of the imagination! She lives in Sydney.