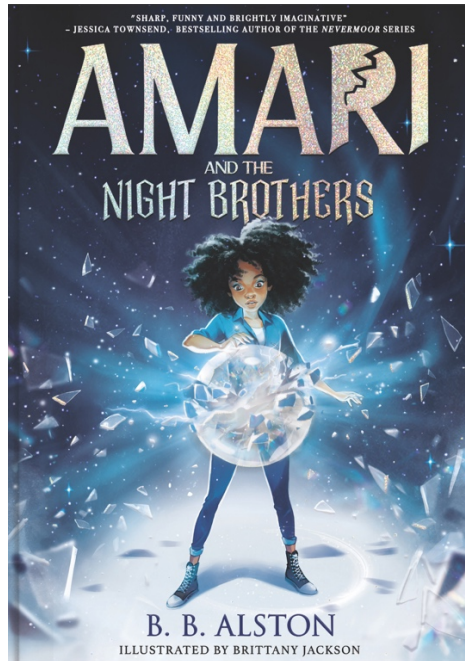


Hardie Grant

CHILDREN'S PUBLISHING

Teacher's Notes



AMARI AND THE NIGHT BROTHERS
(*Supernatural Investigations Series Vol.1*)

Written by B.B. Alston

Illustrated by Brittany Jackson

Teacher's Notes by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

SYNOPSIS

“Prove that we’re right to trust you. Prove you belong here.” (p 99)

Amari Peters, a 12-year-old girl from a US housing project, discovers her brother Quinton was more than he seemed ... And so is she. This is a gripping, heartfelt new fantasy for an upper middle-grade audience, in which Amari ventures on a quest to find her missing brother.



Quinton Peters was the golden boy of the Rosewood City low-income housing projects, receiving full scholarship offers to two different Ivy League schools. When he mysteriously goes missing, his little sister, Amari Peters, can't understand why it's not a bigger deal. Why isn't his story all over the news? And why do the police automatically assume he was into something illegal?

Then Amari discovers a ticking briefcase in her brother's closet. A briefcase meant for her eyes only. There was far more to Quinton, it seems, than she ever knew. He's left her a nomination for a summer tryout at the secretive Bureau of Supernatural Affairs. Amari is certain the answer to finding out what happened to him lies somewhere inside – if only she can get her head around the idea of mermaids, aliens and magicians all being real things, something she has to instantly confront when she is given Elsie Rodriguez, a *weredragon*, as a roommate.

Amari must compete against kids who've known about the supernatural world their whole lives and are able to easily answer questions like *'Which two Great Beasts reside in the Atlantic Ocean?'* and *'How old is Merlin?'* Just getting around the Bureau is a lesson for Amari, with signs like *Department of Hidden Places this way, or is it?*

If all that wasn't enough, every Bureau trainee has a talent that is enhanced to supernatural levels to help them do their jobs – but Amari's talent, when it's revealed, is illegal. As if she needed something else to make her stand out.

With Moreau, an evil magician, threatening the whole supernatural world, and her own classmates thinking she is an enemy, Amari has never felt more alone. But if she doesn't pass the three tryouts, she may never find out what happened to Quinton.

"It's a bit *Harry Potter* meets *Men in Black!*" Lauren Draper, Hardie Grant Children's Publishing

THEMES

Each of the following themes can be addressed via discussion points:

- **People of Colour and Diversity**

Key Quote: "I know it's unfair, but the truth is that when you're a poor Black girl from the 'Wood, certain people are gonna already have it in their minds what type of person you are. You can't give them a reason to think they're right." (p 7)

The author makes it clear in his novel that the issue of race is a central theme. As a Black girl, how is Amari treated by those she encounters at school?

- **Female and Personal Strength**

Key Quote: I'm the girl who tries. The girl who fights. The girl who believes. My eyes open with a burning realization. I'm *unstoppable*. (p 391)

Amari's strength as a young woman is another theme. Discuss the quote above in relation to it.

- **Maturation**



Key Quote:

I don't like doing things on my own. It's scary and I never know if it'll work out.

“That’s part of growing up, Amari,” says Quinton. “You don’t need me anymore. As long as you bet on yourself and believe you can do anything, you can. That’s why I need you to make me a promise, okay?”

Okay.

“Mama told me how obsessed you were with finding me. *Promise* me you won’t spend your life beside this bed waiting for me to wake up. Go out and do and see everything. That’s what I want for you. Be as great as I know you can be. When I do wake up, and I will, I expect to hear lots of stories!” (p 402)

In what ways does Amari mature in this novel?

- **Individuality**

Key Quote: “It means you’re perhaps the most magical being that’s ever existed.” Dr. Khan lowers his eyes and frowns. “It also means your very existence is a crime.” (p 89)

Amari proves to her fellow students and teachers that being ‘different’ (a magician) isn’t a crime. How does she convince them of that?

- **Social Class and Education**

Key Quote: I smile a little. Am I prepared for that? It’s kind of like how being a Black kid from the projects makes Mr. Jenson feel the need to watch me extra close every time I come in his store. Or how surprised my scholarship interviewers were that I could speak *so* well. People assume stuff about you based on things you can’t change about yourself. So I just do my best to prove them wrong, to be the person they’re not expecting. Amari Peters, changing minds one person at a time. (p 101)

The fact that Amari lives in a housing project where people are treated like second-class citizens is another theme. How much does class influence one’s standing in the contemporary world? Discuss in relation to the quote above.

- **Courage**

Key Quote: “Courage,” says Agent Fiona. “And that’s what separates the wannabes from the agents in the end. Quinton didn’t nominate ye ’cause he needed a rescuer, he nominated ye because he believed ye can thrive here. Only you’ve gotta believe it before anybody else will.” (pp 132–3)

Amari and her fellow students at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs are tested in several ways during their tryouts. How does she develop courage and demonstrate her bravery in this novel?

- **Teamwork and Friendship**

Key Quote: Dylan just shrugs. “Partners have each other’s backs, right?” Definitely. (p 225)



Throughout the novel, Amari's need for friendship and support is emphasised. Which characters prove to be her real supporters?

- **Value of Learning**

Key Quote: There are three reasons I never get tired of our library. First, it's just so cool-looking. Everything is made up of books—the floors, the ceilings, even the pillars between the bookcases. You can type in your book title at the computer catalog and get directions like *Three paces to the left and look down* or *Pillar closest to fern, climb up halfway*. The second reason is that there's just so many interesting things to read about, even aside from what I need to learn to become a Junior Agent. The third reason is Mrs. Belle, the librarian. She has this knack for knowing what you'd like to read, just by looking at you. (p 317)

This novel, despite being a fantasy, is also about the reality of schooling, study, and learning how to live one's life. How does Amari's attitude to learning change in the novel?

- **Moral Values**

Key Quote: You're not going to change the world unless you hang with people who want to change the world too. Fast money and selling stuff that hurts other people ain't good. Be better than that. (p 32)

Amari's journey is not simply about becoming a better magician. It is about becoming a better person. What sort of person does she become?

WRITING STYLE

- **Genres are based on recognised tropes or conventions.** This novel might be discussed in terms of the following genres:

Fantasy as a genre includes a range of 'tropes' such as the following:

FANTASY TROPE	QUOTE
Building details to create convincing secondary worlds	"Not the <i>internet</i> ," says Kirsten. "The <i>othernet</i> . It's the protected part of the internet we use in the supernatural world." (p 115)
Essential extravagance	When they said this year's theme is Winter Wonderland, they really meant it. It's snowing inside the huge ballroom. Snow-covered fir trees grow straight up out of the floor and huge ice sculptures of dancing penguins and laughing polar bears fill up the spaces between the candlelit tables. Kids dance in midair, squealing and laughing as they're carried back and forth by swirling gusts of wind. (pp 111–2)
Poetic quality	"Being so young in your magic, you wouldn't know this, but there are ways to make truths spill from lips like water from a fountain." (p 383)



Mythic or archetypal elements	“Are those ghosts?” I ask. “Yep,” says Dylan. “It’s why they call it the All-Souls Festival. Everyone’s invited, living or dead.” (p 336)
Multidimensionality (time and space overlap)	“Did you know that World War One started because a few tiny alien ships accidentally crash-landed into Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife? Everyone thought it was an assassination. The aliens visit three times a year to apologize for the mix-up.” (p 104)
Carnavalesque	And then I put on a show. I turn the ceiling into a cloudless, starry night sky and let the aurora borealis glimmer just beyond their fingertips as shooting stars zip across the auditorium. I turn the room dark again, and suddenly fireworks explode and sparkle overhead one after the other. Then the auditorium becomes a circus, with performers doing flips down the aisles and trapeze acrobats twisting and flipping above them. Clowns spill out of a car onstage while tigers jump through hoops of fire. I put us aboard a pirate ship in the middle of terrible storm. People clutch their seats as the ship rocks back and forth amid crashing waves that tower above us. Finally, I put us on a calm sandy beach with the sun setting into the horizon. “The End.” (p 349)

Read the following quotes and identify and discuss their relationship to any of these fantasy tropes:

“You’re looking through the shades. This is only an interactive recording. We call it a Wakeful Dream.” (p 22)

The Magna Fobia spell is on the tip of my tongue, but I can’t bring myself to say it. I promised myself I’d never use foul magick again—that I would be a good magician, no matter what. Someone Quinton would be proud of. (p 391)

“People tend to fear what they don’t understand. And fear can far too easily become hatred. Why, the Great Bug Conflict of ’69 comes to mind. The Society of Sentient Insects had gone and invented ‘people repellent’ spray. You’d think a reasonable person would understand that turnabout is fair play, but you’d be surprised how quickly reason goes out the window when the bugs start spraying back. A particularly rough year for the Bureau, that one.” (p 42)

I assumed supernaturals like Mrs. Walters were rare, but they’re all over the place, hiding in plain sight. (p 53)

“You wouldn’t have known anything about the supernatural world until your nomination. VanQuish is the nickname for the two most famous agents of the last fifty years—Maria Van Helsing and your brother, Quinton Peters. The *Van* is from Maria’s last name and the *Qui* is from Quinton’s first name—with a *sh* on the end. Get it? They ‘vanquish’ the bad guys? How cool is that?” (p 68)

“But with Raoul Moreau locked away in Blackstone Prison and his brother-in-arms, Count Vladimir, long deceased, the Supernatural World Congress has begun to express concerns that a new magician has surfaced—” (pp 71)

“It’s very rare indeed that a moonstone badge is awarded. Rarer still to have two in the same family. There have only been thirteen in the whole history of the Bureau, and Amari here makes the second Peters to receive the honor.” (p 84)



“And I suppose we’re also to believe it’s a coincidence,” Director Van Helsing continues, “that you showed up here at the same time hybrids are terrorizing our outposts around the country. It is common knowledge that only magicians can create hybrids. Tell me, girl, are these attacks your doing?” (p 90)

“In my professional opinion, the incident with the Crystal Ball revealed just what kind of magician Amari is.” Director Fokus swallows. “She’s an illusionist. If she possesses any other kind of magic in addition to this, such as what’s necessary to create hybrids, it remains to be seen.” (p 97)

“No!” I say, jumping to my feet. “You can’t erase my memories. If you do, I’ll never be able to find my brother. Let me stay. I’ll prove that I’m just like any other trainee. *Please.*” (p 99)

Compare this novel to other fantasy novels and series. [See **Related Reading.**]

The School Story as a genre has a long pedigree in writing for young people. Many fantasies are set in schools, from classics such as Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1857), Enid Blyton’s Malory Towers series, and contemporary tales such as J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series or Jessica Townsend’s *Nevermoor* series.

What are the tropes that define school stories as a genre, apart from the setting?

The **Mystery** novel genre also contains conventions which contribute to suspense. Where have Quinton and Maria gone to? Who is the ‘double-headed snake’ threatening Amari? Who are her friends, and who are her enemies?

Discuss the tropes of this genre (such as red herrings, false leads) which are illustrated in this novel.

- **Characters** in the novel consist of the main characters: Amari Peters; her mother; Quinton, Amari’s missing brother; Elsie Rodriguez, Amari’s roommate and a weredragon; Agent Magnus; Raoul Moreau, a magician; Dylan Van Helsing, one of Director Van Helsing’s twin children and Amari’s partner; Lara Van Helsing, twin to Dylan, and sister to Maria Van Helsing; Elizabeth Crowe, Chief Director at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs; Agent Fiona.

The minor characters include: Emily Grant; Mrs Grant, Emily’s mother; Principal Merritt; Jayden; Mrs Walters; Mr Barnabus Ware; Bertha; Dr Khan; Director Van Helsing; Maria, his daughter; Director Fokus; Kirsten Kurt; Senior Agent Kozy; Director Horus from the Department of Good Fortunes and Bad Omens; Ranger Alford; and Cosimo Galileo Leonardo de’ Pazzi, a magician.

Which character was most intriguing, and why?

- **Humour** is important in this novel, and the author enjoys making fun of the conventions of fantasy as well. For example, when Sir Francis Sasquatch III of the Yellowstone National Park Sasquatches, formally knighted in *both* Faerie Courts, announces himself to Amari:

“Well, I simply must be going, but if you’re ever in the market for a good cave hideout with reliable escape routes, or maybe even a nice underground lair off the beaten path, I’m the woodland real-estate agent to the stars, honey. Think of me when you’re done playing at this Junior Agent business and looking to start your criminal empire in style. Good or evil, when it comes to clients I don’t pick sides. Here’s my card. Toodles.” (p 140)

Or:



“That was a ‘help Agent Fiona get the Black Key’ look.” Agent Magnus goes red in the face. “Not a ‘Go save the world on your own’ look!” I bite my lip. “Well, you might to want work on your looks then.” (p 396)

What other section in the novel was particularly amusing, in your view?

- **Comprehension**

Who is Jayden, and why is Amari so concerned for him?

What makes the elevators in this novel so unique?

Who is Agent Fiona secretly dating?

- **Writing Exercise**

Write a synopsis for a sequel to this novel.

Read the clue below:

*That thing in the shed, was it even real?
The girl on the phone says, “It’s no big deal.”
He can’t believe it. “It tried to eat me!”
The girl on the phone disagrees completely.
“I’m a surgeon, I’ll fetch my laser!”
“Please calm down. Help’s on the way, sir.”
A bit more fussing, then, “Finally, they’re here.”
And with the press of a button she erases his fear. (p 294)*

Then create your own rhyming clue like this one.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Brittany Jackson’s illustrative work is engaging and contemporary.

- **Comprehension**

How would you describe her illustration style?

- **Illustration Exercise**

Invite students to create their own portrait of Amari and then compare how each of the students have depicted her.

Draw a picture of one of the Hybrids described in this novel.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES



Mural: Create a class mural featuring the major characters in this novel. Assign students to work on various characters in drafting the mural and then create the artwork.

Book Cover: Design your own cover for this novel.

Map: Draw a map of any of the areas or buildings described in this novel.

Script: This novel has been optioned for a film production. Choose a scene in the novel and write a short script for its performance.

RELATED READING

Junior/Young Adult Novels:

Constable, Kate *Chanters of Tremaris Trilogy*. Allen & Unwin, 2009.

Forsyth, Kate *The Impossible Quest* (Series) Scholastic Australia.

Kostakis, Will *Rebel Gods*, Hachette Australia, 2020.

Kostakis, Will *Monuments*, Hachette Australia, 2019.

Nix, Garth *The Keys to the Kingdom* (Series) Allen & Unwin.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter* (Series) Bloomsbury.

Townsend, Jessica *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow* (Nevermoor 1) Hachette, 2017.

Townsend, Jessica *Wundersmith: The Calling of Morrigan Crow* (Nevermoor 2) Hachette, 2018.

Townsend, Jessica *Hollowpox: The Hunt for Morrigan Crow* (Nevermoor 3) Hachette, 2020.

Websites:

'Fantasy' *Literary Terms*

<<https://literaryterms.net/fantasy/>>

'Fantasy literature' *Wikipedia*

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantasy_literature>

'Hybrid (biology)' *Wikipedia*

<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hybrid_\(biology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hybrid_(biology))>

'School Stories' *Wikipedia*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_story

'What is Genre Fiction?' *Novel Writing Help*

<<https://www.novel-writing-help.com/genre-fiction.html>>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

B.B. ALSTON started writing in middle school, entertaining his classmates with horror stories starring the whole class where not everyone survived! After several years of trying to break into publishing, he had just been accepted into a biomedical graduate program when a chance entry into a Twitter pitch contest led to his signing with The Bent Agency, more than twenty book deals worldwide, and even a film deal. When not writing, he can be found eating too many sweets and exploring country roads to see where they lead.



He was inspired to write *Amari and the Night Brothers* because he couldn't find any fantasy stories featuring Black kids when he was growing up. He hopes to show kids that though you might look different, or feel different, whatever the reason, your uniqueness needn't only be a source of fear and insecurity. There is great strength and joy to be found in simply accepting yourself for who you are. Because once you do so, you'll be *unstoppable*.

For further information see: <http://www.thebentagency.com/portfolio/b-b-alston>

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

BRITTANY JACKSON loves telling stories through her art, from dynamic and diverse character design to delightfully fun and energetic children's book illustrations. She attended the College for Creative Studies and is the Grand Prize Winner of the L Ron Hubbard's Illustrator of the Future Award of 2007. With over fifteen years of experience as a freelance illustrator, Brittany works in a variety of art styles. In addition to her work as a children's book illustrator, character and concept artist, Brittany's work has been featured on the covers of books, comics, and in various magazines and articles.

For further information see: <https://www.beagifted.com/>

