

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO SHADOW AND BONE



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Enter the Grishaverse with book one of the Shadow and Bone Trilogy, now a Netflix original series.

*Soldier. Summoner. Saint.* Orphaned and expendable, Alina Starkov is a soldier who knows she may not survive her first trek across the Shadow Fold—a swath of unnatural darkness crawling with monsters. But when her regiment is attacked, Alina unleashes dormant magic not even she knew she possessed.

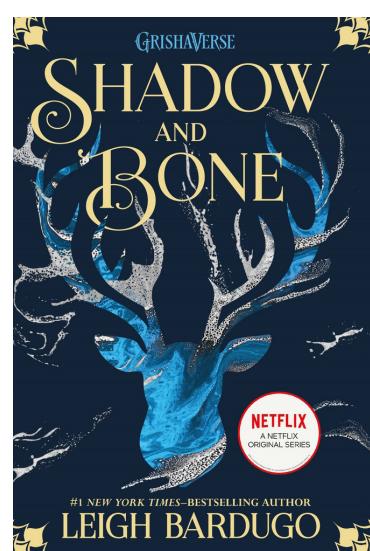
Now Alina will enter a lavish world of royalty and intrigue as she trains with the Grisha, her country's magical military elite—and falls under the spell of their notorious leader, the Darkling. He believes Alina can summon a force capable of destroying the Shadow Fold and reuniting their war-ravaged country, but only if she can master her untamed gift.

As the threat to the kingdom mounts and Alina unlocks the secrets of her past, she will make a dangerous discovery that could threaten all she loves and the very future of a nation.

Welcome to Ravka . . . a world of science and superstition where nothing is what it seems.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Bardugo is the *New York Times*-bestselling author of *Ninth House* and the creator of the Grishaverse, which spans the Shadow and Bone trilogy (now a Netflix original series), the Six of Crows duology, the King of Scars duology, *The Language of Thorns*, and *The Lives of Saints*—with more to come. Her short stories can be found in multiple anthologies, including *The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Leigh grew up in Southern California and graduated from Yale University. These days she lives and writes in Los Angeles.



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## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Before reading *Shadow and Bone*, have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

Before Reading	After Reading	Statements
		When in danger, it is best to play it safe rather than take a risk.
		In a survival situation, one must make decisions that are best for themselves and those they love, even if harm may come to others as a result.
		If you disagree with the policy of those in power, it is better to remain silent than speak out and risk punishment.
		Commitment to duty and honor should outweigh individual misgivings in times of moral crisis.

1. Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a plus sign (+) in the box next to the statements with which they agree, and a zero (0) next to those with which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

2. Once they have had the opportunity to complete the guide, read each statement aloud and have students who agree stand or raise their hands. Each student should be permitted, if they wish, to provide their rationale for agreeing.

3. Repeat the process after students have read *Shadow and Bone*, giving them the opportunity to provide their rationale for keeping or changing their position.



# EXPLORING SHADOW AND BONE THROUGH WRITING AND RESEARCH

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Shadow and Bone* as reflective writing prompts or, alternatively, as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

1. As *Shadow and Bone* opens, readers learn about Alina and Mal's humble origins as orphans: "The servants called them *malenchki*, little ghosts, because they were the smallest and the youngest, and because they haunted the house like giggling phantoms." In what ways does this description of them juxtapose the epic events to come?
2. Consider the cover of *Shadow and Bone*. In what ways is the image portrayed symbolic of the events that transpire throughout the novel?
3. As Mal tries to convince the Darkling that Alina couldn't be gifted, the Darkling retorts, "We all have our secrets." Why does Mal seem so confident that he would have known if Alina were Grisha? What can be inferred about his sense of understanding about her? How does Mal's journey to understanding that she is a Sun Summoner impact his perception of Alina?
4. The Darkling states, "I've been waiting for you a long time, Alina. You and I are going to change the world." Considering the course of events throughout *Shadow and Bone*, how do these ominous words ring true?
5. In what ways does Alina's gift as Sun Summoner prove to be a blessing or a curse? If you had the opportunity to be gifted with similar abilities, would you embrace them? Why or why not?
6. What is your earliest impression of Genya? Do you find her to be a trustworthy friend to Alina? Using examples from the texts, support your position.
7. After Alina expresses her unhappiness at being kept and trained at the Little Palace at Os Alta so she can play her part, Baghra tells her, "There's nothing wrong with being a lizard either. Unless you were born to be a hawk." What is the significance of Baghra's words? What do these animals symbolize? Do you believe it's Alina's right to be lizard-like? Why or why not?
8. Examine the role the Shadow Fold plays in the novel. In your opinion, what does it symbolize for the people of Ravka?
9. As the Darkling speaks of Grisha power, he tells Alina, "Using our power makes us stronger. It feeds us instead of consuming us. Most Grisha live long lives. The greater the power, the longer the life. And when that power is amplified..." To what extent is the Darkling, being a living amplifier, connected to Alina and her role as Sun Summoner? How does his quest to find the rest of Morozova's amplifiers become all-consuming?
10. What role do Mal and the Darkling play in Alina's life? What does each of these men offer her that is unique and desirable?
11. Throughout *Shadow and Bone*, readers witness the complexities of the various relationships among the characters. Consider whose relationship seemed most similar to one of your own personal relationships. What about it reminded you of your experiences?

12. In what ways has the absence/loss of parents and siblings impacted how Alina and Mal function? Though they are technically orphans, they discover and create a different type of family for themselves. From what you learn throughout the course of their story, who do you believe is part of their created clan?
13. *Shadow and Bone* is told in first person. How would the story be different if another character besides Alina were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?
14. In what ways does Alina recognize the influence that the Darkling has over her mentally, emotionally, and physically? For what reasons do you think Alina feels connected to the Darkling? In what ways are they similar? How would you characterize the relationship between them, and how does it change over the course of the novel?
15. Using the “Grisha Order Guide” found at [www.grishaverse.com](http://www.grishaverse.com), study the various roles of the Grisha. If you could select one particular “gift,” what would it be? What is it about these masters of the Small Science that has the most appeal to you?
16. What role does the Darkling play in the novel? In what ways is his manifested evil a catalyst for the choices made by Alina and Mal? Discuss the character traits that allow them to ultimately persevere. How are these characters similar to each other? In what ways are they different? What traits do you have that are like one or more of these characters?
17. Compare what you discover in *Shadow and Bone* to what you have encountered or studied previously in other fantasies you’ve explored. What does Leigh Bardugo’s Grishaverse have in common with other examples and how does it differ? What do you believe to be the benefits of reading and studying complex created worlds and what can we learn about our own world by doing so?
18. Though it is never directly stated in the novel, Russian history and culture have a strong influence on *Shadow and Bone*. What are some of the specific elements that indicate such a connection? In your opinion, do these details enrich the overall story? Why or why not?
19. After asking Alina if she is aware that in some of the border villages, altars are being made for her, the Apparat says, “The people are hungry for hope.” Do you believe this to be true? In what ways does hope drive humanity?
20. Consider the relationship of the Grisha to the rest of the population of Ravka and the world. How are these magicians regarded by their own people and by people in the surrounding lands? Do you find their gifts to be valued equally by outsiders? If you had the opportunity to be a part of the Grisha, which order would you hope to belong to? What is it about that particular group’s ability that appeals most to you?
21. Sacrifice is an important theme in *Shadow and Bone*. Explain the significance of the death of the stag that provides the amplifier the Darkling manipulates, and explore other examples of sacrifice demonstrated throughout the novel.
22. In *Shadow and Bone*, merzost and the Small Science play critical roles to Alina and the Darkling. How are these abilities similar? In what ways are they different? Which do you feel has greater importance? What’s the danger in this particular kind of magic?
23. After a terse conversation where Alina accused the Darkling of making her his slave, he reminds her that she fled her responsibilities to Ravka by running away, declaring, “Make me your villain.” How does this statement illustrate the ways in which the Darkling seeks to control Alina? In what ways is his behavior manipulative or possessive?



24. Consider Mal's role in the First Army. How does his role as a soldier and his greater relationship with Ravka and the army impact how he sees himself? How is he perceived by others? How does this change throughout the course of the novel?
25. Why does Alina seem to have such a difficult time seeing herself as a hero? In what ways is her initial inability to accept her Grisha gifts a result of her childhood?
26. Describe Alina. In your opinion, in what ways does she change and grow through the course of *Shadow and Bone*? What do you admire most about her? Are there ways in which you hope she will continue to grow?
27. The Apparat tells Alina that faith is more powerful than any army or even than Darklings. Based on what you've learned from *Shadow and Bone* and your own experiences, do you agree? Are there ways in which faith can be weaponized?
28. Mal tells Alina, "I'm sorry it took me so long to see you, Alina. But I see you now." How does this acknowledgment serve as a catalyst of change in their relationship?
29. Alina offers, "The stag had been showing me my strength--not just the price of mercy but the power it bestowed. And mercy was something the Darkling would never understand. I had spared the stag's life. The power of that life belonged to me as surely as it belonged to the man who had taken it." Given the journey she's undertaken to this point and her complex relationship with the Darkling, what makes this realization such a revelation to Alina?
30. Using the phrase, "This is a story about," finish the sentence with five words that describe *Shadow and Bone*. Explain your choice.

## USING SHADOW AND BONE TO EXTEND STUDENT LEARNING

*Shadow and Bone* adds to the great sagas of power, ambition, justice, mysticism, prestige, innovation, struggles between light and darkness, and, of course, love! Explore the richness of these themes to enhance the experience of the Grishaverse novels.

1. The Grisha are distinguished from others in Ravkan society and from each other by their distinctive *kefta*. We are fully aware of the role that dress plays in our own expressions of both conformity and individualism, but the fact is that clothing has been used throughout history to distinguish members of societies in terms of status, social roles, occupation, wealth, and power.
  - Have students research modes of dress that have been utilized as forms of distinction at certain points in history. Robes and headdresses are well-known examples, but for many societies shoes, hairstyles, and other forms of cosmetic design have been just as important. Encourage students to focus on why societies seek these outward forms of distinction, what advantages and disadvantages they create, and the factors that either help them to form or allow them to be overcome.



2. From his first appearance in *Shadow and Bone*, the Apparat presents a very intriguing perspective. He's a character clearly positioned to ultimately be of influence on Alina, since he recognizes her potential as a martyr as a means of manipulating faith. This political power play is a recurring theme in literature and history, and one that can be explored for *Shadow and Bone*.

- Assign students to investigate the role of martyrdom as an inspiration to political movements or events; historical examples abound. Encourage students to focus on not only how the political authority establishes and makes use of a martyr but how this concept has an allure in popular culture: What does the martyr represent to the devotee who is committed to them? Of course, the justification for this status is subjective. These are a few prominent historical examples:
  - Julius Caesar
  - Joan of Arc
  - Anabheri Prabhakar Rao
  - Jan Hus
  - Thomas a'Becket
- Thomas More
- Nathan Hale
- Georges Danton
- John Brown

3. Have students pursue the themes of light and darkness in a literary, musical, visual, or dramatic analysis. This may be done as a general theme throughout *Shadow and Bone* or with particular events or scenes. Explorations should take into account how these elements are not only part of the thematic nature of the work but also of the characterizations that they provide the reader. For example:

- How may the amplifiers be understood as both rays of hope and tools of destruction?
- May a creature of light or darkness be reinterpreted as having the opposite quality?
- To what extent could the volcra be understood as personifications of the Darkling? Of Alina or Mal?

4. Mystical elements are a vital component of *Shadow and Bone*, and the interplay between the natural and the supernatural is very much a reflection of how most people throughout history understood the world around them before the rise of modern science (and for many, even beyond that):

- Have students investigate the conceptual and practical discrepancies between premodern and modern science through research into practices such as alchemy, divining, hermeticism, astrology, numerology, occultism, sorcery, and even natural philosophy. Encourage students to recognize the factors that distinguish these practices from modern physical, natural, mathematical, and applied sciences, and the factors that led to the transition. As an extension, students may want to debate a "what was lost/what was gained" approach to the problem. They also might be challenged to consider how the role of the Grisha in Ravkan society could be altered by more modern approaches.

5. Using a variety of mediums, have students create an original piece of art that is symbolic of one of the major themes of the Grishaverse novels (these may include, but are not limited to, loyalty, family, courage, betrayal, risk-taking, fortune, friendship, pain, redemption).

6. In the movie industry, previews of coming attractions are known as trailers. Design an original book trailer for *Shadow and Bone*. Begin by creating a storyboard, detailing which scenes you intend to incorporate in your trailer. Use a moviemaker program of your choice. Post your finished trailer to YouTube, or alternatively, create other Grishaverse-inspired digital art to be shared on social media sites like Instagram or TikTok.

7. *Shadow and Bone* moves at a rapid pace, with the flow and intensity of a video game. Ask students to imagine the book as a game and create an original playlist for several scenes in the novel. The music they select should incorporate both the intensity and the action of the scene, such as thrilling, fearful, mournful, or elated. Create original art for the jewel case and on the interior, and after including appropriate artist information, offer an explanation for the selection of each song.

This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, an associate professor at Sam Houston State University.  
She holds a PhD in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.



# WHERE TO START

Are you ready to explore the Grishaverse, but not certain where to begin?

There is more than one place to commence your journey.

## BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING



If you like to read in chronological order, start with the Shadow and Bone Trilogy and meet Alina Starkov, Sun Summoner and Ravka's only hope for salvation.

## THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES



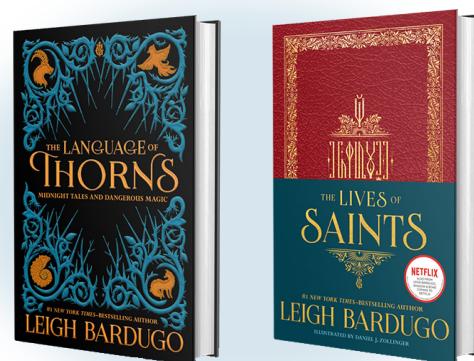
This epic duology picks up back in Ravka, one year after the end of the Six of Crows Duology. While you can start here, we recommend reading the other books in the Grishaverse first if you want to avoid spoilers.

## OR START WITH A HEIST



You can certainly start with the Six of Crows Duology and we promise you won't be lost. Here you join up with Kaz Brekker's crew of thugs and thieves. This duology takes place two years after the end of the Shadow and Bone Trilogy, but focuses on a new set of characters and different plots in a different country.

## AFRAID TO COMMIT?



Want to start reading, but don't have any knowledge of the other books? Try one of these beautifully illustrated collections of Grisha folktales and fables from every corner of this world. You can pick up *The Language of Thorns* without any knowledge of the rest of the books or *The Lives of Saints* if you've already started exploring the Grishaverse.