

Winter of Fire

By Sherryl Jordan

- Reading • Writing • Social Studies •
- Drama • Visual • Lexile 800 •



Synopsis

Winter of Fire is a post-apocalyptic fantasy for teenagers written by Sherryl Jordan. Born into a dark world trapped forever in icy winter, Elsha is a child of the Quelled, a branded people doomed to mine firestones to warm the Chosen, the ruling class. But Elsha has visions and uncommon strength of spirit. Condemned to death on her sixteenth birthday for defiance, Elsha is saved when she is called to be Handmaiden to the Firelord – the most powerful being in her world, the only one with the gift of divining firestones. Viewed with distrust by the Chosen who now surround her, she has a bitter fight ahead to strive for a better world for her people. Along her journey with the Firelord, she meets people who see her for who she is, not for what she is branded, and those relationships are crucial to her in her hour of need. She also discovers that she too has the power of divination, healing and can foretell the future, but it is her strength of character that helps her survive against the odds. Right at the end of the story, though, she realises she can create an even better future for everyone and help people stay warm without the need for firestones. In doing so, she discovers what her family symbol means.

About the Author

Sherryl Jordan, a multi-award-winning author, was born in Hawera and currently lives in Tauranga. Sherryl was a successful illustrator before she ever published a word. Upon embarking on her true love, writing, she wrote 36 picture books and 12 novels before her first, *Rocco*, was selected for publication by Scholastic. *The Juniper Game* and *Winter of Fire* followed, then her much-loved, funny, middle-grade series about Denzil, a hapless young medieval wizard. Many of Sherryl's books have been translated into other languages.

Writing Style

Though written in 1990, and published by Scholastic USA in hardback in 1992, *Winter of Fire* was first published in paperback in New Zealand in 1994; Sherryl Jordan's third published book. *Winter of Fire* is a dystopian, epic fantasy, told from the point of view of the main character Elsha, who strives for equality for her people, the Quelled. The story is set in a post-apocalyptic world, where there is an eternal winter. The strict laws are in favour of the Chosen and used to suppress the Quelled. The author has used minimal description to describe the bleak world, instead focussing on the strong characters and the importance of relationships.

The themes of slavery, oppression, freedom of speech, prejudice, female empowerment, and pollution featured in the story are just as relevant today as when the author wrote them. The 24 action-packed chapters are grouped in two parts: part one titled 'Firebrand' leading up to her becoming the Firelord's handmaiden, and part two 'The Shining Star' leading to her becoming the new Firelord. The text is in the first person, past tense.

Winter of Fire is a compelling read for readers aged 12–16.



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Encourage students to study the setting and the way the social climate affects the action in the novel. Ask the students to identify important themes and issues raised in the novel and explain how these are developed by the author.

INTRODUCING THE NOVEL:

- What type of novel do you think this is, based on the cover illustration and the back-cover blurb? What can you expect from a novel of this genre?
- Predict how significant 'fire' is going to be in this story. What likely scenarios could the protagonist encounter?
- Consider what disasters might create a world with no sun.
- What is the purpose of the text on pages 6-8? Do all novels have these things? Why/why not?

PART ONE – FIREBRAND (CHAPTERS 1-10)

- How would you describe the protagonist? (pp.12-18)
- What does 'harsha' mean?
- Why do you think the Chosen are so callous towards the Quelled? (p.12)
- How did Lesharo lose his eye?
- Why do you think Lesharo's comment had such an impact on Elsha? (p.16)
- What senses has the author used to draw us into the Quelled world? Give examples. (Chapter 2)
- Find some examples of imagery in chapter two. Which is your favourite and why?
- Why do the women eat after the men? How do you feel about that custom? (p.29)
- How would you describe Lesharo? (p.31-32)
- How does Elsha get her woman stone?
- How does Elsha show her uncertainty/doubt? What does she fear? (p.38)
- What significant event happens in chapter three that changes Elsha's life? (p.42-43)
- What inner conflicts does Elsha have on her journey towards the Firelord? (p.46-47)
- What disaster do you think might have caused Elsha's world to be so dark and cold? Elsha describes it as death coming out of the sky and shaking the earth, covering it with dust and dark. The light withdrew behind the darkness, and cold came. (p.54)
- What do you think Amasai thinks of Elsha when she says his prophet is a liar? (p.56)
- Why do you think the townspeople of Jinnah hate the Quelled so much and how do they show their hatred? (p.58-59)
- Why is Amasai horrified by what Elsha tells him on p.66?
- What do you think the high lord thought of Elsha's speech? How did he show that? (p.68-69)
- Why does the high lord accept Elsha as his handmaid even though she had been overheard disrespecting their laws? (p.76-77)
- What is Elsha given that gives her joy through the difficult training period? Why do you think that was? (p.79)
- Why does Amasai ask Elsha to visit him after she is released from her duties with the Firelord? (p.84)
- What similarities does Elsha have with the Firelord? (p.88)
- How had Danii's arm been broken? And how does she feel about her duty? (p.94)
- What is the ritual for finding firestones? What part does Elsha play in it? (p.96-99)
- What does Elsha do to her sacred sign and how does it please her? Do you think there will be repercussions for her actions? (p.108)
- What does Elsha feel from the Earth and who or what led her to the firestones? (pp.109-110)
- Where does Elsha find her lost woman stone and how did she find it? (p.112)
- How did Kiran's baby die? (p.121)
- What do you think Elsha's dream means? (p.123)
- How did the Firelord choose Elsha? How does that align with her dream? (p.127-130)



PART TWO - THE SHINING STAR (CHAPTERS 11-24)

- Why do you think Alejandro sought Elsha out and talked to her? (p.138-141)
- What does Elsha do to help the Firelord and how did he feel about it? (p.148)
- Why was the Firelord angry at Elsha when she returned from her day out with Alejandro? (p.157)
- How did Alejandro undo all his good words? How did Elsha feel about that? (p.163)
- Why does Teraj say he saw no Quelled? (p.172)
- What is special about this hidden village? (p.174)
- What shocking news does Teraj tell Elsha, and how will it change things for her? (p.175)
- What reason does Teraj give Shimer not to kiss Elsha, and why does he say it is good for him (Teraj) to do so? (pp.182-183)
- What helps improve the Firelord's health? (p.184-185)
- How was the harsha injured, and how do they try to heal her? (p.186-187)
- How does Elsha help the woman through her pain? (p.188-189)
- What does Teraj reveal to Elsha and why does he ask her to say nothing? (pp.191-193)
- What do you think Shimer means when he says, "You'll make the two fires one"? (p.198)
- Teraj gives Elsha a present – what is it and why does he call it a mythical creature? (p.198)
- Who was Nirala? (p.208)
- Who is Teraj's father, and what powers did he inherit? (p.209)
- When the Firelord asks what gift Elsha would like, what does she answer? (pp.210)
- What happens after Elsha walks over the bridge? How does she show her pain? What saves her life? (pp.216-221)
- What does Elsha do in the temple that she had always longed to do? How significant is this act? (p.230)
- Why does Elsha stumble when the priests take her out to be tested? (p.235)
- Where does Elsha find the firestone during the divining test? (p.240)
- Who was Xavier the fourth? (p.243)
- What two things does Elsha see in the library that prove she is on the right path? (pp.255-258)
- Who visits Elsha and puts everything at risk? What challenge does he set her? (pp.262-263)
- How does Elsha convince Amasai to fight for her? (pp.273-274)
- Who was victorious in the battle and how did Elsha feel about it? (pp. 280-284)
- Elsha has always believed her family sign was a lion – what do you think it is? (pp.284, 308)
- What does Elsha find she can teach people to do, and what consequences will it have? (pp.302-305)
- Did you enjoy the story? What do you think is a lesson that can be learned from the book?

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: BUBBLES AND CLOUDS

Suggest students study some comics and graphic novels then discuss what features are used in them. They can draw and write a conversation between two characters from the story using the graphic-novel style. Draw clouds for thoughts, bubbles for speech, and cartoons for people.

Students could use pen and paper or find a digital app to draw their graphic novelette.

ACTIVITY 2: THINKING DIFFERENTLY

Discuss with the students what they thought were the three most important events in the story. Ask them to write how they might handle them differently to the characters in the story. They will need to explain how this may change the outcome of the story in a small or major way. Encourage students to think of cause and effect; the smallest actions sometimes have a major impact on others.



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

ACTIVITY 3: STATIC IMAGE

Discuss with students the important themes in the novel (eg slavery, oppression, freedom of speech, prejudice, female empowerment, pollution, climate change). Ask them to pick one theme and create a collage using some of the important words and images from the story. Afterwards they can write a reflection statement, saying how well they thought that theme was advanced in the story and how it made them feel.

ACTIVITY 4: READERS' THEATRE SCRIPT

Talk to the students about the scenes in the story that really stayed with them. Ask them why they were memorable. In pairs/ groups, students pick their favourite/most memorable scene and write a readers' theatre script for it. They will need to set it out like a play. For example:

Title: 'Winter of Fire' Scene [...] By Sherryl Jordan, adapted by [...]			
Characters:	Esha	Narrator 1	Narrator 2 [...]
Narrator 1:	Opens scene saying what has happened until now.		
Narrator 2:	Will share the dialogue with narrator one, helping to set the scene for the audience.		
Narrator 1:	Keep dialogue to 1-2 sentences at the most.		
Narrator 2:	You can even ...		
Narrator 1:	finish each other's sentences.		
Esha:	<i>(put action in italics, but keep to a minimum.)</i> Speech is written as normal.		
Narrator 2:	The narrators can advance the story ...		
Narrator 1:	... and share actions if important to the script.		

ACTIVITY 5: WRITING ASSESSMENT

Ask the students to write an alternative ending to the novel, **or** write an epilogue five or more years on. You are to use the same (living) character/characters. They need to:

- Write realistically in the context of the novel.
- Consider the setting
- Think carefully about how their writing relates to the overall theme of the novel
- The chapters need to be in the same point of view
- Include:
 - carefully chosen words,
 - some language features (eg simile, metaphor, personification),
 - simple, compound and complex sentences.
- Pay attention to the form of your writing: paragraphing, grammar, sentence form, spelling and proof-reading.

Written by Maria Gill, with input from Colin Roy



teacher toolkit

SCHOLASTIC