

A Curriculum Guide to
THE UNWANTEDS SERIES
By Lisa McMann





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BOOK 1

THE UNWANTED

About the Book

Alex knows that when he turns thirteen, he'll be officially categorized as a Wanted, a Necessary, or an Unwanted. And since he's been caught showing a creative skill, he dreads the inevitable—being labeled an Unwanted and sent to his death along with the other Unwanted children from the grim country of Quill because they have broken the law by drawing, singing, or writing. But instead of dying, Alex and the other children find themselves in the secret haven of Artimé, a joyful place where people celebrate the arts and practice magic. He and his new friends revel in their music, art, drama, and writing classes, and their newfound freedom. But the ominous shadow of neighboring Quill still hangs over them—especially when Alex secretly tries to convince his twin brother, a rising star in Quill's tyrannical government, to join him in Artimé.

Prereading Question

Why do the arts, such as music, visual art, drama, and writing, matter? What would our society be like without them? What would your life be like without them?

Setting

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 2) (RL.5.5)

1. Describe the worlds of Quill and Artimé. How are they different? Do they have anything in common? Which one comes across as a better place? How can you tell? Give specific details and find specific words that describe each.
2. Look at the book's structure in terms of how the settings of Quill and Artimé are developed. Does each chapter focus on just one of the two settings? Or do some chapters include both? Do you learn about Quill in the chapters set in Artimé? Look at the structure also in terms of how the characters of Alex and Aaron are developed.
3. The arts are at the heart of life in Artimé. Find details about the role that arts play there. How are the arts used in Artimé as weapons for fighting Quill? Are there ways that the arts are powerful in our society?
4. Quill is said to be a world that discourages creativity. Yet Aaron is working hard to solve problems about poor food and lack of water. Can this be considered creative? What other areas in life show creativity besides art, drama, music, and writing?

Characters

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 3) (RL.5–7.6)

1. Quill has three categories of thirteen-year-olds: Wanted, Necessary, and Unwanted. The Wanted and Necessary go on to become adults in Quill. Find details about different roles of the Wanted and Necessary in Quill society. Why do the Necessary accept their roles? Why do they let their children be removed? What would the Necessary think of Artimé if they knew about it? Give specific details to back up your thoughts.
2. What does it mean to be an Unwanted? How does it make each of the four children—Alex, Lani, Meghan, and Samheed—feel? How does each of them deal with those feelings? Give examples about each of the four children, considering their similarities and differences.

3. Alex, Lani, Meghan, and Samheed become friends in Artimé. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each one? In what ways is each one creative? Do their special areas of creativity reflect their personalities? If so, how? Find specific details to support your views.
4. How does being in Artimé change each of the four newcomers? Give specific examples. How do their relationships with one another change? What incidents in the plot affect the characters and their relationships? For example, Lani starts teasing Alex. Why does she do that? How does it affect their friendship?
5. Samheed feels the most divided between the two worlds. How does this show in his actions? Why does he feel that way? Why does he eventually change his mind about where his loyalty lies? Cite specific examples.
6. Twins play an important role in this book. How do Alex and Mr. Today represent Artimé? How do Aaron and Justine represent Quill? What does Alex have in common with Aaron? How are they different? What does Mr. Today have in common with Justine? How are they different?
7. Although Alex's and Meghan's parents play minor roles, Lani's father, Haluki, turns out to be important. What clues in the text foreshadow that Haluki is working with Mr. Today? Give details about his role.
8. Describe the narrator's point of view in this novel. Besides describing events, does the narrator reveal the characters' emotions and thoughts? If so, which characters? How does this point of view influence your understanding of the characters and events?

Plot

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.9) (RL.6–7.3)

1. Summarize how the battle between Artimé and Quill unfolds in a series of episodes. How do the four children respond to the fighting? How have they changed throughout the story to be prepared for their role in the fight?
2. In a school play rehearsal, Alex plays the role of Perseus fighting Medusa, a story from Greek mythology. What details are mentioned in the book? Find the myth and read it. Are there parallels between Alex and Perseus? If so, when do they occur in the novel?

Themes

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 2)

1. Secrecy is a theme throughout *The Unwanteds*. Make a list of the secrets that different characters are keeping and why they've chosen secrecy. Would the outcome have been different for some of the characters if they'd known the truth? For example, Lani doesn't understand her father's role, Alex doesn't confide in anyone about his hopes for Aaron, and Mr. Today doesn't tell the children about his relationship to Justine or Claire.
2. Mr. Today says of Justine, "Her power is the fear she instills in people. She hides behind the palace so that Quill can't see that she is afraid too." Fear is a pervasive part of life in Quill; give details that show this. How does fear affect Alex and his friends in Artimé during the fighting? Describe what you think the future of Quill might be without the people's fear of Justine and the government.
3. Mr. Today talks about not punishing anyone for their thoughts, only for their actions. Read the First Amendment to the US Constitution and discuss how it relates to Mr. Today's ideas. Do you think Mr. Today makes the right decision? Why or why not?
4. Mr. Today decides to open the gates permanently between the two worlds. What is the symbolic role of the gates? How does he justify opening them? What are the arguments against doing it? Do you think he makes the right decision?

Use of Language

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.4)

1. Have students make note of unfamiliar words as they read, first trying to understand them from clues in the text. A second step would be to look the word up in a dictionary. Here are some words that may be unfamiliar:

| | | |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------|
| ■ dispersed | ■ jeopardize | ■ enticing |
| ■ insubordination | ■ egregious | ■ arsenal |
| ■ infraction | ■ perpetual | ■ cheekily |
| ■ disembark | ■ resigned | ■ brusquely |
| ■ pungent | ■ biannual | ■ remorse |
| ■ queue | ■ veer | |
| ■ emanating | ■ extinguished | |

2. Although McMann emphasizes dialogue and plot, she occasionally uses figurative language. Have students jot down such language and consider how it adds another dimension to the text. Here are some possibilities:

- “bland looks of sleeping fish on their faces”
- “his heart fell like a cement block”
- “pealed like a pleasant-sounding bell”
- “a prune of a woman”
- “to run Quill like a puppet show”
- “like a flouncy skirt”
- “Aaron’s face looked like a troubled sea”
- “like a swarm of bees was trapped inside his head”
- “watched Aaron like a dog watches a gopher hole”
- “like an empty paper cup”

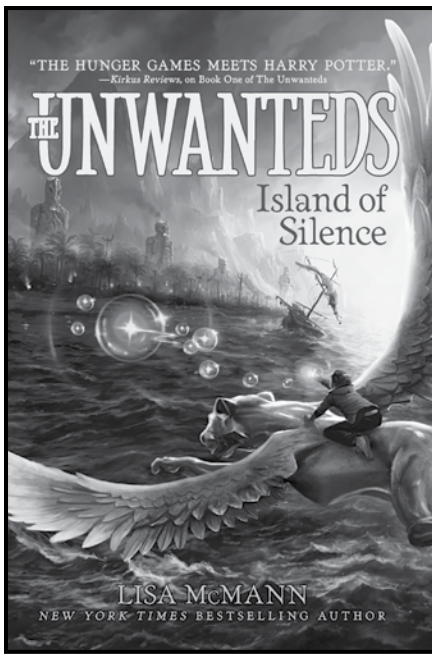
Activities

Artimé Creatures: Artimé has creatures which combine two animals in their names and features. Have students find them in the novel. They include the following:

- Rabbitkeys—rabbit and monkey
- Squirrelicorns—squirrel and unicorn
- Owlbats—owl and bat
- Beavops—beaver and opossum
- Girrinos—giraffes and rhinos

Have students, alone or in small groups, brainstorm a creature that combines two other creatures. They should consider how it might look, sound, and move. Then have them write a four-line rhyming verse about the creature modeled on Mr. Appleblossom’s rhymes in *The Unwanted*s. After they’ve written the verse, have them draw a picture or create a painting of the creature and incorporate the verse in the artwork. Create a wall or bulletin board that’s an Artimé menagerie.

School Brochure: The Artimé that Alex and his friends experience is very much like a boarding school. At the end of the novel, children from Quill may have a choice of going there, too. Have students (alone or in small groups) design a brochure with text that describes the school, its classes, and its grounds. Have them draw or paint pictures to illustrate the brochure. Word processing programs, such as Microsoft Word, have brochure templates as does NCTE’s ReadWriteThink website (ReadWriteThink.org/files/resources/interactives/Printing_Press/). Text and images can be uploaded, and the brochure printed out.



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THE UNWANTEDS BOOK 2

THE UNWANTEDS

Island of Silence

About the Book

Alex and his friends are happy, living in Artimé and studying magic under the guidance of kindly Mr. Today. Despite problems with neighboring Quill, life is good. But when something terrible happens to Mr. Today, everything changes in Artimé, and Alex must take on the role of leader, even though he feels unprepared for it. A brother and sister who can't speak wash ashore on a raft, wearing cruel thorns on their neck, while Lani, Samheed, and Meghan go off on a sailing trip that goes wrong. And in Quill, Alex's brother, Aaron, is out of power but scheming to get it back, which will mean danger to Alex and Artimé.

Prereading Question

What qualities make a good leader? What makes someone a poor or even dangerous leader? Does it vary by situation? Can a leader have good intentions and still be unsuccessful?

Setting

1. Compare what Artimé is like without magic to what it's like with magic. In what different ways do the Artiméans respond to the lack of magic? What do their responses show about them?
2. How have conditions changed in Quill since Artimé became accessible? In what different ways do the Wanteds and the Necessaries respond to the changes? Why have some of the Necessaries moved to Artimé?
3. Describe what this book reveals about the Island of Silence. What do Lani, Meghan, and Samheed think it will be like? Explain what they are basing their ideas on. What do they see at first on the island? What happened to Meghan there, and how is it related to the Silent girl and boy? Describe what happens to Lani and Samheed on the island.

Characters

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 3) (RL.7.6)

1. Mr. Today wants to train Alex to be his successor. Why does he want to do this? What traits in Alex's character suggest that he could be a good leader?
2. Alex resists being trained as the new leader. What is he worried about? What aspects of accepting Mr. Today's offer appeal to Alex? How does his view of himself differ from Mr. Today's view of him? How does his view of himself differ from how his friends view him?
3. Ultimately, Alex has no choice but to lead the Artiméans. Find examples of Alex doing a good job as a leader. Are there examples of mistakes he makes? What motivates him to keep trying?
4. Meanwhile, Aaron is scheming to lead Quill. Mr. Today describes Aaron as "power-hungry." Compare Aaron's reasons for wanting to lead with Alex's reasons for leading. Later, Aaron refers to revenge. What role does revenge play for Aaron? What do the differences between them say about the kind of people they are?
5. Both Alex and Aaron are good at planning. Aaron thinks about his plan: "If all went well, it would still take years." What is his plan? Find examples of each character's ability to plan and think ahead. Compare the differences in what they plan for and why they make their plans.

6. Sisters and brothers play important roles in this book: Lani and Henry, Meghan and Sean, and the two children from the Island of Silence. Discuss the relationship between each pair. Then compare each pair to the others. How are their relationships similar? How are they different?

Plot

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.3)

1. It's common in fairy tales for characters to disobey a rule or command, causing something bad to happen. Although there's no clear rule against it, Lani, Meghan, and Samheed know they shouldn't take the boat. Describe why each of them chooses to go. What are the consequences?
2. Issues about silence are important in the plot in several ways. Mr. Today deals with the fact that he hasn't told six of the original founders of Quill an important fact. Why didn't he tell them sooner? Why does he tell them now? What are the consequences of Mr. Today's finally breaking the silence?
3. At first Alex doesn't tell his friends about Mr. Today's idea to train him. Why is Alex silent about it? Once his friends know, it causes a rift between Alex and Lani. Why? What does Alex think the problem is about? What are Lani's feelings about it? How do Meghan and Samheed react? Explain what their reactions show about each of them.

Themes

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.2)

1. Leadership is one of the main themes in this novel. Compare the leadership styles of Alex and Aaron. How do they treat people? How does each motivate people to follow him?
2. Meghan also has a chance to lead when Mr. Today chooses her and Cole to be in charge of orientation for the newcomers. What traits does she have that made Mr. Today choose her? How does she go about helping the newcomers? Give examples of how she shows leadership.
3. A theme related to leadership is making mistakes. Mr. Today comments on his writings about his past, "You'll find history, magic, and mistakes galore." Why does he think mistakes are important? Besides the three friends taking the boat, what mistakes do people make in this novel, and which ones have serious consequences?

Language

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.4)

1. The characters, including the blackboard Clive, use mild sarcasm in this book. Sometimes the narrative uses the word "sarcasm" or "sarcastically", but sarcasm is also conveyed by body language, such as when Meghan rolls her eyes. What are the characters conveying with sarcasm? Is it used for different purposes, depending on the situation? What emotional effects can it have?
2. Mr. Appleblossom often speaks in rhyme. Why does he use rhymes? What does it tell you about him? How does it fit in with other aspects of his character?

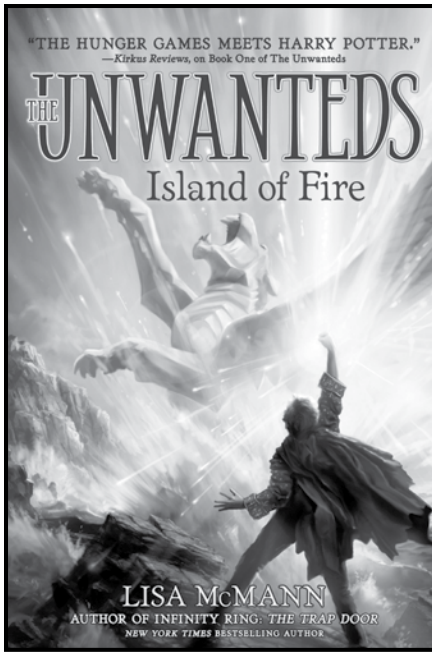
Activities

Create Your Own Interactive Blackboard

Alex's interactive blackboard, which is named Clive, has a strong personality. Clive can talk, show things, communicate with other blackboards, and more; he also has a face. Mr. Today's blackboards can do even more. Have each student create a blackboard of his or her own, name it, and decide on a personality and voice for it. What is its voice like? Each student can brainstorm about what the blackboard can do. Have them draw a picture of its face and other attributes, using labels to explain different parts. Then have them write a paragraph describing its personality. Have the students share their blackboards with one another.

Museum of the Large Bulletin Board

The Museum of the Large serves as a refuge for Mr. Today. Discuss as a class the different items in the museum. Some of them, like the ship and the whale, are truly large. Have students brainstorm real-life large objects, current or from the past, such as buildings, bridges, pyramids, dinosaurs, and so on. Have each student choose a large object to research, describe in a paragraph or two, and illustrate (draw, paint, create online) for a bulletin board. Mount the illustrations and writing to form a classroom Museum of the Large display.



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THE UNWANTEDS BOOK 3

THE UNWANTEDS

Island of Fire

About the Book

With so many things gone wrong, Alex needs all the help he can get to restore the magic on Artimé and rescue his friends, Lani and Samheed, from the dangerous Island of Silence. Help comes from unexpected people, including the two mysterious Silent siblings and a blustering ship's captain named Ahab. Alex gains strength and confidence as a leader, even when his plans flounder and their ship goes off course. Meanwhile, tension mounts as Lani and Samheed, enslaved on Warbler, fight to survive, and Alex's brother, Aaron, gains support in Quill but faces unexpected threats from his own allies.

Prereading Question

How could you communicate if you and your friends suddenly couldn't speak or write? What problems would it cause? Are there times that not speaking is a good thing?

Setting

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1) (RL.5.5) (RL.6.3)

1. Mr. Today was originally from Warbler, the Island of Silence. He describes it as being “quite a paradise” when he left. Compare life in Artimé when it has magic to life on Warbler under Queen Eagala. Compare life in Artimé when it doesn't have magic to life on Warbler.
2. How are workers treated on Warbler? Consider whether there are parallels between their treatment and how slaves were treated in the US before the Civil War. For example, slaves usually weren't allowed to talk with each other while working. What are some other similarities? What are some differences?
3. How does the treatment of workers on Warbler compare to how the Necessaries were traditionally treated in Quill? How did the treatment of the Necessaries compare to slavery in the US?
4. While most of the chapters follow Alex, some chapters focus on subplots about Lani and Samheed, and about Aaron. How does the author structure the novel to tell all those stories? How does she create suspense about them?

Characters

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 3) (RL.4.4)

1. Sky and Crow, known at first as the Silent girl and boy, start to become part of the Artimé community. Describe the ways in which each of them is helpful. Describe some of the ways they change from the beginning of the book to the end.
2. With Lani gone, Alex starts spending more time with Sky. How do their feelings for each other change? What obstacles are there to the two of them becoming close? How does Alex feel about their relationship?
3. Meanwhile, Lani and Samheed are becoming close. In what ways do they become important to each other? Explain how their experiences in the cave and afterward contribute to their changing relationship.

4. A third relationship in the plot is the one between Claire and Liam. How did they know each other in the past? How do they treat each other now? How does Claire feel about Liam after her rescue?
5. Captain Ahab is a character from the classic American novel *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville. In *Moby-Dick*, Ahab is obsessed with a whale and is seeking revenge against it. What role does the captain play in the rescue? Describe the whale he's chasing and its role in the plot. Why do you think the author included these references to *Moby-Dick*?
6. Simber and Alex have become good friends. Describe Simber's background and character, including his strengths and limitations. What makes Simber important to Alex? What makes him important to Artimé?

Plot

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1) (RL.4.3)

1. With help from others, Alex slowly figures out the spell to restore Artimé. Describe the steps he takes in the process. Who helps him and how do they help? What problems does saying the spell solve? What problems remain?
2. The book includes several rescues, including those of Haluki, Claire, Lani, and Samheed, and the people in the Museum. Describe the rescues and the role that they play in the plot. What do they show about Alex's character?
3. The rogue ship leads Alex and his friends to Pirate Island, even though they don't want to go there. How does the detour affect the plot? Sky sees her mother and communicates with her. How does this relate to the secret plan Sky has near the end of the book?
4. Describe in detail Alex's plan for rescuing Lani and Samheed. What roles are assigned to the different people and creatures? How are they going to communicate? How well does the plan work?
5. The last four chapters, starting with "Back to Normal," bring the book to a close. What has returned to normal? What is now different than it was before the trip to Pirate and Warbler Islands? What hints are there about the future?

Themes

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 2, 4) (RL.4.3)

1. One of the main themes in this novel is the power of silence. Reread the excerpt from the handbook for workers. It says that the thorns are for the workers' protection and that they "remove the burden of speech." Discuss this document and the role silence plays in the politics on Warbler. Why was silence instituted among the workers? How is speaking used as a reward?
2. Even though Warbler is referred to as the Island of Silence, people do communicate there through sign language. Describe the different uses of sign language and gestures in this book, including the gesture in Artimé to show loyalty. How does the sign language Lani and Samheed create help them? Consider everyday gestures that you use to communicate, such as a shrug or nod. Compare them to sign language. What are the similarities and differences?
3. Leadership is another major theme in the book. Alex gains confidence in his ability as a leader, but he is sure that being a leader will limit his life and relationships. What does he think those limits will be? Why does he think that? What changes his mind? Discuss how being the leader of a community or country, especially one that's in danger, might affect other aspects of the leader's life.

Language

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 4)

1. The author has a playful approach to last names in this series. Make note of some of the unusual last names, such as Today and Rattrap. What does each name suggest about the person? Why does Carina change her last name? Why do you think she chose the new name Holiday?
2. Related to the theme of silence is the theme throughout the series of the power of spoken words. The spell to restore magic in Artimé turns out to be these words spoken in this order: “Imagine. Believe. Whisper. Breathe. Commence.” Discuss why these are the words of the spell and why they are in this order. How do they relate to building and rebuilding Artimé? Why are words considered powerful?

Activities

Favorite Character Cube

Have students choose a character from the book and create a six-sided cube with pictures and information about the character. NCTE's ReadWriteThink website has a tool called Cube Creator (ReadWriteThink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/cube-creator-30850.html). You can print it out to get a blank template by initiating the process of creating a cube and putting in a general name, such as “Ms. Smith's Class.” Without adding other information, press Finish and then Print. This will give you the blank template. Or you could have students use the Cube Creator online. Have them put in brief text for each side of the cube, such as a character trait or an action the character took. The students can then print the cube out and add pictures. Make a display of all the finished cubes.

Create an Island

Have students consider the islands in the book. It seems likely Alex and his friends will explore more islands. Have students work alone, in pairs, or in small groups and come up with their own island. They should brainstorm its geography, animals, flora, and inhabitants. What is the housing like? The government? And so on. Then have them name the island and create a travel poster for it that includes artwork and description. This could be done on poster board or using an online poster tool such as Glogster, which has teacher accounts for use with classrooms (Edu.Glogster.com).



About the Author

LISA MCMANN is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Wake trilogy, *Cryer's Cross*, *Dead to You*, the Visions series, and the middle grade dystopian fantasy series *The Unwanteds*. She lives with her family in the Phoenix area. Read more about Lisa and find her blog through her website at LisaMcMann.com or, better yet, find her on Facebook ([Facebook.com/McMannFan](https://www.facebook.com/McMannFan)) or follow her on Twitter ([@Lisa_McMann](https://twitter.com/Lisa_McMann)).

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Guide written in 2013 by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian and Chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee. She gives professional development workshops on books for young people and is the author of *Great Books for Girls* and *Great Books About Things Kids Love*.

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