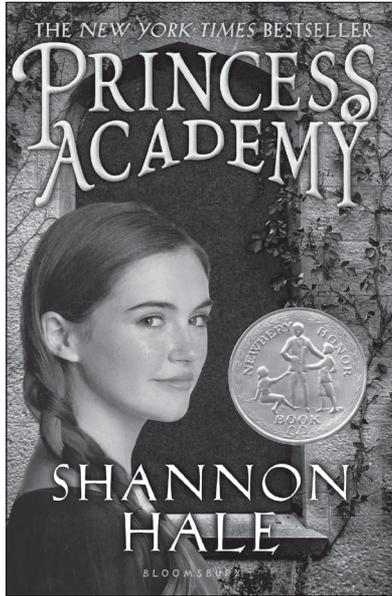


CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE

Princess Academy
by Shannon Hale



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Fourteen-year-old Miri feels unimportant because she is not permitted to mine linder in the quarry alongside her father, her sister, and her peers on Mount Eskel. Instead, Miri is left to tend the goats, do housekeeping chores, and bargain with traders who carry goods from the lowlands to the mountain. When the Chief Delegate of Danland arrives on the mountain and announces that the priests of the creator god read the omens and divined Mount Eskel the home of the bride of the

future king, the lives of all girls, ages twelve to seventeen, begin to change. Required to attend the princess academy that is governed by a stern teacher, Olana Mansdaughter, the girls learn both academics and social skills. Knowing the chosen bride's family will have a good life, Miri is torn between being chosen by the prince and returning to her beloved home on Mount Eskel. Adventure, intrigue, and danger await the girls, and Miri has the opportunity to become group leader, rescuer, and friend.

Princess Academy is a stimulating examination of the power of literacy and bigotry. The book explores such additional themes as heroism, courage, leadership, family and community. Rich in purposeful setting, the book is an excellent conversation piece for discussing story structure and the writer's craft.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shannon Hale is the *New York Times* bestselling author of six young adult novels, including the Newbery Honor book *Princess Academy* and its sequel *Palace of Stone* (August 2012), two award-winning books for adults, and *Midnight in Austenland*. She cowrote the critically acclaimed graphic novel *Rapunzel's Revenge* and its sequel, *Calamity Jack*, with husband Dean Hale. They live with their four small children near Salt Lake City, Utah.

Reader's Guide by Pam B. Cole, Ph.D.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Chapters 1 – 5

1. Identify the setting of the story. How do the people on Mount Eskel earn their living?
2. Describe Miri's relationship with her father and sister. What happened to Miri's mother?
3. Why does Miri feel unimportant? Are her feelings valid? Explain. Why is Miri determined to get something extra out of the traders when they arrive in the village?
4. What is quarry-speech? What role might it play in the story?
5. The chief delegate of Danland arrives in the village with an important announcement. What news does he share with the villagers? How does this announcement contribute to the plot and/or move the story forward? At the end of his announcement Miri remarks, "Snake in a box." What might Miri mean?
6. How does the chief delegate's announcement affect trading and why? Is Enrik a good character? Support your response with a passage from the text.
7. How does Miri feel about the possibility of leaving home? Marda doesn't say anything about the possibility of leaving. However, what can you infer about her feelings from the text?
8. Identify the following characters and predict what role each might play: Peder, Katar, Britta. Cite passages to support your predictions.
9. Describe the building that is transformed into the academy. What are the academy rules? Contrast the girls' daily routine at the academy with their lives on the mountain. What will they learn at the academy and why?

10. Describe their first day at the academy. Why is Gerti punished and how? How does Miri attempt to help her? Miri manages to get the entire class punished. What does she do and how does the class respond?
11. Katar and Miri have different perspectives on the training they are receiving in the academy. How are they different? Why does Miri's attitude toward the training change?
12. The girls believe they will be able to make frequent trips home. However, when a snowstorm sets in, they are trapped in the academy. While the snowstorm is plausible, and Hale sets the scene for a storm in chapter one, how does the storm contribute to the setting? How does it set up the situation for the story? How does it influence the story's structure?
13. After several days of hard work, Olana allows the girls to take a trip outdoors. Why does Miri stay inside? What does she do while she is alone and why? What is her relationship like with the other girls?

Chapters 6–10

1. Olana catches Miri returning a book. How does Olana punish Miri? How does Gerti save Miri and why? What does Miri learn about quarry-speech from the experience?
2. How does Miri begin experimenting with quarry-speech? What memories does she use and how does she choose them?
3. Miri becomes closer to Britta. What causes this?
4. Miri has conflicting thoughts about becoming the academy princess and being chosen by the prince. What advantages does she see in being selected? What disadvantages?
5. Miri guesses that Britta can already read but has been pretending that she cannot. What explanation does Britta give for keeping her reading ability a secret? Is it a reasonable excuse?

6. Miri becomes obsessed with the house in the painting. How does it impact her thinking about her future? The future of her family?
7. Knut advises Miri to keep reading the book about commerce. Why does he do so? How does the book become helpful?
8. Miri learns that knowledge is power. Explain.
9. Why does Miri want to tell her father about reading the commerce book? How does she believe the information can help her family and her village?
10. How does Britta respond when Miri tells her about the information in the commerce book?
11. Olana administers a test to see who may be allowed time off to visit their homes. Only Miri and Katar pass. Describe the relationship between Miri and Katar. How do the test results impact their relationship and their dedication to study?

Chapters 11–15

1. The girls return to Mount Eskel without Olana's permission. How are they greeted by their families?
2. How does Peder feel about Miri becoming academy princess? Marda?
3. Miri looks forward to talking at the council meeting. What information does she share with the council? How do the villagers respond to the information? What plan do they develop for selling linder?
4. How does the knowledge about commerce and the value of linder begin changing the village?
5. The girls plan to return to the academy. Why do they want to return? How do they present themselves to Olana when they return? What skills do they use to win their way back in? Why does she take them back?

6. Tension continues to build between Katar and Miri as they continue to compete for the title of academy princess. Are they motivated in the same way? Explain.
7. Miri finds a gift from Peder at the academy. What is it, and why do you think he left it? What symbolism does the gift hold? Cite passages to support your answer.
8. The girls spend the winter studying in the academy. How is their time one of reflection and growth? Who has the most desire to become the academy princess and why?
9. What accident befalls Marda and how does it affect her relationship with Miri? How does her father respond to the accident?
10. Doter shares with Miri the story about her mother's death. How does the information change Miri?
11. Doter tells Miri, "Your pa is a house with shutters closed" (p. 176). How does this metaphor help Miri understand her relationship with her father? How does it add clarity to her understanding of her childhood?
12. Britta remembers a story about a bird whose wings were pinned to the ground. Why does she tell Miri the story? What does it mean? How has Miri changed?

Chapters 16–20

1. Olana gives the girls an oral test, how does Miri use quarry-speech to help the other girls pass the test? Should Miri have helped the other girls? Explain. Use information from the text to support your stance.

2. There is a five-way tie for the princess academy winner: Katar, Esa (Peder's sister), Liana, Bena, and Miri. Olana tells the five girls they must vote for the winner. When the group chooses Miri, Miri finds Katar crying. Why is Katar crying? Is becoming princess more important to her than it is to Miri? Explain.
3. Though Miri is named the academy princess and will wear the beautiful dress, the prince is free to choose whom he wishes. As the girls await the prince's arrival, what promise do they make to each other? Do you think they will keep the promise? Explain why or why not.
4. Do the girls enjoy the ball? Does Miri like the prince? He does not choose a princess. Instead, he surprises the girls by leaving and saying he will return at a later date. What reason might that be?
5. Miri follows the conversation code with Prince Steffen that she learned in class, but she gets frustrated with the prince's indifferent attitude and breaks it. Is she able to break the ice between them? Explain.
6. What does Miri think of Prince Steffen? What does he think of her? How are Miri and the prince similar?
7. The prince leaves without choosing a bride. How do the girls react to this surprise? How does Olana?
8. The girls are taken hostage by a group of bandits. How do the bandits treat the girls? Why do they take the girls hostage? How does Olana deal with the bandits?
9. Hale removes Olana and Knut from the scene when the bandits take the girls hostage. How and why does she do so?
10. How do the girls prevent giving the bandits the academy princess? What happens as a result? Are the girls brave? Support your answer with passages from the text.

Chapters 21–25

1. When bandits seize the academy and take the girls hostage, how do they threaten the girls? Why are the bandits unable to leave the academy?
2. When the girls first arrived at the academy, soldiers were there to guard them; however, by the time the bandits seize the academy, the soldiers are gone, leaving only Olana and Knut to care for the girls. Early in the story the soldiers' leaving seems insignificant. How might the story be different if they had remained?
3. Is Bena a traitor? Why or why not? Why does Miri trust her when they make a second attempt to escape?
4. How does quarry-speech aid the girls in escaping from the bandits? Why is Miri able to connect with Peder through quarry-speech but not her father? How do the families of the village overcome the bandits?
5. While she and the other girls are being held hostage by the bandits, Miri realizes that she doesn't want to live far from her mountain home. Does this decision surprise you? Why or why not? Support your answer with information from the text.
6. The families take the girls home because there is no food left after the bandits seize the academy. How do the girls positively impact their homes and the village?
7. Is the prince a likable character? Why or why not? Support your answer with passages from the text.
8. Olana and Knut have no choice but to live through the winter with the families on the mountain. What role does Olana play on the mountain? Knut?

9. By the end of the story, Miri's home village has been drastically changed by the training/education the girls receive in the academy. Give examples of these changes. Are they for the better? Explain.
10. Britta was ill and did not attend the ball when the prince met the girls for the first time. When he returns, Britta reveals a "truth" to Miri. What does she reveal? How does Miri respond to her story?
11. Miri and Katar are rivals throughout the story; however, by story's end, Miri feels sorry for Katar. How does Hale create a sympathetic character in Katar? Support your answer with evidence from the story.
12. While the girls are at the academy, Olana shares with the girls a picture of a house and reminds them that the family of one "lucky" girl will live in this home. How does this picture impact Miri? What does Olana regret about the picture and why does she give the picture to Miri in the end? In what way is the picture symbolic?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

1. There are four basic types of conflict (man vs. man, man vs. society, man vs. nature, and man vs. self). Identify an example of each type of conflict in the story and support it with passages from the text. Is one type of conflict more dominant than others? Explain.
2. Hale carefully details the mountain setting of the story (e.g., the rocky mountainside, the treacherous trip down the mountain to the academy, and the heavy snowstorm). What role does this setting play in the story?

3. Will Miri's relationship with her father be different as a result of her experiences at the academy? Why or why not? What about her relationships with Peder and with Marda? Will her position in the community change? If so, how?
4. The climax of a story is the major turning point in action or the point of greatest tension. What is the climax of the story? How does the story turn, or resolve, after the climax?
5. If Miri had been chosen by Prince Steffen to be his bride, would she have agreed to marry him? Support your response with passages from the text.
6. What does the story tell us about education and the manner in which literacy and education are empowering? What events in history can you cite as examples of the power of literacy?
7. Explain how bigotry is a theme in the story and support your explanation with examples. What other stories have you read that are examples of social stratification?
8. Knut is a minor character in the story. What does he contribute to the story?
9. Characterize Olana Mansdaughter. What significance might there be in her last name? (Remember girls take their father's name as their last name, and boys take that of their mother.) Olana appears cruel; however, by the end of the story, the reader gains more insight into her character. Explain.
10. Is bullying a theme in the story? If so, cite examples and explain how characters respond to the ill treatment. If not, how would you characterize the dynamics among the girls as they compete to be academy princess?
11. In a good story, readers are "drawn" to the protagonist in some way. Hale, for instance, creates a likable character in Miri. Cite evidence from the story that illustrates how Hale makes her likable.

12. Who is the most heroic character? Support your response with evidence from the text.
13. Literacy and the acquisition of knowledge change the families on Mount Eskel. Identify an impoverished country and explain how literacy might impact that country's economy.
14. As the story progresses, Miri develops a deeper understanding of quarry-speech. Trace the evolution of her understanding. Use events from the story to support your response.