

September 2020
ISBN 9781760637675
Format: Paperback
Recommended for 12-18-year-olds

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY

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Summary

Two worlds, two hearts and a choice that will shape their fate forever.

Prince North's home is in the sky, in a gleaming city held aloft by intricate unknown technology. But North believes his sky island is sinking. Its engines are failing, and the key to saving his home is to venture to the place the engines were first created.

Nimh is the living goddess of her people on the surface, responsible for providing answers, direction and hope. But in the midst of the surface's worst crisis yet, a mist that spreads madness and poison, doubts have arisen among the people about Nimh's divinity. She must find a way to manifest her power – before she is overthrown, and all is lost.

North's and Nimh's lives are entwined – though their hearts can never be. Linked by a terrifying prophecy and caught between duty and fate, they must choose to either save their people, or succumb to the bond that is forbidden to them.

Author style

Told from a dual perspective – chapters alternate between Nimh and North's view as events unfold – readers are drawn into the innermost thoughts of both main characters in a way that enhances their understanding and empathy.

Use in the curriculum

The Other Side of the Sky is Book 1 of a duology and is suitable for readers of high fantasy and science fiction genre study at secondary level. With vivid characters and a well written, fast-paced plot, it is likely to spark a lot of interest and enthusiasm. Senior students may find it useful for an independent study, comparing the book with other dystopian or science fiction titles. The well-known authors have a significant online presence, which can also assist research.

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Themes

magic • science • love • honour • betrayal • faith

Classroom discussion and application

Before reading

Literary techniques

Answer the following questions relating to narrative hooks and other literary techniques used in the story:

- A narrative hook grabs the reader's attention so that they will keep reading. What hooks can you find in the opening chapter of *The Other Side of the Sky*? [Hint: consider foreshadowing in the form of prophecy, mysterious worlds, a sense of menace.]
- If the purpose of an opening chapter is to draw the reader into the story and make them want to read on, how would you rate this chapter and why did you assign that rating?
- How would you describe the tone of the first chapter? Does this tone continue or change when we are introduced to North in Alciel? What might the change of tone tell us about the two different characters?
- Define the terms 'dual narrative' and 'omniscient narrative'. Why do you think the authors have used a dual narrative in *The Other Side of the Sky*? How might the story have differed if they had used an omniscient narrative? Which narrative do you prefer to read in general?
- Try writing some one of Nimh's chapters from North's perspective and vice versa. How does changing the perspective/POV affect the plot, characterisation and tone of the chapter?
- Do you think this book would be as enjoyable from a single POV? Why/why not? If you had to choose to read it from only one POV, whose would it be and why?
- Like the narrative, there are many dual elements in the novel, the most obvious being the coexisting worlds of Nimh and North. How many other dual objects or concepts can you find in the novel? [Answer for Teachers: North's two mothers, the twin moons of Miella and Danna, two powerful forces – magic and science, the two goddesses – Nimh and Inshara]. Why do you think the (two) authors might have emphasised dualism in the novel?
- Consider the following quote from the text. Who do you think this girl is and what do you think is going to happen next in the story?

"After I have been brought before the man who returned twenty years ago from the other side of the sky. There are things to be said between him and I. He has much to answer for—and I have much to do here." [p 471]

Writing exercise

Organise students in pairs and have them devise the plot of a short story involving two people. [Allow students to come up with as many different scenarios as possible to make the exercise engaging.] Have one student write one paragraph of the story, then the other student follow on in the next paragraph. Continue until the story is completed. Discuss what some of the challenges were writing together, how it impacted on the shape and events of the story, and what, if any, benefits came out of the process.

Character profiles

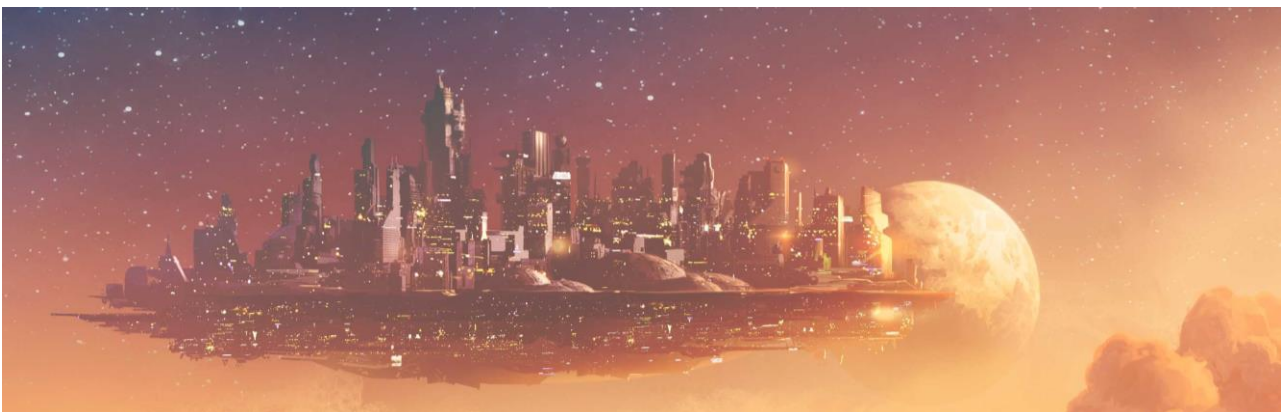
Compile a character profile on Nimh and North. Note what we are told about each when they first appear in the story, and what we discover about each as the story progresses. Discuss whether both characters are transformed in the novel or whether one changes more than the other.

Discussion Questions:

- Which world would you choose to live in: Nimh's, where magic reigns but people struggle against starvation and mist disease, or North's bureaucratic and highly engineered world but where scientific knowledge has been forgotten?
- To what extent do you think the novel is successfully exploring the conflict between faith (religion?) and science?
- Do you feel any sympathy for Inshara given she has suffered during her childhood?
- In what ways are Nimh and Inshara similar and in what ways are they different?
- In what ways is Nimh and North's search for their place in the world like other YA novels you have read?
- Who do you think is the most interesting character in the novel?

After reading

After finishing the novel, design a new cover to incorporate as many of the story's key themes as possible. Remember, covers are more than an image, so carefully consider other aspects such as the font you want to use, the size of the title and authors' names, perspective and framing. Pitch your cover idea to the rest of the class and explain why you have chosen each of these elements.



About the authors

Amie Kaufman and Meagan Spooner are long-time friends and sometime flatmates who have travelled the world (but not yet the galaxy), covering every continent between them. Amie, who is the co-author of the Illuminae Files and the Aurora Cycle series, lives in Melbourne, Australia. Meagan, who is also the author of the Hunted trilogy, lives in North Carolina in the US (though she considers herself an honorary Aussie). Together, they are the authors of *These Broken Stars* and the rest of the Starbound trilogy. You can find them at www.amiekaufman.com and www.meaganspooner.com



A word from the Megan Spooner

'The intersection of science and faith was one of the initial inspirations for the entire book. Amie and I often write about two main characters from different worlds, and in this book we wanted that to include diametrically opposed understandings of the universe. At the beginning, it seems as though the two characters will never agree, but as the book goes on both are forced to re-evaluate what they "know" to be true. *The Other Side of the Sky* is certainly a book about how nothing is truly binary, and that to cling to that preconception can only prove foolish in the long run.



'Another inspiration was the idea of writing a romance between characters who couldn't touch. It was written in alternating points of view, with Amie Kaufman largely writing much of North's prose, and me writing Nimh's. That said, when we revise, we both work on each other's stuff, so by the end of our books, it's often difficult to tell who wrote what. Because we live on opposite sides of the planet, our collaboration is almost entirely virtual/online – something everyone is having to get used to now, unfortunately. But it's never slowed us down!'

– Megan Spooner