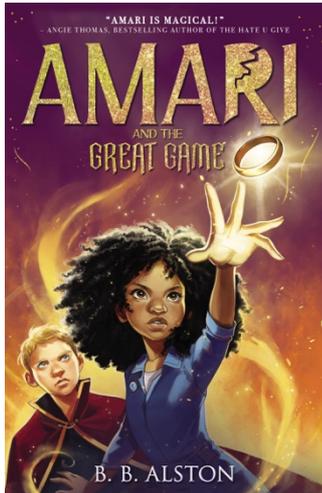


Teacher's Notes



Amari and the Great Game

Written by **B. B. Alston**

Teacher's Notes by **Bec Kavanagh**

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

9+ aged readers (grades 5–6)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - ACELT1608
 - ACELT1612
 - ACELT1614
 - ACELY1709

THEMES

- Difference
- Prejudice
- Friendship and family
- Courage
- Self-worth

SYNOPSIS

Amari has found her missing brother, Quinton, helped to capture the evil magician Moreau and expose his progeny, her once-classmate Dylan, *and* discovered her own extraordinary abilities. Now she's training as a Junior Agent at the secret Bureau of Supernatural Affairs and is also a member of the International League of Magicians, an elite secret society of magicians. But Amari's life is far from easy. Quinton is still under the effects of Moreau's spell, and no-one is able to wake him. And even though many see Amari as a hero, there are a lot of people who can't see past the fact that she's a magician – someone they've been told their whole lives they should fear.

When the great leaders of the magic world, including Prime Minister Merlin, are trapped in a mysterious time freeze, the tide of public opinion takes a vengeful turn against magicians. Temporary Prime Minister Bane, a wraith with his own vendetta against magicians, starts a campaign to round up all UnWanted, and he's keeping a very close eye on Amari. And to make things even more complicated, the League of Magicians wants Amari to lead them against Bane. Amari doesn't want to lead the League, but it's between her and Dylan, and Dylan's willing to do *whatever* it takes to beat her.

Amari just wants to be accepted for who she is, but she must figure out who's behind the time freeze and defeat Dylan before Bane's vendetta gets her expelled ... or worse.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

B. B. Alston lives in Lexington, South Carolina. His debut novel, *Amari and the Night Brothers*, is a #1 Kids' Indie Next pick and the winner of Barnes & Noble's inaugural Children's and YA Book Award as well as a *New York Times* and indie bestseller. When not writing, he can be found eating too many sweets and exploring country roads to see where they lead. Visit him online at www.bbalston.com

THEMES

Prejudice

Just after the time freeze, Bear accuses Amari of having something to do with it, and says 'that's the thing about you magicians. You're always doing stuff that shouldn't be possible' (p28).

- How does the phrase 'you magicians' here reveal Bear's prejudice towards magicians?
- Where does this prejudice come from? Is it valid?
- What other examples of prejudice does Amari face in the book? How does she respond?
- What are the real consequences of people's prejudice on the people they're prejudiced against?

Friendship

'I can't let Elsie get caught up in all this. Friends protect their friends. And Elsie's the best friend I've got' (p187).

- Why is Amari unable to tell Elsie about the Great Game?
- What does she think she's protecting her from?
- What's the problem with her 'friends protect their friends' logic here?
- What is Elsie angry at Amari about in this scene?
- Discuss the role that friendship plays in Amari's final confrontation with Dylan.

Power

When Maria finds out that Cozmo tried to pressure Amari into leading the League, she's furious. 'You aren't ready for magic like that—it's too dangerous' she tells Amari (p152).

- What danger is Maria referring to?
- What power would Amari receive as the head of the League?
- Is Amari tempted by the power? Why might she be?
- Would it be a bad thing to have so much power? Why/why not?



WRITING STYLE

In medias res is a term that means to start in the middle of the action. When book two opens, Amari is sprinting down the sidewalk, trying to get to school on time.

- Discuss the way readers respond to the story beginning in this way.
- What other films and novels do you know that have used this technique?
- How does the writer bring necessary information into the scene?
- How else could the writer have started the novel?

Amari and the Great Game is the second book in a series. Discuss the conventions of fantasy series – what do you expect from a sequel? What assumed knowledge do you begin the book with? This is a good opportunity to discuss small and large narrative arcs. In simple terms, a narrative arc maps the rise and fall of the action in a story. In a series, there is often a series arc (Harry Potter defeating Voldemort, for example) and then smaller story arcs for individual novels within the series (Harry finding the Deathly Hallows).

- What is the series arc for Amari? (This is often related to the larger conflict.)
- What is the story arc for *Amari and the Great Game*?

Identifying the conflict in a story is one way to figure out what the narrative arc is. Asking what the protagonist wants and what (or who) is standing in their way is another. What does Amari want? What's standing in her way? How does she overcome this obstacle?

COMPREHENSION

- The media reports that 'the entire supernatural world is watching' (p8) to see if Amari is a 'good' magician or not. How does she feel about this pressure? Is the scrutiny fair?
- What's special about the fortune cookies Elsie gives her friends? What does Amari's fortune say? What does she think this means? What does it turn out to mean?
- Why is Amari uninvited to summer camp? What does this mean for her training? Who helps to get her back in?
- Discuss how social media plays a positive role in holding Bane (and others) accountable and ensuring that Amari is treated fairly.
- What is the history of the UnWanted? How does Bane use this history to manipulate public opinion?
- Why does the League of Magicians want Amari to lead them into battle? Why doesn't she want to? What are the 'grave consequences' (p66) that Cozmo warns her about?
- What privileges does being an Elite give Amari? How does this change the way that people see her?
- How do the terms 'good' and 'evil' apply to the League of Magicians and the Bureau of Supernatural affairs? Consider how they see themselves, and how they're seen by different people.
- What does 'Essentially Human' mean? How is this term used to give some people more privileges than others? What's the real-world equivalent?
- What secret is Director Harlowe hiding? Why does she hate Amari and magicians so much? What does she want?



- How does Lara feel about her family's behaviour? How does this change her attitude towards Amari?
- Is Bane responsible for his own actions? Discuss the way that Bane and Dylan are manipulated by others who want power for themselves. Does your opinion of each of them change throughout the story?
- What questions do you have at the end of the novel?

WRITING EXERCISE

Write a short story that follows this structure:

- Once there was a ...
- Every day they ...
- Until one day ...
- And because of that ...

Now, think about *in medias res*, and use this to write a new beginning for your story that launches the reader straight into the action.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Kirkus reviews calls *Amari and the Great Game* 'refreshing', 'energetic' and 'playful' – do you agree? Discuss the elements of a good book review. What should you include? What should you avoid? Write your own short (200 word) review of *Amari and the Great Game*. These could be published in a school newsletter or on the school blog.
2. Use the last scene of the novel to write the opening chapter of book three.
I take a slow, deep breath and meet my brother's eyes. In them I see love that makes my heart overflow. He's been telling me I can do anything my whole life. Who am I to say they're wrong? I smile through my tears. "I say we fight." (p423)
3. If each story arc has a central conflict, design a central conflict for book three. Draw a picture of the 'villain' in your conflict, and describe their power over Amari.
4. Now that Elsie has unlocked her dragon ability, it seems likely that she'll be having her own adventures. Write the synopsis of a spin-off novel featuring Elsie as the central protagonist.

RELATED READING

Amari and the Night Brothers by B. B. Alston

Nevermoor by Jessica Townsend

Otilie Colter and the Narrowway Hunt by Rhiannon Williams

Philomella and the Impossible Forest by Doris Brett (published April 2023)

