

Jasmin McGaughey and Tigest Girma: Writing Across Genre, Culture and Power

Join award-winning authors Jasmin McGaughey and Tigest Girma for a conversation on writing in genre and centering diverse voices. Though each story is unique, they share a focus on identity, culture, belonging, and power.

In this session, they'll explore how they craft worlds where culture and myth blend together, the challenges and opportunities of writing diverse characters in fantasy and romance, and why representation in fiction matters. Hear from two bold new voices in speculative fiction in this special joint conversation.

GENRE AND EXPECTATIONS

Jasmin McGaughey and Tigest Girma both play with genre conventions such as fantasy, romance and speculative fiction. What expectations do we bring to fantasy, romance or speculative fiction? How do the authors meet some expectations but deliberately break others? Why might an author blend genres rather than staying in just one?

In groups, students:

1. list three "rules" of a chosen genre (i.e. "fantasy must have a quest");
2. identify how either author meets or breaks one of those rules;
3. write a 2-3 sentence genre mash-up pitch (e.g. romance and post-apocalyptic fantasy or mystery and climate fiction) for a new novel.

Groups should share and discuss how breaking genre rules can open space for new voices.

CULTURE AND WORLD BUILDING

Jasmin McGaughey and Tigest Girma both write stories that blend magic, history, family and imagination. How do the authors draw on cultural knowledge and traditions in ways that feel respectful? What is the difference between representation and appropriation? Who has the right to tell particular stories, and why does this matter? How can readers recognise when a text handles culture thoughtfully vs superficially?

As a class, list examples of good practice when culture is represented in fiction, such as:

- consulting communities
- avoiding stereotypes
- showing characters as whole and complex
- acknowledging limits of one's own perspective

Then discuss:

- Why might some stories be better told by writers from inside a culture?
- How can writers outside a culture approach it with care, or choose not to?

REPRESENTATION AND WHO GETS TO BE A HERO

Both novels centre characters who are not always centred in mainstream fantasy or romance. Why does representation in fiction matter?

Students should write a brief response beginning with: "A hero I've never seen in fiction but would like to is..." Share with a partner and discuss why this character matters.

POWER, VOICE AND PERSPECTIVE

Power operates through families, kingdoms, friendships, politics and magic in both books. Who has power in the worlds of these stories, and why? How does power shift across the narrative? How do the authors use point of view to show or hide power?

Rewrite a short scene (or summary of one) from another character's perspective, ideally one with less or more power. Reflect in two sentences: how did the power dynamics change?

LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

Both writers use vivid language and imagery to convey mood, atmosphere and emotion. How do the authors show what a character is feeling without directly naming the emotion? Which images or descriptions in the text stuck with you, and why? How do sensory details (sound, colour, smell, texture) shape mood?

Students are given (or choose) a short passage from either novel and:

- highlight three words or phrases that convey a strong feeling or mood;
- annotate what emotion each one evokes (unease, excitement, grief, joy);
- rewrite the passage to change the emotional tone (e.g. tense, hopeful, romantic, awkward, mysterious, everyday)

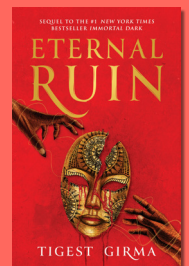
Discuss: What small language choices made the biggest difference to the mood?



Jasmin McGaughey and Tigest Girma



Moonlight and Dust is available at Readings.



Eternal Ruin is available at Readings.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS (YEAR 7-10)

Learning areas: English, Humanities/Civics and Citizenship

Capabilities: Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Capability, Intercultural Capability

Foundational Skills: Literacy

Foundational Skills: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures