**Book Talk: *Atlantia***

**Ally Condie**

Ally Condie is an author and former high school English teacher who lives in Utah with her husband and their four children. She has a bachelor’s degree in English Teaching from BYU and an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts in Writing for Children and Young Adults. In addition to *Atlantia*, Condie has written the Matched trilogy, consisting of *Matched*, *Crossed*, and *Reached*, the Yearbook trilogy, consisting of *Yearbook*, *First Day*, and *Reunion*, and three standalone novels: *Freshman for President*, *Being Sixteen*, and *Summerlost*. She is also a co-writer of the new Darkdeep series with Brendan Reichs; the first book in the series, *The Darkdeep*, will be released on October 2, 2018. *Matched* was a #1 New York Times Bestseller and its sequels were also New York Times bestsellers, and *Summerlost*, her most recent novel, was an Edgar Award Finalist 2016 Best Juvenile Mystery. Condie is also the founder and director of the WriteOut Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to bringing writing camps to teens in rural areas, and is on the board of Go Jane Give.

For more information, visit [allycondie.com](http://allycondie.com/)

In *Atlantia*, Rio is a young woman with a dangerous secret who has always dreamed of leaving Atlantia for the unknown Above where she can finally use her true siren’s voice. Rio’s sister Bay makes her promise to stay Below so they can be together, but Rio is stunned when Bay then chooses to go Above, leaving Rio stranded below. In her struggle to discover why Bay tricked her and how she can escape to the Above to find her, she meets her mother’s estranged sister Marie, one of the powerful sirens who are both worshiped and feared in Atlantia, and True, a young mechanic with secrets of his own. Rio must figure out who she can trust even as she learns to trust herself because the fate of her home and everyone she loves depends on her.

*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantia\_(book)*

**Quotes**

“It is agony to cry when you can’t make a sound, when you have to stuff your pillow into your mouth, almost choking yourself so that no one will hear the timbre of your real voice. No one knows how much that hurts, not even the loved ones who want to keep you safe. I miss Bay so much, and I am so angry with her. If she were here, I would cry out at her. I wouldn’t care who heard…*When was the last time Bay and I fought?...*But I could never *really* fight because of my voice. I couldn’t even tell her how angry I was at her. And so now I wonder if she also never knew how much I loved her. Because I do. There are two things that I’ve always known for certain: that I have to see the Above and that I love my sister…The impossibility of everything overcomes me. In desperation I look around for something, anything to help. And I see the shell again. I seize it and hold it up against my ear. My own breathing is the only sound. Then I hear something else. My sister, singing a lullaby from our childhood, one that our mother used to sing to us when we were small… *Under star-dark seas and skies of gold Live those Above, and those Below They sing and weep, both high and deep While over and under the ocean rolls*… She sings it again, and again. The song is calming, lulling, sad and gentle, true. I close my eyes and listen.” (pg. 59-61)

In order to keep her siren voice a secret, Rio is forced to use a false, flat, emotionless voice that robs her of the ability to express her emotions. In their struggle to protect her, Rio’s mother and sister have forced her to painfully bottle up any emotion that could slip out and give up her secret. The emotional pain Rio feels as she suppresses her emotions is mirrored by the physical pain she feels as she chokes herself into silence. She cannot cry out of she will be discovered, though she has no idea what awful fate she is protecting herself from; her mother claimed that keeping her voice a secret was to keep the family together, but since she is the only member of her family left, why is she still staying silent? Is it because she simply cannot stomach another disruption to her life, or does she sense that there was something deeper, something more desperate, behind her mother’s choice to keep her hidden from the outside world? As she wrestles with pain and regret for the things she was never able to say to her sister, she grabs for the only thing her sister left for her: the shell. The lullaby she hears when she listens to the shell reminds her of a time when things were simple, yet it is also the first clue in dismantling the prison of lies that holds Atlantia hostage. Thought Rio doesn’t know it, the song is a story of the pain of the sirens, the exact pain that she is currently feeling, but her innocence blinds her, turning the painful truth into a comforting story of how things used to be.

“What do they think I’ll do? Run? Cry? Scream? The first option doesn’t make any sense, because I don’t know where Atlantia is leaking. For all I know, I could run right into the breach. And crying and screaming are going to use up what air I do have. If it’s a breach in the air system, the oxygen in the room will be gone soon enough…Should I risk everything and command them to let me leave? Then I can go hunt for a mask. But the voices in the walls of Atlantia start up again, and this time they are screaming at *me*. Telling me to *stay*. *Stay*. Who are they? The sirens?...I do *not* want to die like this—drowned or suffocated in the Below without ever having seen the Above…Eventually the sirens’ screams die down. People are no longer talking, and I feel weak. Most of us shiver. There isn’t much air left in the room. We all wait to see if the water will come rushing in or the air out or both. Just when you think you don’t have anything else to lose. You die.” (pg. 176-177)

Rio is working at her desk when the alarms go off and when everyone grabs their emergency air masks, she realizes that she doesn’t have hers. After all of her work preparing to escape—practicing her swimming, training to avoid the explosive mines, procuring a pressurized air tank on the black market—she is facing death because she forgot the inconvenient but mandatory mask that could now save her life. She knows that her new-found powers can save her and yet she hesitates, unwilling to give up her secret and her hope of seeing her sister again, even as the air in the room gets thinner and thinner. The voices in the walls, the sirens of long ago, scream for her to stay, almost as if Atlantia itself needs her to stay—foreshadowing that the very existence of Atlantia and its people are in fact depending on her keeping her secret and completing her plans. Her decision to stay, to keep silent, even as she accepts that she is probably going to die, shows that she is finally starting to believe in what Marie is telling her and that she is also starting to trust in herself.

“For a minute anger breaks over me as strong as waves against rocks. Anger at my mother and my sister, for loving me but always sheltering me. Anger at the people Below who want to contain the sirens and the people Above who want to kill them. And most of all, anger at the long-ago, greedy people who brought us to the point where the only way to survive was to Divide. Those people used up everything…’Marie wasn’t supposed to die…She was supposed to use *her* voice to keep you safe.’ Marie was supposed to use her own voice. Instead she taught me about mine.” (pg. 258-259)

At this point, Rio has learned the truth about her world’s history and her own life, watched the murder of the aunt she had finally come to trust, and seen that the truth of the Above and the Below is worse than she could have imagined. She now knows that her mother was murdered to silence her, that Marie and the other sirens were murdered out of selfishness and bigotry, and that she now bears the responsibility of being the only person left in the world who can save her home and the people living there, all because of the greed of those who, long ago, condemned humans to a divided world. We can feel her pain and anger so clearly because we’ve been on this journey of discovery alongside her, and we’ve seen how everyone around her tried to protect her from the truth, from the outside world, and from herself, and in the end she is left raw and unprotected as she steps into the light to argue for her people’s lives. Humans of the past and present have wreaked havoc on the world and left it to Rio—sheltered, innocent Rio—to fix their mistakes and save everyone, including herself.

**How I would teach *Atlantia***

This book is an easy but fun read, so I would want to teach it in a way that students had plenty of time to discuss the plot and characters with their peers, maybe in small discussion groups. It would be a great way to introduce fantasy literature, so I would have the students read *Atlantia* and then compare and contrast it with a common fairytale, such as *The Little Mermaid* or *Sleeping Beauty*. I would encourage the students to break down the plot devices and themes of each story and then explain their thoughts in a short essay. This book would also fit well into a unit that included Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* as another example of dystopian literature.

**Why should teens read this book?**

*Atlantia* is an entertaining story and I think that any teen who likes fantasy/sci-fi would enjoy it. It would be particularly helpful for a reluctant reader, especially if they like fantasy/sci-fi-type movies because the text is easy to comprehend and follow, even though the story is fun and age-appropriate. Because the book deals with themes of loss and identity, I think that most teenagers will relate to this book.

**Books like this one**

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

*Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine

*The Sandcastle Empire* by Kayla Olsen

*Wild Magic* by Tamora Pierce

*Ender’s Game* by Orson Scott Card

*Stardust* by Neil Gaiman

*Want* by Cindy Pon

*The Cruel Prince* by Holly Black

**Text Complexity**

**Lexile Score**: 680L (approx. 4th grade)

Age range: 12-17

**ATOS Book Level**: 4.7 (approx. 4th grade)

Grade range: 9-12

Both of these scores agree with each other that the difficulty of the book is approximately at a 4th grade reading level, and I agree. The language used is simple and the structure is easy to follow, though the content might be a bit difficult for many 4th graders to understand. With the book’s tense situations, discussions and depictions of murder, and the web of secrecy that the characters need to detangle, I would recommend this book for middle and high school readers.

**Exeter Qualities**

**Exciting plot**

The plot of *Atlantia* is fast-paced, full of secrecy and surprises as it draws the reader into the story. Rio must navigate the treachery of her world’s leaders, the surprise of her aunt Marie’s revelations, and the continual dangers of her life in the Below.

**Characters who go beyond typical experiences**

Your typical teenager doesn’t life in a dying city below the ocean, nor are they secretly sirens with the power to control people and objects.

**Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world**

This book deals with environmental themes, like pollution, conservation, and finite resources, which are very applicable to the world today. In the book, mankind polluted the earth and used all of its resources, forcing them to make terrible decisions about who got to live in safety and who had to sacrifice their life to support them. Just like our world today, the greed of humans created a changed climate and forced the poor to live and work in terrible conditions to support the rich who constantly ignore the cost of their lavish lives.