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Book Talk

A Face Like Glass by Frances Hardinge



Frances Hardinge was born in England and grew up in a an old house which had a lot of character. Hardinge's upbringing inspired her to write books that were mysterious, dark and adventurous. Hardinge started writing short stories at a very young age and grew up reading different types of books. She always enjoyed writing but never published any of her works until her book *Fly By Night* was discovered by a publisher. Ever since Hardinge published her first book, she has become a full time writer and author. Many of Hardinge's books such as *A Face Like Glass*, and *Fly By Knight* were both voted in to the top 100 United Kingdom Young Adult novels list.

SUMMARY:

In the novel *A Face Like Glass* by Frances Hardinge, the story takes place in an underground city called Caverna. The city of Caverna consist of hundreds of tunnels that run through the whole city, creating little underground chambers where the citizens reside. The main attraction in Caverna is the art of deception. There are cheese makers who design cheeses that will help people to forget their pasts, winemakers who create wines that can transform people and face masters who help the people of Caverna create new facial expressions. In the Midst of it all is the main Character, Neverfell who becomes the center of attention when she follows a Rabbit out of the Rabbit hole. Neverfell's face defies the laws in Caverna because it is so honest

and true. With a face that shows all emotion, Neverfell can not be understood by the people around her because she is so different. That being said, Neverfell begins to hate who she is with all of her faces. Yet it is her differences that make her special in a world of somebodies.

QUOTES:

“She was alone, this child. This odd and terrible child. She was alone as he was. More so than he, in fact, despite all his attempts to hide away. More so than a child that age could realize” (page 6).

- Grandible who a famous cheesemaker first discovers Neverfell after she fell into one of his wheels of cheese. From the moment Grandible saw Neverfell’s face, he knew that she was different. However, Grandible created a mask for Neverfell which she would wear until she left Grandible’s care. This mask is important because it lead Neverfell to believe that she was hideous and unwanted. The mask symbolizes the covering up of truth and who Neverfell truly is. Once the mask comes off, Neverfell finally understands the power of her face and gains confidence.

“Everybody used to hire Facesmiths because they wanted to have the newest, brightest smile, or the most lordly glare. . . . like they had a secret sorrow” (29).

- Facesmiths in Caverna are highly sought after for their skill. Unlike Neverfell, the citizens of Caverna are born with no facial expressions therefore they need to learn all of their expressions. However, it is only the rich that can afford to learn countless expressions. So many people in Caverna can only possess two changes of face.. These facial expressions range from happy, sad, content, anger, hurt, etc. Facesmiths craft faces that suit different events and occasions and help to cultivate a lie. The lies come in the forms of the facial expressions because they are not genuine reactions. Instead these “faces” are taught and fake. This is one of the reasons Neverfell is ostracized in the city of Caverna. Neverfell’s face never lies and instead shows all of her true emotions which make the Caverna citizens uncomfortable.

“Nobody in Caverna is supposed to look like that. . . . Right now you’re upset to the point of shattering, and your expression is too painful for them to see” (89).

- Neverfell’s face is a genuine representation of the way she feels inside. Her face always tells the truth, so it is hard for the people of Caverna to understand her. In a city where

money is made from deception, her face becomes a problem. The winemakers and cheesemakers of Caverna build their craft around how well they are able to mask people's true emotions. So when Neverfell takes off her mask, her kindness and genuineness can not be concealed behind potions and lies which deconstructs the foundations of what Caverna is built on.

Teaching *A Face Like Glass* and Reading Level

This book by Frances Hardinge could be taught along side other books like *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and *1984* by George Orwell. These three books are all dystopian novels that broadcast problems that the human race faces. All three books can be taught to sophomores or juniors in high school during a class discussion on dystopian novels, covering why dystopian novels are written and what the purpose is behind writing dystopian novels. The Lexile reading for *A Face Like Glass* approves this book for children that are ages 14 and up. The book *A Face Like Glass* would be an appropriate read for young adults in highschool because there is a lot of character analysis, complex imagery, and plot development that would benefit a more experienced reader. Even the idea of an underground city like Caverna is a very simple setting, but the way it is described and the way Hardinge creates space in the city through the use of her words can be hard to grasp at the middle school and elementary school level. This book can also be recommended to readers after reading chapter seven about fantasy in *LfTYA* by Aileen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson. Overall, this book is a great read for young adults because Hardinge uses great imagery and language to create another world, which in turn will help readers to broaden their imaginations. The complex language that is used will also strengthen readers vocabulary and the underlining theme of self discovery will connect young adults to the novel's protagonist. There are many lessons to be learned from the book both in the form of life lessons and reading lessons for young adults.