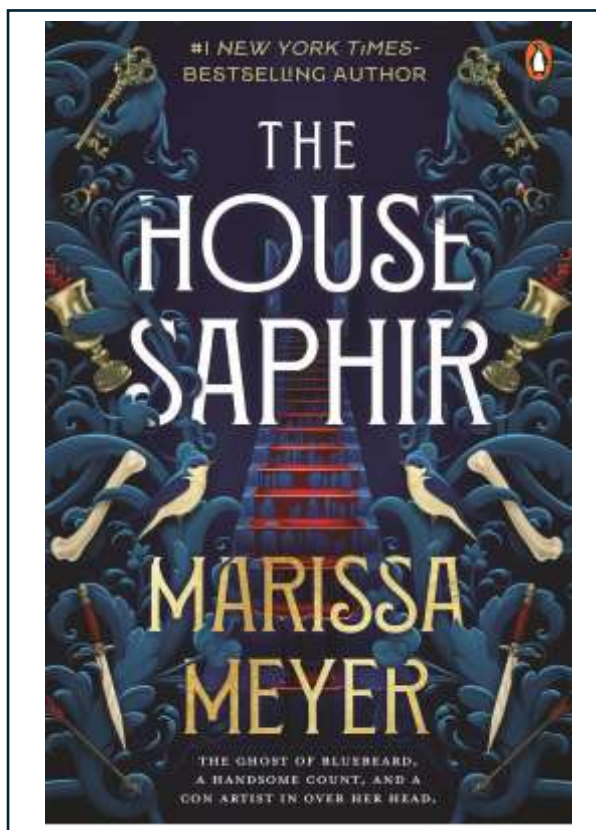




## TEACHERS' RESOURCES



### The House Saphir Marissa Meyer

#### PLOT SUMMARY

Mallory Fontaine is from a long line of witches, but the only magic she possesses is the ability to see ghosts. She and her sister maintain the family business, selling bogus spells to gullible buyers and conducting tours of the infamous house where the Saphir murders took place. Mallory is a self-proclaimed expert on Count Bastien Saphir, also known as Monsieur Le Bleu, who brutally killed three of his wives more than a century ago. When she meets Bastien's handsome great-great grandson and heir to the Saphir estate, Armand, he is the perfect mark. He offers Mallory a large sum of money to rid his ancestral home of Le Bleu's ghost, never mind the ghosts of murdered wives and monsters that are as common as household pests. When murder again comes to the House Saphir, Mallory has to solve the murder and banish the ghost, all while upholding the illusion of witchcraft. Relatively easy compared to her biggest challenge: learning to trust her heart. Especially when the person her heart wants the most might be a murderer himself.

#### RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 14+ (Year 9+)

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#### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities: Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding

#### REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

Page-turning murder-mystery with ghosts, monsters, witches, a funny and fearless heroine, and a swoony Gothic romance.

An inventive and darkly funny romantic fantasy from a *New York Times* bestselling author.

#### THEMES

- Fairytale retellings
- Magic and witchcraft
- Ghosts and monsters
- Murder mystery
- Gothic romance

#### PUBLICATION DETAILS

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# THE HOUSE SAPHIR by Marissa Meyer

## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

'Meyer takes the classic French folktale *Bluebeard* and expertly sprinkles in ghosts and otherworldly creatures to create an eerie tale with a side of steamy romance. The characters are full-bodied, possessing either winsome or terrifying auras, while the setting beautifully conveys a bewitching ambiance . . . Bloody brilliant!' *Kirkus Reviews*

## ABOUT MARISSA MEYER



**Marissa Meyer** is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the Lunar Chronicles series, the Renegades trilogy and the duology *Gilded* and *Cursed*. Her first standalone novel, *Heartless*, was also a #1 *New York Times* bestseller, and her most recent rom coms are *Instant Karma* and *With a Little Luck*. Her first middle grade novel, *Let It Glow*, written with

Joanne Levy, was also a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestseller. Marissa is the author of *The Happy Writer*, in which she shares her writing tips and experiences. She lives in Tacoma, Washington, with her husband and their two daughters. You can find her at [marissameyer.com](http://marissameyer.com)

## AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

From Marissa Meyer:

*Bluebeard* was a favourite fairytale of mine when I was younger – perhaps because it was so different from the other fairytales I knew. It is dark and morbid and although the protagonist survives her murderous husband in the end, it doesn't exactly have the sort of 'happily ever after' we've come to expect from fairytales. One question that lingered for me over the years was what became of Bluebeard's last wife – the one who got away. As I fell in love with gothic romances, ghost tales and haunted mansions, a story

started to grow in my imagination. A sequel of sorts, in which the ghost of Bluebeard returned to haunt his ancestral home. This was blooming in my mind around the same time that I was finishing the *Gilded* and *Cursed* duology, and I loved the idea of continuing to expand its mythology and magic system by tying together multiple fairytales in an ever-expanding world. From those ideas eventually came *The House Saphir*.

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

### Gothic romance

*The House Saphir* is written vividly in a style that embraces the **Gothic romance** tradition, a literary genre that includes such famous examples as *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier and (in satirical form) *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen. Gothic fiction of this kind blends romance with the supernatural and unfolds in dark and mysterious, often haunted settings, often with a conflicted female main character in an emotionally intense relationship with a brooding male figure. *The House Saphir* has all of these elements – ghosts, monsters and the supernatural; dark magic and witchcraft; an emotionally intense romance between main character Mallory Fontaine and maybe-murderer Armand; mysterious haunted mansion settings; and themes of death and the afterlife. A suspenseful murder-mystery plot, darkly funny and fearless main character, and romance all combine to make *The House Saphir* a page-turning and enjoyable example of this style.

### Questions and activities

1. How does the writing style of *The House Saphir* embody the characteristics of a Gothic romance? Discuss with specific examples from the book. Have you read any other of the Gothic romances mentioned? How is *The House Saphir* different and what qualities does it share?
2. Discuss the psychological conflicts faced by Mallory in *The House Saphir*. How do these conflicts contribute to its Gothic atmosphere?



3. Examine the role of supernatural elements and setting in *The House Saphir*. How do they contribute to the novel's themes and overall mood?

### Reinventing the fairytale

Marissa Meyer is known as the 'Queen of fairytale retellings' in her novels, and reimagines them with proactive, fearless heroines and inventive alternative stories. In *The House Saphir*, Meyer embraces the Bluebeard tale, a French folktale written by Charles Perrault and first published in 1697. It is one of the classic tales included in Perrault's collection *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (*Stories or Tales of Past Times*), which also features other famous stories like 'Cinderella' and 'Sleeping Beauty'.

In the original story, the tale revolves around a wealthy and violent man named Bluebeard, who has been married several times, but his wives have all mysteriously disappeared. He marries a young woman and gives her the keys to all his rooms, but forbids her from entering one particular room. Driven by curiosity, she eventually opens the forbidden room and discovers the bodies of Bluebeard's previous wives. Horrified, she tries to escape, but Bluebeard returns and threatens to kill her. She manages to delay him until her brothers arrive and rescue her, killing Bluebeard and freeing her from his clutches.

#### Questions and activities

1. Compare and contrast *The House Saphir* with the French folktale *Bluebeard*. How does Marissa Meyer draw on and diverge from the traditional tale to create a unique narrative?
2. Compare Mallory from *The House Saphir* with another active protagonist from a fairytale retelling. How do these characters challenge traditional passive roles and what impact does this have on their respective stories?

### Magic and the supernatural

Magic, ghosts and monsters play significant parts in *The House Saphir*. The characters frequently interact with the supernatural, which drives much of the plot and character development.

#### Questions and activities

1. Discuss the characters' interactions with the dead and how these drive the plot?

2. Examine the role of ghosts and monsters in the narrative.
3. What role does magic play in the novel?

### Characterisation

Our protagonist Mallory and her sister Anaïs navigate a world filled with ghosts, monsters and dark magic, and their bond is central to the story of *The House Saphir*. Their loyalty to each other is tested by the challenges they face, including dealing with their mother Gabrielle's legacy and with the consequences of their own actions.

#### Questions and activities

4. Choose a character and summarise the arc they follow across the book. What is their background and motivations? How do they develop? What internal struggles do they face?
5. How do Mallory and Anaïs's views on magic differ, and how do these views affect their actions throughout the story?
6. Armand is a conflicted character, who is both appealing but at times dangerous-seeming. Describe his arc across the story and the different sides to his personality.
7. What role does family play in the characters' motivations and decisions?
8. Write an alternate ending or a missing chapter from the perspective of a secondary character.

### KEY QUOTES

'The shadows converged into an inky figure that rose into a slender column, slowly taking form. Mallory was not surprised when Monsieur Le Bleu stood before her again, though she noted that he was more unkempt than before.'

'She faced the mansion, which sat like a crouched monster in the shadows off the street corner, illuminated by the faintest hint of lamplight and a touch of silver from the waxing moon.'

'Just thinking it made her dizzy. What was wrong with her? Never in her life had Mallory believed she wanted love. Love made people weak. Love got you killed.'