

## A Teacher's Guide to

### *NEVERMORE*

By Kelly Creagh

#### ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The information, activities and discussion questions that follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Nevermore*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe Isobel's life at the start of the novel. What does Varen do to Isobel at the end of Chapter One that changes everything?
2. Early in their work on the Poe project, Varen discusses the identity of Lenore with Isobel, calling her the love of the narrator. How is this notion of the narrator's lost love an important element in the story? In what other ways do Isobel and Varen's initial work on their project foreshadow events to come?
3. Why does Isobel lie about Varen to Nikki and Brad? Is Isobel able to be honest with anyone about her feelings or strange visions? Why or why not?
4. How would you describe Isobel's relationship with Varen in first half of the novel? Why do you think Brad and the rest of Isobel's old "crew" reacts so violently to Varen? Have you ever had a relationship turn sour? How did it affect your other friendships? What did the experience teach you?
5. In addition to his interest in Poe, Varen knows a good deal about dreams and their relationship to real life. What clues in this scene suggest that Poe also knew much about the nature of dreams? What does Isobel learn from talking with Varen and how does she relate their conversation to the frightening experiences that happen in her bedroom?
6. How does Reynolds first enter Isobel's consciousness? What important information does he give her about dreaming? Initially, do you think Reynolds is Isobel's friend, enemy, or something in-between? How does that change over time?
7. When does Pinfeathers first appear to Isobel? Why do you think none of her classmates can see or hear the Nocs? What important messages do Nocs convey to Isobel in the course of the novel?
8. What message does the note Isobel receives from Varen, via Pinfeathers, hold? How is it made more important by her reading it just after Brad's horrible accident? What is happening to Brad as Isobel reads the note? What is happening to Varen?
9. Why does Isobel love cheerleading? How does she describe the sensation of flying through the air? Compare this language to the way she dances, staggers and falls during her nightmarish journey at the Grim Façade. How might these images relate to the interwoven real and dream worlds of the novel?

10. When Isobel finds herself in a dreamlike version of Mr. Swanson's class, she reads Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken." Why is this poem apt for the moment in which Isobel finds herself? How does Mr. Swanson's comment about choices relate to Isobel's experiences with Varen and Brad?

11. What is the Red Death? How is it related to the white-veiled woman? To the Nocs? How do you know the Red Death has been involved in what happened to Brad, and why do you think Brad has been chosen for this torment?

12. Typical high school social hierarchy plays a role in how the characters relate to each other, at least early on in the novel. Explain how Varen's jacket, the pink dress in which Gwen dresses Isobel, the cheer uniform, and other elements of clothing echo the changes in each character's perception of the others.

13. When Isobel escapes from the Grim Façade, she returns home to startling news about Varen and Brad. If you had found yourself in Isobel's situation, what choices might you have made about answering police questions, confiding in Gwen, dealing with Brad, and trying to find Varen?

14. While Isobel sees elements of the dream world Varen has created in her real life, she ultimately maintains a stronger hold on reality than he does. What makes her able to keep a distinction between her world and the dream world? What do you think makes Varen more susceptible to being engrossed in this alternate dimension?

15. Varen once told Isobel, "*You could never be Lenore.*" Yet, does the epilogue imply that Isobel has become Varen's Lenore? Do you think there remains any hope of Isobel rescuing Varen? Does Isobel herself need rescuing?

16. Consider how you might read *Nevermore* as an exploration of the tension between dreams and reality, between thought and action, between life and death. What might these comparisons suggest about a sequel to *Nevermore*?

17. Compare *Nevermore* to romance and horror films you've seen. If you had to categorize the novel as one or the other, which would you choose? Why?

18. In *Nevermore*, Varen tells Isobel that "Alone" is his favorite work by Poe and reads the poem aloud to her. Reread "Alone" and discuss how this poem relates to Varen's life and to his character. How does this poem relate to the novel's epilogue? What imagery is shared?

19. Toward the end of the novel, Isobel inquires about the Nocs. Reynolds describes them as being "Imps of the Perverse." Go to the library or online and read Poe's short story "The Imp of the Perverse." Discuss how this story relates to the Nocs. How does it relate to Varen? How does the theory of the Imp of the Perverse relate to events in Poe's life? Finally, how does Poe incorporate the "Imp of the Perverse" into his own stories such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat"?

20. In addition to reading "Alone," Varen begins to read aloud the poem "Ulalume" before he is interrupted. The final (sometimes omitted) stanza reads:  
"From the secret that lies in these worlds  
From the thing that lies in these Wolds—

Have drawn up the specter of a planet  
From the limbo of lunar souls—  
This sinfully scintillant planet  
From the Hell of the planetary souls?”

What clues or foreshadowing does this poem offer in regards to the supernatural events in *Nevermore*? What do you think Poe is referring to with the line, “the thing that lies in these worlds”?

21. Discuss how the author uses parallels in the novel: for example, the real world and the dream world, Isobel and Bess, Varen and Pinfeathers. What do these parallels represent, and what does their existence say about the characters in the book?

## RESEARCH AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. Go to the library or online to read the poem "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. Copy each verse onto a large index card. On the back of each card, include a one-sentence description of what happens in the verse, definitions for any terms you do not understand (e.g., "Plutonian," "Gilead," and "Pallas"), and notes on any personal experiences called to mind by the verse, such as a sense of grief or being awakened from a nightmare. With friends or classmates, explore these completed verse cards. Discuss how your analysis of the Poe poem helps you better understand Kelly Creagh's novel.

2. Edgar Allan Poe's gothic poetry is part of the American Romantic Movement in literature and art. Poe's mysterious life and haunting poems, including *The Raven*, inspired author Kelly Creagh. At the library or online, research the Romantic Movement. Then, write a short essay explaining how the plot, themes, and imagery of *Nevermore* can be read as a modern Romantic story. Use specific examples from the novel.

3. The attraction between Varen and Isobel wreaks havoc on the social structure at school. With friends or classmates, role-play a conversation between Brad, Nikki and the other remaining members of their crew in which you: (a) Try to persuade Brad to forget about Isobel or (b) Discuss your anger with Varen and any action you intend to take with him?

4. In the character of Varen, write a poem describing the moment you realized you were attracted to Isobel and what you plan to do about your feelings, especially as your situation grows increasingly dangerous. Or, in the character of Isobel, write a journal entry describing the moment you realized you were falling in love with Varen and what that might mean.

5. In the character of a Mr. Swanson, write a note to the school principal describing your concerns about Varen, Isobel, or another character from the story. Or, imagine you are a student witnessing one of the upsetting moments that takes place in the cafeteria in the course of the novel. Write a journal entry, letter to an adult or a note to a friend describing what you saw and your impressions.

6. Use watercolors, colored pencils, or other visual arts media to sketch a picture of Pinfeathers or another of the Nocs. Using information from the novel, write a paragraph describing the origins, powers, and forms these characters can take. Finish with a comment about what Reynolds may mean when he says that the Nocs are “shrapnel of the inner self.”

7. Who or what is the Red Death? Read Edgar Allan Poe's "Masque of the Red Death." Then, write a short essay detailing ideas and images from this story, which the author incorporates into her novel, especially the events that begin at the Grim Façade. In your essay, explain the different ways Brad, Varen, and Isobel are each drawn into this horrible experience.
8. Go to the library or online to learn more about the legend of the "Poe Toaster." Use the information you find to create a comic strip or poster about the "Poe Toaster."
9. Choose a poem, song, painting, or other creative work that has truly inspired you. Go to the library or online to learn more about this work and its creator. Then, write an outline or 2-3 paragraph description of a fictional novel you could write based on your inspiration and research.
10. Write a paragraph explaining what dreams mean to you in your life. Then go to the library or online to find another literary work that explores dreams, such as Langston Hughes' classic poem "Dreams" or the contemporary novel *Wake* by Lisa McMann. Read and compare the motif of dreams in your chosen work and *Nevermore* to your own thoughts on the role of dreams and dreaming.
11. At the end of the novel, Isobel is determined to find Varen. In the character of Isobel, write a note to your Gwen or Reynolds explaining why you are leaving and what you feel you must do.
12. In *Nevermore*, we learn that Poe was the "father of the detective story. Poe invented the character of C. August Dupin, which later served as inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous character Sherlock Holmes. Perhaps Poe's greatest mystery, however, is the riddle of his death. Using information from the novel and your own research, write a report from the point of view of a detective who has solved the mystery of Poe's death.
13. Create a drawing, song or poem describing the place in which Varen finds himself in the novel's epilogue. Or make a playlist or catalogue of artworks that you feel reflect Varen's plight.
14. Read at least two of Poe's works mentioned in the novel ("Alone" or "Ulalume", for example) and consider the way he ends his stories and poems. Are the resolutions what you expect? Are they satisfying? Compare the endings of Poe's stories to the ending of *Nevermore*.