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Representing gender and difference in young adult fantasy fiction: “Shadow and bone” and “Six of crows”

Mathilde Buri

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INSPÉ de Besançon
Master MEEF Anglais
2021/2023



MÉMOIRE DE FIN D'ÉTUDES

PRÉSENTÉ PAR :
MATHILDE BURI

DIRECTRICE DE RECHERCHE :
MARGARET GILLESPIE

**REPRESENTING GENDER AND
DIFFERENCE IN YOUNG
ADULT FANTASY FICTION**
SHADOW AND BONE & SIX OF CROWS

Illustration by Marina MUNN

Mémoire

Présenté pour l'obtention du Grade de

MASTER

« **Métiers de l'Enseignement, de l'Éducation et de la Formation** »

Mention 2nd degré, Professeur des Lycées et Collèges,



Présenté par

BURI Mathilde

Sous la direction de :

GILLESPIE Margaret

Grade : Maitresse de conférences.

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PREAMBLE

This *mémoire* is the completion of my university education pursuits. It was written to satisfy the requirements for the *Métier de l'Enseignement, de l'Éducation et de la Formation* (MEEF) diploma from the Besançon-based *Institut National Supérieur du Professorat et de l'Éducation* (INSPÉ). The goal of this master's programme is to prepare students for careers in education and teaching in addition to preparing for the professional skills-based teaching recruitment exams. To understand its effects and prepare for my future career, it makes sense for me to concentrate more intently on how gender and women are portrayed in young adult fantasy books more fully. As part of my Master MEEF 2 in English graduation, I am delivering this *mémoire*.

You are being given this *mémoire*, 'Shadow and Bone & Six of Crows: Representing Gender and Differences in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction,' in line with the wisdom I acquired through my academic training and life experiences. To achieve the best suitability between the teaching of information and the most effective methods of its transmission, I must examine new representations of gender in young adult literature. In this way, the education I received at the University of Besançon, my passion for young adult literature, and the Master MEEF in English I did at the INSPÉ of Besançon have enabled me to fully utilise the information and abilities required to create this project. This *mémoire* was built on study into how stereotypes persist or disappear in young adult novels, particularly fantasy tales authored by women. This dissertation's research and writing began in September 2021.

This initiative emerged at the request of Besançon's *Institut National Supérieur du Professorat et de l'Éducation*. My studies required that I complete a university research project on the English-speaking globe that was related to an educational concern. My research question, 'How are female characters and marginal figures portrayed and what stereotypes might influence their characterisation?' was developed in collaboration with my *mémoire* director, Margaret GILLESPIE, and Tracy BLOOR, a teacher-researcher at *Université de Franche-Comté*. To investigate the aforementioned subjects, I conducted research not only on the work of researchers, but also on social media, surveys, and the analysis of real documents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge everyone who helped me complete my research *mémoire* and who offered me assistance when I was writing it.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Margaret GILLESPIE, a lecturer and teacher at the University of Franche-Comté in Besançon, who acted as my *mémoire* director, for her perseverance, her availability, and her invaluable advice that enriched my personal knowledge and fed my reflection.

Additionally, I would like to thank the entire teaching staff at the INSPÉ of Besançon as well as the qualified instructors who were in charge of my education for their contributions to the successful completion of this *mémoire*. They gave me the information I needed to develop the teaching sequence that is described in the didactic section of this dissertation as well as the other educational themes covered by this project.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my friends and colleagues Lisa SCHERMULY and Audrey BALLOT who helped me tremendously in designing my *mémoire* over a two-year period, for their invaluable emotional and intellectual support throughout my research.

Mathilde BURI

Besançon, May 7th, 2023

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Introduction

“You could have made me your equal. Instead, you made me this”.

“You may have needed me, but I never needed you”.

(Alina Starkov, from the Netflix adaptation of *Shadow and Bone*)

What comes to mind when you think about fantasy novels? You may think of the Harry Potter series, *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit*. But what about the women in these novels? Are they the main characters? Or rather secondary characters? Do they even have a significant role? In fiction, just as in real life, women often have a secondary role, finding themselves frequently in men’s shadow, even in fantasy fiction; so even in an imaginary world, or in the imagination, women remain on the margins.

I have chosen to explore the different ways women and other marginal figures are portrayed by the same author and in the same fantasy universe. The question arises as to why women are depicted so differently by the same author.

My analysis will focus on two literary works: two fantasy novels for young adults, written by the Israeli-American author Leigh Bardugo. The first, *Shadow and Bone*, was published in 2012, and is part of the Grisha trilogy, and the second, *Six of Crows* was published in 2015 and is the first part of a duology. The Grishaverse series has won many awards, including The Goodreads Choice Award for Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science Fiction in 2012, 2013 and 2019, but it is also the New York Times Best Seller.¹ A funny and interesting fact, the popularity of this universe led to the creation of a tabletop roleplaying game called “Grishaverse: Roleplay in the World of Leigh Bardugo,” the game allows players to explore the world of the series and create their own character and play within it. The books were adapted into a Netflix series on April 23, 2021, the adaptation incorporates elements and characters of *Six of Crows*.

¹ Laini Taylor, « A Gleam Off the Samovar », *What to Read, Children’s Books*, The New York Times, June 15, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/books/review/shadow-and-bone-by-leigh-bardugo.html>

But first, what is young adult literature or fiction? These are books written generally for readers aged twelve to eighteen. These novels are meant to be a transition from early childhood books to adult fiction. Their content is often related to issues that young readers might encounter, such as friendship, the search for identity and love. The big difference between young adult and adult fiction is often the age of the main protagonist, which is adapted to the age of its readers. For young adults we will find protagonists between 12 and 18 years old, while for adults it will be between 18 and 30, however this rule is not always true.

I will analyse these two texts with the following question: **How are female characters and marginal figures portrayed and what stereotypes might influence their characterization?** My two chosen novels may appear similar because they are by the same author and are set in the same imaginary universe, but the stories are rather different, as well as the characters, especially the female protagonists we may find in those novels. Moreover, they were not published at the same time, suggesting the author may have evolved in her writing and in her way of seeing women, and more broadly difference, in a fantasy novel. The three main female characters in the texts are not from the same environment, nor did they grow up in the same way. It is for this reason that I have chosen to study two novels by the same author, to explore this subject: they were written by the same women, but they are strikingly different.

The most significant difference between the two texts is that women are not always the main character. In *Shadow and Bone*, the main character is Alina Starkov, an orphan who grew up with her best friend Mal, while in *Six of Crows*, we cannot really find a main character, we follow the story of a crew, but the one we hear the most about is a man. In *Six of Crows*, the women (Nina Zenik and Inej Ghafa) only have secondary or tertiary roles. These three women have evolved in the same universe, the imaginary world of *Ravka* where some

people called *Grisha* have powers, they are feared by the “powerless ones²”. Nina was born a Grisha while Aline became one “by force”. In this society, women ostensibly have the same status as men. All people are equal in the army for example where there are as many women as men and where they both fight side by side. But is society really totally equal? It is not. It is a fantasy universe, but the author chose to include the description of some poorer districts where women must sell their bodies to survive and where there is a traffic of women who are sold by men, never the other way round-

The roles played by women in these two fantasy novels are significant with regard to the challenging of gender stereotypes that has been seen in a lot of young adult books recently. Two other examples of this are the *Hunger Games* books, published in 2008, featuring Katniss Everdeen and the Harry Potter books, published in 1997, with its heroine Hermione. Both heroines also fight against gender stereotypes. When you think about it, these two novels can, at a very basic level, be said to engage with feminism in that they feature a woman as a main character or women with a significant secondary role. The Grishaverse was written in the 2010s, during the fourth wave of feminism, often called the period when ‘women fought back’³. Different aspects of this movement can be found in the universe of Leigh Bardugo: challenging men in positions of power, rejecting female stereotypes (at least some of them) in books or video games and promoting diversity in women:

The fourth wave of feminism does not have a precise date of beginning; it is mixed with the third wave that did not have an end. As feminism moved out of the third wave, women continued to fight for their rights. The third wave of feminism was characterized by women wanting *their* version of feminism and wanting to address different societal contexts, The third wave of feminism is mainly characterised by the discovery of sexuality and talking

² Ordinary humans.

³ Pruitt Sarah. ‘What Are the Four Waves of Feminism?’, Breaking History, March 11, 2022, <https://www.history.com/news/feminism-four-waves#fourth-wave-present-day>

about it, which used to be a very taboo subject that was not allowed to be discussed in society. Sexuality has been liberated. The fourth wave is quite similar, women continue to publicly challenge men in power while the notion that men may also be victims of patriarchal society is also explored. The fourth wave of feminism is about sexual harassment, body shaming and rape culture. The big difference with the third wave is that accusations and victims are being unleashed on social networks—an easier way to spread information and to be heard.⁴

Masculinity is also an issue in our society, which continues to be basically patriarchal: run by men and made for men. Patriarchy imposes norms on men as well as women: the perfect man is strong, muscular, and able to protect a woman. However, this “ideal” bears little resemblance to reality: men, like women, are all different.

In both of the novels under study here, these different elements included in third and fourth wave feminism can be found in the way female characters are depicted; these elements are more or less obvious, and I will develop them more in detail in my analysis.

In the course of the following pages, I will study how female characters are depicted and represented in the two novels, according to the following outline:

Leigh Bardugo’s inspiration

- a. Inspiration from her life.
- b. What is a fantasy novel?
- c. Shadow and Bones/Six of Crows

II. Depiction of female characters

- a. Previous famous works (90s–2010)
- b. Life goal of the characters and link with feminism

⁴ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Feminism’, Britannica, accessed May 03, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>

- c. A way to raise awareness.

III. Criticisms

- a. Books
- b. Series
- c. Impact of the books/series

I. Leigh Bardugo's inspiration

a. Inspiration from her life

It may not seem like it, because it's a fantasy novel in a totally made-up world, but as strange as it may be, Leigh Bardugo drew a lot of inspiration from her own life to write the books and create her characters. Leigh Bardugo was born in Jerusalem and moved to Los Angeles to live with her grandparents. She had never written a book before *Shadow and Bone*, didn't know how to structure a novel nor how to write it. She just wrote little manuscripts that she never finished.

When the idea for the story came to her, Leigh Bardugo was in a very difficult situation and relationship with her partner, a relationship she has described as 'scary'⁵. And this is reflected in the attitude and creation of one character in particular: 'The Darkling', the character who could be described as the villain of the story. Theories based on an Instagram post and a "Goodreads" comment made by the author, would seem to suggest that this character was inspired by her abusive, violent, and manipulative ex-partner. In one post she says that although she thought she was a smart, strong, independent woman she had found herself in a position where she was just afraid to do anything.

⁵ Bardugo Leigh, "*Shadow and Bone (The Grisha , #1), by Leigh Bardugo*" Goodreads, April 216, 2021, <https://www.goodreads.com/notes/36315977-shadow-and-bone/657056-leigh-bardugo/38cd0abd-7e12-4d34-a793-f1eebc5ef896?ref=rnlp>



Shadow and Bone (The Grisha, #1), by Leigh Bardugo

39%

Put on your pretty clothes and wait for the next kiss, the next kind word.
Wait for the stag. Wait for the collar. Wait to be made into a murderer and a slave.



I think I was actually writing into something deeper than I realized in this moment. I was in a very bad, very scary relationship when I wrote Shadow and Bone. I thought of myself as a smart, confident, independent person, and I was so ashamed of where I'd ended up. When I first started working on the book that would become Shadow and Bone, I didn't know what my future would look like or the way that book would change my life. All I knew was that I was stuck and scared. Writing Shadow and Bone helped remind me that I could set my mind to a task and accomplish it, that there was more to me than a frightened woman spending her days walking on eggshells. So maybe these lines were actually me standing at the crossroads, choosing whether to give in to fear and inertia—or fight my way out.

This behaviour and way of thinking can be found in the attitude of the main heroine, Alina Starkov. Indeed, the Darkling uses her and her powers throughout the book, he wants her to belong to him and to achieve this he manipulates Alina by giving her love and power, which she could have learned to acquire by herself. But he wants her to be beholden to him. However, the story is narrated by Alina, which gives her a certain authority, Alina displays a certain confidence that the author did not have in real life, despite the protagonist's emotional naivety. Moreover, Alina's relationship with Baghra, who trained her and helped her to escape, and Genya, who has always supported her emotionally, shows a certain sisterhood. These characters may also have been inspired by real people who helped the author to “escape” from her abusive relationship.

On an Instagram post from 4/22/21⁶, where she parallels two photos of herself, one from 2010 and the other from 2021, she explains that during the year 2010, she was beginning her long battle with depression, trapped in a relationship that made her weak and frightened. She was isolated from family and friends by her partner, who could have helped her. She then goes on

⁶ Leigh Bardugo, (@bardugo), “I hate that picture on the left. Not just because 2010 Leigh had terrible taste in eyewear, but because I can see how much pain she’s in,” Instagram, April 22, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CN-mBOyFgul/>

to tell us in the description: ‘I had lost myself. And I was trying to write a story about a girl finding her way out of the dark.’



would find myself on a set in Budapest, bundled up in a parka, full of joy and disbelief, as those stories came to life around me.

It's tempting to look at the woman on the left and try to forget her. Her pain is so visible it embarrasses me. But she doesn't deserve my scorn. I'm proud that she took those first steps and fought her way out of the dark. I'm not sharing this to pat myself on the back. I still struggle with depression. I still have difficult days. Maybe you do too. All I can offer is that we never know what may be waiting a little way down the road, what magic may be in store if we can just keep going. Love you. Let's go to Ravka.

She makes it clear that she compares her life with her heroine's, who was also separated from her family as an orphan, cut off from her friends by the main male character who takes her

away from everything to supposedly train her and show her where she belongs. Without knowing the author's life, one might think that the story was simply written to communicate a feminist message to a young female readership, but in reality, it is just as much a hidden and romanticized autobiography.

Baghra had begged him to give me another amplifier, but he'd insisted it had to be the stag's antlers. A necklace – no, a collar – of bone. And when I'd pushed him, he'd kissed me and I'd forgotten all about the stag and amplifiers and everything else. I remembered his perfect face in the lamplight, his stunned expression, his rumpled hair.

Had it all been deliberate? The kiss by the lakeshore, the flash of hurt that had played across his face that night in the barn, every human gesture, every whispered confidence, even what had happened between us tonight?

I cringed at the thought. I could still feel his warm breath on my neck, hear his whisper in my ear. The problem with wanting is that it makes us weak.

How right he was. I'd wanted so badly to belong somewhere, anywhere. I'd been so eager to please him, so proud to keep his secrets. But I'd never bothered to question what he might really want, what his true motives might be. I'd been too busy imagining myself by his side,

the saviour of Ravka, most treasured, most desired, like some kind of queen. I'd made it so easy for him.

You and I are going to change the world. Just wait.

Put on your pretty clothes and wait for the next kiss, the next kind word. **Wait for the stag. Wait for the collar. Wait to be made into a murderer and a slave** (*Shadow and Bone* 28)

In this passage Alina comes to realise what is happening and what he has put her through. All this love that is untrue, only there when she asked him too many questions, to keep Alina's powers close to him. A comparison can be made with Bardugo's life. Indeed, she tried to write the book during her relationship, saying: 'Why bother? This is gonna be one more thing you start and don't finish.'⁷ She describes how the book changed her life, even though she didn't realise it at the time. However, once the book was published, like Alina, she found out about her partner's abuse, and began to take control of her life. In particular the imperatives '**Wait for the stag,**' '**Wait for the collar,**' '**Wait to be made into a murderer and a slave**' arguably demonstrate that, possibly without even noticing, the author was rebelling against the injustices she was suffering through her character. Like Alina she chose to no longer be just a scared little girl hiding behind a man. Both character and creator chose to give up fear and stand up for themselves.

Of course, the idea that the Darkling was inspired by her ex-boyfriend is conjecture; indeed, Bardugo has never explicitly confirmed the link herself. She has only stated somewhat comically that the Darkling was: 'Every really bad, bad boy [she] ever fell for in fiction.'⁸ On the other hand, although this character is indeed somewhat inspired by her partner, she has

⁷ Leigh Bardugo, interview by Tyler Doster, April 22, 2021, her inspiration for 'Shadow and Bone,' set visits and foster puppies, transcription Awardswatch, <https://awardswatch.com/interview-leigh-bardugo-on-her-inspiration-for-shadow-and-bone-set-visits-and-foster-puppies/>

⁸ Leigh Bardugo, interview by Adam Chitwood, April 24, 2021, "Shadow and Bone" Author breaks down the Darkling and His complicated feelings towards Alina, transcription Collider, <https://collider.com/shadow-and-bone-is-the-darkling-in-love-with-alina/>

always said that she rather liked the character of the Darkling, and that she did not portray him as a real villain.⁹

So, Leigh Bardugo's life is mirrored to some extent in Alina's story. But what about her other characters? One of the characters in *Six of Crows*, Kaz, is also somewhat inspired by the author. Indeed, his handicap reflects Bardugo's own physical disability (she suffers from osteonecrosis), as her character has a limp and must use a cane to get around, which the author also has to do when she is in pain. She explained in an interview that she didn't even realise this resemblance until people pointed it out to her. She also mentioned that this was an unconscious way of making peace with her own disability as the character she created lives with his disability, and he made it his strength. Unlike *Shadow and Bone*, this is the only element of Leigh Bardugo's life that was unconsciously inspired. Placing a male character with this sort of weakness, Bardugo is breaking away from the conventional macho characterisation to be found in heist narratives and can be said to be undermining hegemonic masculinity.

The other inspirations for the novel simply came from the world around her at the time. The idea for the concept of this new trilogy came from a walk-in Los Angeles, where she saw a poster for the film *Monuments Men*¹⁰ starring George Clooney and Matt Damon, a film set during the Second World War, where a group of men have to go and retrieve works of art stolen by the Nazi regime. And that's when feminism took over for Leigh Bardugo, seeing a

⁹ Reading Rockets, Finding Strength in disability, Youtube, video, November 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5Wq75ms_8o

¹⁰ Leigh Bardugo interview by Natasha Razi, March 26, 2016, transcript, Disability in Kidlit, Interview with Leigh Bardugo about *Six of Crows*. <https://disabilityinkidlit.com/2016/03/26/interview-with-leigh-bardugo-about-six-of-crows/>

movie poster with only men, and directed by a man, she was keen to do something different and prove that a much wider range of characters could be introduced.¹¹

Bardugo was also inspired by the real world and the city of Amsterdam in the creation of Ketterdam, a place where young adults with difficult and traumatic backgrounds have to fight to survive because things and people do not do them any kind of favour. For instance, Kaz does not show any weakness when it comes to his disability, as he has to use a cane to get around, but he never seems to mind, and he never whines about it. In addition to characters with a disability, the story also includes characters of colour, and of alternative sexual orientations. Bardugo explained that this was in part a reflection of the fact that the team she works with now is made up of many different ethnicities, people who are not alike in any way, which in turn inspired her to diversify her characters.¹¹ Moreover, Leigh Bardugo's readers, being very active on the networks, even spoke about this lack of diversity. Leigh Bardugo has therefore become aware of this aspect in order to improve it in her next books.

b. What is a fantasy novel?

The characters referred to above come from the books *Shadow and Bone* and *Six of Crows* which are both fantasy novels written for young adults. But what is a fantasy novel?

To understand it you have to look back to the very beginning, etymologically speaking the term is derived from the ancient Greek word 'phantasia', which means 'to make appear' but the contemporary meaning of the word fantasy is rather different. The word we are familiar

¹¹ Leigh Bardugo, interview by Amy Brabenec, September 29, 2015, transcript, booklife, Q & A with Leigh Bardugo, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/68206-q-a-with-leigh-bardugo.html>

with comes from the German expression ‘phantasia’ which signifies ‘imagination’, in the sense that one has created things or an imaginary world.

Fantasy has always existed; all ancient cultures had and have their own myths and folklore. We can even track its origins back to Ancient Classical mythology, which explained the purpose and workings of nature, with all the gods of Olympus such as the mythical god Apollo pulling a flaming cart to provide daylight for mortals. These supernatural elements would later become a key element of modern fantasy.¹²

In the 1800s, the brothers Grimm travelled around Germany to listen to and retrieve the stories they could hear and then published the tales of *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Rapunzel*, and so on. These tales were darker and bloodier than the ones we know today, they were used to instil life lessons and yet there is no denying the fact that they have had a major impact on the fantasy novels we find today.¹³ Fairy tales and fantasy have an ideological side, often perfect worlds where everyone is in their place or must find it. Recent tales are totally different, in fact, they test the roles of everyone, a woman does not need to be rescued by a prince - as the popular Disney film *Frozen* has shown.¹⁴

Fantasy does not follow the rules of the real world and can be set in any time and place and yet in many fantasy novels there is a strong influence of European folklore and history, with

¹² Amanda Pagan *Hallmarks of Fantasy: A brief History of the Genre*, New York Public Library, May 18, 2020, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2020/05/18/hallmarks-fantasy-brief-history-fantasy>

¹³ Miriam Laufey Hirst, “Fantasy and Feminism: An intersectional Approach to Modern Children Fantasy Fiction”, Phd in Arts, Social Sciences and Education, University of Boston, May 2018

¹⁴ Chris Buck, *Frozen*, directed by Jennifer Lee, Disney, 2013.

its many castles, kingdoms, princesses, knights, dragons and so on. The Arthurian myth¹⁵ has been highly influential.

During the Victorian age one of the most famous fantasy novels was published, with a young girl as the main character, *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1865). The main character is a rather rebellious young girl who refuses to learn and listen to her lesson. She is a bit careless and does not respect the rules of decency that she has been taught but this causes her no harm, quite the contrary. In fact, she goes on adventures without being under the guidance of a man. Lewis based his novel on the brothers Grimm's tales, but added some changes, such as the fact that the story takes place in the present time. It must be taken into consideration that the Victorian period was very oppressive and the publication of this kind of fiction could be dangerous, but, on the other hand, *Alice in Wonderland* was also an innovative idea and for a readership of young adults and children.¹⁶ The fantasy novels of the 19th and early 20th century were mainly written for children, although adults found them just as interesting, since they could escape from the real world. The stories written in these periods are the ones that still influence the great fantasy writers.

Fantasy literature took a turn when, in the early 20th century, Edith Nesbit, decided to put not only magical elements but also to use these magical worlds to talk about childhood in conflict as in her novels, such as *A Book of Dragons* (1900) or *The Story of the Amulet* (1906). However, she never explicitly wrote a moral lesson or what not to do in order to fit into society.¹⁷

¹⁵ The stories of King Arthur in Camelot. Part of Britain's mythology. It is about a medieval romance, with the magic sword Escalibur, the Knights of the Round Table and the quest for the Holy Grail. It was written to be the perfect and wise King and society. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

¹⁶ Miriam Laufey Hirst, 14

¹⁷ Miriam Laufey Hirst, 83

The golden age of fantasy novels arrived in the 1950s and 1960s with the publication of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien, and *The World of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. These authors helped forge the identity of the fantasy genre, and these books are classics today. At the time, authors of the fantasy genre were trying to give a sophisticated image¹⁸ to their work using scientific and technological elements, such as quantum physics, which was slowly becoming known.

The brothers Grimm's novels, which were the most successful, already included young women in their tales. However, feminism was not present. The tale of Cinderella is well known, it is the story of a young girl who is forced to be a maid in her own house and is locked in her room. She becomes a princess for a night, is seduced by a handsome prince and loses a shoe that only fits her foot. This is the censored version that everyone nowadays knows, but the original version is quite different. Indeed, what is not shown and told in modern tales is that Cinderella's stepsisters mutilate their feet so as to be able to fit into the glass slipper in order to marry the prince. We can observe that the size of a woman's feet is a beauty standard here—they have to be small and thin. A woman's beauty, what she is worth, depends on the size of her feet or any other physical attribute.¹⁹

These tales, which used to be very successful and whose modern versions are still very popular, were long an undisputed truth. Women had to be beautiful and fit certain standards to be married to a man or a prince, and for most of them it was the only purpose of their life. Women who do not fit into these norms or boxes are often the villains of the story such as the evil stepmother in *Snow White*, or *Maleficent* in the Disney version of *Sleeping Beauty*.²⁰

¹⁸ Miriam Laufey Hirst, 124

¹⁹ Miriam Laufey Hirst 85

²⁰ Miriam Laufey Hirst, 39

Customs and attitudes evolve, as it has always been necessary to adapt to the times. For instance, in medieval and early modern Europe, there was “a tendency [...] for powerful folktale heroines either to be deprived of their power or for their power to be transformed into evil witchcraft.”²¹

Indeed, going back to the older versions of *Little Red Riding Hood*, the protagonist tries to save herself from the wolf by cunning. However, this leads her and her grandmother directly to death and it is at this moment that a male character, the hunter, steps in to save the two female characters and punish/kill the wolf. (Charles Perrault, *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, 1697)²²

In their tales the Grimm brothers tried to make the women as a non-independent as possible. For example, if we take a closer look at the tale of ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ – in which a man tries to steal the queen’s baby to eat it – the brothers Grimm’s versions try as much as possible to diminish the role played by the female protagonist. They try to isolate the female character as much as possible from the whole plot, as she must know the name of Rumpelstiltskin. In the 1810 version, she sends her servant to find it out; however, in a newer version by the Grimm brothers they remove this important character, to cut out the queen as much as possible and in the end, she has to rely on her husband to know the name.²³

We can therefore conclude that the first fantasy novels and tales featured women a step forward in a sense, but these female characters are often passive in the story and are not important in the plot. They often, even always, need a man to move on and be happy, either

²¹ Stephens and McCallum. *Ideology and Children’s Books*. Routledge. 1998, p. 202

²² Charles Perrault, *Little Red Riding Hood and other tales*, 1999-2021
<https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html>

²³ Brother Grimm, *Rumpelstiltskin*, 1812 <https://fairytalez.com/rumpelstiltskin-grimms-version/>

by being rescued or by getting married. Moreover, they tend to correspond to the beauty standards of their time-, these women are for the most part described as white, fine, graceful, and so on. It is the representation of the perfect woman for the time, and it is also with this representation that women identified.

c. *Shadow and Bone / Six and Crows*

In addition to elements from her own life, Leigh Bardugo also drew inspiration from old fantasy novels.

In *Shadow and Bone*, Alina Starkov is a young, orphaned woman who has always grown up in a world divided by an enigmatic dark wall of smoke called the ‘The Shadow Fold’. The Shadow Fold, which is filled with terrifying and dangerous creatures called ‘volcra’, splits the kingdom in two, making travel and communication nearly impossible. Alina is a shy cartographer, belonging to Ravka’s ‘First Army’. She joined with her lifelong best friend Malyen Oretsey, an orphan, also known as Mal. They are sent on a mission in the Shadow Fold, unfortunately their boat is attacked, and when Alina sees her best friend is about to die, she discovers that she is endowed with great powers, she can summon light. She unconsciously uses this gift to save the rest of the crew.

After the attack Alina is taken before the Darkling (the most powerful man in this universe) who decides to take her to the capital to train her and teach her to use her abilities. She finds herself caught up in the middle of a political conflict and domination of the kingdom as she tries to understand how her powers work and what her place and purpose in this world is.

Throughout the adventure we will see Alina evolve in different places. At the beginning she is only a timid cartographer, but soon we realise that she would do anything to protect her best friend Mal. Indeed, at the beginning Mal was to be the only one to enter the Shadow Fold, but to prevent this Alina burns all the maps of this mysterious place so as to be

taken with her friend. Mal is her only family; indeed, they grew up together. Their relationship is deep, and they are loyal to each other. Mal is very protective of Alina, and despite some of his choices he has always supported her as well as he could. At first you might think that Alina is dependent on Mal, because she only talks about him and relies on him a lot, but in fact it turns out to be the opposite. Their friendship is very important to her, she relies on him to be with her during the difficult times she is going through. Mal's presence reassures her and makes her feel more confident, which is a rather clichéd position for a male character: the protective man.

But Mal is not the only man in Alina's life. As stated earlier, the Darkling also plays an important role. He is a very powerful, mysterious, and enigmatic character. His power enables him to manipulate and persuade others. He is a symbol of strength; he commands the Second Army of Ravka and he holds great political power.

But the Darkling is also cold and calculating, he will do anything to achieve his ultimate goal. He is very intelligent and an outstanding strategist. He also has a dark side, a difficult past that has made him see the world in a different way and that drives him to become stronger and more dangerous. In *Shadow and Bone*, the Darkling takes Alina under his wing by training her as a Grisha. He becomes her mentor and a father figure to Alina, but their relationship soon becomes complicated and full of sexual tension. The Darkling is attracted to the powerful magic that lies within Alina, but he sees her as an object and a way to achieve his goal. Their relationship is one of the central themes of the story. Indeed, he quickly exerts a strong influence on Alina and her choices, imposing his vision of the world on her. He is not afraid to manipulate her and deceive her in order to achieve his goal. Alina finds herself stuck, having to choose between her loyalty to the Darkling and her desire to make her own choices, to follow her own path. He ends up controlling Alina completely, by putting a power-

amplifying necklace on her, which only he controls. He forces her to use her powers to destroy the world and reshape it as he sees fit.

Here, Alina is completely dependent on the Darkling, she needs him to guide her and to train her. His manipulation goes further by making her fall in love with him, cutting her off from her friends, and from Mal in particular. Even though Alina becomes more and more independent, and gains confidence in herself, the Darkling doesn't let her go and quickly takes her under his control. But Alina eventually breaks the hold he has on her and manages to confront him.

As suggested above this character seems to have been inspired by the author's ex-partner, and we find the manipulative side she described, a morally and physically violent man who wants to control everything, which isolates the female character from her friends and family to make her more vulnerable.

Six of Crows is a novel by Leigh Bardugo set in the Grishaverse (Grisha series). The story follows a group of six unlikely allies who come together to pull off a heist. The leader of the group is Kaz Brekker, a cunning and ruthless criminal known as the 'Dirtyhands.'

The other members of the group include Inej Ghafa, a spy and assassin; Jesper Fahey, a sharpshooting gambler; Nina Zenik, a Grisha Heartrender²⁴ - a type of Grisha who has the ability to manipulate the bodies of living beings, including humans - Matthias Helvar, a former Drüskelle soldier, and Wylan Van Eck, a demolition expert. Together, they plan to break into the Ice Court, the most secure prison in the world, to rescue Bo Yul-Bayur, a scientist who holds the key to a deadly new weapon.

²⁴ Heartrenders are able to use their powers to cause harm or even kill by disrupting the functions of the heart and other organs. They are also sometimes known as 'healers' because they can use their powers to stimulate the healing process in the body. Heartrenders are members of the Order of the Living and serve as healers and surgeons in Grisha society.

As the group embarks on their mission, they face numerous challenges and must rely on their skills and cunning to outsmart their enemies. Along the way, they also confront their own personal demons and secrets, and the heist becomes a test of their loyalty and trust in each other.

In addition to the main plot of the heist, the novel also explores the backgrounds and motivations of each member of the group. Kaz is driven by a need for revenge and a desire to prove himself, while Inej struggles with feelings of worthlessness and a traumatic past. Jesper grapples with addiction and a strained relationship with his father, and Nina must confront the guilt she feels for her role in the destruction of her homeland. Matthias is torn between his loyalty to his people and his growing feelings for Nina, and Wylan struggles with a lack of self-confidence and a strained relationship with his wealthy merchant family.

As the group works to complete the heist, they must also contend with a number of powerful enemies, including Jan Van Eck, the wealthy merchant who wants to use the scientist's weapon for his own gain, and Pekka Rollins, the leader of the Dime Lions gang. They also face a betrayal from within their own ranks, as not everyone is as committed to the cause as they seem.

Ultimately, the group's success or failure will have far-reaching consequences, and the novel builds to a thrilling and climactic conclusion.

In this book, I want to focus on two female characters in particular. Inej²⁵ is a skilled acrobat and assassin who works for Kaz Brekker and his gang, the Dregs. She is also known as the 'Wraith' because of her stealth and ability to move unseen. Inej is originally from Ketterdam, a city in the Kingdom of Kerch, and was sold into slavery at a young age before being rescued by Kaz. Despite her past, Inej is a kind and compassionate person who values loyalty and

²⁵ She was saved from a brothel by Kaz

friendship. She is also fiercely independent and determined to control her own destiny. Inej is an important member of the Dregs and plays a key role in many of the group's missions and schemes.

Kaz Brekker²⁶ and Inej Ghafa²⁷ have a complex relationship in the *Shadow and Bone* series. They have a deep bond of loyalty and friendship. Kaz has a rough exterior, but he cares deeply for Inej and the other members of the gang. Inej is fiercely loyal to Kaz and trusts him implicitly, even when his actions are questionable. Kaz also has strong feelings for Inej and is protective of her, but he struggles to express his emotions and maintain a professional relationship with her. As their story unfolds, Kaz and Inej's relationship becomes more complicated, and they must navigate their feelings for each other while also working together to achieve their goals.

Inej Ghafa does not depend on Kaz Brekker in the sense that she is not reliant on him for her survival or well-being. Inej is a skilled acrobat and assassin and is more than capable of taking care of herself. However, Inej does depend on Kaz in the sense that she values his friendship and loyalty and trusts him to have her best interests at heart. Characters like Inej are not common, a woman who kills of her own free will is not common. Moreover, Kaz depends on his assassin to achieve his ends. Leigh Bardugo defies gender stereotypes by giving Inej the cold and powerful image that one would normally give to a man.

Nina is a member of the Grisha, a group of people with magical abilities, and is a member of the Order of the Twin Adder, the order of Grisha who can manipulate the physical world. Nina is a Heartrender, which means she has the ability to manipulate the bodies of living beings and cause harm or stimulate healing. Nina is originally from the Kingdom of Ravka but is forced to flee after being accused of a crime she did not commit. She eventually

²⁶ Leader of the Dregs

²⁷ They are both member of the Dregs, a criminal gang in the city of Ketterdam.

ends up in Ketterdam, where she joins Kaz Brekker and his gang, the Dregs, on a mission to rescue a valuable prisoner. Along the way, Nina becomes friends with the other members of the Dregs and develops feelings for one of them, Matthias Helvar. Nina is a brave and fierce character who is not afraid to speak her mind and stand up for what she believes in.

The relationship between Nina Zenik and Matthias Helvar is one of the most complicated ones in the *Shadow and Bone* series. Matthias is a druskelle, a member of an elite group of soldiers trained to hunt and kill Grisha and is initially hostile towards Nina because of her status as a Grisha. However, as they spend more time together on a mission to rescue a valuable prisoner, Matthias begins to see Nina as an individual and not just as a member of a hated enemy group. Nina also starts to see Matthias as more than just a druskelle and begins to appreciate his intelligence and loyalty. Despite their initial animosity and differences, Nina and Matthias develop feelings for each other and eventually become romantically involved. However, their relationship is strained by the fact that they come from different worlds and are on opposite sides of a long-standing conflict. They must navigate their feelings for each other while also trying to find a way to bridge the gap between their two communities.

Nina Zenik does not depend on Matthias Helvar in the sense that she is not reliant on him for her survival or well-being. Nina is a skilled Grisha and is more than capable of taking care of herself. However, Nina does depend on Matthias in the sense that she values his friendship and support and trusts him to have her best interests at heart.

The women described by Leigh Bardugo appear to be independent, even if men are part of their stories, they do not rely on them but rather on their own skills. Some clichés and stereotypes remain, however.

II. Depiction of female characters

a. Women in recent works of YA fantasy fiction

How does the representation of women in Bardugo's narratives compare with other popular works of YA fantasy fiction, for instance *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J.K Rowling published in 1997 and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins published in 2008?

Leigh Bardugo's novels focus on feminism and inclusion, but what about her predecessors? Both are popular sagas in the young adult fantasy genre. I decided to choose these two examples because they have been and still are very successful, both adapted into films. And both were written by women. These works have similarities with the Grishaverse.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone follows the story of Harry Potter, a young orphan who discovers he is a wizard and is sent to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. There he is taught magic, makes new friends Ron and Hermione, and discovers that a dangerous secret threatens the wizarding world.

The book includes a variety of female characters. However, men are more represented and occupy more important roles.

The iconic female character of Harry Potter is obviously Hermione Granger who is portrayed as intelligent, brave and resourceful. She is also depicted as being instrumental in helping Harry and Ron solve the mysteries they encounter. But even if her role is important, she is only a supporting character. Her role is still quite complex, as she is described as highly intelligent, ambitious, and determined, which are qualities often attributed to men. She is not afraid to speak her mind and to challenge the authority of others to achieve her goals. These traits are typically associated with feminist ideals, such as equality and empowerment.

Furthermore, Hermione is a remarkable witch, often outperforming her male peers in class. Her abilities and achievements demonstrate that women are just as capable as men in the wizarding world, and that traditional gender roles and expectations should not limit what women can accomplish.

But Hermione is also described as being perfectionist, overly studious and somewhat bossy, while these traits are not negative, they do play into the stereotype of women being high-strung or controlling. Furthermore, Hermione's tendency to be very emotional at times, such as when Ron's comment hurts her, can also be seen as a gender stereotype, women are much more emotional than men.

Additionally, while Hermione is a strong and capable woman, she is still subject to forms of sexism and gender-based discrimination. For example, she is often teased and bullied by her male peers for her intelligence and academic achievements. This behaviour can be seen as a reflection of the ubiquitous stereotype that smart and ambitious women are threatening or unappealing to men.

In the same book we find Molly Weasley who is a maternal figure to Harry and his friends, she is described as kind, caring and fiercely protective of her family. A very stereotypical description of the woman - a working mother with an absent husband who is often at the office.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone has been criticised for its lack of diversity and representation even if Dean Thomas, a friend of Harry's, is described as black with dreadlocks. The book focuses more on class issues. Harry himself comes from a poor family and was raised by his abusive aunt and uncle, whereas his friend Ron comes from a very large family who struggles financially. The book touches more on the issue of social class and the privileges associated with it.

It is important to note that the book does not include any marginalised communities, such as LGBTQ+, or characters with disabilities. But these were still very controversial subjects at the time of writing and unknown to most people.

The Hunger Games is set in a dystopian future world where the government selects teenagers from each of the twelve districts to enter a televised competition where they fight to the death, called the Hunger Games. We follow the story of Katniss Everdeen, a sixteen-year-old girl from district 12. She volunteers to enter the competition in her sister's place.

Women play an important role in the book. The main character is a woman, the story is written from Katniss's point of view, and the reader is in her head, which creates a feeling of closeness. The reader understands and sees Katniss's actions through her eyes, which allows her to be taken out of the stereotype of a “strong and insensitive woman” and makes her more human.

Her character is described as strong, combative, and skilled in hunting. Skilled in hunting is a quality that is often appropriate for men, as women do not hunt or know how to use a weapon in typical fairy tales. Katniss' character is not defined by her gender but rather by her courage and determination.

Katniss is certainly not a passive and submissive woman; she is in charge of her destiny and refuses to be a pawn in the Capitol's game. Sisterhood is very present in the book; indeed, Katniss maintains a very strong bond with her little sister Prim, her friend and ally Rue and her mentor Effie Trinket, these relationships throughout the book show the importance of solidarity between women. Katniss is seen as a role model by many young readers who identify with her, even if she is not always vulnerable, she is a complex character trying to cope with her patriarchal and unequal society.

It is important to mention Peeta Mellark who is one of Katniss' love interests. This character is empathetic and emotionally intelligent. He is not afraid to express his feelings and show his vulnerability. This deconstructs the stereotype of the strong, emotionless man.

Reviews of the book are rather mixed, especially on Twitter, with some readers saying that the book reinforces certain stereotypes, especially those of the strong, protective man and the woman who needs help. However, others find the character of Katniss totally revolutionary, a strong woman who dares to defy the government and who is not afraid to kill.

However, all agree that the book lacks the inclusion of ethnic and sexual minorities, even if the main theme of the book, just like Harry Potter, is social class and the abusive power of the government.

Both of these books are not completely inclusive and feminist, however they both depict strong women who break out of the gender stereotypes we are used to see. Neither is a damsel in distress waiting for a man to come along. They are quite capable of taking their destiny into their own hands and working it out. These narratives feature heroines who are beginning to revolutionise the world of young adult literature.

b. Depiction of Leigh Bardugo's characters and link with feminism

In her works Leigh Bardugo offers us several very different female characters with very different life goals and pasts. We find Alina who is the main protagonist of her trilogy, and Genya Safin in the same universe. We will also find Nina Zenik and Inej Ghafa. These are the four main female characters who stand out in the books and are often the readers' favourites.

Alina Starkov is the main protagonist and narrator of her own story. Her story is a modernised fairy tale. Although the main character of the story Leigh Bardugo has not spared her heroine, starting with her physical description. The first thing we are told about her is **‘an ugly little thing [...] pale and sour, like a glass of milk that’s turned’** page 1. This is quite astonishing as a first description of the main character. If you compare this to normal fairy tales, the heroines are often beautiful and incredibly graceful, the stereotype of the perfect heroine.

‘I knew I was nothing special to look at, but there was something in his gaze that made me feel like I was more’.

(Shadow and Bone, Chapter 3, 45)

Alina’s reflection shows us the societal pressure that women face, always having to pay attention to their appearance and seeking validation from men. She expresses that she is ‘nothing special to look at’ and that her value as a person is linked to her appearance. She says that the look in the Darkling’s eyes makes her feel like she is more, she is looking for validation from a man who would be attracted only by her looks.

Alina is never really described physically because the story is written from her point of view, she nevertheless mentions how others react to her appearance.

‘I knew I wasn’t much to look at, and I’d always been the kind of person who fades into the background. But suddenly, I was the centre of attention’.

(Shadow and Bone, Chapter 6, 86)

In the same way, this extract reflects the pressure that women constantly receive on their appearance, which impacts on their mental state and the way they see themselves, they devalue themselves. However, here Alina highlights the fact that she is the centre of attention, societal norms are totally arbitrary and situational, indeed Alina, an orphan and mapmaker

whom no one looked at before, suddenly finds herself under the spotlight because she is the sun summoner, the one who will save the world.

‘Zoya turned to me, her eyes glinting. “So this is the famous Sun Summoner,” she said, looking me over with a critical eye. **“You look like a servant girl.”** Her words were meant to sting, but **I found myself feeling absurdly pleased**’.

(Shadow and Bone, Chapter 11, 136)

This extract highlights how two women can judge and criticise each other’s appearance, it is not always about sisterhood. This kind of criticism perpetuates hurtful societal norms that emphasise looks and beauty without looking at the qualities of a person. However, Alina’s response to Zoya shows the potential that women have to resist and fight against these societal standards of beauty and to assess their own worth by taking into account their qualities as well as their personality. Zoya’s words are violent on purpose, Alina feels ‘absurdly pleased’ by them, which shows that she no longer takes into account remarks about her looks and does not expect any validation to feel comfortable with her body.

By writing this Bardugo shows that sisterhood is not always present between two women, indeed jealousy can take over. This can be seen as a gender stereotype, with women being labelled as ‘vipers’ when jealousy is present, as in the Cinderella tale with her stepsisters.

According to these extracts, Alina feels bad about herself and cannot find her place in this patriarchal world where the Darkling pulls the strings. He frequently manipulates her to achieve his ends. Indeed, the Darkling has much more experience than Alina due to his old age, and he is also the leader of the army. He is a figure of authority and power. A rather stereotypical role since a man represents power and war, destruction. We learn later that he is the creator of Unsea, which Alina must destroy.

Alina is in a vulnerable position, still discovering her powers and her new identity. The Darkling takes advantage of this to manipulate her feelings to do what he wants with Alina.

‘He was watching me, his eyes unreadable. “I’ve been searching for you for a long time, Alina,” he said softly. **“You and I are meant to be together.”**

I felt a shiver run down my spine. “I don’t understand,” I said, taking a step back.

“You will,” he promised. “But first, there are things you need to learn, things only I can teach you.”

I shook my head, suddenly afraid “I don’t want your help.’

‘You don’t have a choice,’ he said coldly. **‘You belong to me now’**

(Shadow and Bone, Chapter 13, 170)

Here, the Darkling manipulates her into believing that they are bound by fate, that they must be together. Through this speech he makes her understand that only he can help her. This highlights the problem of control and manipulation in a romantic dimension. Indeed, saying that they ‘meant to be together’ and proclaiming that she ‘belongs’ to him are indications of his sense of entitlement and ownership over her. The use of the sentence ‘You don’t have a choice,’ further supports the fact that the Darkling has made Alina his object, that she has no choice but to bend to his will and obey. This kind of behaviour is typical of a patriarchal society, where the man feels obliged and entitled to control a woman’s choices and life. The Darkling’s manipulative behaviour and the way he forces Alina to do what he wants is an example of how gender roles and power dynamics can play an important role in a relationship.

Alina’s relationships with the men in the books are a bit stereotypical. Mal and Alina are childhood friends who end up falling in love after thinking they are best friends all their lives. Mal is often described in a very clichéd way.

'I felt a rush of relief when I saw him, **tall and strong** and familiar. I ran to him, throwing my arms around his neck, feeling **his warmth and solidity** against me. He smelled of pine and cold air and something faintly sweet, and it was **the most comforting scent in the world.**'

(Shadow and Bone, chapter 14, 194)

This could be reminiscent of the stereotype of the damsel in distress rescued by a strong man as in all fairy tales. Alina places herself as a vulnerable and weak woman, who depends on a strong, protective man who can comfort her and support her in difficult times. However, this is only one moment in a complex, multifaceted relationship.

Throughout the novel Alina is a very ambivalent character. She is very 'adolescent' when it comes to Mal, whom she misses throughout the story. But she also knows how to make hard choices like running away from the Little Palace to escape the Darkling's grip and take on his powers.

'I didn't know why I was crying. Maybe it was because I'd finally had to face the fact that I was a Grisha, that **I belonged to a world that I'd always scorned and feared.** Or maybe it was because Mal was gone, and **I missed him** so much that my heart felt like it was breaking. Either way, I couldn't stop the tears, and **I didn't try to hide them.**'

(Shadow and Bone, chapter 16, 215)

Alina shows herself to be emotionally vulnerable, which goes against gender stereotypes where women are comforting and nurturing in their relationships. Furthermore, the fact that she misses Mal here, and the way she expresses it, that her heart is breaking challenges the stereotype that women are always pursued by men and are never the ones doing the pursuing or feeling heartbreak. This is why her relationship with Mal is so complex. And it is also why so many readers identify with Alina, a woman lost in this patriarchal world who is desperately seeking her place.

The character of Genya, who is a good friend of Alina, is completely different. Her story is a disturbing one. Genya is a Grisha Tailor, who takes great pride in the work she does, and with her powers she creates beauty. However, even though Bardugo has described her as a model

of beauty and perfection, Genya is still a strong woman who is not afraid to speak her mind in order to stand for herself:

‘I’m not just some pretty face,’ Genya said hotly. ‘I’m the Darkling’s tailor. I’m a Grisha. And you have no right to speak to me like that.’ She was shaking with anger, her cheeks flushed.’
(*Shadow and Bone*, Chapter 7, 93)

Unlike Alina at the beginning, Genya is not defined by her appearance, she understands exactly what she is capable of and does not need the approval of others to get ahead in life. These personality aspects are often associated with men in literature.

However, even if Genya is not characterised by her looks, there are many descriptions of them.

‘Genya was stunning. Her hair was an elaborate tumble of glossy black ringlets, her skin a **flawless** alabaster. She wore a fitted blue silk dress that hugged **her curves and showed off her small waist.** Around her neck was a necklace of diamonds and sapphires that sparkled in the light.’

(*Shadow and Bone*, Chapter 6, 79)

This objectification of her body can be seen as a traditional gender stereotype as Genya is always qualified by her beauty first. But as said before, Genya does not take this into account. This is what makes the difference with the other books.

Genya’s history is traumatic, it includes violence and sexual abuse, by the Darkling and by the King of Ravka. However, these events are said to give her character dimension, not to pity or define her. This adds complexity to her character and makes us understand her motivations.

‘I wanted to ask her about the king, about what had been done to her, but **I didn’t have the courage.** It wasn’t until much later that I would learn the full extent of Genya’s suffering, of how **the king had used her gift to warp her face and body, to make her into a living doll** to be used and discarded at his pleasure.’ (*Shadow and Bone*, chapter 14, page 177)

This shows the harsh reality of our society, where women are subject to sexual violence and objectification. The king altering Genya’s face and body is a metaphor for our patriarchal society that controls and silences women by taking possession of their bodies. To make a

comparison with reality, cosmetic surgery is becoming increasingly popular. Women are changing their bodies to fit beauty standards that are often created by men. Genya's trauma highlights the fact that women are used for men's pleasure and then discarded once they become useless. Furthermore, the fact that Alina does not have the courage to ask Genya about her suffering also highlights the social stigma and shame that surrounds discussions of sexual violence, making it difficult for women to talk about it and seek help.

Both characters challenge gender stereotypes. In the end, Alina turns out to be a strong, independent woman who wants to show the world that women are not weak and do not need male protection. She is a soldier in the Ravkan army and is willing to fight for her beliefs. She is also a Grisha, a powerful and feared group and although she was never afraid of her powers, she was scared of what she could become and of not finding her place. The stereotype that women are submissive and have no powers is totally deconstructed here.

Genya, on the other hand, explores the stereotype that women are only valued for their appearance. She is a Grisha who can change people's appearance. However, she uses her power to transform herself, which gives her a reputation as a 'living doll' that the king can use for his own pleasure. This abuse of power highlights the dangers of objectifying a woman's body.

Throughout the book, Alina and Genya prove that women are capable of doing more than society expects of them. Both possess unique powers that they use to their advantage, rather than being held by societal expectation. They are complex and multi-dimensional characters.

The inclusion of complex female characters, such as Genya and Alina, who challenge gender stereotypes, can be seen as revolutionary in the world of young adults' literature. For a long time, female characters followed a certain archetype, that of the damsel in distress or the love

interest of the male character. Their stories were often told from a male perspective. It was therefore difficult to identify with or even understand these women.

Leigh Bardugo's characters in *Shadow and Bone* emancipate themselves from these limited genres and offer readers a more nuanced and empowering portrayal of womanhood. They are strong, capable and independent, and above all they tell their own story, from a female perspective.

Furthermore, the themes explored by Leigh Bardugo in the Grisha series, such as power and the search for identity, contribute to a movement that revolutionises literature from a female perspective. These themes are not limited to one gender, but rather explore the complexities of the human race in a complex and patriarchal world. The book offers a rich and provocative experience that is accessible to a wide range of readers, regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, or background.

In *Six of Crows*, the narration is somewhat different, as, thanks to the use of internal focalisation the reader is 'inside the heads' of all the characters. It's like being part of Kaz's gang. You don't look down on the characters and you don't judge them. Everyone is on the same level. In this duology, Leigh Bardugo has decided to add diversity to her characters, whether it be their ethnicity or their sexuality.

All the characters are interesting in this book as all deconstruct a stereotype. Nina, who is one of the readers' favourite characters according to Twitter²⁸, is introduced to us for the first time from Kaz's point of view.

'The girl was a grisha, he had no doubt of that. She wore a red kefta, but it was cut low on her collarbone, displaying the bronze pendant at her throat. Her long hair was twisted into a braid, the end of which brushed her hips. **Kaz took in the lines of her body, the proud thrust of her breasts, her hips, the soft flare of her waist.** She was tall and lithe, with **curves** that suggested a

²⁸ Mena, (@galliigans), "Top 10 best Grishaverse character poll", September 11, 2022, <https://twitter.com/galliigans/status/1568992659494113284>

life spent not in workshops or factories, but dancing. There was a confidence in the way she held herself that spoke of experience beyond her years.'

(Six of Crows, Chapter 5, 74)

This description by a man objectifies Nina's body by describing her appearance in detail, especially her physical body. The fact that this description comes from Kaz emphasises the male gaze and reinforces the fact that women are judged primarily on their physical attributes. This is not a positive portrayal of women; however, Leigh Bardugo has put herself in a man's point of view, in his head to show how women are seen most of the time for men, she is not trying to reinforce the stereotypes but rather to denounce them. Nina is still described as curvy, which is rare for a heroine in a novel, often women are represented as thin. Especially among the Grisha, as we saw in *Shadow and Bone*, women are described as slim and slender, especially those in the Ravkan army.

Several descriptions of Nina can be found. However, one by Inej is very interesting as it shifts from male to female gaze.

'**The girl was pretty**, Inej wouldn't deny that. She wore a red kefta, cut low to display a long neck that was draped with a thick chain of silver. Her hair was piled high on her head in thick black braids, but a few locks had escaped and fell in a **graceful** curve around her face. It was her eyes that made her striking, though. They were the pale blue of a frozen river, and just as cold.'

(Six of Crows, chapter 4, 63)

In this extract Inej gives us his first impression of Nina, even though the appearance is just as much described as in Kaz's description, there is nothing sexual here, but rather appreciation. Inej appreciates Nina's beauty. However, Nina's body is still objectified, the female gaze is only feminist when it is used to empower women and not to reduce them to their body appearance. In this case, Inej's description of Nina's curves can be seen as an appraisal of her body. Not forgetting that she does not stop at the physical and describes Nina's personality as joyful and radiant, which shows us that she is more than just a pretty face. Leigh Bardugo wanted to show that even through a female gaze a woman's body could be objectified. Moreover, Inej talks about Nina's eyes, which shows that she is able to see beyond the

physical, that from a glimpse she can guess Nina's personality, which is "cold". According to Inej, Nina seems warm because of her body shape, but it is the opposite, and she can tell this by her eyes. Comparaison avec le corps / yeux le reflet de l'âme / personnalité / voir au-delà de l'apparence.

However, Nina is not just a curvy woman with a pretty face, on the contrary.

‘Nina Zenik was **six feet of temptation and trouble**. The crown of her head was a mass of **wild black curls**; her face was all cupid-bow lips, high cheekbones, and dark eyes. She wore a bright red kefta that **was tight over the curves** Kaz had only guessed at and carried a beaded bag that clinked with vials of jurda parem. She moved with the easy grace of someone who had danced all her life, her eyes scanning the busy street. **Nina had been raised in the lap of Ravkan luxury**, but she'd rejected that life **to join the Second Army**. She was a Heartrender, able to control a person's pulse and breathing with a single touch, but she'd also been trained as a spy. Her passions **included books, gambling, and flirting with every man, woman, and occasional goat who crossed her path.**’

(Six of Crows, Chapter 6, 81)

Nina is described here as ‘temptations and trouble’, again reducing her to a sexual object. However, it is important to note that Nina is comfortable with her sexuality and her body. She uses it as her strength and does not hesitate to utilise her beauty and curves to achieve her goals. It is important to show women who are comfortable with their bodies and what they do with them, because it is their choice. We understand here that Nina, who carries jurda parem²⁹, is a reckless character and that she lacks self-control.

Nina deconstructs the stereotype of the venal woman who wants to live in luxury, indeed we understand that she has given up her well-to-do life to join the army, which shows her strength. Furthermore, her passion for books, gambling, and flirting challenges the idea of the passive woman and highlights a complex and multifaceted character with diverse interests and desires.

We understand that Nina is a stereotypical character but at the same time she remains complex and dynamic, gambling is often a male-related activity.

²⁹ Jurda Parem: A drug used by Grisha to amplify their powers.

In addition, Nina has an affair with Matthias, an enemy, which adds another dimension to her character. In the end, she betrays her lover to save him. During her journey to rescue him again from the prison where she has locked him up, her love eventually turns into remorse.

Inej's character is totally different from Nina's, who is rather rough and seductive.

'She was all sharp angles, lean lines, and the kind of natural grace that made Kaz look like a street brawler. Her black hair was always twisted up in some complicated style, but a few strands had come loose and now brushed against her cheekbones. She wore a red sash tied at her waist, **a common sight among the women who worked in the city's better brothels. But Inej's sash was nothing like those worn by the whores** who catered to sailors in the Barrel. It was silk, shot through with threads of gold, and embroidered with **dozens of tiny knives.'**

(Six of Crows, Chapter 2,16)

Inej is described as 'waif', a term often used in literature to describe a delicate woman who needs to be protected. However, Inej is a proven fighter and a crucial member of the Dregs. This description is complex and multifaceted. Inej is more than a 'badass' or 'feisty female' archetype, which is often found in fantasy novels. Here we recognise her extraordinary physical abilities. It is immediately clear that a disturbing past follows her, which gives her a deep dimension.

The scars on her hands show that she has experienced struggles, and that her liver is an important part of her character.

Inej, unlike Nina, is never sexualised by a man in the book.

'I had been sold to the Menagerie when I was fourteen. I spent years working the brothels of Ketterdam's Barrel, but that was nothing compared to what it was like in the Menagerie. They **branded me as their property and beat me until I couldn't stand. But I survived, Kaz. I endured. I escaped.** And I'll endure whatever Kaz can come up with because I know he's the only reason I'm alive right now, and I owe him everything for that.'

(Six of Crows, Chapter 2, 28)

This paragraph shows us a certain vulnerability in Inej, who opens up about her trauma when she was held at the Menagerie. She was forced to perform as an acrobat and was exposed to many forms of physical and emotional violence. She was raped and sexually assaulted by her

abductors, which impacted her relationships with men forever. She witnessed the torture and murder of other slaves. Her traumas, however horrific and violent, are described with sensitivity and care throughout the book.

It is important to note that women and girls are often victims of sexual violence and exploitation. Inej's trauma is the harsh reality that some women endure. However, the strength she shows in sharing her story and her determination to overcome her trauma can inspire and help women in this situation. It is important to note that, like Genya, her trauma does not define her, she is a strong character and is capable of being very brave and compassionate.

Unlike Genya who did not want to talk about it, here Inej shows that it is important to denounce this kind of violence so that the perpetrators are punished and become aware of the seriousness of their actions. By writing about these women, who have suffered a trauma that is said to be taboo, Bardugo challenges harmful stereotypes and sends a message of hope and empowerment for women.

In comparison to *Shadow and Bones*, Inej and Nina are confronted with much more violent struggles. Both women often find themselves having to kill or steal to survive in this dark world. Both had to fight to regain their autonomy in a world that was trying to take them away. In contrast, Alina Starkov's struggles are more to do with her new powers and the politics that seek to control her. While her gender did not necessarily come into play or cause her problems, the sources of conflict were her love interests.

These three women's challenges and struggles, Nina's and Inej's experiences are more related to their gender and social expectations, while Alina's are more related to her powers and political intrigue.

c. A way to raise awareness.

In her writing, Leigh Bardugo raises issues that are rather unmentionable in our society today. By discussing these topics, she promotes empathy and understanding towards marginalized communities.

Indeed, the Grishaverse speaks freely about the exploration of gender and sexuality. One example is the Darkling who uses his powers to manipulate people and their desires, often engaging in coercive sexual relationships. Many relationships in our society are not healthy, women are manipulated and are under threat from a man.

This topic resonates with real life experiences, abusive relationships or even through unequal power systems. Some studies have shown that manipulation in couples can show up in different ways, both at work and in social contexts. A study published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* reports that emotional manipulation is the most common form of abuse in romantic relationships, with 92% of participants reporting such experiences.³⁰

Leigh Bardugo and Alina show that it is possible to get out of it and talk about it. Bardugo's narrative finally celebrates the empowerment of characters who resist manipulation and assert their autonomy. These examples can serve as inspiration and encouragement for readers who may be in this situation.

³⁰ Rachel Grieve, *The emotional manipulation-psychopathy nexus: Relationships with emotional intelligence, alexithymia and ethical position*, (Personality and Individual Differences, volume 48, issue 8, page 945-950), June 2010, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0191886910000966>

In the Grishaverse and particularly in *Six of Crows*, the author addresses the problem of prostitution and sex work by highlighting the exploitative and harmful nature of the industry.

There is the brothel called the Menagerie, which is run by a cruel and abusive owner called Aunt Heleen. The Menagerie is full of girls and women who are forced into prostitution, often through coercion, abduction and other means of exploitation. The women in this whorehouse are treated as objects and not as humans, and their bodies are used and abused for the pleasure of the clients.

The description of the Menagerie and the characters inside, are used to raise awareness about the dangers and harms of prostitution and the sex world, especially for those who are pushed into this world. Bardugo presents a clear and uncompromising view of the world of sex, highlighting the fact that it is often the result of inequalities and exploitation. In many countries prostitution is illegal and punishable, and those working in prostitution may face discrimination and violence. Many women end up engaging in sex work against their will, often through trafficking or because of poverty.

According to the International Labour Organization, an estimated 4.8 million people are trapped and forced into prostitution.³¹ The women in *Six of Crows*, fight against exploitation of women in the Menagerie. The book shows the importance of solidarity and support among women to fight oppression and exploitation. One book cannot stop a criminal industry that has become so large in the world, but it warns its readers of the danger and the importance of helping those in need of help against violence. The book offers a critical eye through which the reader can see and understand the sex industry.

³¹ Lin Lean Lim (Ed.), *The Sex Sector*, (International Labour Organization, 1998), https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_PUBL_9221095223_EN/lang--en/index.htm

A major issue raised is that of slavery through the depiction of the indentured servitude system in Ravka, which is nothing less than a form of legalized slavery. The Grisha, those with magical powers, are forced to join the Second Army and serve the king of Ravka. They are treated as property and have no control over their own lives. Additionally, the Grishaverse explores the legacy of slavery and the impact it has had on the country and its people. All this resonates with world history and more contemporary issues. Forced labour and exploitation of human beings, often of marginalised populations. These problems are not unique to Ravka but rather have been a persistent problem in human history.

In the United States, for example, slavery was legal until the 13th amendment in 1865. People continue to be affected by this past slavery. According to a report by the National Domestic Workers Alliance, domestic workers - many of whom are women of colour - are often subject to exploitative labour, which resembles legal and illegal slavery, with very low wages, long hours, physical and mental abuse. In addition, forced labour is a global problem, affecting an estimated 21 million people worldwide, according to the International Labor Organization. Many are forced to work in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction, and are subject to abusive working conditions, including physical and sexual violence.

By exploring the complex issue of slavery and forced labour in the Grishaverse, Leigh Bardugo raises awareness about these ongoing human rights violations and encourages readers to consider their own role in working towards a more just and equitable society. In addition, the Grisha are subject to a form of racism, as they are feared because they are powerful. They are completely on the margins of the population. Laws and regulations have been created to curtail their freedoms.

The LGBTQ+ community being included in *Six of Crows*, is not there to raise awareness, but to give people confidence in Jesper's case. Jesper is bisexual, and struggles to come to terms with his sexuality, Wylan who is gay, comes from a conservative family and fears rejection if he comes out to the world. Their relationship is portrayed with sensitivity and nuance, their struggles seem complex. The Grishaverse highlights the challenge that LGBTQ+ people face in coming out to others and to themselves.

Moreover, the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in the grishaverse, including Jesper and Wylan, but also the Darkling and Tolya, challenge traditional gender and sexual orientation stereotypes. This helps normalise the presence of LGBTQ+ people in our society and helps readers embrace and accept diversity.

But Bardugo is perhaps most influential in her portrayal of strong and complex women who challenge traditional gender roles and expectations.

Inej is a skilled fighter and spy, who is not challenged by her relationship with any man. She is a character with agency and a clear sense of purpose and ambition, she is not objectified or reduced to a mere love interest. Similarly, Nina is a Grisha who defies the expectations placed on her as a woman, choosing to train as a soldier and become a fierce warrior. She also challenges the stereotypes around female sexuality, being very confident and unapologetic about her desires and sexuality.

The Grishaverse also explores feminist themes and examining issues such as reproductive rights³², body autonomy, and the impact of patriarchy on women's lives. For example, Alina struggles with the expectations placed on her as the Sun Summoner and is forced to navigate the politics of power and control that surround her. Overall, this universe

³² United States removing the abortion rights in some states.

challenges traditional gender roles and promotes the idea that women are capable of being complex and powerful beings, who can make their own choices and choose their own destiny.

III. Criticism/reviews

a. Books

Leigh Bardugo's books have been and still are very popular, *Shadow and Bone* has been translated into thirty-eight languages, with over 2.5 million ³³copies sold in English. In addition, readers are very active on the networks, including 859,983 ratings and 77, 306 reviews for *Shadow and Bone*, 804,170 ratings and 88,198 reviews for *Six of Crows* on Goodreads. There are so many tweets under the hashtag #grishaverse that the algorithm can no longer count them. These networks are a way of communicating between readers and Leigh Bardugo, who takes the opinions of fans very seriously.

Shadow and Bone was well received when it first came out, but readers appear to have grown tired of it because of the lack of gender and ethnic diversity in the books. Indeed, readers complained that all they got were white, thin, perfect women.

An offensively thin and Orientalist veil that serves only to more firmly entrench the popularity of the most horrendous of YA tropes.³⁴

Even so, this fantasy novel was still 'revolutionary' in 2012, as it portrayed independent women who do not rely on men and has a woman as the main character and narrator.

³³ Nellie Andreeva, Denise Petski "Netflix Orders 'Shadow and Bone' Series Based on Leigh Bardugo's Grishaverse Novels From Eric Heisserer & Shawn Levy", Deadline, January 10, 2019, <https://deadline.com/2019/01/netflix-orders-shadow-and-bone-series-leigh-bardugo-grishaverse-fantasy-novels-1202532783/>

³⁴ Gyllyweed, "an offensively thin and Orientalist veil that serves only to more firmly entrench the popularity of the most horrendous of YA tropes.", Goodreads, March 2, 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10194157-shadow-and-bone>

Readers were delighted to see a novel written by a woman and featuring a female character who had to revolutionise the world she lives in, she had to save it, which is what the synopsis promises.

The story was sometimes described as too ‘mushy’ because of the love triangle which, according to the readers, had no place in the story. A very well-known love triangle in young adult literature is the one found in *The Hunger Games*, to make a short comparison, the latter has not been criticised in the same way, indeed fans on Twitter or on Goodreads, find that it has its place in the story because it is a crucial choice that can totally change the character of Katniss.

“The eventual romance works for Katniss because it is *safe* for her.”³⁵

In a more feminist sense, criticisms were made about the representation of women in the novel, as women could be seen as objects and tools to satisfy men’s goals (the Darkling with Alina). Indeed, it was pointed out that women in the novel are not strong and independent but many of the female characters are defined by the relationships they have with the male characters, or the fact that they are weak and/or powerless.

But there is the character of Genya, who becomes a great friend of Alina. Genya is a Tailor; she can change the appearance of others to make them more beautiful. She helps Alina to feel more beautiful and confident. She uses this ability to subvert the patriarchal norms of Ravka’s society, for example she chose to style her own hair and makeup rather than relying on male hairdressers and makeup artists, as is typical for noblewomen in Ravka. However, it is used to beautify other women, to remove scars, to make them perfect. So, her role can be seen in two different ways, Genya challenges the patriarchy by showing that she can stand on her own

³⁵ Elle, (@ellexamines), “The eventual romance works for Katniss because it is *safe* for her.”, Goodreads, January 14, 2020, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2767052-the-hunger-games>

two feet and that women can be beautiful without men and for themselves. Or that women still have to be beautiful to show themselves in public, without a scar, perfect.

In addition, many reviews talk about the fact that the LGBTQ+ community is underrepresented or even non-existent in the novel.

“As for LGBTQ+ rep, well there is none, that may be part of the reason this book wasn't one I enjoyed THAT much even though it was definitely right up my alley. (just to be clear, I did enjoy this book quite a bit, but from what I've heard about it, and what I knew of the plot compared to what kind of books I know I generally like, it was a bit disappointing.) I make a habit of only reading books with some sort of LGBTQ+ rep, because I've spent so many years of my life reading books without a single character I could relate to.”³⁶

This is a criticism that Leigh Bardugo has taken into account for her future novels and the adaptation of the books into a series.

Regarding the character of Alina, opinions are mixed. Some found her too naïve. During her training phase, she was described by some readers as a ‘teenage caricature, cyclothymic and schizophrenic’³⁷ Some felt that the character was not developed and became too quickly ‘strong and independent. She doesn’t question herself and immediately becomes the heroine we want her to be.

From a more feminist angle, readers criticised the relationships that Alina has with the two male characters. The author tries to portray Alina as a strong and independent woman who does not require a love interest or a man to make her choices. However, her relationship with Mal, her best friend, is described by readers as not healthy, almost toxic, with a lack of communication about the characters’ feelings and needs. Mal is overprotective and possessive

³⁶ Karoline, “As for LGBTQ+ rep [...] I could relate to”, Goodreads, May 1, 2021, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10194157-shadow-and-bone>

³⁷ RosenDero, « Grisha Tome 1 : Les Orphelins du Royaume » Babelio, July 12, 2018, <https://www.babelio.com/livres/Bardugo-Grisha-tome-1--Les-Orphelins-du-Royaume/1322129/critiques#>

of his childhood friend, which enforces the stereotypical notion that a man needs to control and protect a woman. Some readers have also pointed to Alina's loss of independence in this relationship, as she often follows his 'command' and orders. She often lets him make decisions for her.

“EDIT: The reason I'm writing this review and not why the Darkling is the worst love interest because:

A.He's the villain, he's supposed to be the worst. That's kind of the point.

B.Mal is supposed to be the hero, but he's so toxic and awful and I don't like how he's portrayed as some ideal mal.

C. The Darkling was never a really a love interest.”³⁸

To conclude on this relationship, readers were disappointed by the unoriginal and overly stereotypical nature of the relationship.

The relationship she has with the Darkling is also heavily criticised. The Darkling is a manipulative and controlling character and readers did not like this aspect as, like Mal, it reinforces gender stereotypes and the idea that men should control and own women. She has a false independence from this character, she often follows his lead and lets him make important decisions for her.

As with her relationship with Mal, this is described as toxic and reinforces gender stereotypes.

The book contains conversations between Mal and Alina that are examples of stereotyping:

“Did you miss me, Alina?

‘Yes, every day,’ I answered sincerely.

“I missed you every hour.” (*Shadow and Bone* 168) ³⁹

On the other hand, some saw her as a woman who started from nothing and rose by herself. Indeed, Alina is not used to being put forward, she has always been discreet and

³⁸ Sofia, ““EDIT: The reason [...] a love interest”, Goodreads, July 25, 2021, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10194157-shadow-and-bone>

³⁹ Quotation from a reader

without anything special. An average character. However, this figure forges a new personality, she dares to take her place and speak for herself. She learns to make herself heard.

The opinions are really mixed because, as seen before, some people believe that Alina's character is poorly constructed, while others say that she is well developed and realistic, as she grows up facing different complicated situations. She has managed to embrace who she is, her power and her new identity. She is an ambivalent character.

“Alina is the definition of a Mary Sue. She starts off incompetent and idiotic, and ends the book suddenly a goddess and idiotic. I guess it was too much to ask for character development.”⁴⁰

“Starting from Alina Starkov, our leading lady.

From the time when she was eight years old to the present where she's a mapmaker in the Army, she has never quite belonged anywhere, she's always one of those who craves the loved one, dreams about a place where she fits in, while everything in her life is close to pretence and is pathetically insecure. The only thing she knows and care about is her best friend for life Mal. So, when she's plucked and thrown away with the Grisha, she knows that she doesn't belong there, with Mal not by her side. She's left with loneliness, and worse, the burden of saving the world sets her apart. Because, she is, after all, the key to destroying the Fold and make Ravka whole again. All her emotions, frustrations, insecurities, happiness and astonishment were so crystal clear that I could go inside the book and tell her “I understand you”.

I loved how her character grew and pushed the book to a defining end.”⁴¹

The relationship between Alina and Genya, a secondary character, who plays an important role in Alina's life during her training, is very much appreciated and they soon become very close. Many reviewers have praised the portrayal of Genya and Alina's friendship as being positive and supportive, with the two characters forming a strong bond and looking out for each other.

⁴⁰ Sofia, “Alina is the definition of a Mary Sue. She starts off incompetent and idiotic, and ends the book suddenly a goddess and idiotic. I guess it was too much to ask for character development.”, Goodreads, July 25, 2021, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10194157-shadow-and-bone>

⁴¹ Devyani, “Starting from [...] defining end”, Goodreads, March 14, 2012, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10194157-shadow-and-bone>

“I will never shut up about #genyalina ship, They’re sisters!”⁴²

There is a notion of sisterhood, women helping each other against men. Their friendship is said to be complex and nuanced, with the two characters having a deep understanding and appreciation for each other. Genya and Alina’s friendship is free from jealousy or competition, with the two supporting and uplifting each other rather than trying to tear each other down. Some reviewers have also claimed the portrayal of Genya and Alina’s friendship as being an important and positive representation of female relationships, with the two characters forming a strong and meaningful bond. Their relation is a source of strength and comfort for both characters, they are relying on each other for support and guidance.

It is clear that the reviews are mixed, for this first volume in the saga. Leigh Bardugo took into account everything she could before writing *Six Of Crows* and yet the readers’ reviews remain very mixed.

Many readers were pleased to see women being put in the spotlight in situations that are out of the norm and where men are usually involved. Nina and Inej are part of a gang, and they play an important part. Inej is the spy and assassin of the Gregs, Nina conducts the interrogations and is the Grisha of the group. These women are described by the readers as strong and independent, and they are self-sufficient.

An LGBTQ+ dimension has also been added to the duology. Indeed, we find the character of Jesper who is part of this community, is portrayed as Ravka’s best shooter.

Many readers were delighted to see such a wide range of characters, with many different personalities and appearances. Nina is described as overweight, but incredibly beautiful and compelling. So-called fat characters are rare in young adult books.

⁴² Lala (@justgayyyyyy), “I will never shut up about #genyalina ship, They’re sisters!”, Twitter, March 22, 2023, <https://twitter.com/justgayyyyyy/status/1638540314049916934>

“It's not a secret that I become really attached to characters I love. And I loved every single one of this crew! They all have such different and distinct personalities. Their banter gave me life and how close they all became by the end of the book has me tearing up just thinking about it.”⁴³

Many liked to see women described as complex and nuanced. For example, Inej is depicted as multifaceted and fully fleshed out.

Unlike *Shadow and Bone*, readers liked the female characters in *Six of Crows* because they are capable and competent heroines, Nina and Inej play vital roles in the plot, and they often deal with very difficult and complicated situations.

Just as with *Shadow and Bone*, some of its readers think the opposite. Indeed, they find the description and image of the female characters in the book almost abject. The women are too sexualised, especially Nina who uses her body to get her way, the description of the woman as an object that makes men fantasise. Others have pointed to the lack of truly independent and strong women, many of these characters are only defined by the relationships they have with the male characters. Having considered the lack of LGBTQ+ characters in her novels Leigh Bardugo introduced the Jesper character. However, this did not seem to be enough for the readers, as for them the community is still underrepresented.

“This book is a wish-fulfillment trope-fest packed with ableism and misogyny. The setting of "Six of Crows" is a modern pornographic imaginary that equates death with sex, feelings with weakness, and ignores basic human psychology in favor of a James Bond-level action tale.”⁴⁴

Focusing on the two female main character of the book, Nina is a very nuanced character, some readers describe her as an independent and strong woman who is not afraid to take

⁴³ *A*, “It's not a secret that I become really attached to characters I love. And I loved every single one of this crew! They all have such different and distinct personalities. Their banter gave me life and how close they all became by the end of the book has me tearing up just thinking about it.”, Goodreads, May 13, 2021n <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10194157-shadow-and-bone>

⁴⁴ Melissa Stacy, “This book is a wish-fulfillment trope-fest packed with ableism and misogyny. The setting of "Six of Crows" is a modern pornographic imaginary that equates death with sex, feelings with weakness, and ignores basic human psychology in favor of a James Bond-level action tale.”, Goodreads, March 18, 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10194157-shadow-and-bone>

heavy decisions, indeed at the end of the novel she takes a kind of potion that will amplify her powers knowing that this potion will make her die in a horrible way, but to save her friends she decides to risk it. Nina is much appreciated as many find her very realistic, she is described as overweight which allows many people to identify with her. Readers really care about this aspect of the protagonist, as it is rare to see this kind of character in novels, especially for a heroine. Although some people don't take this side of the character very well, readers say that Nina's weight is mentioned far too much in the book and that it becomes the main feature of the character. It could almost be seen as a mockery or used for comic effect to diminish the importance and strength of her character. This would reinforce stereotypes about overweight people.

Nina is in a long-term relationship with Matthias, a situation that has been widely criticised. Some reviewers have said the portrayal of Nina and Matthias's relationship as being unhealthy and/or toxic, with the two characters often engaging in verbal or physical conflict. Others poured scorn on the fact that their relation is overly dependent on physical attraction, with the two characters often being driven by lust rather than genuine emotion. Some readers have also pointed out the lack of communication or understanding, with the two characters often failing to openly discuss their feelings and needs. Some reviewers have also said it being too focused on, with their interactions taking up too much time and attention in the story.

I'm reading about how Matthias captured and betrayed Nina. If hes for real, I have no clue why people love their couple. I see no chemistry and no actual base for them to be partners. Maybe if she didn't throw him in Hellgate. Idk. I'm not feeling it AT ALL.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ @youarebmyside, "I'm reading about how Matthias captured and betrayed Nina. If hes for real, I have no clue why people love their couple. I see no chemistry and no actual base for them to be partners. Maybe if she didn't throw him in Hellgate. Idk. I'm not feeling it AT ALL.", Twitter, May 11, 2021,

<https://twitter.com/youarebmyside/status/1392211698208157703>

The character of Inej is described as a woman of colour who has found herself on the streets of Ketterdam after being sold into slavery and spending time in a brothel. This dimension of adding characters of colour, which was not present in *Shadow and Bone*, was well received by readers. However, her story was considered too tragic and melodramatic by readers who only saw Inej through this dimension and could not help but see her as a ‘victim’. Some of Inej’s motivations remained unclear to readers, as they thought that the character’s backstory was not developed enough, although more could have been learned about this story, which seemed interesting to develop. Some said they felt emotionally manipulated by her story and felt forced to like her. Supporting the fact that Inej was a slave should have been only a part of her story, but it had the opposite effect for some readers, they only saw her through that aspect, and only saw that.

“it makes me wonder why Leigh gave Inej, and the Suli so much trauma in the first place if she wasn’t going to actually explore it. I’m glad Leigh wanted to include a brown character, but I truly don’t think it was in her place to detail trauma revolving around race at all for a fantasy novel as a white woman.”⁴⁶

However, others find her strong and independent, even though she was saved by a man, Kaz, she managed to become a strong woman, an assassin, and a spy.

In the books, Inej and Nina have a close friendship that is a central part of the story. They are both members of Kaz Brekker’s crew and work together to pull off heists and other dangerous missions. Inej and Nina have a strong bond and are there for each other through thick and thin, supporting and uplifting each other.

Inej and Nina’s relationship is described as being positive and supportive, with the two characters forming a deep connection and understanding of each other. They have a mutual respect for their skills and abilities and can rely on each other for support and guidance. Their

⁴⁶ Serena, “It makes me wonder [...] as a white woman”, Goodreads, May 9, 2021, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23437156/reviews?reviewFilters={%22world%22:%22kca://work/mzn1.gr.work.v1.LwRAfKf6dcBlbXYivcaaFg%22,%22ratingMin%22:5,%22ratingMax%22:5,%22after%22:%22NjAwMDQsMTUzMTU5MTg2MzYxMw%22}>

friendship is said as being free from jealousy or competition, with Inej and Nina supporting and uplifting each other rather than trying to tear each other down.

Overall, Inej and Nina's friendship is depicted as an important and positive representation of female relationships, with the two characters forming a strong and meaningful bond. Their friendship is a source of strength and comfort for both characters, and they can rely on each other for support and guidance as they face challenges and adversity.

b. The Series

The series spans the whole Grishaverse. Indeed, it is a mixture of *Six of Crows* and *Shadow and Bone*, which are actually two different books, but the story takes place in the same universe. The director and Leigh Bardugo decided to make this mix to make the series more homogeneous. *Six Of Crows* is more diverse in terms of the ethnicity and sexuality of its characters. All this to make the show less flat and feel more 'modern'.

This is also why Alina is half Shu to add a less flat dimension to the show and to raise the issue of racism, as she is indeed a victim of it from the first episode. This change was very well received by the fans who found that Alina's history finally made sense.

Leigh Bardugo had warned fans in an interview that she wanted to modernise her characters following criticism from readers, so they would probably not look like the descriptions in the books. However, the character of Nina, described as plump, is not really plump in the show. Despite the fact that the actress plays Nina very well, readers went wild.



“Nina zenik is fat. Danielle is not. she captures nina's energy and that's great, but nina zenik is a fat character.”⁴⁷

From a feminist point of view, it is true that Nina Zenik is described as plump, but asking the actress to change her body to best embody her character raises a big problem in society, The fact that women don't support each other in this situation is already a problem, however the biggest issue here is that as Danielle Calligan is thin, healthy and in good physical shape, people have no right to ask her to change to play her character, in fact the readers are trying to take over the actress' body without asking her for her opinion. Danielle Galligan was able to convince the fans without changing anything, she was able to understand the character of Nina which is very complex.

The representation of women in the series is mixed, as we find all the female characters present in the books, but some of them are given flatter roles. For example, Baghra is put aside and lives in a cave, because her powers frighten the other Grishas. She is given a diabolical dimension by being ordered to assassinate Mal. This ties in with the previous arguments: women with great powers end up becoming evil. Similarly at the end of Season Two, Alina loses her Sun Summoner power and gets the Darkling's powers back, as a way to darken her character. This change may have been made to keep viewers on their toes. However, she has been made into an evil person that people will fear. A stereotype has been added which demonises the status of powerful women.

The relationship between Mal and Alina still exists. In the novels the protagonist would do anything for Mal who is the love of her life and her best friend. At the end of Season Two, Mal dies: this does not change. However, Alina sacrifices herself to save him.

⁴⁷ Alina starkov's lawyer, (@hannenias), “Nina zenik is fat. Danielle is not. she captures nina's energy and that's great, but nina zenik is a fat character.”, Twitter, March 1, 2023. <https://twitter.com/hanneninas/status/1630741058953814016>

Whereas in the novel, she begs for help. This adds a feminist dimension where the male character is this time saved by a woman. Indeed, Alina didn't need anyone to save him, she was able to manage on her own, she still loses her powers to save him.

Some of the relationships are somewhat altered. In the novels, Inej and Nina are very close, a great friendship and sisterhood emerge from their relationship, which is sometimes sexually ambiguous. The director has chosen to make Nina completely heterosexual and to erase the relationship with Inej, we see them only very little together. However, the relationship between Jesper and Wylan, which is only implied in the books, becomes much more explicit. Viewers see kissing scenes and a glimpse of their first night together. What can explain this choice? If our society is still not used to seeing homosexual couples on the big screen, it is nevertheless more used to seeing male couples than female ones. Homosexuality among women is still quite taboo and is not often shown to the public. The reason for this choice is not clearly explained anywhere.

According to the opinions found mostly on Twitter, the opinions are mixed. Indeed, fans are happy to see their characters come to life and some changes have been well received, such as the relationship between Jesper and Wylan which is very explicit and well presented. Adding this LGBTQ dimension to *Shadow and Bone* brings a more modern dimension, and more people have the opportunity to identify with more characters. However, the demonisation of Alina's powers has been received in different ways, some find it a way to make her even more powerful while others find it a shame to darken her power, she who was the light of Ravka becomes a character that the inhabitants will fear and dread. This choice to change her powers and give her the powers of the Darkling means that Alina will be isolated from everyone. This takes us back to the very first fairy tale, where women were isolated

from the world to make them more vulnerable, regardless of their status or power. This can be seen as a big step backwards in terms of gender stereotypes.

c. Impact of the Books/Series

The books and the series have had a great impact on young people. Indeed, although the book has been read by all age groups, it was originally intended for young adults - from the age of 13 - yet many have questioned whether the book is suitable for such young readers, particularly *Six of Crows* which tells much rawer stories than *Shadow and Bone*. Readers were confronted with violent social issues without being warned, which was a choice of the author. The author spoke about this in an interview and admitted that warning readers about the sexual violence that women experience, prostitution was completely sexist:

I have literally never seen somebody call for a trigger warning on a Stephen King book, for instance. It has to be on every single book. And I would be curious to know which things made it through that process, and which got flagged and which didn't, I think would be pretty interesting.⁴⁸

The numerous reactions to *Six of Crows* are due to the popularity of *Shadow and Bone*, which follows a modernised fairy tale storyline. Gender stereotypes are broken, such as putting a woman in the foreground and writing from her point of view, being in her head the whole time and understanding the journey she makes. Bardugo was able to show the place of a woman in a patriarchal world by putting Alina in the foreground. However, the story line is less violent than *Six of Crows* – or at least the readers are less aware of it.

In *Six of Crows* the readers are confronted with direct violence. Once again, we are inside the heads of all the characters, Bardugo shows us the traumas they have suffered. Inej was kidnapped and sold into a brothel and was forced to sell her body at a very young age. Kaz

⁴⁸ Sarah Kenchington, "Shadow and Bone Author Leigh Bardugo has Strong Opinions on Trigger Warnings," Fansided, April 07, 2023, <https://winteriscoming.net/2023/03/09/grishaverse-shadow-and-bone-author-leigh-bardugo-has-some-strong-opinions-trigger-warnings/>

saw his brother die. Other books have confronted us with violent scenes like Stephen King with his horror stories or even *The Hunger Games*. So why did readers get so offended by Bardugo's work? Looking for reviews on Twitter or Goodreads, it's simply because not only do we witness the violence that is done to these teenagers but also, we follow their trauma by being in their heads, this closeness to the characters brings out emotions in the readers.

Conclusion

Both *Shadow and Bone* and *Six of Crows* feature women and outcasts trying to break out of stereotypes. Both are part of the same universe and written by the same author, although they are very different.

The reader is put into the head of each character, which allows them to better understand the characters and to see them evolve in their society, but above all this understanding of the characters allows us not to judge them, because the reader knows their stories and the struggles they have gone through. Leigh Bardugo makes explicit problems of our modern society in her books, which for a long time have remained unspoken.

The portrayal of bisexuality is often not discussed in books for young adults, even though it is a subject of representation that affects many young people. In Leigh Bardugo's novels we have Jesper and Nina who are completely bisexual, while one is totally in harmony with herself and her sexuality, the other is searching for himself and wants to understand who he is. Jesper discovers his true self gradually with Wylan and his friends. The bisexuality of this character offers a positive view of the portrayal of bisexuality, as it is not portrayed as a source of confusion or shame, but rather as a normal aspect of his identity. This can have an impact on young readers. The young adult genre is a time of great exploration and discovery

for many young people, especially in terms of sexuality. Jesper is a character who can help these young readers to find themselves because here this aspect of his personality is described as a valid aspect of the human experience.

As for the way the author writes her characters, whether they are women or men, she tries to break out of the traditional gender stereotypes. The women she describes are physically and mentally strong, they are just as capable of fighting as the men. Alina and Nina are not only defined by the relationships they have with men, but they also have their own ambitions and desires. It should also be considered that Bardugo challenges the place of power, she shows that women are just as capable of becoming leaders, like Zoya who is commander of the Second Army.

Male characters are emotional and vulnerable. In the Grishaverse, men are not expected to be stoic and unemotional, but are encouraged to show their feelings and vulnerabilities. Even if some are described as cold, for example Kaz, they are quite capable of showing emotional intimacy. Moreover, they are not reduced to their physical abilities, indeed Kaz is a strategist and Mal is an excellent tracker, Bardugo privileges intelligence in his masculine characters.

The representation of gender is changing, and stereotypes are beginning to be more and more put aside. More and more readers are finding characters they can relate to and hold on to in order to understand who they are and their place in this society. By normalising non-heteronormative identities like bisexuality, it takes away a marginalisation that society has created to put what is not considered normal aside. However, some gender stereotypes are still very much present, as they are ingrained in the readers' minds, but readers' mindsets are changing along with our society. Moreover, readers communicate more easily with authors who are open-minded, who listen to criticism and remarks to evolve and create works that correspond to a large number of readers.

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SEQUENCE D'ENSEIGNEMENT

SÉQUENCE: INSPIRE THE YOUNG READER GENERATION!

(Réalisée vers le milieu ou la fin d'année)

Niveau 3^e – Cycle 4

Notion : Langages

Attendus du CECRL : A2-B1

OBJECTIFS					
Culturels	Lexicaux	Grammaticaux	Phonologique	Pragmatiques	TICE
Nouveaux et anciens contes de fée. Les genres littéraires Le féminisme Le genre Stéréotypes de genre Tropes L'inclusion	Le vocabulaire littéraire La description physique et morale	Re-travailler le <i>Present simple</i> , le Preterit L'expression d'opinion Comparatif	/wɪmɪn/ /wʊmən/	Présenter un personnage Créer un personnage Argumenter	Créer un carnet de suivi à l'aide d'outils numériques.

DEROULÉ DE SÉQUENCE DÉTAILLÉE

Nombre de séances totales envisagées :

Modalités pratiques : classe de 3^e composée de 28 élèves

TÂCHES ÉVALUÉS :

- **Tâche finale:** 'You are a young author, and you want to get into young adult literature, in the fantasy genre. You need to write your main character, free of all stereotypes.
You can represent it by drawing it, with a photomontage, an IA, etc... If you want to. Be original!'

Attendus :

Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues (CECRL)

- Peut écrire une histoire simple (des évènements connus ou sur la vie dans une avenir lointain)
- Peut écrire une biographie imaginaire et des poèmes courts et simples sur les gens.
- Peut tenir un journal décrivant des activités, des personnes et des lieux en utilisant un vocabulaire concret et des expressions et des phrases simples avec des connecteurs simples tels que « et », « mais », « parce que »
- Peut raconter une histoire

Peut écrire des descriptions détaillées non complexes sur une gamme de sujets familiers dans le cadre de son domaine d'intérêt.

Grille d'évaluation				
	Expert (B1)	Autonome (A2+)	Apprenti (A2)	Débutant (A1)
Réalisation	J'ai fait la description complète de mon personnage (physique et mentale) sans aucun stéréotype de genre. /4	J'ai fait une description complète de mon personnage (physique et mentale), avec un stéréotype de genre. /3	J'ai fait une description de mon personnage mais celle n'est pas complète, il manque l'aspect physique ou mentale. /2	Je n'ai pas fait une description de personnage. /1
Grammaire	Les temps utilisés sont parfaitement cohérents, aucune faute n'a été commise pour la conjugaison. /4	Les temps utilisés sont cohérents, aucune faute n'a été commise pour la conjugaison. /3	Les temps utilisés ne sont pas tout à fait cohérents. Une erreur a été commise pour la conjugaison. /2	Les temps ne sont pas tout à fait cohérents. J'ai commis plus d'une erreur de conjugaison. /1
Vocabulaire	J'ai utilisé le vocabulaire vu lors de la séquence correctement, j'ai ajouté des mots de ma connaissance personnelle. /4	J'ai correctement utilisé le vocabulaire vu lors de la séquence. /3	J'ai utilisé le vocabulaire vu lors de la séquence mais j'ai fait entre une et trois erreurs. /2	J'ai utilisé le vocabulaire vu lors de la séquence mais j'ai fait plus de trois erreurs. /1
Compréhensibilité	Mes phrases sont parfaitement claires et compréhensibles /4	Mes phrases sont claires et compréhensibles /3	Mes phrases ne sont pas totalement compréhensibles /2	La plupart de mes phrases ne sont pas claires et compréhensibles /1
Soin.	Ma copie est parfaitement soignée et lisible /4	Ma copie est soignée et lisible /3	Ma copie est peu soignée et peu lisible. /2	Ma copie n'est absolument pas soignée et peu lisible. /1

Note :

/20

Compétences :

Ecrire et réagir à l'écrit

B1 : Peut écrire un énoncé simple et bref sur des sujets familiers ou déjà connus.

- **Carnet de bord:** 'At the end of each class, you must complete your **logbook**. It must include:
 - A short **physical description** of the character
 - **Adjectives** about the **character's mentality**
 - The **Stereotypes** you have noticed.
 - **Your opinion** about the character, you must justify.

Here is an example:

identity card



SHADOW AND BONE
Alina Starkov

Body:
Alina has dark eyes and brown hair.
Her skin is pale and she is small

Mind:
Independent
scared Strong
powerful

STEREOTYPES
Deeply in love
Love triangle
manipulated by a man

OPINION
I like Alina because she is a strong and independent woman. She has amazing powers, and most people admire her

ÉTAPES	OBJECTIFS TRAVAILLÉS	DOCUMENTS	ACTIVITÉS
1 1 séance	⇒ Description physique ⇒ Comparatif ⇒ Nouveaux et anciens contes de fées.	➡ Disney movie posters.	Anticipation : ➡ Chainspeaking Consigne: "What do you know about fairy tales?"

⇒ Stéréotypes de genre.



↳ minmap avec tout ce que les élèves disent pour tout regrouper. Activité pour voir ce que les élèves savent et le vocabulaire déjà acquis. Commencer par les contes de fées car c'est le début du genre fantastique.

➔Travaille sur les affiches des films Disney, Snow White, Cinderella, Moana et Frozen.
Disney met en scène beaucoup de femmes, les premières étant énormément stéréotypées.



Consigne: "Describe the characters" (EOC)

↳ La description physique ayant été vue en classe de cinquième, celle-ci ne devrait pas poser de problème. Le but ici est de faire dire le mot. Le but pour l'instant est de leur faire dire le plus d'adjectifs de description possible. Sans forcément s'en rendre compte les élèves vont faire ressortir des stéréotypes que ce soit féminin ou masculin.

➔Noter les mots clefs dit par les élèves au tableau pour ensuite faire une trace écrite claire.

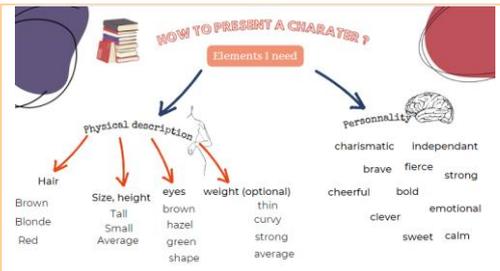
➔Mettre les affiches de Blanche Neige et Frozen l'une à côté de l'autre.

Consigne: "Compare the two women characters" (EOC)

↳ Le comparatif ayant été vu en classe de cinquième, cet exercice ne devrait pas poser de problème. Cependant, il est important de faire un rappel sur comment comparer deux personnages. Après ce rappel, les élèves peuvent faire leurs phrases plus facilement. Ici le but est de faire dire aux élèves les mots « stereotypes » ou « cliché » car Blanche Neige est représentée en dansant, dans une jolie robe et souriante, alors qu'Elza (Frozen) a un regard plus combatif, on peut voir une force se dégager.

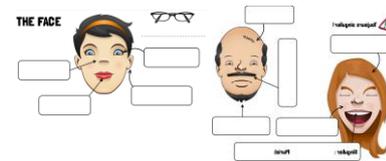
➔Noter les mots clefs dit par les élèves au tableau pour ensuite faire une trace écrite

			<p>claire.</p> <p>➔ Avant de leur faire prendre la trace écrite et pour s'assurer que le thème est compris. Leur demander, d'après eux, quel est le thème aborder dans cette séquence. Par la suite leur distribuer le dérouler de la séquence avec les dates d'évaluation prévues et les explications sur le Logbook. Quatre personnages féminins et deux masculins ayant été présentés, ils doivent en choisir deux pour commencer leur Logbook. Logbook qui se fait numériquement pour ne pas avoir de feuilles volantes ou perdues.</p>
<p>2</p> <p>1 séance</p>	<p>⇒ Stéréotypes de genre.</p> <p>⇒ Présenter un personnage</p> <p>⇒ vocabulaire description physique</p>	<p>➤ Images de personnages fictifs connus</p> <p>➤ 7 extraits de films différents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ° Snow White ° Cinderella ° The Hunger Games, Katniss ° Shadow and Bone, Alina / The Darkling / ° Harry Potter and the Philosopher Stone Harry / Hermione. 	<p>Anticipation:</p> <p>➔ In your opinion what is a stereotype? (EE) Affiché au tableau.</p> <p>↳ Pour rappeler la séance précédente et voir ce que les élèves ont compris. Sur leur cahier, ils écrivent une phrase ou deux sur leur définition d'un stéréotype. Pour ensuite la partager à l'oral avec la classe</p> <p>➔ L'enseignant note les mots clefs de chaque définition au tableau pour faire ressortir la définition globale donnée par la classe.</p> <p>➔ Activité : Stereotyped or not ?</p> <p>Consigne: "Is this character stereotyped or not?"</p> <p>↳ A l'aide d'un diaporama contenant des images de personnages fictifs connus, dans les Disney, les séries, ou des livres. Faire défiler les images, les élèves, à l'oral, doivent dire, si d'après eux, les personnages à l'écran sont stéréotypés ou non. Ils doivent justifier leur choix. Cela permet de développer leur esprit critique et d'exprimer leur opinion. Ce diaporama contiendra aussi des personnages masculins, pour leur faire comprendre que les femmes ne sont pas les seules victimes des stéréotypes.</p> <p>➔ Activité: How to present a character?</p>



D'après ce schéma les élèves doivent ressortir les éléments importants, les adjectifs sont rajoutés au fur et à mesure.

➔Revoir la description physique et les parties à décrire. Feuille d'exercice pour revoir les différentes parties d'exercice. Les élèves doivent le faire seul, avec leurs souvenir. Puis correction tous ensemble.



➔**Activité** : Describe this character. (EE)

La classe est séparée en 7 groupes de 4. Avant de lancer l'activité, l'enseignant donne un exemple. C'est-à-dire, qu'il décrit un personnage physiquement et mentalement. L'exemple est affiché au tableau tout au long de l'activité.

Les groupes sont séparés en îlots, sur chacun de ceux-ci est disposé un QR code. Les élèves le scan avec leur téléphone. Apparaîtra une courte video du personnage qu'ils doivent décrire.

Consigne: "Describe this character, and introduce him/her to the class so that they can guess who it is"



Exemple: QR code qui renvoie à une vidéo de Snow White qui chante dans la forêt.

➔ **Les vidéos sont courtes. Elles montrent bien les personnalités des personnages. Les élèves ont quinze**

			<p>minutes pour décrire leur personnage avant de le présenter devant la classe. Les personnages étant connus, les élèves peuvent essayer de les deviner. Cette activité a pour but de les entraîner à la tâche finale. Cette activité comprend des personnages masculins et des personnages féminins.</p> <p>Homework: In your opinion, explain in a few sentences why the character you have presented is stereotyped or not.</p>
<p>3</p> <p>1 séance</p>	<p>⇒ Stéréotypes de genre</p> <p>⇒ La description physique et morale</p> <p>⇒ Tropes</p>	<p>▶▶ Video: What is a "trope" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyPUs2hj3ds</p> <p>▶▶ Video tropes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The damsel in distress - The brainy brunette trope - The white savior trope - The bad boy - The femme fatale trope - The gay best friend trope - The model minority trope 	<p>Vérification du homework.</p> <p>▶→ Interroger quelques élèves à l'oral. Normalement certains avis quant à la stéréotypisation des personnages devrait diverger, surtout vis-à-vis des personnages d'Alina, Hermione, Katniss, et du Darkling. Ces avis divergeant commencent à leur montrer que certains personnages sont complexes et qu'il est compliqué d'identifier certains stéréotypes.</p> <p>Anticipation</p> <p>▶→ What's a trope. (CO)</p> <div data-bbox="981 1048 1318 1518" data-label="Form"> </div> <p>↳ Les Il est important de comprendre les tropes pour comprendre les stéréotypes que l'on peut retrouver à la télé ou dans les livres. Comme expliquer dans la vidéo, ces personnages que l'on a pris l'habitude de voir sont rentrés dans notre culture, et il est parfois compliqué de s'en débarrasser ou de changer l'idée que l'on s'en fait. La vidéo est courte, mais le débit de parole est rapide. C'est pourquoi la vidéo sera passée trois fois aux élèves, dont une fois avec des pauses pour faciliter la tâche et prévenir une meilleure compréhension.</p> <p>▶→ understand the most famous tropes. 7 groupes de 4 élèves. Un QR code est placé sur chaque îlots, celui-ci renvoie à une vidéo qui explique</p>

			<p>un trope précis. Exemple : The damsel in distress trope.</p>  <p>Les élèves scan le QR code devant eux avec leur téléphone. Ils doivent remplir leur worksheet sous forme de carte d'identité, pour relever seulement les informations importantes :</p> <p>Consigne: Name of the trope: Characteristics: Role in a movie/book: Public opinion :</p> <p>Les élèves tournent dans les îlots, pour voir tous les tropes et remplir toutes leurs cartes.</p> <p>↳ Les élèves ne regardent pas toute a vidéo, ce qui serait trop long. Mais de 00 - 1 :28. Ils passent environs 10 minutes sur chaque îlot, ce qui leur laisse le temps de regarder la vidéo autant de fois qu'ils veulent pour bien remplir leur carte. La correction se fera tous ensemble à l'oral.</p> <p>↳ Les Ce qui doit ressortir le plus est le fait que tous ces tropes existent et sont utilisés pour servir le personnage masculin.</p> <p>Homework : Apprendre la carte d'identité des tropes.</p>
<p>4 2 séances</p>	<p>⇒ Les genres littéraires</p> <p>⇒ Le genre</p> <p>⇒ La description physique et morale</p> <p>⇒ L'inclusion</p> <p>⇒ Présenter un personnage</p>	<p>▶▶ Books covers.</p> <p>▶▶ Fanarts</p> <p>"Still, she had learned to fend for herself, to suffer stoically, and when the need arose, to take a life without hesitation. The first lesson Kaz had taught her: Don't be afraid to get your hands bloody. The second lesson: Never put your faith in a Saint. Saints were for the weak and stupid, and she had never been</p>	<p>Vérification du homework: ▶→ Which trope is it? Diaporama contenant des personnages fictifs connu comme Snow White, Cinderella, Hermione, Drago Malfoy, etc... Qui correspondent aux tropes vus lors de la séance précédentes.</p> <p>↳ Les élèves doivent dire à quel trope ils pensent que ce personnage appartient en justifiant leur réponse. Cette anticipation sert à voir si les cartes ont été apprises et à leur donner des exemples concrets.</p> <p>Inclure à la fin du diaporama, un personnage qui ne fait partie d'aucun de</p>

either.

The money was good, better than good, but Inej could see the shadows gathering in the distance. She knew that sooner or later, the Dregs would come up against something they couldn't handle. It was the nature of the business they were in. She'd watched crews come and go, some disbanded, some destroyed, their members scattered to the winds, and she knew the Dregs were no different. But while she was with them, while she had the knives she'd been given and the training she'd acquired, she would keep her head down and do as she was told." (*Six of Crows*)

"I'd never wanted to be a Grisha. Never wanted to be different, to risk discovery, to risk being taken away from the only home I'd ever known. But now that I was here, I was desperate to prove myself. I wanted to be as good as they were. I wanted to be better. I was grateful to the Darkling for finding me. For giving me a place in the world. But I was also angry with him for the way he used me. For the way he made me feel as if I was nothing without him. I was done feeling helpless, done letting others control me.

I didn't want to be the girl who begged and pleaded, who let others make decisions for her. I wanted to be the girl who acted, who fought for what she wanted, who was strong and sure of herself. I wasn't there yet, but I was determined to get there." (*Shadow and Bone*)

"Hermione's hand was flying

ces tropes, ou qui ne rentre pas totalement dedans. Par exemple : Alina Starkov, Inej Ghafa ou Jesper Lahey.

↳ Ces trois personnages sont connus, la série Netflix ayant connue beaucoup de succès. Les élèves vont avoir du mal à les faire rentrer dans des catégories car ce sont des personnages complexes qui ne se définissent pas que par un aspect. C'est ainsi que nous allons introduire le côté personnage fort et puissant qui défie les stéréotypes et les tropes dans lesquels ils ont été longtemps enfermés.

Anticipation

➔Welcome in the fantastic genre!

Mettre des cover de livres pour jeunes adultes au tableau.



Consigne: "What type of document is this?"

"What are the titles of those books?"

"What is the literary genre?"

"In your opinion for who were they written?"

Expression orale en continue.

Les mots attendus sont : *fantasy/fantastic ; books ; young adults / adolescents*

Consigne: "Do you know who the main characters are?"

↳ Ces quatre livres ont tous été adaptés en films ou en série. Ils sont donc connus par la plupart des élèves, qui connaissent donc les noms des personnages principales de ces livres. On les amène vers le fait que les personnages féminins ici sont importants.

➔Let's meet the characters!

Projeter des cartes d'identité non complète, les élèves doivent faire des phrases avec les mots, ils peuvent en ajouter s'ils le souhaitent.



through the air again.
 'Please, sir, don't you remember?
 It's on page two hundred and
 twenty-six of Defensive Magical
 Theory...'
 But Snape cut her off.
 'That will do,' he snapped.
 'Today we will be mixing a
 potion that often comes up in
 O.W.L.s, the Draught of Peace. I
 want you all to read the recipe
 carefully, and then we will start.
 Keep an eye on the time, Potter.'
 Harry pulled his copy of One
 Thousand Magical Herbs and
 Fungi towards him and riffled
 through it looking for dittany,
 but he was much too distracted
 by Hermione's odd behaviour to
 read anything. Why was she
 pleading with Snape like that?
 And why on earth hadn't she
 answered Harry's questions?"
*(Harry Potter and the
 Philosopher Stone)*

"I don't think I'm the right
 person for this mission, but I
 have been chosen, and I will not
 fail. I feel like I've been
 preparing for this my whole life.
 Hunting, gathering, and taking
 care of my family in District 12
 has taught me survival skills that
 most people in the Capitol
 couldn't imagine. I know how to
 find water, shelter, and food in
 the wild. And if I have to kill to
 survive, I will.
 But I also know that this mission
 is bigger than me. It's about
 fighting against a government
 that wants to keep us all in line,
 that wants to keep us down. It's
 about standing up for what's
 right, even if it means putting
 my own life at risk. I'm not just
 fighting for myself anymore. I'm
 fighting for my family, my
 friends, and all the people in the

Faire cette étape avec Hermione,
 Alina, Katniss et Inej.

↳ Cela leur permet de s'entraîner sur la description physique des personnages. De plus la question d'évolution sera sous-entendue.

Consigne: "What do you notice from their description?"

↳ Cela Les élèves vont pouvoir relever le fait que les descriptions physiques ne sont souvent pas parfaites, Hermione est décrite avec des grandes dents, Alina comme pas très attirante, Inej est le premier modèle d'inclusion car elle vient des pays de l'Est et sa peau est basanée.

➔ New personalities

En groupe, les élèves vont travailler sur des extraits des livres Harry Potter, Hunger Games, Six of Crows et Shadow and Bone.

Ils devront répondre à un petit questionnaire concernant l'extrait qui leur ai attribué.

Who's speaking: narrator or the character?

Character traits:

Stereotypes:

Not stereotyped :

↳ Cela va permettre aux élèves de voir comment son construit des descriptions dans les romans. Les extraits peuvent paraître long, mais ils ne font que deux voir trois paragraphes. Le vocabulaire pouvant poser un problème sera expliqué en dessous du texte pour faciliter la compréhension.

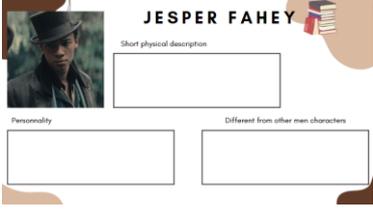
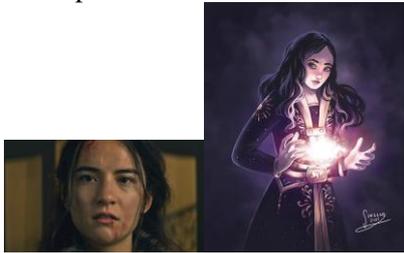
Ici les élèves vont essayer de relever la personnalité de leur personnage ainsi que les stéréotypes qu'ils peuvent trouver, et les nouveautés chez leur personnage qu'ils n'avaient pas rencontré avant.

Le travail se fait en groupe car c'est un travail qui reste complexe à faire seul, de ce fait les élèves peuvent s'entraider dans la compréhension du texte et favoriser un esprit d'équipe.

Les phrases mises en gras peuvent être un obstacle à la compréhension du texte car complexes avec du vocabulaire compliqué pour des troisième, c'est pourquoi ces phrases seront expliquées avant le début de l'activité pour ne pas les perturber. De plus ces phrases en disent beaucoup sur les personnages, c'est pourquoi elles

		<p>districts who suffer under the Capitol's rule. I don't know what's going to happen in the arena. I don't know if I'll make it out alive. But I do know that I won't give up. I won't stop fighting, even if it seems impossible. Because if there's one thing I've learned, it's that you have to keep fighting, even when things seem hopeless. You have to keep going, even when you feel like giving up. That's the only way to survive." (<i>The Hunger Games</i>)</p>	<p>doivent être souligner, et analyser plus en profondeur.</p> <p>➔Correction La correction se fera à l'oral et l'enseignant notera des mots clefs au tableau, qui serviront à faire la trace écrite. Cette dernière qui regroupera toutes les nouveautés concernant la représentation des femmes.</p> <p>Example: « <i>Nowadays women in books are described as strong, independent, and intelligent. They are not afraid to show their emotion, they can be afraid or emotional, but it does not mean they are weak. Some like Inej are murderer, it shows women can be stronger than men and are not afraid of using weapons.</i> »</p>
<p>5 2 séances</p>	<p>⇒ Les genres littéraires</p> <p>⇒ Le genre</p> <p>⇒ La description physique et morale</p> <p>⇒ L'inclusion</p> <p>⇒ Comparatif</p>	<p>➔ Fanarts / representation</p> <p>➔ Jesper Fahey video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpXZnu-ZHyw</p> <p>➔ Kaz Brekker video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juOkz4S6M7A</p>	<p>Anticipation</p> <p>➔ Rappel sur le comparatif <i>Hermione is more intelligent than Snow White</i> <i>Cinderella is prettier than Alina.</i></p> <p>Afficher ces exemples au tableau pour faire un rappel sur le comparatif. Plus une PRL pour que tous les élèves soient au clair avec cette notion.</p> <p>➔ Evolution in the representation of women</p> <p>Consigne: "Compare these characters" (EE)</p> <p>➔ Afficher au tableau des images des personnages déjà travaillées, comme Snow White, Cinderella, Alina et Inej. Les élèves doivent comparer ces quatre personnages féminins quant à leur physique et leur mentalité.</p> <p>☞ Cela va permettre aux élèves de s'entraîner à comparer des personnages. Le but est de les emmener vers le mot « evolution » car Cendrillon et Blanche Neige sont les premiers personnages de Disney, elles sont très stéréotypées, que ce soit au niveau du physique ou de la mentalité, alors qu'Alina et Inej qui sont des personnages de romans modernes, sont, moins stéréotypées, et Inej</p>

		<p>représente une minorité.</p> <p>Correction tous ensemble à l'oral, l'enseignant note les phrases des élèves pour que tout le monde ait les mêmes phrases correctes.</p> <p>↳ Naturellement les élèves auront comparé le nouveau contre l'ancien.</p> <p>Consigne: "What about Inej and Alina? Can you compare them?" (EOC)</p> <p>↳ Cela va permettre aux élèves de se rendre compte des différences qui peuvent exister entre deux personnages écrit par la même autrice.</p> <p>Consigne: "Now that we have compared all the characters, can you tell me what have changed, in women representation?"</p> <p>↳ On attend qu'ils disent que la représentation physique est un changement flagrant. Ainsi que la mentalité des héroïnes qui ne sont plus du tout passives mais active.</p> <p>➔What about men ?</p> <p>Consigne: "Do you remember how men used to be represented?" (EOC)</p> <p>↳ On fait appel à la mémoire des élèves qui doivent se souvenir des personnages masculins vu précédemment, c'est-à-dire : des hommes forts, qui utilisent la force brute sans trop réfléchir et qui sauve la femme en détresse. Pour introduire les hommes non stéréotypés.</p> <p>➔ Compréhension orale individuelle (Peut être réalisée en salle informatique, avec des Ipad si le collège en possède, ou avec les tablettes personnelles des élèves (département 70))</p> <p>Chacun de leur côté, les élèves vont regarder les vidéos de Kaz et Jesper.</p> <p>↳ On Le but n'est pas de se concentrer sur le physique même si la représentation physique des deux est importantes, Jesper est métissé, Kaz doit utiliser une canne pour se déplacer. Dans les vidéos on peut voir différents aspects de leur personnalité, comme leur intelligence, mais on peut voir aussi certaines émotions, comme la tristesse ou alors quelques faiblesses qu'ils peuvent laisser paraître, ce qui n'est pas habituel pour homme d'après notre société.</p>
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			<p>➔Correction tous ensemble, les élèves viennent écrire leur réponse au tableau.</p>  <p>Homework: Compare Jesper or Kaz to another fictional character.</p>
<p>6</p> <p>1 séance</p>	<p>⇒L'inclusion</p> <p>⇒Le vocabulaire de la description physique et mental</p>	<p>➔Image de la série Netflix Shadow and Bone, Alina Starkov</p> <p>➔Extrait Six of Crows, description de Nina</p> <p>'The girl was a grisha, he had no doubt of that. She wore a red kefta, but it was cut low on her collarbone, displaying the bronze pendant at her throat. Her long hair was twisted into a braid, the end of which brushed her hips. Kaz took in the lines of her body, the proud thrust of her breasts, her hips, the soft flare of her waist. She was tall and lithe, with curves that suggested a life spent not in workshops or factories, but dancing. There was a confidence in the way she held herself that spoke of experience beyond her years.'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Six of Crows, Chapter 5, 74)</i></p> <p>➔Image de la série Netflix Jesper et Wylan</p>	<p>Vérification du homework:</p> <p>➔Compare Jesper or Kaz to another fictional character. Interroger quelques élèves à l'orale.</p> <p>Anticipation:</p> <p>➔For you, what does "inclusion" means? (EOC)</p> <p>☞Une façon de voir ce que les élèves savent de l'inclusion et ce que ce mot signifie pour eux.</p> <p>Noter les mots importants dit par les élèves au tableau. Pour construire une définition commune.</p> <p>➔Inclusion in young adult fantasy literature.</p> <p>Projeter une photo d'Alina provenant de la serie et un fanart fait à partir de la description du livre.</p>  <p>Consigne: "What differences can you notice? Can you compare her ethnicity to one of the tropes we've seen before? In what is she different?" (EOC)</p> <p>Noter les éléments importants et les phrases dites par les élèves sur un word en arrière-plan pour construire la trace</p>

écrite.

Consigne: "Reading this description, how do you imagine Nina Zenik?"
Can you compare her to a trope we have seen before? In what is she different?"
(EOC)

Kaz took in the lines of her body, the proud thrust of her breasts, her hips, the soft flare of her waist. She was tall and lithe, with **curves** that suggested a life spent not in workshops or factories, but dancing.

Consigne: "Looking at those pictures, do you think the Netflix series respected the description of Nina?"



↳ Ici les avis des élèves peuvent diverger, ce n'est pas une question piège. Seulement une façon de leur faire exprimer leur avis sur le personnage et l'adaptation qu'en a faite Netflix.

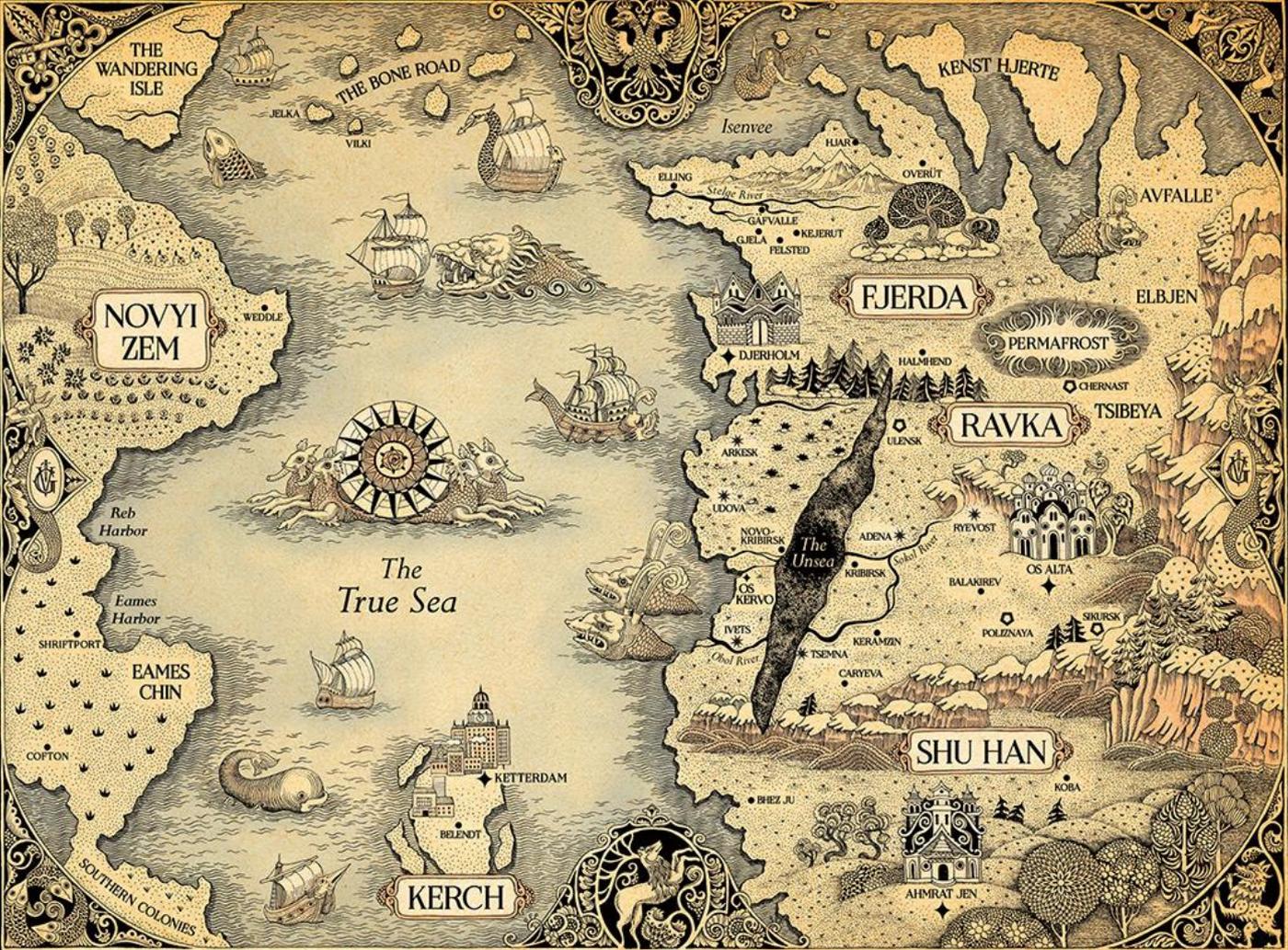
Consigne: "Looking at the character of Jesper, especially his sexuality, can you compare him to a trope? Is he different?"



↳ Cet exercice de description iconographique, sert à réutiliser les tropes vus dans les séances précédentes pour les comparer avec les personnages de Leigh Bardugo. Alina qui représente une minorité asiatique dans la série, n'est pas comme le trope « the perfect representing minority ». Et Nina représenté comme « curvy » ne rentre pas du tout dans le trope « the funny fat friend » car c'est un personnage qui peut être dangereux pour les autres, un personnage fort et

			<p>puissant. Quant a Jesper on pourrait le comparer au « Gay best friend trope » cependant il ne se définit pas par sa sexualité dans les livres ou la série.</p> <p>➔ Reprendre la trace écrite</p> <p>➔ Make your own character. (EE)</p> <p>Consigne: " Create your own character, it has to defy a famous trope, it can be a man, a woman, anything you want. Make a small description."</p> <p>⊃ Cette activité se fait seul et les prépare à leur tâche finale. Les élèves doivent créer un personnage inclusif, qui défie un trope que l'on a vu précédemment. Ce début de personnage pourra leur servir pour la tâche finale. La correction se fait individuellement, l'enseignant passe dans les rangs pour aider les élèves (qui ont le droit au dictionnaire) et les corriger.</p>
<p>7 2 séances</p>	<p>⇒ Créer un personnage</p> <p>⇒ Argumenter</p> <p>⇒ L'expression d'opinion</p>		<p>➔ Ces deux séances serviront pour la tâche finale.</p> <p>Les élèves auront une heure pour créer leur personnages (brouillon) qu'ils doivent rendre à la fin de leur à leur enseignant, pour éviter toutes modifications en dehors des cours.</p> <p>Le barème sera tout de suite donné aux élèves pour qu'ils n'oublient aucun aspect dans leur rédaction.</p> <p>➔ Lors de la deuxième heure.</p> <p>Les élèves auront trente minutes pour remettre leur description au propre. Puis pendant la demi-heure suivante, ils pourront donner vie à leur personnage, soit en le dessinant, soit avec un créateur de personnage sur internet.</p> <p>➔ Une fois corrigés, les descriptions seront reliées ensemble et déposées au CDI pour que tout le monde puissent les consulter.</p>

ANNEXES



Annex 1: the map of Ravka