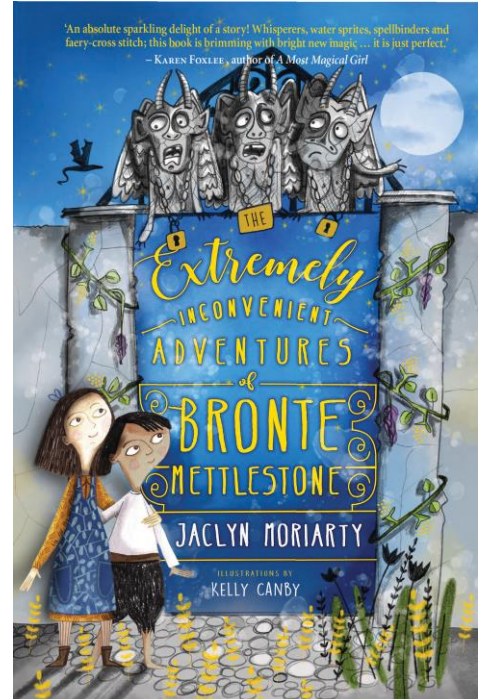


# The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone

By Jaclyn Moriarty

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Recommended for 10-14 year olds



## Summary

Bronte Mettlestone's parents ran away to have adventures when she was a baby, leaving her to be raised by her Aunt Isabelle and the Butler. She's had a perfectly pleasant childhood of afternoon teas and riding lessons – and no adventures, thank you very much.

But after hearing that her parents have been killed by pirates, Bronte discovers they have left extremely detailed (and bossy) instructions for her in their will. The instructions must be followed to the letter, or disaster will befall Bronte's home. She is to travel the kingdoms and empires, perfectly alone, delivering special gifts to her ten other aunts. There is a farmer aunt who owns an orange orchard and a veterinarian aunt who specialises in dragon care, a pair of aunts who captain a cruise ship together and a former rockstar aunt who is now the reigning monarch of a small kingdom.

So, armed with only her parents' instructions, a chest full of strange gifts and her own strong will, Bronte must journey forth to face dragons, Chief Detectives and pirates – and the gathering suspicion that there might be something more to her extremely inconvenient quest than meets the eye...



Combining aspects of the rollicking adventure, the old fashioned episodic tale, the quest story, and a very modern take on the fantasy novel (complete with a rockstar aunt who has her own kingdom), Moriarty's book breaks and remakes the rules.

*The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone* is written in deceptively simple first person, past tense, and features some of the most arresting opening lines you will see in a middle-grade fiction novel. In the space of just two sentences we learn of Bronte's parents' death at the hands of pirates, and her somewhat unusual response to becoming an orphan.

Artfully constructed, and fast moving, *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone's* text is also playful. For example, the narrator explains the various meanings of the word 'will' in amusing fashion, while also telling us quite a bit about the device that will drive the plot and herself.

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## In the author's own words

'Years ago, a reader sent me an email in which she mentioned she was drinking cloudberry tea. In my reply, I said that I'd never heard of cloudberry tea but that I thought it belonged in a book, and I promised to write a book featuring cloudberry tea one day.

'A long time later, I remembered my promise and sat down to write a story about a girl who had been left in the lobby of her aunt's apartment building as a baby, with nothing but a note and a canister of cloudberry tea. Now she is ten and she has just learned that her parents have been killed by pirates. They have left instructions for her to travel across the Kingdoms and Empires delivering treasure to each of her ten other aunts.

'Usually, I start a book by writing an elaborate plan, but I decided that I'd try writing this one without any plan at all. I would let Bronte, the main character, tell the story, and would wait and see what happened at each aunt's house.

'There are plenty of books about children with missing parents who go on journeys. I wanted to explore what it actually meant to Bronte, to have been abandoned by her parents as a baby—her attempts to be indifferent to them, her dreamy idolisation of them as she learns more about them, and her fury, confusion and sadness. But mostly I wanted this to be an adventure story in which Bronte, who has always been very grown-up, learns how to be a child and have fun.'

Jaclyn Moriarty

## Classroom discussion questions and activities

### Pre-reading

#### Cover

Before reading the story, examine the image on the front and back cover of the novel and write a short paragraph to explain your reaction to it. How does the cover make you feel, what genre of book do you expect, and what sort of things do you think might occur in the novel? After finishing the novel, go back to this paragraph to see whether your predictions of genre and events were correct.

#### Title

How do the words *Extremely Inconvenient* contrast with the word *Adventures* in the book's title? Why do you think the author chose this title? Does it make you want to read the story more or less?

### Novel study

#### Show Not Tell

The first two sentences of Chapter 1 are packed full of information about Bronte Mettlestone. Some is concrete and told to us directly, for instance the fact that Bronte is 10-years-old and newly orphaned, and some comes to us in a less direct manner and is inferred by the reader. For an example of the latter, ask yourself what Bronte's reaction to news of her parents' death reveals about her personality? Divide a page in your workbook into two columns, one with the word Told Directly, and the other with Shown. Read all of Chapter 1 and make a list of examples where the author has told us directly about Bronte and examples where the author has shown us Bronte's reactions, thoughts and ways of saying things that help us work out for ourselves the sort of person she is.



## Characters

'In a family, they explained to me, you get a sort of identity. "Imogen's the bossy sister, and Esther's quirky, and I'm the scatty one," Astrid explained, and her sisters nodded wisely (page 232).

- Given her unorthodox upbringing, what identity do you think Bronte assumes in her 'family' of Aunt Isabelle and The Butler? What clues in the first half of the book make you think this? How do you think her identity might change in the new family she belongs to by the end of the story, comprised of her parents, Alejandro, Aunt Isabelle, The Butler, and the rest of her extended family?
- Describe in one sentence the 'identity' of each of the aunts Bronte visits.
- What surprise 'identity' does Aunt Isabelle reveal at the end of the novel?
- Consider your own family and the identities assumed by all the people in it. Draw a family tree that outlines the identities of you and your family members.

## Building Suspense

Read the last line of Chapter 37 and all of Chapter 38. What 'tricks' does the author use to build tension and suspense about what is about to happen next? In your answer think about:

- When we are first told about the avalanche. (Look up the term foreshadowing.)
- Introducing the idea of Bronte's 'three bad mistakes'
- The use of capital letters and italics
- The effect of giving Bronte's cough a persona (Look up the term personification)

## Plotting clues

The novel is in many ways as much a mystery story as it is an adventure story.

Write down the two major discoveries in Bronte's adventure on a big sheet of paper:

1. that she is part-Whisperer, part-Spellbinder;
  2. that she is instrumental in confounding the Whispering King's plans.
- Starting at the end of the story, track backwards along the author's path to these two big discoveries to create a story map, marking each revelation along the way and the chapter in which they happen. For example, 'Patrick and Lida are alive – Chapter 104', and 'The Whispering King sent Bronte the first telegram – Chapter 103'.
  - Using the finished story map, talk as a class about the author's sense of timing throughout the story. Does each revelation come at exactly the right time? Were you able to piece together each revelation with ease? How neatly does everything fit together at the end of the story? Did you pick up on the author's clues earlier in the story?

## Changing voice

Sometimes Bronte speaks directly to us, the readers. One example of this is in Chapter 49, which begins with the sentence, 'Here might be a good time to tell you this.' Why do you think the author decided to use this technique at this precise point in the story? Can you find other examples of when this happens in the novel?

## Genre study

As a class, talk about the fantasy genre.

- What subgenres of fantasy are there? For example, high fantasy, urban fantasy, magic realism, comic fantasy, historical fantasy, dark fantasy, fairy tales, supernatural fantasy. In pairs or small groups, choose one subgenre to investigate further, considering its archetypes and prominent authors and their works. Gather your findings on a poster and present to the class.
- After completing the previous exercise, talk as a class about what subgenre (or subgenres) of fantasy *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone* could be classified as. What expectations might you have about the book if you consider it as part of this subgenre/s? How has the author fulfilled or subverted your expectations?
- Do you find generic classifications a particularly helpful way of thinking about stories? Why/why not?
- What is world-building? Why is it crucial to any story, but particularly to fantasy stories?

As you read, what are some characteristics of the Kingdoms and Empires that jump out at you? Some questions to consider:

- How do the various people in this world interact with each other?
- What things in this world are fantastical to the reader but commonplace to its inhabitants?
- How are things that seem ordinary to the reader given a fantastic flair in the story? (E.g. a cruise ship that looks like an 18th-century ship but has many features and activities you might find on a modern cruise ship.)
- What social structures do you observe in the story? (E.g. Does this seem to be a feudal society? An industrialised society? A patriarchal society? A matrilineal society?)

## Themes

1. 'He shook his head, "At night, when we sleep, we mostly dream a lot of nonsense, but sometimes we dream as we ought...This bottle, if placed by your bed while you sleep will direct you to the right dream."' (page 264) How do Bronte, Billy and Taylor's dreams prove to be the 'right dreams' in the novel?
2. Consider the motif of threads and stitching in the novel. What instances can you find of this motif in the story? For example, in Chapter 62, Bronte describes her nervousness as fear 'running fine lines up my spine, over my shoulders and right down into my stomach. There, the lines met one another and knotted up.' (page 324). Why do you think this motif is repeated throughout the story?
3. The Whispering Kingdom and Whisperers are widely misunderstood throughout most of the novel. Why do you think this is? How might the Majestic Spellbinding have contributed to this problem? Do you think it was right to hold the entire kingdom responsible for the Whispering King's actions?
4. Jaclyn Moriarty says of her novel, 'I wanted this to be an adventure story in which Bronte, who has always been very grown-up, learns how to be a child and have fun.' Do you agree that this is what happens in the story? Give examples from the story of how Bronte learns to be a child. What do you think about the very last line of the novel?

## Final class activities

### Mock trial

Conduct a mock trial for the Whispering King in your classroom. Assign students the roles of the King, Carabella-the-Great, the pirates, the King's defence lawyer, the prosecution, the Whisperers, Gustav Spectaculo and the Scorpion, as well as a judge and jury.

### Class debate

*The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone* is a story about different types of sadness and grief and the ways in which we cope with and overcome loss.



## About the author

Jaclyn Moriarty is well-known as the prize-winning, bestselling author of novels for young adults (and sometimes for slightly older adults). A former media and entertainment lawyer, Jaclyn's books include the Ashbury-Brookfield series and the Colours of Madeleine trilogy. The first two books in that trilogy were both awarded the NSW Premier's Literary Award and the Queensland Literary Award. Jaclyn grew up in Sydney, lived in the US, the UK and Canada, and now lives in Sydney again. *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone*, her most recent book, is the first she has written for younger readers.