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Children and Young Adult Book Review *High School* The Red Abbey Chronicles Maresi

Student Reviewer: Rebecca Posten
Educator Reviewer: Shannon Lindsey Cheek



Turtschaninoff, M. (2016). *The Red Abbey Chronicles Maresi*. New York City, NY: Amulet Books.

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Pages: 244

Student Review:

This book is important because it discusses the significance of education and how it can impact an individual's life. For example, Maresi arrives at her favorite place on the entire island: the library. She says: "It is the best part of the day. It makes everything worth it: living here, away from my family, far from our lush valley between the towering hills. Lying in bed night after night with a pining in my heart" (p. 26). She believes that access to books and the knowledge they hold is worth all of the sacrifices she makes to live within the Red Abbey. Without education, people deal not only with ignorance, but with poverty and poor living conditions.

*It is an important life
lesson to learn to
protect the ones you
love.
-Rebecca*

I would recommend this book to mature female readers. I do not see myself recommending it to males or even immature females. Much of the content could be really awkward for some people, especially males. People who enjoy reading books with strong female protagonists will enjoy this book, particularly if they enjoy mystical fantasy books. The goddesses associated with the Abbey appear in supernatural ways and Maresi learns to conquer her fear of the most terrifying goddess, The Crone.

I enjoyed the sisterhood element of the story. The characters rely on one another because they cannot be with their actual families. There is a great deal of emphasis on the importance of friendships. It is an important life lesson to learn to protect the ones you love. Unlike high school, the Abbey seems to create a sisterhood of loyalty and kindness. Despite enjoying the sisterhood concept, there were a few parts of the book I disliked. The first issue I had was the strange names of the characters. I felt that there were too many unusual names, and it was overwhelming at times. I know that unusual names are common in fantasy novels, but I felt like the characters were not developed enough to distinguish between all the names. I also did not always understand the feminine rituals, particularly the one in the ocean that seemed to center around "life blood" and made them all feel womanly. The final issue I had with the book was the simplistic plot. Based on the prologue and the first few chapters, I could mostly guess the sequence of events that followed. The events seem a little too predictable and the climax was slightly anticlimactic.

Rebecca Posten
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11th Grade

Educator Review:

Maresi is a young lady who lives on an island, Menos, which houses the Red Abbey. The Abbey is dedicated solely to the education of young women. The students are expected to attend classes, perform chores, and carry out other duties. Most of the women have been abused or come from poverty-stricken lands, though a few are there just to receive a superb education. A new girl named Jai arrives seeking shelter and shortly after her arrival, danger follows. Jai's misogynistic father and his crew of barbaric men arrive to collect her and take her back to her abusive home. The women of the island battle the men, and ultimately, the women prevail. The women are then able to return to their peaceful existence, focusing again on their educations, typically with plans to return to their homelands and improve the places they left behind. Maresi comes of age and develops

a newfound sense of confidence in herself. At the end of the book, she is preparing for her journey back to her family.

This book would likely appeal to young adult females, particularly erudite individuals who recognize the power of education and acquiring knowledge. There is a decent amount of focus on the significance of getting an education, but the young women are also learning about their own identities and capabilities beyond the realm of academics. The book is not likely to hold much appeal for a male audience due to the lack of positive male characters, the emphasis on the powers of sisterhood, and the seeking of feminine powers. One of the major factors that educators should consider before using this book is the aforementioned issues with teaching this type of text to a class with male students. This book is clearly designed for a female audience and is likely to have little appeal to male students within this particular age group.

As far as the content, teachers should know that this book discusses several topics that may require some disclaimers and prior discussion. Some of the potentially controversial topics include: ceremonial worship of the female body, explicit references to “monthly moon blood,” descriptions of pagan-style rituals involving supernatural entities, disturbing descriptions of violence towards women, examples of blatant misogyny, and a scene involving ritualistic sex.

One last concern is that this book is referred to as a feminist book multiple times on the jacket and description, yet feminism typically implies equality between men and women. Except for a few isolated instances, this book seems to vilify men.

Shannon Lindsey Cheek
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