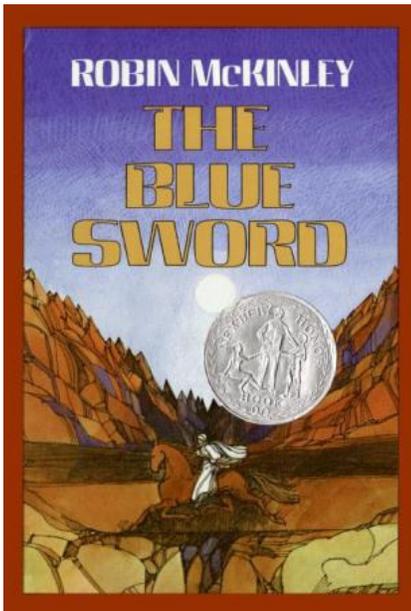


The Blue Sword

by Robin McKinley

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



About the Book

When Harry Crewe's father dies, she leaves her Homeland to travel east to Istan, the last outpost of the Homelander Empire. Harry is drawn to the bleak landscape of the northeast frontier and wishes she might cross the sands to climb the dark mountains where no Homelander has ever set foot. This is where the Free Hillfolk live. She hears stories that the Free Hillfolk possess strange powers -- that they work magic -- that it is because of this that they remain free of the Homelander sway.

When Corlath, the king of the Free Hillfolk, comes to Istan to ask that the Homelanders and the Hillfolk set their enmity aside to fight a common foe, the Homelanders are reluctant to trust his word. They are even more reluctant to believe his tales of the Northerners: that they are demonkind, not human.

Harry's destiny lies in the far mountains that she wishes to climb, and she rides to the battle with the North in the Hill-king's army. She

bears the Blue Sword Gonturan, the chiefest treasure of the Hill-king's house and the subject of many legends of magic and mystery.

She does not know the Hillfolk language, nor does she know why she has been chosen. But Corlath does. Harry is to be trained in the arts of war until she is a match for any of his men. Does she have the courage to accept her true fate?

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Book Details

The Blue Sword written by Robin McKinley
HarperCollins, 1982. ISBN 9780688009380. Ages 12 and up. 1030 Lexile.
<http://www.harpercollins.com/books/Blue-Sword-Robin-Mckinley>

The Blue Sword was a 1983 Newbery Honor Book.

The Hero and the Crown follows **The Blue Sword**. It is a prequel, but it was meant to be read second, according to the author. **The Hero and the Crown** is the story of Aerin, a wild child without a mother who then learns of her great power and the adventure it will bring her.



About the Author

Robin McKinley is an American writer who has won many awards in the US, including the Newbery Medal for **The Hero and the Crown**, a Newbery Honor for **The Blue Sword**, and the Mythopoeic Award for Adult Literature for **Sunshine**.

Robin McKinley was born in Warren, Ohio, and lives in Hampshire, England, with her husband, author Peter Dickinson, two hellhounds nicknamed Chaos and Darkness, an 1897 Steinway upright named Rhodanthe, and increasing numbers of rosebushes wedged into three tiny gardens. The view out her office window is her change-ringing bell tower and in the next village over is a paragon among horses whom Robin is so fortunate as to have permission to ride.

Her other books include the *New York Times* bestseller **Spindle's End**; two novel-length retellings of the fairy tale **Beauty and the Beast**, **Beauty** and **Rose Daughter**; and a retelling of the **Robin Hood** legend, **The Outlaws of Sherwood**.

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Author Resources:

Robin McKinley's official website

<http://www.robinmckinley.com/>

Robin McKinley's Blog

<http://robinmckinleysblog.com/>

Author page on HarperCollins website

<http://www.harpercollins.com/author/microsite/About.aspx?authorid=12469>

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Email Robin McKinley directly at: nuraddin@robinmckinley.com

Please note that the author resides in England.

Talk About It!

Topics to share when discussing **The Blue Sword** with young readers.

- How does your impression of Harry change from the beginning of the novel to the end?
- What sort of impression do the Hillfolk make on the town and on Harry during their first visit? Do these impressions change when we read about the encounter from Corlath's point of view?
- The author never really points out a specific time period that this story is set in, what time period would you give it, based on the surroundings and the weapons used.
- Also, the story seems to exist in a fantasy world. In what land or country would you imagine this story taking place?
- From the first three chapters, what are your general impressions of the Homeland vs Damar/Daria and their respective cultures?
- What is *kelar*? What sort of things does it do?
- What do you think of Harry Crewe? Why do you think she handles being kidnapped so well? What do you predict might happen to her next?
- What do you think of Harry's adoptive "parents", Lady Amelia and Sir Charles? How do you think they reacted to having such a different type of girl living with them? How do you think they reacted when they saw her again, after her transformation?
- Describe how the relationship between Corlath and Harry changes and grows.
- Corlath seems to be indecisive about his "gift" of *kelar*. Describe how that much power and influence might be a curse as well as a gift.
- Towards the end of the book, when the Hillfolk are about to face the great battle, Harry deliberately disobeys Corlath and goes off to fight her own, separate battle. How does this show how Harry has transformed through the novel? What does this do to their relationship?
- How does the relationship between Jack and Harry change from when they're together at the start of the story to when they're together at the end?

Learn and have fun!

Here are some ideas for extending the experience of reading **The Blue Sword**.

- Draw a map for the setting of **The Blue Sword**. Include the camp where Harry is stationed at the beginning, the camps of the Freefolk, Corlath's City, Luthe's mountain, and the valley where the battle is fought.
- The Northerners are described as not fully human. Draw a series of pictures based on the descriptions in the book of what Thurra and his army might look like.
- We hear the description of what happened when Harry brings the mountains down on the enemy from her perspective. Write a short story depicting the event from another character in another place's point of view. How would Corlath and his army perceive what happened? Would they hear it? Feel it? See anything? What would it have looked and felt like to the enemies? Pick any character that was not with Harry and her small army when it happened.
- Research the history of women in battle, using resources such as World Book Advanced, available to students through INFOhio (<http://www.infohio.org/>) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (<http://www.ohioweblibrary.org/>). Have things changed over time when it comes to women and their role in war? In what ways? Do you think Harry would have met any challenges if this story took place in America's history? What about other countries?
- Research the gods of ancient Greece using some of the resources listed above. Can you see any similarities between these gods from ages past and the ones created by Robin McKinley in **The Blue Sword**? Choose a few gods from Ancient Greece and try to find gods that may match them in the novel.
- Using resources like World Book Advanced and Oxford Reference, find out some more about myths and legends. Do the myths from ages past have any similarities to the stories told in **The Blue Sword**? What are some similarities or differences?



<http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>

Explore More!

Additional ideas and resources to use with *The Blue Sword*.

“Like” Robin McKinley on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Robin-McKinley/103113453062370>

Receive updates and talk to others who are fans of Robin McKinley.

Follow Robin McKinley on Twitter

[@robinmckinley](https://twitter.com/robinmckinley)

Robin McKinley LiveJournal Community

<http://mckinleyrocks.livejournal.com/>

The SurlaLune Fairy-Tale Site

<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/>

Personal website hosted by librarian Heidi Anne Heiner. Portal to fairy-tale and folklore studies, featuring forty-seven annotated fairy tales, with their histories, cross-cultural tales, and illustrations. Also available are over 1,500 tales on the ebooks page.

Greek Mythology

<http://www.greekmythology.com/>

Learn details about Greek gods and goddesses, myths, and heroes.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio and the Ohioana Library Association, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>.

This toolkit created June 2012, revised March 2013.