

# The Republic of Birds

## JESSICA MILLER

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 9+

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### CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

### SYNOPSIS

Olga Oblomova isn't special. Her sister is beautiful and an exquisite dancer and Olga often feels quite jealous of her. Olga's stepmother is a famous actress and her father is the Head Architect at the Sky Metro. Or at least he was. But he fell out of favour with Tsarina Yekaterina, and now the whole family has been exiled to the Imperial Centre for Avian Observation, right at the edge of the Tsardom. But Olga soon finds that in this new place, she has new strange feelings – feelings that shouldn't be talked about and powers that can't be discovered.

When her sister is captured and taken to the Republic of Birds, it is up to Olga to save her. Can she harness her new powers to save her sister, or will the challenge be too much, even for a girl as determined as Olga?

*The Republic of Birds* is a story of courage and of sisterly love, and of discovering what matters most in life.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Miller grew up in Brisbane and now lives in Berlin. Her debut novel, *Elizabeth & Zenobia*, was shortlisted for the Text Prize and the Readings Children's Book Prize. It was commended as a CBCA Notable Book and named one of *Kirkus Reviews'* Best Middle Grade Books for 2017.

### BEFORE READING

1. What is cartography? Use a dictionary or the internet to discover the word's meaning and where it comes from. How do you think the first maps were made?
2. Draw a map of one of your favourite places – it could be your school, your house, your neighbourhood, etc. What were the most important things to include and why?

### WHILE READING

1. What does exile mean? Why has the Oblomov family been exiled?
2. On page 5, Olga says, 'Father clears his throat and smooths his moustache. A speech is coming. I have spent nearly thirteen years trying to avoid Father's speeches. I know the signs.' How does Olga feel about her father's speeches? What type of speeches are they? What words in the passage suggest these things to you?
3. What does Olga think of her stepmother, Anastasia? Use an example from the novel in your response.
4. Before they were exiled, what sort of life did the Oblomovs live?
5. While the family wait to be collected by Krupnik (on pages 23 – 25), Olga watches her father and she thinks, 'Something about him seems smaller.'

What does she mean by this? How can a person appear smaller?

6. Unlike the others, Olga is not terrified of the birds that come to the Avian Observation Centre. What does she feel about them? Why do you think this is?
7. What does Olga discover about maps while she is at the Centre? And why must she keep this a secret?
8. On page 119, Olga watches Anastasia after the birds take Mira. What does she feel for her stepmother in this moment?
9. The firebird's egg is described on pages 129 and 130. Does it look the way you expected? Is there anything surprising about it?
10. In Chapter 12, Olga meets Fedor and Big Fedor. Fedor has a vast vocabulary. Look up the definitions of the following words he uses and use them in a sentence:
  - Infiltrator
  - Interloper
  - Prowler
  - Blanched
  - Discombobulated
  - Perplexity
  - Perspicacious
  - Serendipitous
  - Prodigious
  - Hospitable
11. Why would no one in Tsaretsvo dare to wear feathers?
12. What is the dilemma Olga faces when Ptashka demands the firebird's egg in return for Mira.
13. Olga knows she risks losing her magic if she tries to use it to get the firebird's egg. Why does she take the risk?
14. On page 282, Olga has almost lost all of her magic, but she manages to conjure up an extraordinary amount of magic. What is it that gives her this extra strength at this important moment?

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

1. Draw a character map. Along the lines that connect the characters, label their relationship (sister, father, teacher, etc.) Under each character's name, write three adjectives to describe them.
2. Olga and Mira's father makes some unfortunate choices at the beginning of the novel. What are these choices and what is it about his personality that causes him to make these choices?
3. Olga thinks Mira is the favoured daughter. Do you think Mira considers herself better than Olga? Use an example from the novel in your response.
4. Describe Olga's character. What are her weaknesses and her strengths? What do you think of her jealousy of Mira? Does she overcome her jealousy? What other feelings does she have for Mira?

### STYLE & STRUCTURE

1. The school history book is called *Glorious Victories: An Impartial Account of the War in the Skies*. What do you think the author is trying to suggest about Tsaretsvo's leaders by using this title?
2. On page 85, a telegram is sent to the Oblomovs. What is a telegram? How is the word 'STOP' used in the telegram? The font used for the content of the telegram is different from the rest of the novel. What effect does this have?
3. *The Republic of Birds'* author, Jessica Miller, is writing in present tense from a first-person narrative point of view. How does this shape how we see the events of the novel?

### THEMES

#### Rivalry

1. Olga feels very jealous of Mira's skills and the attention she receives. Do you think that Mira is also jealous of Olga? Why or why not?
2. Before the War of the Skies, the Republic of Birds and Tsaretsvo lived in harmony. What caused the conflict?

#### Difference

1. What happens to girls who are too different in Tsaretsvo? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Why?
2. Olga is not keen to be a Spring Blossom. Why does she feel that she doesn't fit in Stolitsa? What advice does Varvara give her (p 304). Do you agree with this advice?

#### Self-belief

1. Olga is a new yaga, so her powers are not refined yet. However, we see her performing some amazing magic. How is she able to do this?
2. At the start of the novel, Olga thinks she is talentless and that Mira is the special one in the family. How do these negative emotions affect their relationship?
3. Cartographers need to have substantial self-belief to be successful. Do you think Olga will become a successful cartographer? Why?

### SYMBOLS

1. The firebird's egg is a symbol of power. Why did the Imperial Coven feel it was so important to hide it away?
2. Maps symbolise many things to Olga and the other characters in the novel. Describe their value to Olga and what they symbolise in the novel.

- Chapter 25 is titled 'Mira Dances Again'. What does dancing symbolise in this book and how does it change from the beginning to the end?

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## RESPONDING

- Write a journal entry as Mira during her period of captivity. How do you think she would be feeling? What might she be thinking about?
- Write a book review for *The Republic of Birds*. Be sure to include reasons you think young people will enjoy reading this book and how they might relate to the themes or characters.
- Draw a map of Stolitsa. Include the Sky Metro, the Instructionary Institute for Girls, the Imperial Society for Cartography, the Floating Birch Forest Tea Room and other landmarks.
- Using [Storyboarder](#), choose a scene from the novel and create a storyboard for that scene using the visual detail in the book to make it come to life.
- Olga describes that in the city there is an Instructionary Institute for Girls and an Instructionary Institute for Boys and that at each place the students learn different topics. Do you think that boys and girls should have different schooling and learn different things? Write a paragraph response that follows the following format:
  - Topic sentence (what point do you want to make?)
  - Three reasons why the point you are making is important.
  - Evidence to support your reasons why.
  - A sentence that summarises your main point.