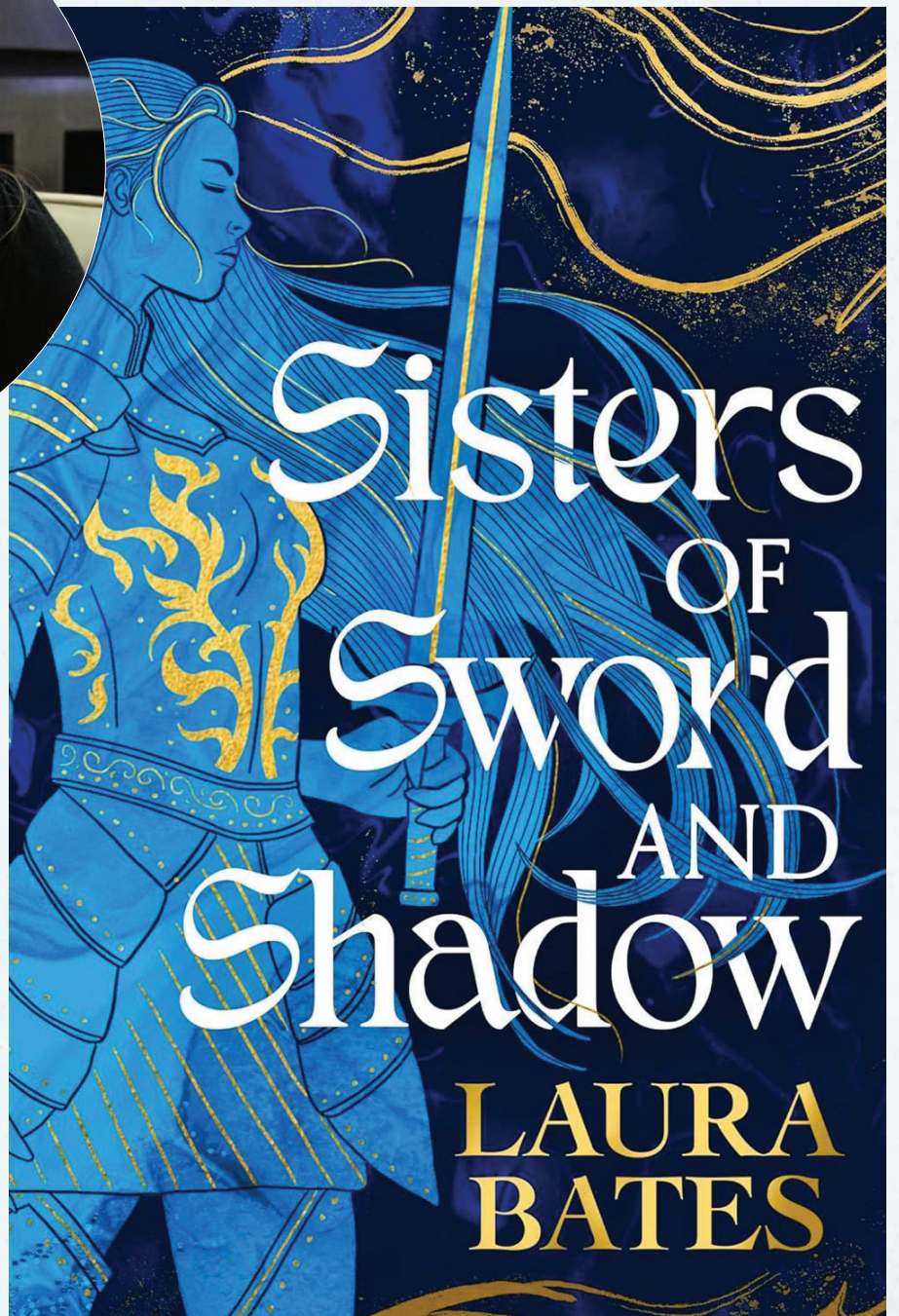


Sisters of Sword and Shadow
by Laura Bates

TEACHING RESOURCES





LESSON 1

Sexism and Gender Equality

WATCH

48 Things Women Hear In A Lifetime (That Men Just Don't)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yMFw_vWboE&ab_channel=HuffPost

DISCUSS

- What is sexism?
- Have you or someone you know ever experienced sexism? What happened and how did it make you feel?

TASK

Visit the 'Everyday Sexism Project' website (<https://everydaysexism.com>). The Everyday Sexism Project exists to catalogue instances of sexism experienced on a day-to-day basis. Read some of the entries to the website.

In pairs, discuss these questions:

- With regards to gender equality, in what ways might life one hundred years ago be different to life in the present? Do you think women in this time faced sexism and gender inequality?
- Now, imagine being transported one hundred years into the future to a world where gender inequality and sexism no longer exist. How might life in this future be different to now?

What did it matter if they dressed up and played pretend with their swords and horses, if the moment she slipped back into a pretty dress a man could treat her as his plaything, shake her like a rag and toss her away?

Sisters of Sword and Shadow, p.237–8

READ p.194–6 from 'The man grunted...' to '...if he had been like these brutes, or worse?' and p.235–8 from 'He moved closer...' to 'For so long.'

TASK

Key term:

- **Misogyny:** dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.

Visit the Womankind Worldwide website (www.womankind.org.uk/misogyny-runs-deep-how-to-stand-up-to-sexist-language) and read through the advice given on how to stand up to sexist language.

Re-write a scene from the book where Cass uses some of this advice to stand up to the sexism and misogyny she experiences at the hands of male characters.



LESSON 2

Changing the Narrative

OPENING THOUGHTS

- How are females expected to look and behave? How are males expected to look and behave? Make a list for each.
- Looking at your lists, what do you notice about the differences between expectations for men and women?

'What difference is there between our fellowships, if you forget what you have been told about who in our world has the power to make decisions and announce decrees?'

Cass felt dizzy. None of it made any sense. There were rules, and traditions and things had been this way for centuries. And yet...

Sisters of Sword and Shadow, p.39

WATCH

Girls toys vs boy toys: The Experiment – BBC Stories.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWu44AqF0il&ab_channel=BBCStories

What does this video reveal about our subconscious ideas about traditionally male and traditionally female interests?

The clash of swords rang out as small groups of young women met in noisy combat. Cass gasped as one of them rolled backwards across her toes before leaping back to her feet with a triumphant shout, catching up her shield and re-entering the fray.

Sisters of Sword and Shadow, p.33

READ p.32–34 from 'Girls in short tunics and hose...' to '...inside the stronghold of the Sisters of Sword and Shadow.'

TASK

Key terms:

- **Juxtaposition:** the fact of two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect.
- **Subvert:** undermine the power and authority of an established system or institution.

Highlight any verbs/adjectives/adverbs that you would associate with masculinity in one colour; and any you would associate with femininity in another colour.

DISCUSS How does Bates use **juxtaposition** in this section of the book to **subvert** traditional gender roles?

TASK

1. Read this newspaper article about the barriers faced by some female politicians.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/07/barriers-female-politicians-women-beto-orourke>

2. Create a newspaper story in which you 'flip the script' and look at how absurd it would seem if we treated male politicians the way we treat female ones.

LESSON 3

Family and Belonging: Lost and Found



OPENING THOUGHTS

Make a list of any books/films/tv/games where the main characters find belonging with a family who they are not related to. Choose one from your list and answer the following questions:

- Does the character have any blood-related family members and what is their relationship like with them?
- What are the circumstances that lead the character to their new family group?
- How does the character and their life change after becoming part of this group?

'You did not come home.' There was resentment and anger in her sister's voice, but above all there was such hurt that hot needles sprang to Cass's eyes. 'You were not prevented, and yet you chose not to...' – Sisters of Sword and Shadow, p.299

READ p.297–300 from 'The door creaked open...' to 'like water bursting through a dam.'

TASK

In this section of the book, Cass realises how hurt Mary was by Cass's disappearance and lack of communication.

What reasons do you think Cass has for not contacting Mary or her parents to let them know she is safe? List them.

In your opinion, did Cass do the right thing by leaving her family entirely behind? Write a persuasive paragraph in which you argue your point of view. You should use evidence from the text to back up your ideas.

Read your paragraph to a partner. Do they disagree or agree with your opinion? Are you able to persuade them to consider your point of view?

Indeed, she was coming to feel that Lily was almost as much of a sister to her as Mary: more so, in many ways. When she thought about the choice she had made to ride away from the possibility of a loveless, unchosen match, and contrasted the shadow future with the close, loving kinship she had found here, with Lily and the others, she knew with absolute certainty that she had made the right choice...' – Sisters of Sword and Shadow, p.171

READ p.196–199 from 'Settle an argument for us' to '...smiling as I walk away with their plates.'

DISCUSS The term '**found family**' refers to a trope in literature in which a group of people intentionally chose to love and support each other, regardless of marriage or blood relationship. What might be some of the benefits of having a 'found family'?

In *Sisters of Sword and Shadow*, who are Cass's 'found family' and in what ways does she feel a sense of belonging and safety among this group?

TASK

Imagine you are Cass and you have just found the Sisters of Sword and Shadow. **Either:**

- Write a letter to Mary in which you explain why you left home. Consider ideas about sexism and gender inequality. How might your life be different if you had not joined Sigrid that day in the forest? **or**
- Write a diary entry in which you describe your feelings about life in the sisterhood. What are the positives and negatives? In what ways have you experienced feelings of freedom and power?