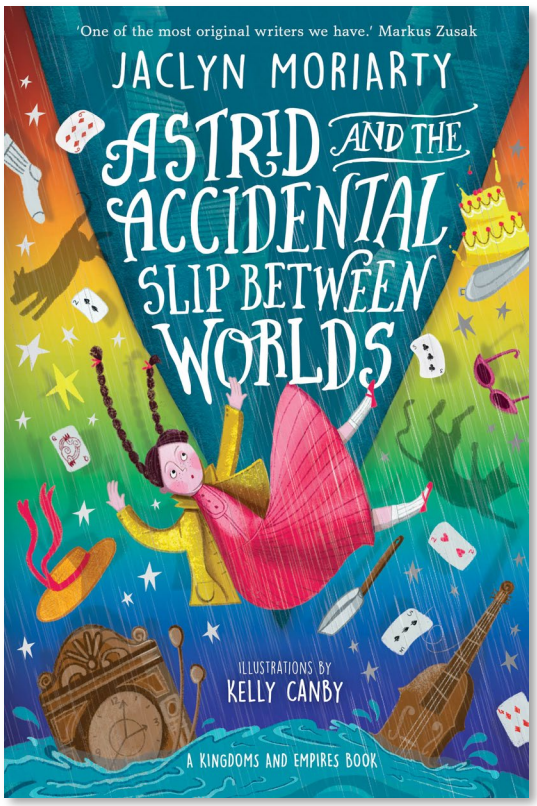

ASTRID AND THE ACCIDENTAL SLIP BETWEEN WORLDS

Written by JACLYN MORIARTY

RECOMMENDED FOR: For Years 5 to 8 (UPPER PRIMARY and LOWER SECONDARY)

GENRE: Middle Fiction

THEMES: Magic, family, identity, siblings, quests, extended families, adventure, danger

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SYNOPSIS

The sixth stand-alone book in Jaclyn Moriarty's award-winning and bestselling series.

This is the story of ten-year-old Astrid, who lives in the Kingdoms and Empires, but finds herself accidentally trapped in our world. As the youngest of three sisters, Astrid is accustomed to her older sisters making decisions and sorting out problems. She's an observer, funny, likes sports, is often absent-minded, and has a special talent: she can read the truth in people's faces. Partly because of this skill, she's the Kingdoms and Empires Junior Poker Champion. Astrid knows that she's not supposed to stay in our world for more than a couple of weeks—that it could endanger her—but she's unsure of what the danger is exactly.

Meanwhile, in Astrid's world, her older sister Esther is on a school camping trip. She and her camp group are led by a local Faery guide to a campsite—and promptly abandoned. The group consists of Esther, who is a Rain Weaver, along with a Faery, a Whisperer, a girl who grew up in the ocean, and a pair of extremely irritating twins. Strange objects begin falling from the sky into the campsite, Shadow Magic begins to infiltrate, the food and water are running out—and the group discover they are trapped and cannot leave.

Astrid's other older sister, Imogen, is also distracted. She's attending the Elven Games, along with the sisters' friend Oscar and their cousin, Bronte Mettlestone—and Bronte is on a special mission. Somewhere in the Kingdoms and Empires, a True Mage has turned wicked and shadowy. It's a race against time to locate the True Mage and stop their evil plan—before all the worlds are forever changed, and Astrid and Esther are lost forever.

IN THE AUTHOR'S OWN WORDS

'Each of the books in the Kingdoms and Empires series is a stand-alone story focusing on one character in particular. Previous books in the series have starred Astrid's two older sisters, Imogen and Esther, so I knew that it was Astrid's turn.

'As one of six kids myself, I am very big on fairness between siblings.

'I wanted Astrid to be separated from her sisters, family—even her world—so that she could find out who she truly is, and what she could achieve. In Oscar's story, a boy from our world ends up in the Kingdoms and Empires. So I decided that Astrid should do the reverse, and find herself trapped and alone in our world.

'While I was on a beach holiday a few years ago, I found myself chatting to a mother and a young girl in the waves. The girl was a big reader, apparently, and also a basketball player. She seemed like a very cool kid. Her name was Echo, which I thought was a very cool name. I asked if I could please use her name in a book? And she seemed delighted.

'Echo, the girl in the ocean, reminded me of an old friend who is similarly cool, and is part Fijian. By the time I got out of the water, Echo had become a character: she has one Fijian parent, one Irish parent, and several older siblings. She lives in Sydney, Australia, she discovers Astrid stranded and alone, and she takes her in. I knew it would be scary and overwhelming for Astrid to be alone in our world, so I wanted her to have a generous, loving family to take care of her.

'Again, I was thinking of my own big family, and the chaos, warmth and variety of characters. Friends who visited us, who came from small or quiet families, were often in awe of/terrified by our chaos.

'In my twenties, I went to live and study in the US, and there was something both terrifying and magnificent about being alone in a completely other world. Of course, I spoke the language and had plenty of knowledge about America from TV and movies, so it was not anything like as isolating or frightening as it must be for many other people who are forced to move around the world. Later, living in Montreal, Canada, I experienced being surrounded by a language I didn't understand—although again, there were plenty of English speakers, and English-speaking Canada was only a short

distance away. It was a time when I sometimes wondered exactly who I was, and sometimes felt like I was understanding myself in a whole new way.

'I was also inspired by a letter from an eleven-year-old reader of the other Kingdoms and Empires books, Theo. Theo lives in Oregon and has written a few times—he's also created and designed a card game based on the series. He pointed out, in one of his letters, that if there are shadow thread mines there must also be bright thread mines, and these could be used to strengthen bright magic. Also, Theo (and other readers) asked me whether, if Shadow Mages can turn good, True Mages might become evil.'

Jaclyn Moriarty

AUTHOR BACKGROUND



Credit: Wendy McDougall

Jaclyn Moriarty is the internationally bestselling author of novels for children, young adults and sometimes slightly older adults, including the (lengthily titled) books in the Kingdoms and Empires series: *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone*, *The Slightly Alarming Tale of the Whispering Wars*, *The Stolen Prince of Cloudburst*, *The Astonishing Chronicles of Oscar from Elsewhere*, and *The Impossible Secret of Lillian Velvet*. Her latest book in the series is *Astrid and the Accidental Slip Between Worlds*, and her latest novel for adults is *Time Travel for Beginners*. Jaclyn's books have been translated into several languages, won the NSW Premier's Literary Award, the Queensland Literary Award, the Aurealis Award and named as CBCA Honour Book and Boston Globe–Horn Book Honor Book. They have also been shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, the Nebula Prize and the Russell Prize for Humour Writing for Young People. A former media and entertainment lawyer, Jaclyn grew up in Sydney, lived in the US, UK and Canada, and now lives in Sydney again. She is very fond of blueberries, chocolate and ice skating. www.jaclynmoriarty.com

SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION

Cover

- Does the cover feel more mysterious, adventurous, whimsical or suspenseful? What makes you feel that way, and how does that mood influence your interest in the story?
    - *Title:* The title tells us that there is more than one world. Can you see anything on the cover that might suggest something about these worlds? Turn the book over and look closely to see if you can discover the location of one of the worlds.
    - *Illustration*: Astrid is surrounded by unusual objects and appears to be falling. How does her facial expression influence the way you interpret this scene and what expectations does it set for the story ahead?
    - *Colours*: Where does your eye go first when you look at the cover? Why do you think the illustrator made Astrid's dress and shoes bright red, and what might this choice suggest about the challenges she will face?

Prologue

- If a prologue is designed to grab a reader's attention and make them want to keep reading: has Jaclyn Moriarty sparked a sense of curiosity in you with *Urgent For Immediate Dispatch*? In your answer consider:
    - The relatively mundane format of a business email versus mentions of True Mages, shadow magic, Elves, Faeries and a hairy beetle.
    - The visual layout, including headings in bold, underlining, a list, italics, strike-throughs.
    - The effect when words and phrases such as *urgent*, *immediate dispatch*, *private and confidential*, *peril* and *trust nobody* are in the same document as *really quite serious*, *I mean, come on*, '*Oh my*' and '*Hmm, fair point*'.
    - **Narrative Techniques**
    - Throughout the novel, Jaclyn Moriarty uses many different writing styles, including business reports, letters, diary and multi-point-of-view journal entries, meeting minutes and traditional narrative, to name just a few. Why do you think she chose to tell the story in so many different ways? How do these stylistic changes affect your understanding of the characters, the worlds and your overall reading experience?
    - Although *Astrid and the Accidental Slip Between Worlds* deals with serious themes, it is also a very funny novel. How does Jaclyn Moriarty use humour to help readers connect with the characters and remain engaged in the story, even during difficult moments?

Themes

- **The Outsider**: Astrid, Esther, Vibrant-May, Tatty, Hetty, Autumn and Pelagia all face situations where they are separated from the people, places or routines they know best. How does each character respond to the challenges of being a stranger in an unfamiliar world, and what does the novel suggest we need in order to find courage, friendship and belonging?
- **Grief**: Astrid has a significant impact on Echo's family. How does she help family members cope with their grief, and what does this suggest about the role of friendship and connection during difficult times?
- **Good v Evil**: 'Remember when we talked about good and evil?' Clopper said. 'By the lake? It was important to me that I might…still be good. I never intended anybody to get hurt. I

feel dreadful.' (page 407) How do Clopper's words and Reggie's response challenge the traditional fantasy idea that characters are either heroes or villains? What does Jaclyn Moriarty suggest about good, evil and second chances?

Characters

- Trace the development of Astrid, Esther, Vibrant-May, Tatty, Hetty, Autumn and Pelagia across the novel. For each character, identify:
    - What the character is like at the **beginning** of the story (personality traits, attitudes, strengths and weaknesses).
    - What the character is like by the **end** of the story.
    - The key events, challenges or relationships that contributed to their growth.
    - Specific evidence from the text that demonstrates this change.
- Compare the characters and consider:
    - Which character undergoes the most significant transformation?
    - Which character changes the least?
    - Are there any common lessons that multiple characters learn throughout the novel?

Genre

- Fantasy novels often feature clear heroes and villains, magical worlds and epic quests. How does *Astrid and the Accidental Slip Between Worlds* both follow and challenge these genre conventions, and what effect does this have on the reader?

Discussion

- Astrid can tell exactly how people are feeling just by looking at them. Do you think this would make life easier or harder? What might be the advantages of always knowing the truth, and what challenges could come with never being able to avoid other people's feelings?

Assessment

- Write a *microstory* about a time when you have felt like an outsider. In the story you might consider if you met someone who made you feel welcome (or unwelcome) and the effect that they had on you and how you felt about yourself.
- Draw a map of your own imaginary world, adding geographical features (lakes, rivers, mountains, volcanoes, cave systems), and create strange beasts or creatures who might live in the world. As a class, brainstorm tourist attractions, celebrities and dangers in this world.