

a background thread while the small events of everyday life took up everyone's attention, much as we do when read in the paper about conflicts around the world, then get up and go to work etc. In the same way, I wanted to show Cam as a person, just a person like anyone, not possessed of any extraordinary qualities, important to some people, not at all important to others.

2. How did the book's format and style affect your writing process? Do you have any tips or advice for aspiring writers?

The book's structure actually gave me a lot of freedom. I'm terrible with plot and struggle with planning. Writing it as I did enabled me to work with bites, if you like, chunks which were manageable, given that the narrative arc I was working along was Cam's emotional arc.

Everyone around me says to plan. I'm struggling as much with planning with my second novel as with my first. But everyone I know who writes or teaches writing plans. I think it's important to be able to take criticism, but also to be able to have enough perspective on your work to know when to make suggested changes and when to stick to your guns. And I guess the most important thing is to write. To make time to write and to be consistent with that time, whatever it is. And what you first put down on paper may seem like nothing, but that's what will eventually become a finished piece of writing.

3. What do you feel you've achieved with the unique dialect?

I wanted to create a flavor and a social hierarchy that didn't explain, but showed itself through how people spoke. I didn't want an unintelligible dialect or one that required too much work to read. Overall I think it takes the reader to another place, and that's the most important thing.

4. Did you base either the Uplanders or the Downlanders on any culture in particular?

Ha, ha. I did. Everyone thinks *The Returning* is 'medieval'. With the Downlanders I was actually thinking of the deeply rural parts of England in the latter part of the 19th century, but medieval is fine. The main thing is that it was a semi-feudal, rural society, with the narrow views that isolation brings. The Uplanders are clearly drawn from Japan.

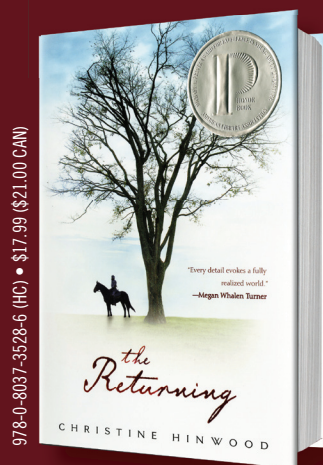
5. If you had to pick one favorite character in the book, who would it be and why?

I do rather love Cam. He's troubled and attractive - even to me! But my favorite is Graceful. I like her because she is plain and beloved and good and flawed. That's how I meant her to be anyway! I wanted her not to have to be beautiful to be successful, loved and happy.

6. What was it like finding out that you'd won a Printz Honor for *The Returning*?

It was the biggest buzz of my life! I danced when I found out and I danced when I got to work and told everyone. I smiled like the Cheshire Cat for weeks!

2012 Michael L. Printz Honor



PRAISE FOR THE RETURNING

Best Fiction for Young Adults Selection

★ "A riveting examination of war and its effects set in a nonmagical alternative past. . . Grounding the story are the closely observed characters and their world—vivid, flawed, and immensely appealing."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"Reads like a foreign tongue in which one is magically fluent."

—*The Horn Book*

"Done with such grace, searing honesty and subtle tragedy"

—*The Bulletin*



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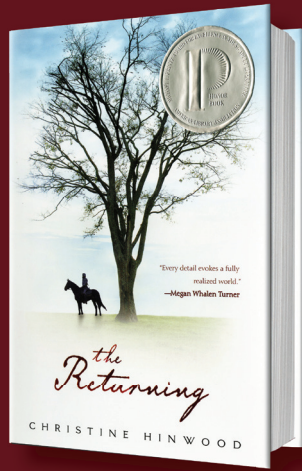
Correlates to Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (6-12)

DISCUSSION GUIDE



CHRISTINE HINWOOD

ABOUT THE BOOK



Cam Attling is the sole returning soldier to the small town of Kayforl after a war between the Downlanders and the Uplanders. He returns having lost both a limb and his sense of self. After his betrothal to Grace Fenister is called off by Graceful's ambitious father who has higher plans for his family's future, Cam leaves home in search of a new beginning. His pursuit takes him to the castle of Lord Ryyu, whose son, Gyaar Ryyu, spared Cam's life in the war. It is here that Cam begins a new identity and forges new relationships. Intertwined with Cam's story, however, are the stories of multiple families who, like Cam, have been affected by the

war. Gyaar Ryyu struggles with the loss of his brother and meeting his parents' expectations; Diido hardened by the war, must learn to love and trust; Graceful Fenister, once betrothed to Cam Attling, marries into a world she could never have possibly imagined; and Pin, Cam's younger sister, aches at the loss of her older brother and never forgoes hope her brother will return. Ultimately, this is a multi-layered epic about a faraway time and place in which an entire population must re-envision their lives in the aftermath of war.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Christine Hinwood has always written. Born in England, Hinwood spent most of her childhood in Australia, but she has lived also in England and America. As a child she had a creative imagination and would make up stories in her head that she would later discuss with people. She studied Professional Writing and Editing at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Melbourne, Australia. A 2012 Printz Honor book, *The Returning* was first published in 2009 in Australia under the title *Bloodflower*. *The Returning* is Hinwood's debut novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The story takes place at the end of a war. Describe the setting of the story, the purpose of the war, and the relationship between the Uplanders and the Downlanders.
- Cam has recently returned from war. How has the war affected him? How has his relationship with his family changed since his return and why? How is he viewed by others in the community and what accounts for their attitudes?
- Graceful Fenister and Cam Attling were betrothed prior to Cam's leaving for the war. Why does Graceful's father break the betrothal? How do Graceful and Cam respond to her father's decision? Does Graceful's father act in her best interest?
- Graceful Fenister's father is more affluent than most. How does his family earn their livelihood? Why does he want to plant mulberry trees and what effect will his decision have on others living in the area? Support your responses with evidence from the text.
- Contrast the Fenister family's lifestyle with that of the Coverlasts. How does each family view the other?
- How would you characterize Arno Fenister? Is he respected in the community? How does the phrase, "If the one means can achieve two ends, well, all the better" (p. 17) explain his character? Support your response with evidence from the text.
- Who is Acton Mansto and why does Corban Farmer shoot Acton's dog? How does Acton respond to the dog's death and what are the reactions of the community members? How does this scene contribute to the development of the story, especially to the multitude of characters?
- Ban and Cam are friends. How does Ban contribute to the development of Cam's character? Why does Ban's family disapprove of Ban's friendship with Cam? How does Ban deal with his unhappiness? Why do you think the author has Ban "exit" the story by leaving home? Support your answers with textual evidence.
- After returning home from the war, Cam feels as though he has no purpose. Why does he leave his family? Consider the passage, "And so he left them, the safety, the prison of family and friend and village" (p. 88) in your response. How does Cam's father respond to Cam's leaving? Does his father hold any resentment or anger toward Cam? Explain.
- Pin is Cam's sister. What role does she play in the story? How does her character help develop Cam's character and/or move the plotline forward?
- Pin is devastated by Cam's leaving home. How does she respond to his leaving? Why does she hope to reach the sea? What does Pin mean when she says, "There are no wishes" (p. 107)?
- Having left home, Cam seeks out Gyaar Ryyu. Who is Gyaar and why does Cam go in search of him? How is Cam received by Gyaar? Describe the life Cam is able to build for himself.

- Characterize Diido. How has her life been changed by the war? Cam is captivated by Diido. What draws him to her? How does Diido initially respond to Cam? How does she change and why?
- How does Cam respond to Gyaar's news that Gyaar is to wed Graceful? Why does Cam keep his former betrothal to Graceful secret from Gyaar? Is his silence justified? Explain.
- Between Graceful, Pin, or Diido, who is the more likeable character? Support your response with evidence from the text.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Choose one of the research topics below and write an essay and/or prepare a class presentation in which you discuss these characteristics in *The Returning*. You may also address ways in which the story is not characteristic of an epic or is not representative of the Medieval Period.
 - 1) Research the characteristics of an epic.
 - 2) Research characteristics of the Medieval Period.
- Using Extranormal Moviemaker (xtranormal.com) or another media form, prepare a 5-10 minute movie clip that illustrates a poignant scene from the book and explain how that scene contributes to the overall story.
- Analyze the dialect and language used in the story. Prepare a brief class presentation explaining how the dialect and language contribute to the story, especially the setting, culture, and character development.
- Cam leaves home and does not return. Toward the end of the story Pin shares a message from him with the family in which he says he will return. Write a scene for the story in which Cam returns to his family after all the years that have passed.
- Using the list of characters on pp. 302-303, develop a character map of the story by placing Cam's name in the middle of a circle and drawing connecting lines to at least ten other characters (circle their names). When possible, connect the characters with a symbol as opposed to a straight line. For example, you might use a broken wedding band to connect Cam and Graceful.

Q&A WITH CHRISTINE HINWOOD

1. How did you decide to write the book in the style you chose? Why have multiple points of view? Why not just tell the story from Cam's point of view? The village of Kayforl is one of the main characters in *The Returning*, and I wanted to show its different faces as seen by different villagers. I find it fascinating when I come across a character from one novel mentioned in passing in another. I wanted to have a character narrate a story, then to meet that character later in the book almost as a stranger. The structure of the novel gave me the freedom to delve into more details of village life than Cam would plausibly explain or be interested in. The big event of the war could be