

A Teacher's Guide to

Changeling: Order of Darkness Book One

By Philippa Gregory

About the Book

It is 1453: The Church reigns supreme in Europe, but there are disturbing signs that the Muslims in the East are getting stronger and suspicions that the End of Days may be approaching. Novice priest Luca Vero, aged seventeen, joins a secret church order that battles evil by investigating mysteries—spiritual mysteries. At the same time, recently orphaned Lady Isolde of Lucretili, also seventeen, finds herself banished to the local nunnery. Isolde and her Moorish servant and best friend, Ishraq, immediately suspect that something is not right at the Abbey: nuns are fainting in chapel, seeing visions, sleepwalking, even finding bloody stigmata on their palms. Is it the work of the devil? Her worst fears seem confirmed when the Abbey receives a visitor: investigator Luca Vero, accompanied by his servant, Freize, and a dour clerk, Brother Peter. What dark force is terrifying the nuns and causing them to act this way? Can Luca and Isolde uncover the true source of the problem?

Discussion Questions

1. In the first chapter, we learn that Luca's monastery has accused of him of heresy. What is heresy, and why is it so harshly punished by the Church?
2. Why has Luca, who loves numbers and calculations, never heard of the numeral zero? Why is he so excited when he learns about it?
3. Isolde's brother tells her that her father's will left her two options: to marry the drunken and brutish Prince Roberto, or to renounce her wealth and live her entire life as a nun, with no husband or family. Why does Isolde choose the nunnery? Which option would you choose? Why?
4. How does the relationship between Luca and Freize change over the course of the book?
5. Luca and Isolde both have some of the qualities a monk or nun should possess, but lack others. What do you think were the most important requirements for the religious life? What would you do if you found yourself poorly suited for the career your parents chose for you, or the one you planned to pursue?
6. How do various characters—Isolde, the Lady Almoner, Freize, and others—perceive Ishraq? In what ways is she different from others in her society? How do people today react to those they perceive as different from themselves?
7. What are some of the explanations that the nuns, the villagers, and others offer for the strange goings-on at the nunnery, and for the wild creature they capture? How do people today seek to explain phenomena they cannot understand?
8. How does the Lady Almoner explain the presence of gold in the nunnery's storeroom loft to Luca and Freize? What is the true explanation?
9. Why do Luca, Freize, and the Lady Almoner think that Isolde and Ishraq are holding a Satanic mass using the body of Sister Reeve? What are they actually doing? Why does no one believe their explanation?

10. We never learn how Isolde and Ishraq escaped the Abbey's gatehouse cellar. How do you think they escaped? Why do you think Freize claimed that he released them?
11. What are the differences between the way that Isolde's father raised her and the education he provided for Ishraq? Why were the two trained differently? Whose knowledge and skills do you think are more useful? Whose position in society would you prefer to occupy?
12. The villagers think that Sara Fairley's son Stefan was taken by a werewolf; Brother Peter thinks that Sara had a hand in his disappearance. What actually happened?
13. Together, Freize and Ishraq save the captured werewolf from execution. Why? How?

Activity Suggestions for Using *Changeling* book in Classrooms and Libraries

1. Try doing the same math problem using Roman and then Arabic systems of numerals. Which is easier? Why do you think Western society gave up Roman numerals for Arabic numerals?
2. Find out more about the life options—marriage or the convent—available to noble women like Isolde. Make a chart that compares and contrasts the advantages and disadvantages of each choice. Or divide into teams that argue the merits of each life choice.
3. Freize is a loyal servant and friend to Luca, but he has his own perspective on events and is not afraid to disagree with his social superiors. Rewrite one episode in the book from Freize's point of view. Try to capture not only his ideas and attitude, but his tone and use of language.
4. Isolde and Ishraq are close friends, but most of the characters in the book see Ishraq as strange, frightening, or inferior. Find out more about how fifteenth-century Christian Europeans perceived people who, like Ishraq, were ethnically, racially, or religiously different from them.
5. For centuries, most Europeans knew very little about human anatomy, in part because they never performed autopsies out of respect for the dead. Find out more about the history of autopsies. Try using the Internet to find out more about Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), the founder of human anatomy, who lived during the time in which this book is set.
6. Two herbs, bella donna and wolfsbane (or aconite), play important roles in the book. Find out more about the ways early modern Europeans used plants as medicines, poisons, and charms. Compare these uses with how plants were used in other cultures (in Africa, East Asia, or the Arab world, for example). Why do you think herbal remedies are becoming more popular again in recent years?
7. Luca has never seen a fork; Isolde owns one only because her father, an Italian nobleman, encountered them in the French royal court. Find out more about the history of table manners or of manners in general. How have they changed over time in our culture? How do they vary from culture to culture? What purpose do manners serve?
8. As we see in the book, fifteenth-century Europeans believed in werewolves and in other creatures we consider mythical. Find out more about werewolf stories. What powers were werewolves supposed to have? Do any other cultures have stories about wolf-man creatures? What other mythical creatures or magical beings did medieval westerners believe in?

9. In the book, we see a wide variety of relationships start, change, or end, based on revelations about trustworthiness. Pinpoint some key moments in the text where one character realizes s/he cannot trust another. Think about moments in your life when you realized that someone was not worthy of the trust you gave them, or moments in your life when you decided to offer someone new your trust.