



THE GOOSE GIRL

BY SHANNON HALE

READING GROUP / TEACHER GUIDE

ABOUT THIS BOOK:

Taken from the Grimm's fairy tale of the princess who became a goose girl before she could become queen, this is the story of Anidori-Kiladra Talianna Isilee, Crown Princess of Kildenree. She was born with her eyes closed and a word on her tongue, a word she could not taste. She spent the first years of her life listening to her aunt's stories, and learning the language of the birds, especially the swans. And when she was older, she watched as a colt was born, and she heard the first word on his tongue, his name, Falada.

When Ani is seventeen her father dies in a riding accident and Ani is sent away with a group of guards to a neighboring country, Bayern. And there she is supposed to marry a prince she has never met. But along the way half her guard rebel, and they take her lady in waiting, Selia, as their princess, a false princess. Ani manages to escape unhurt, but without anyone to guide her to the Bayern court, not even her beloved horse. When she finally finds her way there, Selia and the two-faced guards are already accepted and part of the Bayern royal family, and Ani can do nothing but accept a job as the king's goose girl.

For months she saves money to take the long journey home in the spring, anonymously. But fate won't have it. The prince shows up in her goose pen and neither knowing who the other really is, they fall in love. The other animal tenders take to Ani's stories, and for the first time in the lonely princess's life, she has made real friends. Even a bit of magic arises when Ani finds that she doesn't just have the gift of animal speech, she also has the power to control the wind.

Bit by bit she hatches a plan with her friends to tell the king and the prince the truth and expose Selia. And despite the violent and terrible former guards who seem to know that Ani is in Bayern and are plotting to expose her, she and her band of forest-born animal tenders finally find their way to the wedding of Selia and the prince. With charm, luck, some good fighting scenes, and a little help from Ani's skill of moving the wind, the usurpers are exposed, and Ani and her mysterious love, who we now know is the prince, are free to wed.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR:

Shannon Hale started writing books at age ten and has never stopped. As an MFA candidate at the University of Montana, Shannon spent two years steeped in the short

story. She loved the short story form and the raw, honed perfection of literary fiction, but found herself wanting to add fantastic elements to everything she wrote (much to the despair of some of her professors). There was another graduate student there who had the same interests, and they spent secret hours talking about their favorite authors and exchanging books.

Over the summer break in 1999, Shannon and her fantasy-loving friend challenged each other to write a book before the semester began. (It took much longer than expected.) She was geared up to write but didn't know where to begin. Taking inspiration from the wonderful Robin McKinley and her first book *Beauty*, Shannon decided to write a novel from her favorite fairy tale, "The Goose Girl." Shannon finished her M.F.A., and published *The Goose Girl* not long after that.

A sometime actress, instructional designer and missionary, she now makes her home in Salt Lake City, Utah with her super-human husband and their pet, a small, plastic pig.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY:

Shannon Hale says: "Tales are fascinating things. They seem to me to be the poetry of history – all the superfluous bits are worn down, tossed away, leaving only the sharpest images, the strongest words, the barest stories. But those stories survive. To do so, I believe they must hold some real human truth. They speak to each reader in a different way, and yet appeal universally to readers and storytellers over decades and centuries."

"In writing a novel from a tale, I hoped to retain the essence of it, what makes it sublime. Of course, part of what makes tales, such as those collected by the Grimm Brothers, so appealing is the mystery inherent in their brevity, something instantly lost when flushed out to novel length. I felt it was important, therefore, to make the setting as close to the setting of the tale as I could. It felt to me like a place we know, a place that is here somewhere, but in the past, just as tales are about us but long ago. To do that, I based Bayern loosely on the Germany of old, the birthplace of the Brothers Grimm. This is not a true historical setting, but resources such as the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus helped me build a foundation for what I hoped was a believable, and familiar, world."

This book is taken from a Grimm's fairy tale. Read the original fairy tale (see www.shannonhale.com for one version). Then discuss:

- Why would the princess stay on as a goose girl and not go home?
- What other options would she have had at the time?
- What would you have done in her place?
- How might the author expand the simple story?

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS:

Family: Anidori comes from a royal family that is not very close. How does that affect her decision to stay in Bayern?

Courage: Instead of going right in to the king and demanding her rightful throne, Ani takes a back step, and an unorthodox route to solve her problem. Does that show greater courage than the more obvious choices, and if so, how?

Deceit and Trust: Why is it so easy for Selia to deceive Ani? How does Ani turn herself around and become someone who 1. Trusts Talone and 2. Inspires trust in others?

Friendship: What is the difference between Ani's animal tender friends and the friends she might have had in Kildenree?

Fairy Tale Patterns: Many fairy tales center on royalty, purity, and the number three. How do these stock themes become unique in Shannon Hale's story? What other patterns can you spot that while familiar, take on a life of their own in this novel?

CONNECTING TO CLASSROOMS

Language Arts: We see most of this story through Ani's eyes (as she "wrote" it). Rewrite a section from Selia's point of view. From Geric's point of view. How do these different points of view change the story?

Social Studies: Goose Girl is set in a fairy tale time and place with strong castles and deep forests. But what is the "reality" behind this classic setting? Where and when does it seem to take place? Start by researching Middle Europe of the sixteenth century – do the details seem familiar? What are some historical elements to the story that could be connected to the real world?

Gender/Women's Studies: Ani starts life at the mercy of her family and the politics around her. But when she starts to taken an interest in her own life she finds she must prove herself. How would the story have been different if she'd been born a boy? Would there be a story at all? How might she have approached the king of Bayern differently?

Theater: Enact one of the scenes from the book – perhaps the scene when Ani shows up at Selia's wedding with her forest band behind her.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

1. Did you get a sense of the overall tone of the book from the beginning? What does the narrator say that gives you that sense?
2. How is magic handled in the story? Is it easy to believe that Ani has special powers?
3. How are women treated in the story?
4. How does class, background and family affect the different characters' behaviors?
5. Would you have done the same if you'd been Selia?
6. Do you have any sympathy for Conrad?
7. Why is Talone so faithful to Ani?
8. Do you think Ani would have fallen in love with Geric if she'd only met him in the castle and not on the goose grounds?
9. Would Ani have been able to accomplish as much without her magic powers?
10. What is the significance of the various pieces of jewelry Ani has/had?
11. What would you have done if you'd been Ani at the king's feet?
12. Which character would you most like to be?

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE SHANNON'S WEBSITE AT WWW.SHANNONHALE.COM.