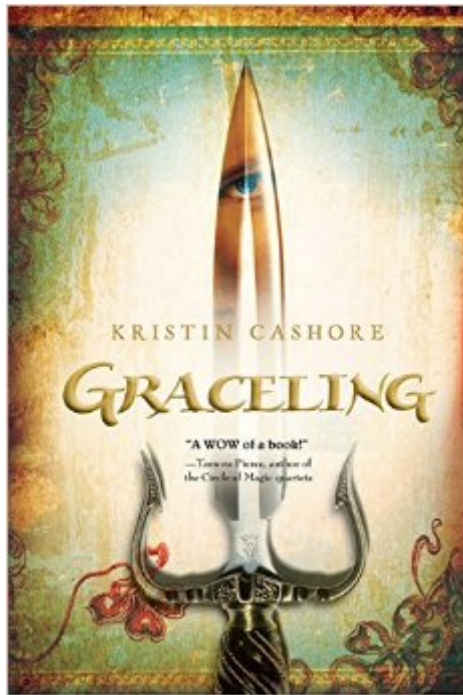


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# Graceling



## Synopsis

Kristin Cashore's best-selling, award-winning fantasy *Graceling* tells the story of the vulnerable yet strong Katsa, a smart, beautiful teenager who lives in a world where selected people are given a Grace, a special talent that can be anything from dancing to swimming. Katsa's is killing. As the king's niece, she is forced to use her extreme skills as his thug. Along the way, Katsa must learn to decipher the true nature of her Grace . . . and how to put it to good use. A thrilling, action-packed fantasy adventure (and steamy romance!) that will resonate deeply with adolescents trying to find their way in the world.   
Awards: Winner of the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature, winner of the SIBA Book Award/YA, Indies Choice Book Award Honor Book, ALA Best Book for Young Adults, 2008 Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year, 2008 School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, .com's Best Books of 2008, 2008 Booklist Editors' Choice, Booklist's 2008 Top Ten First Novels for Youth, 2009 Amelia Bloomer List, BCCB 2009 Blue Ribbon List. Don't miss the sequel *Fire*, also a New York Times bestseller and ALA Best Book for Young Adults, winner of the 2010 Cybil for YA Fantasy/Sci Fi and the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book was a real treat to read. It was interesting on so many different levels. There is a powerful heroine who undergoes a transformation, discovering a strength of character to match her physical strength. Watching Katsa mature through the narrative was wonderful. The political intrigue was

surprisingly compelling, and the mystery that drives the plot (why was this old man kidnapped, and by whom?) really worked. The romance was captivating. Even though it is obvious where the romance is going from the very first encounter, it was skillfully written. The magical elements of the story are not overwhelming, but alter reality just enough to make for a fun, fantastical world. I found myself sneaking off to read more of this book, and I was sorry to see it end. BUT. This is billed as a book for 14 yo and up, so I think it fair to warn parents of elements they may not want their young teen to encounter. There are a couple of fairly discreet sex scenes, where the author is clear about what is going on but not very detailed. There is also a mention of a brothel near the beginning of the book (although a more offensive word is used to describe it) and there are many incidences of unwanted attention paid to girls or inappropriate comments made about them. This is a plot element, since it makes the lead female character defensive of the young women. Also, and this is probably the "biggie" for conservative parents, Katsa rejects the concept of marriage, and there are several times when one or another character implies that it is a yoke that will force a couple to stay together regardless of their actual feelings. Being lovers is somewhat extolled as demonstrating their real trust and commitment to one another, since they are together without being forced, and love each other enough to set each other free if the love fades. This book may actually allow parents to discuss these themes with teens, who need to decide where they stand on sex and marriage. However, some parents may decide just to skip this one if they don't want to deal with the issues. Honestly, though, it really is a wonderful book, and I would definitely recommend it to any adult (particularly women) and most older teens, especially if they have someone willing to discuss any issues that come up for them as they read.

Graceling is an engrossing read with wonderfully interesting characters and I enjoyed it on many levels. I won't summarize the plot again for this review, but the author offers some interesting thoughts on talents and personal agency that are insightful while telling a good story that can be taken at surface level for a light read if that's all you seek. The book has a satisfying romance that is neither mushy nor too remote. It rang more true overall than most relationships that have been in my recent reading. It's not primarily a romance, although the romance is a strong secondary plot that provides some of the motivation for the characters. About halfway through, I began to wonder about it being YA since the characters do not come across as teens. I had to go back to the copyright page and check the recommended reading age to verify that, yes, it is being promoted as YA for ages 14 and up. Really, it is a toss up either way. Not that YA isn't mature and wonderful--I read a lot of it after all--but it could have just as easily been marketed to adults. I think the majority of

readable fantasy is in YA these days. I highly recommend the novel but I have to do so with a warning. If it matters to you, the book has a rather anti-marriage message in it which fits the main character's personality, but will be the most problematic element for some readers. *Graceling* is well-written with some grand adventure, musings on talents, as well as characters who actually grow and change as they learn more about themselves. It never goes for the cheap shot in action sequences although they aren't the focus of the story. In other words, I liked it. Even the few philosophies that I didn't agree with made me think. That makes it a book worth reading.

Upon receiving my copy of *Graceling*, I had absolutely no expectations based on the summary. By the end of the third chapter, my expectations rose dramatically. *Graceling* is about Katsa, the niece of a king, who has an extraordinary strength in combat skills. This extraordinary skill is called "Grace". Others may also have a "Grace" although the abilities vary from person to person. Some "Grace" skills are more useful than others, but all Gracelings are marked by their mismatched eyes. Because of her unique and useful skill, she has become a henchwoman to her uncle Randa who is one of the seven kings of the world. It isn't something that she enjoys but it is something that she has come to accept. While on a mission for The Council to retrieve the Prince Tealiff, she encounters another Graceling whose presence makes an impression on her. Later, she encounters him again and learns that he is Tealiff's grandson and a Prince in his own right. The meeting with Po will prompt her to make a decision that will change the course of her life and her world as she and Po learn more of their Grace powers and of treachery and madness that lay within the corridors of another kingdom that will threaten the already fragile political stability of the seven kingdoms. It sounds like a typical fantasy novel and to a large degree it is, but *Graceling* is so confidently and smoothly written that it felt fresh and new. The action and pacing of the plot moved at a brisk clip that I never felt bored. Ms. Cashore also made good use of dialogue in that it was appropriate to the station of the characters. She also made a good decision in resisting the urge to make her characters speak in a modern rhythm. Instead, the dialogue had a classic style that gave it a timeless feel. Which brings me to the characters! Katsa is a wonderful heroine to me. I do warn that she might not be everyone's type of heroine, especially those who are expecting a traditional sassy heroine. Katsa is a skilled fighter who is conflicted about how her skills are used. She is understandably wary of people due to the nature of her Grace and when she says that she is not interested in marriage, she really means it. She has a good heart but she can also be aloof, even dour at times. She is an odd mix of a personality that is unique for a fictional heroine. Typical for an anti-hero perhaps or a side character, but not the lead female. Because of that, I enjoyed Katsa and

forgave her for some of her flaws that in another type of heroine, I might not have been so forgiving. Katsa has friends in her cousin Raffin, her attendant Helda, and others who form The Council, a group of people throughout the seven kingdoms who work to help keep stability in the lands. These secondary characters are vividly drawn so it is easy to keep track of them and understand their importance to the story and to Katsa. However, it is in Po, the Prince who is trying to deal with his own ambiguous feelings about his Grace and searching for friends of his own, that she meets someone who can fully understand her. And what a wonderful pair they are. It has been a long time since I've encountered two characters who were so uniquely right for each other. This is a novel that I found unexpectedly mesmerizing. Before I sound too gushy, I admit that it isn't a perfect story. The end is drawn out a fraction too long and at times, the prose was a little too pretty. Yet those are minor quibbles because the truth is that once I started the novel, I had trouble putting it down. I even found myself sneaking peeks at work whenever I could. I would say to myself, "Just one more chapter!" And after I finished that chapter, I would say, "Maybe just one more!" Simply put, *Graceling* was an excellent and enjoyable read that I will recommend to my friends without hesitation. Minor caveat: This novel is a Young Adult novel and I recommend this book to readers age 14 and up with few reservations. However, there are descriptions of violence and a few scenes of sexual intimacy that, while neither graphic nor gratuitous, parents of children age 13 and under may want to consider prior to allowing their children to read.

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