

Year 9 – *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman

Plot Overview

Sephy is a Cross - a member of the ruling class. Callum is a nought - a member of the underclass who were once slaves to the Crosses. The two have been friends since early childhood. But that's as far as it can go until the first steps are taken towards more social equality and a limited number of noughts are allowed into Cross schools.

Against a background of prejudice and distrust, intensely highlighted by violent terrorist activity by noughts, a romance builds between Sephy and Callum - a romance that is to lead both of them into terrible danger.

Characters

THE HADLEY FAMILY

Kamal Hadley

Kamal is a government official, and he regards Crosses as superior to noughts. His belief in the importance of segregation drives his behaviour.

Jasmine Hadley

Despite her family's power and status, Jasmine suffers throughout the book. Her husband's neglect causes Jasmine to feel lonely, insignificant and powerless.

Minerva (Minnie)

Minerva is the older sister of Sephy. Despite frequent arguments with her sister, Sephy does sometimes confide in Minerva.

Persephone (Sephy)

'Sephy' is a Cross, meaning that she was born with a certain amount of privilege. Initially, Sephy is naïve to the brutal world around her.

THE MCGREGOR FAMILY

Ryan McGregor

Ryan, alongside Jude, joins the Liberation Militia. However, as a result of his loyalty to this cause, and his devotion to his family, Ryan is imprisoned.

Meggie McGregor

For fourteen years, she worked for the Hadley family as a member of household staff. She's devastated when her husband and son become LA members.

Lynette

Lynette is Callum's older sister. She suffers PTSD from a racial attack and fantasises she is a Cross.

Jude

Callum's older brother, who displays violent and aggressive tendencies.

Callum

Intelligent and hard-working, he is best friends with Sephy until he joins the LM.

Literary Techniques

Pathetic fallacy – where the environment is given human emotions to reflect a character's mood.

Example: *'Even the moonlight was fading as a cloud hid the moon's face from me.'*

Simile – where one thing is compared to another using 'like' or 'as'.

Example: *'She had a grip like a python on steroids.'*

Metaphor – where an object is said to be something that isn't literally true but captures its essence. Example: *'Put a straightjacket on your feelings.'*

Allusion – indirect reference made to elements in another well-known story or artifact.

Example: *Noughts and Crosses* alludes to Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*.

Onomatopoeia – where the sound of a word is very similar to its meaning.

Example: *'My ears popped'*

Dual narrative – Where a story is told by two narrators. In the novel, Sephy and Callum take it in turns to narrate events.

Atmosphere – the use of settings to create a particular feeling for the reader.

Example: *'The air smelt of strong, cheap disinfectant. It was so strong I could almost taste it.'*

Juxtaposition – where two contrasting characters, settings, events or ideas are placed side by side to highlight their differences.

Example: Jasmine Hadley's 'attempted suicide' is juxtaposed with Lynette's suicide.

Plot Twist – an unexpected turn of events in a story.

Example: The last-minute reprieve that Ryan McGregor receives is a plot twist.

Themes and Ideas

Race and Prejudice - From 1948-1994, the South African government enforced apartheid. This meant that black and white people were forced to live separately, go to different schools and black people could not vote. White people got privileges and ruled the country. However, this all came to an end when black people finally got the right to vote and elected Nelson Mandela as president. *Noughts and Crosses* imagines a world where the experience of black and white people is reversed.

Conflict and violence – Not only is there conflict and violence between noughts and Crosses but between families and family members, between teachers and students, between men and women. Violence takes verbal and psychological forms as well as being physical.

Loyalty – Callum and Sephy have to struggle between their loyalties to their families and communities, and their loyalty to one another.

Families – In the novel, families are shown to be sources of support but also potentially highly toxic. Parents seek to control the lives of their children as well as trying to protect them.

Love – At the centre of the story is the love between Sephy and Callum but there is also love for one's parents and siblings.

Secrecy and deception – This theme is established right from the start where Meggie loses her job because she failed to realise Jasmine Hadley was using her as an alibi for a secret affair she'd been having. Further secrets emerge such as Mr Hadley's own affair and illegitimate son and the history teacher, Mr Jason, whose mother turns out to have been a nought.

QR Codes

Punctuation Guide



Further Reading: Interview with Malorie Blackman about *Noughts and Crosses*



Other Dystopian Novels – Recommended Reading List

