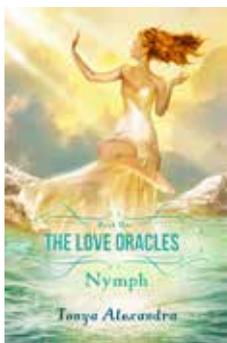




# Walker Books Discussion Guide



## The Love Oracles Book I: Nymph

Tonya Alexandra  
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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

An idyllic Greek island. Obsessed demigods. A fallen nymph. A mortal boy.

Merope, a beautiful but faded star nymph, is banished to Earth for displeasing the gods. She tries to fit in, go to school and live a normal “human” life. And then she meets Lukas. But relationships between men and goddesses are forbidden. Will their love grow? Or will Merope and Lukas feel the wrath of the gods?

## Author/Illustrator Information:

Tonya Alexandra always needed to be a writer. She needed words to capture her imaginings and to fully express herself. So she studied communications at university, did a PR job in Prague and worked as a marketing assistant at an educational publisher. She knew she wanted to write but didn't know how. After being a “marketing guru” for an internet start-up and a web content producer for Adobe, Tonya went on to study publishing and editing at Macleay College. She has since written travel articles for magazines and newspapers such as *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *Nymph* is her first novel.

## How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

### Recommended reading level:

- Secondary years 9+
- Ages 14+

### Key Learning Areas:

- English

### Example of:

- Novel
- Fantasy genre

### Themes/ Ideas:

- Love/Romance
- Relationships
- Mythology
- Gods and Goddesses

### National Curriculum Focus:\*

English content descriptions:

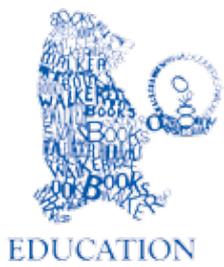
Year 9

ACELA1551  
ACELA1552  
ACELA1553  
ACELT1633  
ACELT1771  
ACELT1634  
ACELT1635  
ACELY1739  
ACELY1811  
ACELY1742

Year 10

ACELA1564  
ACELA1565  
ACELT1640  
ACELT1812  
ACELT1642  
ACELY1749  
ACELY1754

\*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.



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## Tonya Alexandra on *Nymph*

*Nymph* was inspired by the Greek myth about Merope; a star nymph ashamed of loving a mortal rather than a god. I didn't like that idea. I think we should be free to love who we please. But the idea grew beyond this because I wanted Merope to grow. Nymphs are not great modern role models and I wanted her to be a stronger female character; to stand up for herself, be brave enough to participate in the new world she was living in, and eventually take on the gods she'd previously been afraid of.

And then as I wrote, I wanted even more for her:  
I wanted her to find a real best friend.

I wanted her to understand that beauty is not important.

I wanted her to think about the different forms of love and witness Lukas's love for his grandmother, and compare it to the superficial relationships of Olympus.

I wanted her to know it was okay to change and want more from life.

I wanted her to experience the thrill of loving and kissing and wanting someone for real.

I wanted a love story.



Photo credit: Tania Niwa

I hope readers are able to identify with Merope (even though she is unnaturally beautiful) and feel for her struggle to belong, in her own world as well as on Earth. And how she learns there is always a friendly face who will help in difficult times if you open up (even if it means turning to someone different from yourself, like Eleni).

Hopefully it is also encouraging to see someone come from what is essentially paradise and prefer the harsh reality of Earth. I've always thought, if things aren't working where you are, it's not you – you're just in the wrong place. Don't despair, nothing lasts forever; you'll find your people, you'll find your Greek island.

## Discussion Questions

The Pleiades (Merope and her six sisters) feature in Ancient Greek mythology as the daughters of the Titan Atlas and the sea nymph Pleione. In some versions of the myth, Merope, the youngest sister/star is faded because she is ashamed of marrying a mortal. How do you think this inspired the author when writing this novel?

Merope is exiled to earth as punishment for rejecting Orion's advances. How is the gods' treatment of goddesses different or similar to how men treat women?

"Merope stared at the screen, once again mystified. Zeus had banned technology such as this on Olympus, he considered it to be in conflict with the natural world." (Page 134)

Why do you think Zeus considers technology a conflict with the natural world? Do you think this is the only reason Zeus is reluctant to embrace new technology and change? How would life on Olympus change if it kept up with the technological advances of the mortal world? Would life be unbearable in paradise without your iPhone?

"Their purpose on Olympus was to exemplify perfection ..." (Page 15)

Merope has spent her whole life being taught that physical perfection is important above all else. How has this shaped her as a person? Do you think this is similar or different to physical ideals of our world? What are the ramifications of placing too much importance on appearance?

If your parents or friends didn't like your boyfriend or girlfriend would you give him or her up, hide your relationship or not care?



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If you had to conceal your true self from someone to keep them interested, would you?  
How does Merope's idea of love change?

Much of the drama in the novel stems from characters defying convention to do what they feel is right. What characters does this apply to?

Maslow described belonging as a basic human need, but we can work to exclude people just as much as to include them (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's\\_hierarchy\\_of\\_needs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs)). Discuss how this statement and the idea of belonging applies to Merope. Why is belonging a basic human need? What are the dangers of not feeling like you belong in a certain place or with a certain group of people? How can this need be used to manipulate people?

Merope struggles with loneliness when she first arrives on Earth. What are the dangers of loneliness? Why does Merope's feeling of loneliness continue throughout the novel even when she is surrounded by people?

In Ancient Greek mythology, nymphs were often part of a god's retinue (a group of people in the service of a noble or royal). Do you think Merope had a responsibility to the gods of Olympus to be a consort? Why did she choose to face exile rather than fulfil her responsibility? Are there social expectations today you could relate this to?

Why does Orion pursue Merope when she has made it clear that she is not interested in him? If he was a mortal boy, what should Merope have done to stop his intimidating behaviour?

At the heart of *Nymph* is a (relatively) young woman's struggle to determine her own future. What barriers stand in Merope's way? Who helps her on the way and why? How would her story be different if she were a regular mortal who rejected the advances of a man?

Heracles has a very high opinion of himself, often to the point of arrogance. How does he change during his time on Earth?

Heracles could be judged harshly for his behaviour, but he comes from another world where his attitudes are considered normal. Can you think of an example in today's society where people have to change their natural behaviour to fit in?

Based on your prior knowledge of Greek gods and goddesses, was the depiction of these characters as you expected? How were they similar/different?

Merope begins to prefer Earth to Olympus. Why do you think that often those on top, like celebrities, are often miserable?

How does the relationship between Merope and Heracles change throughout the novel? What causes these changes?

Does the revelation that Merope and Lukas were struck by Eros's arrows change the nature of their relationship? Why didn't Merope tell Lukas about being struck by Eros? Do you think their love is still legitimate?

Imagine Merope had just arrived from Olympus and was going to attend your school. What advice would you give to help her fit in?

What expectations do you have for the rest of the series?