

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

"PURE MAGIC."  
*Lauren James*

"VIVIDLY IMAGINED."  
*Guardian*

ONE GIRL AGAINST AN EMPIRE

*"Intricate, beautiful  
and startling."*

—Jonathan Stroud

# REBEL SKIES

ANN SEI LIN

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Rebel Skies* is a fast-paced futuristic fantasy steeped in Japanese culture, tradition and origami. Kurara can't remember her past, and her present is filled only with her menial work aboard the *Midori* – a giant floating sky-resort. Instead, she and her closest friend Haru imagine a future in the sky cities, where her secret gift as a Crafter – someone who can control paper at will – doesn't have to be so secret. When a stranger named Himura arrives and the *Midori* is attacked by an ancient paper monster, Kurara has no choice but to try to forge a new life, discovering along the way that not everything she has taken for granted turns out to be quite what it seems.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ann Sei Lin** is a writer, librarian, and book nerd with a love for all things fantasy. Though London is now her home, she spent several years in Chiba, Japan, living in a rickety apartment block next to a rail station where the rush of the midnight train would make the walls shake. When not writing, she is often studying, gaming or trying to make that origami rabbit for the one hundredth time.

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

*Rebel Skies* is a novel full of interest and intrigue that can be explored with groups of a range of ages. While fantasy elements are immediately apparent, there are many undercurrents running through the novel worthy of discussion, including social hierarchies, sense of belonging and home, the nature of power and control and the idea of free will. The following starting points for discussion may need to be flexed for younger or older or more able groups. Depending on your group, you may also want to prepare some materials or set research tasks to explore the real elements of Japanese culture in the book.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### Getting started:

To start, ask what anyone enjoyed about *Rebel Skies*. Did anyone have a favourite part, or character? Why? Can anyone expand on their answer? Did it remind anyone of something else they've read, or seen, or heard? If so, why?

#### 1. Crafters

"You only say that because you're a Crafter. Most normal folk would be glad to see a shikigami burn." – p.11

What did anyone think of the idea of being a Crafter? Did anyone realise at first what sort of power it could give you?

What would it be like to be able to control paper? What does anyone think they might do with that power?

## 2. Kurara

*'One day, I'm going to get out of here. One day, I'm going to leave all this behind.'* – p.20

Discuss the character of Kurara – what were anyone's first impressions? What did readers like about the character? Did anyone find it strange she had no memories before the *Midori*? Did anyone think she might be a shikigami before it was revealed? Were there any hints or suggestions anyone picked up on? If so, what were they? How did the author suggest what was to come?

## 3. Himura

*'Crafter. People had spat that word at him as though it were a curse. Others had whispered it in terror.'* – p.11

How does Himura compare to Kurara? They're both Crafters, but are they similar in any other ways? In what ways are they different? Look at the given quotation – what does this tell you about Himura? How does this relate to his character? Discuss any conflict he feels – who liked Himura? Who disliked him? Who wasn't sure? Did anyone feel sorry for him, or sympathetic towards him? Why?

## 4. Shikigami

*'It did not feel as if she was standing before a living creature, but rather in the path of a hurricane.'* – p.40

Look at the description of the shikigami in the prologue, or on page 40. What impression does the author give of what shikigami are? Whose perspective do we see the shikigami from, at first? Does this change? If so, how? By the end, how did anyone feel about the idea of shikigami? Can shikigami have their own thoughts and feelings?

## 5. Power and control

*'She was no stranger to injustice, but it had been a while since she had felt quite so powerless.'* – p.141

Who has power in the novel? What gives them power? What about control? Is that the same thing? What gives anyone control over others? What about blood bonds between Crafters and shikigami? Is that a fair use of power? What about Princess Tsukimi? Does it matter she's not a Crafter? Why does she still have so much power?

## 6. Sorabito

*'The best death a Sorabito could hope for was death by falling...'* – p.284

What is the relationship like between Sorabito and 'groundlings'? How does the author create this dynamic? Can anyone think of a real-life example of people divided in a similar way? How are they similar? How different? What about Sohma – who are they in the novel? Do they remind anyone of any real-life rebel groups? Or rebel groups from other works of fiction?

## 7. Sky Cities

*'Bright banners streamed in the wind with the city's motto blazing across it: *The Sky Is Here.*'* – p.199

What did the group think of the idea of the sky cities? Who likes the thought of living on a sky city? Why? Who doesn't? What would be the best/worst thing about living in the sky? Extension: what impact does the nature of a sky city have on the people who live there?

## 8. Ofuda, origami & Japanese culture

*'Silk sparrows rested on the embroidered branches of her yellow obi.'* – p.245

Ask the group how many words they can remember from the book that they weren't familiar with before. Or, list out the elements of the book inspired by Japanese culture – which of these are real, and which an invention of the author? (You can use the glossary at the back for reference.) How does the reader know that the influence on the book is Japanese? How does the author put an original spin on some of these cultural elements and traditions? Do they work well in the context of a fantasy novel? Extension: have images to hand of, e.g., traditional Japanese dress, or set a research task to explore historical elements from the novel.

## 9. Core and heart

'His chest was open. Paper bones and organs lay on display for all to see. In place of a heart lay the reattached core.'  
– p.272

What is the difference between a heart and a shikigami core? How are they similar? What functions do they serve? What does being able to access a shikigami's core mean for the shikigami, as opposed to a human (or an animal)? Is there any equivalent for a human heart, similar to a blood bond? What is the author trying to say in the depiction of a shikigami's core?

## 10. Past and future

'As long as they were together, she could face whatever tomorrow would bring.' – p.339

What does anyone think might happen next in Kurara's world? Why might she have made Haru promise not to tell her her own past? What could be hidden in the past? Are there more revelations to come? What about Himura – where might his story lead? Discuss what readers think could happen in any future books set in this world.

## 11. Continuation

To continue the group's engagement with the book, consider setting some age-appropriate tasks. You could challenge readers to write an episode that takes place on a sky city, or imagine what they could achieve as a Crafter and create a short story. Or, research more of the culture that inspired the book together, or in groups and present back, e.g., what is the cultural significance of origami in Japan? Finally, prepare some origami instructions and put the group's paper skills to the test!