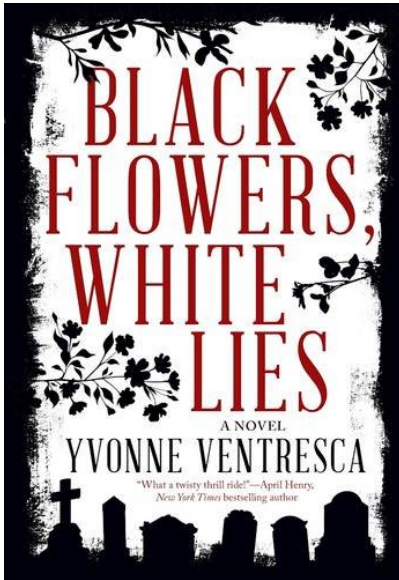


# *BLACK FLOWERS, WHITE LIES*

## A CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

Aligned to the Common Core Standards, Grades 7–12



Discussion points, activities, and writing prompts to help educators use *Black Flowers, White Lies* for classroom study or as a selection for independent reading. Great for book clubs, too!

*Black Flowers, White Lies* is a psychological thriller which won a Gold medal IPPY Award for young adult fiction in 2017.

### About the Author

**Yvonne Ventresca** is the author of *Pandemic*, winner of a 2015 Crystal Kite Award from the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. Her other works include the short story “The Art of Remaining Bitter,” which was selected for the anthology, *The Mysteries of Death and Life* and the short story “Escape to Orange Blossom,” which was chosen for the dystopian collection, *Prep for Doom*. She is also the author of two nonfiction books, as well as numerous articles. In addition to being a writer, Yvonne is a third-degree black belt in Isshinryu karate, which she has studied for the past eleven years. She resides with her family in New Jersey. Visit her online at <http://www.yvonneventresca.com>.



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## About the Book

Her father died before she was born, but Ella Benton knows they have a supernatural connection. Since her mother discourages that belief, Ella keeps her cemetery visits secret. But she may not be the only one with secrets. Ella's mother might be lying about how Dad died sixteen years ago. Newfound evidence points to his death in a psychiatric hospital, not as a result of a tragic car accident as her mother always claimed. After a lifetime of just the two of them, Mom suddenly feels like a stranger to Ella.

When a handprint much like the one Ella left on her father's tombstone mysteriously appears on the bathroom mirror, at first she wonders if Dad is warning her of danger as he did once before. If it's not a warning, could her new too-good-to-be-true boyfriend be responsible for the strange occurrences? Or maybe it's the building superintendent who's grieving a daughter who looked like Ella? As the unexplained events become more frequent and more sinister, Ella becomes terrified about who—or what—might harm her.

Soon the evidence points to someone else entirely: Ella herself. What if, like her father, she's suffering from a breakdown? In this second novel from award-winning author Yvonne Ventresca, Ella desperately needs to find answers, no matter how disturbing the truth might be.

## Common Core Aligned for Grades 7-12

7<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA. RI.7.1,2,3,4,5,6,9; W.7.3a-e,4; SL.7.4,5; L.7.1,2,3

8<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA. RI.8.1,2,3,4,6,9; W.8.3a-e,4; SL.8.1a,3,5; L.8.1,2,3,4a,c,d

9–10<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA. RL.9–10.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9; W.9–10.3a–e,4; SL.9–10.1,4,5;  
L.9–10.1,2,4a,c,d

11–12<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA. RL.11–12.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9; W.11–12.3a–e,4; SL.11–12.1,4,5;  
L.11–12.1,2,4a,c,d

## Before You Read

1. Examine the front cover of *Black Flowers, White Lies*. Describe what you see on the cover (without looking at the rest of the book yet), paying attention to the smallest detail.
  - a. Can you predict what this book might be about?
  - b. What from the illustration and title of the book supports your prediction?

2. Read the text on the jacket flap. What do you learn about the book from this blurb? What words or phrases stand out to you?
3. Study the design elements of the entire book jacket: the colors, text, cover illustration, and word choice. What adjectives would you use to describe it?
4. Who do you think is the intended audience of this book? If you saw this book on a shelf, would you want to read it? Why or why not?
5. Write one paragraph describing your thoughts about the book, and include one question you have that you hope to learn the answer to when you read. Share your paragraph with the class.

## Chapters 1-5

1. The novel opens with Ella visiting her father's gravesite. Using this scene, list the many details Ventresca includes that inform the reader about Ella's life.
2. Authors often begin novels at a point of conflict or change in the life of the protagonist. What is changing in Ella's life that could be considered a point of conflict?
3. *Black Flowers, White Lies* is set in Hoboken, New Jersey. Conduct a brief Internet search for photographs and information about Hoboken, including Yvonne Ventresca's Hoboken Pinterest board, <https://www.pinterest.com/yvonneventresca/hoboken-new-jersey/>. Pick three adjectives to describe the novel's setting.
4. Ella says at the end of Chapter One that she is a "believer in karma and fate and the mysterious workings of the universe."
  - a. Define karma.
  - b. Define fate.
  - c. Based on these two definitions, do you believe in karma and fate?
5. Why might Ella's recent visit to the cemetery disappoint her mother?

### Who is Ella?

Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Ella, on a large piece of paper.

Using Chapters 1–5 as evidence, document any known details about Ella inside the outline.

Outside the outline, write any questions about Ella that you might have.

- a. Ella's says, "being in the cemetery brings me peace, quiets the anxious thoughts that often scurry through my mind." Explain in your own words what she might mean by this.
  - b. What does Ella usually do at the cemetery?
  - c. What disturbing item does Ella find at the gravesite?
6. Grace and Ella go to a psychic to have their Tarot cards read.
  - a. What are Tarot cards and why might someone want to get a reading?
  - b. Pretend that you are Ella and write a diary entry describing what the Tarot reading was like and what you think it means.
  - c. Grace and Ella's mother are skeptics. Define the word skeptic.
7. Ella is always noticing little things that could be "signs" of a connection to the spirit world. Using chapters 1-5 as evidence, create a list of these "signs."
8. Create a screenplay-like script for the incident on Ella's eighth birthday. Include all the dialogue written in the novel, taking creative liberties and fleshing out where necessary. Be sure to have a definite beginning and end to the scene.
9. Using the description of Benton Books on page 40, draw a map of the store.
10. When Ella meets Gavin, she says, "I'm not even sure Grace would approve."
  - a. Do you think it's important to have a best friend approve of who you are dating?
  - b. What does this say about Ella and Grace's friendship?
  - c. Do you see any red flags in their relationship? If so, list them.

#### Who is Blake?

Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Blake, on a large piece of paper.

Using Chapters 1–5 as evidence, document any known details about Blake inside the outline.

Outside the outline, write any questions about Blake that you might have.

### Making Connections

Dishonesty is a theme in *Black Flowers, White Lies*. Blake lies about his early arrival into town. Ella hides the truth when Grace asks her about Blake and Beautiful Boy. And Ella's mother kept a big secret for much of Ella's life regarding Oscar.

- Do you believe in "white lies" or are all lies wrong?
- On a scale of 1-5, rank the lies listed above with 1 being the least harmful and 5 being the most. Explain your ranking.
- Is it ever all right to lie? In what types of situations?

Find a partner and share a time you have lied and a time you have been lied to.

- How did it feel to lie?
- Did anything good come out of lying?
- Did the lie stop at one lie, or did it lead to a chain of lies to support the original lie?
- How did it feel to be lied to?
- What happened when you discovered you had been lied to?

Reflect on the following quote from Sir Walter Scott:

*O, what a tangled web we weave; When first we practice to deceive!*

Explain the meaning of this quote in your own words. Using evidence from your own life, agree or disagree with Sir Walter Scott.

## **Chapters 6-10**

1. One Hoboken florist explains to Ella that black flowers are often a very dark red. Conduct an Internet search for black flowers. How many varieties of black flowers can you find?

- a. Ella says the black flowers at her father’s grave had “floppy, outstretched petals.” Browse images of black flowers on the Internet. Can you find a flower that matches this description?
  - b. Research the meaning of black flowers. Can you predict who might have placed black flowers on the grave and why? Use the information you find in your research as evidence to support your prediction.
2. Based on what Blake tells Ella about their first meeting in the mall, rewrite that scene from Blake’s point of view, including description and dialogue. Be sure to have a definite beginning and end to the scene.
3. Blake tells Ella some information regarding her father’s death that he says Stanley told him. Ella is shocked at what he says. Do you think he is telling the truth?
  - a. Provide two reasons why Ella should believe Blake.
  - b. Provide two reasons Ella should believe her mother.
  - c. Who do you believe? Use evidence from the book to support your argument.
4. Blake says he always wanted a sister. List things Blake says and does that illustrate his claim.
  - a. In your own opinion, do you think Blake is being a good brother to Ella? Why or why not?
5. Ella faces the fact that she might have to “rewrite the legend” about how she thinks her father died. Legends are created stories passed down through generations about a person doing (usually) incredible things. There’s (usually) some truth to the stories, but they can’t be proven. Write the legendary version of Ella’s father’s death.
  - a. Then, rewrite the story based on what Blake has uncovered.
  - b. Why do you think it is so difficult for Ella to find out her father might not have died in the way she thought?
6. Ella chooses to wear the rose-colored dress her mother picked out for her instead of the strapless, yellow dress Blake bought for her. Do you think she made the right choice? Why or why not?
7. Imagine that Ella chose the yellow dress instead. Rewrite the scene on page 76 with Ella wearing Blake’s dress.
  - a. How would her mother react?

- b. What do you think Ella would say?
  - c. Would Blake stand up for Ella?
  - d. What would Stanley think of Blake's involvement?
8. The wedding is held at The Brass Rail in Hoboken, New Jersey and Ella says the restaurant has a haunted history. Research the history of The Brass Rail.
- a. Do you believe it might be haunted?
9. Grace says "Everyone lies sometimes." Do you agree?
- a. How many characters in *Black Flowers, White Lies* have lied?
  - b. On a scale of 1-5 with one being "inexcusable" and 5 being "absolute good reason," rate each lie in *Black Flowers, White Lies*.
  - c. What other options besides lying did the character have?
  - d. How would telling the truth have changed things?
10. What do you think Ella means when she says, "I lost him once. Now I'm losing him all over again?" Explain in your own words, using examples from the book to support your answer.
11. In a group of three, each student should take on a role: Ella, Blake, or Grace. Create four frozen statue poses depicting chapters 6-10 entitled "Lies." For each image, choose a quote from the text to use as a caption. Perform all four images in sequence, along with the captions, for the rest of the class.

## Chapters 11-15

1. Ella's mind swims with lots of thoughts regarding where the muddy handprint could have come from. Some of her explanations are logical. Some are not. List all the thoughts she has.
  - a. Can you think of a logical explanation for the muddy handprint?
  - b. Can you think of a supernatural explanation for the muddy handprint?
2. Ella says that Hudson Animal Care and Control is a "full resources" facility and that they do euthanize animals if they run out of room. Conduct an Internet

search to learn about the different types of animal shelters, including “kill” and “no kill.”

- a. If you were going to volunteer at an animal shelter, what would you like to know first? List your questions.
  - b. Contact your local animal shelter and interview someone on staff to find out how their organization works.
3. When Gavin visits the shelter, Ella thinks he is not being entirely honest. What are some of the red flags that raise her suspicions? Why do you think he might be lying?
4. Describe, in your own words, Ella’s reason for visiting Norma. What is her plan?
- a. What does she learn on her visit?
  - b. Do you think Norma might have left the muddy handprint? Why or why not?
5. When Ella and Blake return from the hardware store she finds the word DAUGHTER written on the laundry room wall in what appears to be blood and a bloody handprint. But when Ella tries to show it to Blake minutes later, the wall is clean. How would you explain this?
6. Why does Ella decide not to spend another night at Grace’s?
- a. Imagine you are Grace and write a diary entry about your text from Ella about not spending the night. How does this make you feel? Why do you not text back?
  - b. Imagine you are Ella and write a diary entry about your evening home alone.
7. Ella and Gavin discuss Hoboken history and ghost stories on their date. Research the story of Sybil’s Cave on Frank Sinatra Drive.
- a. Gavin says that Edgar Allan Poe changed her name, but based “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” on this story. Read the short story by Edgar Allan

#### Who is Gavin?

Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Gavin, on a large piece of paper.

Using the text as evidence, document any known details about Gavin inside the outline.

Outside the outline, write any questions about Gavin that you might have.



Poe. What similarities are there between history and the story he created? Where did Poe take artistic liberties?

8. After Chapter 15, how do you explain what has been happening to Ella? What are your predictions? Who do you think is to blame? Support your answer with examples from the text.

### Making Connections

Ella works part-time at her mother's bookstore, but volunteers at the animal shelter.

- Have you ever volunteered your time to help somebody?
- Think of needs in your school or community. Write down each need and how a group of volunteers might serve to help the situation.
  - Choose one situation on the list and create a class volunteer project.
- Write an essay, using examples based on research, that describes how an individual can influence the lives of others through volunteering.

## **Chapters 16-20**

1. What do you think Grace means when she asks Ella, "Are you that desperate for attention?" Why might Ella need attention?
2. For his job with Haunted Hoboken, Gavin memorized a script of facts and anecdotes. Using what little information is given in Chapter 18, create a brochure and walking map for the tour. Be sure to include information about The Brass Rail, Arthur's Tavern, the Hotel Victor sign, City Hall, the library, and the PATH station.
3. Write an account, from Gavin's point of view, from the end of his date with Ella until he meets her in the morning to explain why he feels he can't see her any more.

4. Do you believe Ella's accounts of what has happened? If not, she might be an "unreliable narrator."
  - a. Research what an "unreliable narrator" is.
  - b. Why might a character be considered unreliable?
  - c. How does the reliability of the narrator play into the reader's experience?

### Making Connections

Blake plays "Two Truths and a Lie" with Ella. Now play your own version.

Sit in a circle. Each person must come up with two true statements about themselves and one lie. Go around the circle and have each person share his or her three statements. When each person is done, the rest of the group will try and guess which statement was the lie.

After the game, discuss:

- What clues might be in someone's body language if they are lying? Facial expressions? Tone of voice?
- Think about a time when you have lied. Do you think it was obvious that you lied? Did you feel differently while speaking? How so?
- Think about a time you were lied to. Did you know the person was lying? How so?

## Chapters 21-30

1. To get answers and help, who are the people Ella considers turning to? List them in order of who you think would be the most helpful to the least. Explain why you have placed them in this order.
  - a. In your life, who would you consider turning to if you needed help like Ella? Explain your choice.
2. What is a fugue state? Do you think it is possible that Ella committed these acts in a fugue state? Why or why not?
3. What is the difference between facts and what Ella perceives happened? For example, the fact is that she woke up and Oscar was not moving and she had blood on her hands. What isn't fact? She is the one who harmed Oscar.
  - a. Go through the bizarre moments from the past several chapters. Create a T-chart of what is Fact and what is Not Yet Proven. Add a third column for possible explanations.
4. "Gaslighting" is a form of psychological manipulation in which the victim is made to doubt their own sanity. Research the origin of the term gaslight.
  - a. What are some strategies that are used to gaslight someone?
  - b. Based on your research, do you think Blake is gaslighting Ella?
5. If you were Ella, what kind of evidence would you want to take with you when you escape the apartment? Explain each item you would choose.
6. Make a prediction as to what happened to Oscar and how he is alive.
7. Create another chart of the curious incidents that have happened to Ella through the course of the book. How could Blake have been responsible for all of them? Use evidence from the book where possible. For others, simply predict based on what you already know.

### Who is Henry?

Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Henry, on a large piece of paper.

Using the text as evidence, document any known details about Henry inside the outline.

Outside the outline, write any questions about Henry that you might have.

8. At the end of chapter thirty, as Ella leaves to get Oscar, she says she has something else for Gavin to do. How do you think Gavin can be of help right now?

### Making Connections

Sometimes it is difficult to sort through what is fact and what is perception.

Have someone unannounced (a teacher or a student from a different class) come into your classroom while students are working quietly on a task at their desks. Plan with the mystery visitor ahead of time to make sure he or she does several things in your class during his or her brief visit such as:

- Borrow something like a book, a craft supply, money, etc.
- Talk to a student in the class
- Give a note to the teacher
- Ask a question
- Set something down on a table

After the visitor leaves the room, have the students write down as many details as they can remember about the visit.

- What details do they recall? What was the visitor wearing? How long was the visitor in the room? What did the visitor borrow while in the room? Whom did he or she talk to? What did he or she say?

Once everyone has finished writing, ask students to share their observations. Compare notes. What are the similarities and differences between student reports?

Discuss what might be facts and what was simply perception.

## Chapters 31-33

1. On page 239, Ella tells her mother and Stanley everything Blake has done to manipulate her. Using evidence from the book, write a script of what Ella tells them.
2. The situation with Blake has left a strain on Ella's mother and Stanley's new marriage. Pretending that you are Ella's mother, write a diary entry detailing your thoughts and feelings about what Ella has told you about Blake's actions.
  - a. Pretending that you are Stanley, write a diary entry detailing your thoughts and feelings about what Ella has told you about Blake. Include his feelings about the cash under the mattress and the realization that Blake doesn't attend NYU.
3. Ella always thought Henry didn't like her. Where does she bump into him and what does she learn about Henry?
4. Do you think Blake is in Martinique? What do you think he is doing there? Do you think he ever plans to return to Hoboken again?
5. How has Ella changed from the beginning of the novel to the end? Use evidence from the book to support your answer.
6. Do you think the photo of Ella's dad is a sign? How so?
  - a. What do you think causes Ella to now want to place the photo in a frame?

## After You Read

Below are a few final project ideas for the conclusion of *Black Flowers, White Lies*.

1. Read the "Praise" quotes from other authors on the back cover. Choose one and write a 500-word essay supporting what they said about *Black Flowers, White Lies* using textual evidence as support.
2. Several themes run through *Black Flowers, White Lies*.

Family	Death
Trust/Self-trust	Truth/Lies
The supernatural	Manipulation

Choose one of these themes on which to base a 500-word essay.

- a. How is this theme evident in the characters and events of the novel?
  - b. What can readers take away from *Black Flowers, White Lies* in relation to this theme?
3. Create a book trailer for *Black Flowers, White Lies*. Carefully choose music, visuals, and words to create an overall feel for the book.