

# RANDOM HOUSE TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

## I am Rebecca

Fleur Beale

**Life inside a religious cult becomes too much for 16-year-old Rebecca when she finds out who she is to marry.**

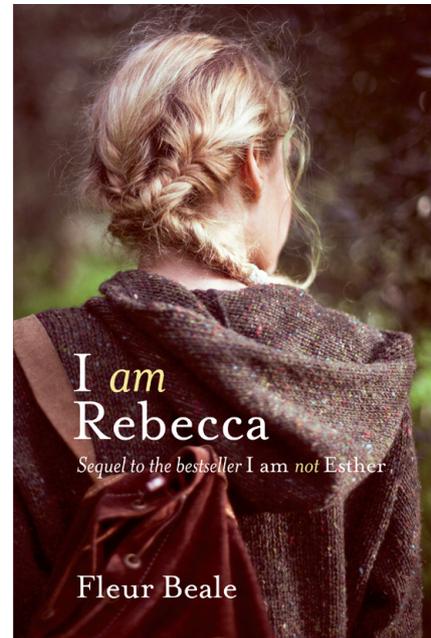
All the girls in her strict religious sect must be married just after their 16th birthdays. Her twin sister Rachel desperately wants to marry the boy she's given her heart to. All Rebecca wants is to have a husband who is kind, but both girls know the choice is not theirs to make.

What will the future hold for Rebecca? Is there a dark side to the rules which have kept her safe? Can the way ahead be so simple when the community is driven by secrets and hidden desires?

Award-winning YA writer Fleur Beale's sequel to the bestselling classic *I Am Not Esther* is a gripping psychological thriller.



**Fleur Beale** is the author of many award-winning books for children and young adults. A former high-school teacher, she now lives in Wellington.



### SPECIFICATIONS:

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Readership: 13+

### RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- Before Reading
- Close Reading
- Style and Technique
- Characters
- Themes
- Creative Responses
- Research Topics
- Reading List

Price (GST inclusive) and author details are correct at the time of writing but are subject to change without notice.



## Before Reading

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1. What does the cover image suggest about the book's content?
2. When and where might the story be set?
3. What does the title suggest to you?
4. What do you know about the earlier novel *I am not Esther*?
5. Do you think a sequel should be able to be read as if it were a stand-alone novel?

## Close Reading

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### Chapter One

1. Each chapter in this novel begins with one of the rules that must be followed by sect members. What do you think is meant by the term 'worldly education'? Why do you think the sect leaders would want the children to leave school as soon as they are able? (p. 9)
2. What is your very first impression of the Pilgrim family? What is the first piece of evidence that Mr Pilgrim exerts a great deal of control? (p. 9)
3. What sin does Abraham commit? Why is such an action considered to be a sin in the eyes of Mrs Pilgrim? (p. 10)
4. What evidence is there that Rachel and Rebecca are well regarded by their teachers? Why are the girls apprehensive about being given a certificate? (pp. 12–13)
5. Why does Mr Pilgrim crush the drawing the girls have been given and then burn it? (pp. 14–15)
6. Why do you think one of the rules states 'it is a sin to create ungodly images'? (p. 16)
7. What do you learn about Daniel, Esther and Miriam in this first chapter? (p. 15–16)

8. Why is Mr Pilgrim keen to keep his family away from 'worldly people' as much as possible? (p. 17)
9. What does Abigail mean by 'to speak seemly'? (p. 19)

### Chapter Two

1. What does the rule at the beginning of this chapter suggest about the way the sect is organised? (p. 20)
2. What are Rebecca's first impressions of Elder Stephen? (p. 21)
3. Why are the girls horrified at the thought of selling eggs at the market? (p. 22)

### Chapter Three

1. What does the rule at the beginning of this chapter suggest about the sect's view of life? What do you think is meant by the term 'salvation'? (p. 23)
2. Why are the girls reluctant to tell their father they did not want to work at the market? (p. 23)
3. Why do you think the children are taught lessons from America? (p. 24)

4. How is Gideon different from the other men who belong to the sect? (p. 25)
5. Why do you think Rebecca thought that 'it didn't please the Lord for women to wear men's clothing' or to wear makeup? Why might this be seen as a bad thing? (p. 25)
6. Why were the girls shocked by some of their customers and unable to make eye contact with them? (p. 26)
7. What does Gideon mean when he tells the girls that 'the Lord will want you to do all you can to show the godliness of the Children of the Faith'? (p. 27)
8. Why did Rebecca think that Elder Stephen would be angry if he knew that market days had become the highlight of her week? (p. 28)

#### Chapter Four

1. To what extent do you think that the rule that opens this chapter ('A man's behaviour is a matter between himself and his conscience') is observed by the followers? What are the different ways that the rule can be interpreted? (p. 30)
2. Why are the girls horrified by the thought of having to go to market with Ira? (pp. 30–31)
3. Why is their father initially disappointed in the girls when they tell him they have something to say about another member of the congregation? (p. 33)
4. What does Ira imply about the position of women in the Children of Faith and to what extent is he correct in this view, in terms of how women are treated by men within the cult? (pp. 35–36)

#### Chapter Five

1. How does the rule at the beginning of this chapter relate back to Chapter One? (p. 37)

2. Why does Rebecca think her mother is lucky and to what extent do you agree with her view? (p. 37)
3. Why is Magdalene so upset? (p. 40)

#### Chapter Six

1. Why do you think Elder Stephen insists that the rule must be obeyed? (p. 42)
2. What is being implied when Elder Stephen says that the Saturday market visits have been a success? (p. 43)
3. How is tension built up in the first half of this chapter? (pp. 42–46)
4. Why does the Council of Elders think that a prompt marriage would be good for Ira? (p. 47)

#### Chapter Seven

1. What is meant by vanity and idolatry in the rule at the beginning of this chapter? (p. 49)
2. What do you learn about Esther from this chapter? (pp. 51–52)
3. Why do you think the Elders may not have wanted Daniel to become a doctor? (p. 53)
4. Rachel says to Rebecca, 'I think you have to want to live by the Rule. You have to know with your whole heart and soul that it's the right way to live.' Yet both girls doubt aspects of the rule. Do you think the Pilgrim children manage to live happily and remain faithful to their religion? (p. 54)

#### Chapter Eight

1. Why do you think the Elders and parents believe they should have the right to arrange the marriages of the children, as per the rule at the beginning of this chapter? (p. 56)
2. Do you agree with the girls when they say, 'We'd come to understand how chatting

to our customers was the worldly way of showing respect'? Do you consider "chatting" to be a sign of respect? To what extent do you think the girls have confused basic friendliness with respect? How would you describe 'showing respect' in your own life? (p. 56)

3. Why do the children rarely get sweets? (p. 57)
4. Explain in your own words what Rebecca means when she says, 'Our clothing was modest, too — it was easier to keep our minds turned to the will of the Lord if we didn't need to worry about how we looked'. (p. 58)
5. What does Abraham's comment about eating all his sweets at once reveal about his father's attitude towards treats of any type? (p. 61)

## Chapter Nine

1. According to the rule, parents should prepare their children for marriage by setting a godly example. What do they mean by this and do you think this is good preparation? (p. 63)
2. Do you think teenagers are better off to be ignorant but innocent about sex education? (p. 63) Explain your answer.
3. What evidence is there in the novel so far to suggest that Elder Stephen is wise? (p. 63)
4. Why might Talitha prefer to remain single and have no children than to be a married woman with the sect? (p. 65)
5. Why do you think the young people of the sect agree to being married at a young age to people selected by the Elders and approved by their parents? (p. 65)
6. Why do girls have to wait until they are married before their new husbands can

reveal to them what goes on in the marriage bed? What does this reveal about the status of women? (p. 67)

7. To what extent do you agree with Rachel's view that the rule keeps them safe? (p. 68)

## Chapter Ten

1. Why do you think women must cover their hair in public? (p. 69)
2. What does the girls' game about choosing 'worldly clothes' reveal about them? To what extent is this a sign of potential rebellion? (pp. 69–70)
3. Why would the Elders think that if a girl was not married by the age of 20 then she was not suitable to be a wife and mother? (p. 72)
4. What do you think about the idea of girls being formally betrothed as soon as they turn 14? Again, why would the Elders want them to be betrothed at such a young age and then married by the age of 16? (p. 73)

## Chapter Eleven

1. Why would the Elders think that worldly education is evil? (p. 76)
2. Why would fathers not tell their daughters about who might want to marry them? (p. 79)
3. What exactly is the secret code the young men use? (p. 80; p. 84)
4. Why did Rebecca think that Saul would be a good match for her sister? (p. 83)

## Chapter Twelve

1. Why would the Elders think that a marriage was acceptable only if it would benefit the community? (p. 90)

## Chapter Thirteen

1. What does the rule at the beginning of this chapter reveal about the sect's attitude towards the medical profession? (p. 92)
2. How did the women attempt to subtly subvert the dress code when someone got married? (p. 95)

## Chapter Fourteen

1. According to the rule, betrothed couples are not allowed to spend time together unless a married adult is present. Why might that be? (p. 100)
2. Why did Enoch tell the girls that he would not report them for talking to their cousin? And why did the girls feel they had to tell their father, even though Enoch would not report them? (p. 103)

## Chapter Fifteen

1. Why would fathers have to report their children to the Elders if they committed a grievous offence? What might be regarded as a grievous offence, apart from what Rachel and Rebecca did in the previous chapter? (p. 105)
2. Why weren't the twins allowed to talk to their younger siblings? (pp. 107–109)

## Chapter Sixteen

1. Why, according to the rule, do the Children of the Faith have to keep apart from the world? Do you think there is any justification for this view? (p. 110)
2. What do you think about the way the Children of the Faith are expected to treat those who have left the cult? (pp. 110–113)

## Chapter Seventeen

1. Why do you think the sect would not

allow Christmas decorations, trees or presents? (p. 115)

2. What signs are there in this chapter that the marriage between Kezia and Ira may not be a happy one? (pp. 115–116)
3. The girls believe that 'the worldly way of choosing a life partner was haphazard and led to much unhappiness and immorality'. (p. 116) To what extent do you agree or not agree with this view? Explain.
4. What do you think is meant by the phrase 'behave at all times in a seemly manner'? (p. 117)

## Chapter Eighteen

1. According to the rule at the beginning of this chapter, it is the duty of the husband to choose the names of his children and they must come from the Bible. Why might that be? (p. 119)
2. Why might unmarried girls over the age of 15 be expected to work in the nursery on Sundays? (p. 119)
3. Why does Elder Stephen make Rebecca feel uncomfortable? (p. 120)
4. Why are the women expected to have their babies without any pain relief? (p. 121)
5. Why do Rachel and Rebecca find it so difficult to answer Magdalene's questions about babies? (pp. 123–124)

## Chapter Nineteen

1. What do you think is meant by the rule 'All life is sacred'? (p. 125)
2. Why do you think the women are encouraged to have many children? (p. 126)
3. Why is Kezia's behaviour considered so shocking? (p. 128)

4. Why would running be against the rule? (p. 131)
5. Why do you think Kezia behaves the way she does? (pp. 129–134)
6. How does Rebecca attempt to give Kezia advice without breaking the rule? (pp. 132–133)

### **Chapter Twenty**

1. Why might the Children of the Faith believe that illness is a sign of sin? (p. 135)
2. What does Sister Jerushah's house reveal about her own family life? (p. 138)
3. What do Nurse Katherine and Elder Stephen argue about? (pp. 140–141)
4. Why does Nurse Katherine warn Rebecca? (pp. 141–142)

### **Chapter Twenty-one**

1. Why, according to the rule, must all sect members obey the leader? How could this be a dangerous rule? (p. 143)
2. To what extent does the girls' opinion of Elder Stephen change as a result of what the nurse tells them? (p. 143)

### **Chapter Twenty-two**

1. According to the rule at the beginning of this chapter, 'the world is full of evil, temptation and corruption'. To what extent is this also true of life in the community of the Children of the Faith? (p. 148)
2. What indications are there that Rebecca and Malachi might have a happy marriage? (p. 150)
3. Why do you think Elder Stephen questioned Rebecca? To what extent was he satisfied with her answers? (pp. 154–156)

4. Why are the girls so surprised by the fabric for their petticoats? What does this reveal about their mother? (p. 158)
5. What signs are there that Malachi is not as obedient as he may seem to be? (p. 159)

### **Chapter Twenty-three**

1. What does the rule that begins this chapter suggest about the leader of the Children of the Faith? (p. 161)
2. Who do you think Rebecca is more angry with: Malachi for abandoning her, or Elder Stephen for insisting that Malachi switch jobs? (p. 162)
3. What would be the consequences for Rebecca if she refused to marry the man Elder Stephen chose for her? (pp. 164–165)
4. Why would the Elders want Ira to be married again so quickly after the departure of Kezia? (p. 168)

### **Chapter Twenty-four**

1. What do the vows made by the husband and wife reveal about the way the sect considers the roles of men and women? (pp. 173–174)
2. Why does Rebecca feel upset about the fact that her little sister loves machinery? (p. 177)

### **Chapter Twenty-five**

1. What does Rebecca mean when she says that Talitha has given her a precious gift? (p. 179)
2. Why does Rachel begin to feel restless and lonely in her first months of married life? (pp. 181–183)

### **Chapter Twenty-six**

1. How does Saul stand up for Rachel in this

chapter and what does this indicate about their relationship? (pp. 186–187)

2. What indications earlier in the novel were there that Elder Stephen had Rebecca in mind as his new wife? (p. 189)
3. Are you surprised by Mr Pilgrim's willingness to have his 16-year-old daughter marry a 76-year-old man? (pp. 190–191) Explain your answer.

### **Chapter Twenty-seven**

1. How does the rule that introduces this chapter partly explain why committed members of the Children of Faith never argue with their leader? (p. 193)
2. Why does Rebecca think that Rachel has 'truly gone' from her? (p. 196)
3. Why is Rebecca highly suspicious of Elder Stephen's motives for marrying her? What evidence is there to support her views? (p. 197)

### **Chapter Twenty-eight**

1. What signs are there that members of Rebecca's family do not want her to marry Elder Stephen? (p. 199)
2. What does Rebecca mean when she says that Elder Stephen's praying left her with a 'bruised and bleeding soul'? (p. 201)
3. Why does Rachel believe in the rule? (p. 203)

### **Chapter Twenty-nine**

1. Why do you think Elder Stephen asks Rebecca if she knows about the 'secrets of the marriage bed'? (pp. 204–205)
2. Why did the woman in the jewellers' shop do nothing to help Rebecca even though she was clearly uncomfortable about the fact that Rebecca was about to marry an old man? (p. 207)

3. What further evidence is there that Elder Stephen treated his first wife badly and is likely to be equally unloving and unkind to Rebecca? (pp. 207–208)
4. How do Rachel's words to Rebecca spur her on to leave? Do you think she might have tried to leave without this encouragement from Rachel? (p. 208)

### **Chapter Thirty**

1. Why has Elder Stephen sent Hosea and how do his actions only further convince Rebecca to leave? (pp. 210–211)
2. Why do you think the neighbours are so ready to help Rebecca? (pp. 213–216)
3. Why do you think the policewoman asked Rebecca if she was sure she wanted to leave, despite having heard about the marriage plans? (p. 218)

### **Chapter Thirty-one**

1. How have the previous actions of Daniel, Miriam and Kirby made the situation easier for Rebecca? (pp. 220–225)

### **Chapter Thirty-two**

1. How does Daniel attempt to comfort Rebecca? (p. 227)
2. In what ways have Daniel and Miriam changed? (pp. 227–228)
3. Why is Rebecca surprised by her reflection in the mirror? (p. 231)
4. What does Rebecca learn about herself from her session with the counsellor? (pp. 232–234)

### **Chapter Thirty-three**

1. How is Rebecca able to reassure herself about hell and damnation? (p. 236)

2. What are some of the things Rebecca finds so surprising when she goes to church on Christmas Day? (p. 240)
3. What does Rebecca learn about her aunt Ellen? (pp. 241–242)
4. Why do you think Kirby cuts only some of Rebecca's plait off? (p. 244)

### Chapter Thirty-four

1. Why does Rebecca choose to go to a co-ed school without a uniform? (p. 245)
2. How does Rebecca grapple with issues of personal faith? (pp. 246–247)
3. What does Rebecca mean when she says 'freedom is precious but costly'? (p. 251)

## Style and Technique

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1. The publisher describes this novel as a psychological thriller. To what extent do you agree with this categorisation? What other genres could you say this novel fits into?
2. This novel is written from Rebecca's point of view. How effective do you think this narrative style is? What limitations are there with using this perspective?
3. Each chapter in this novel begins with a rule. To what extent do you think this is a useful device to prepare you for what the chapter will be about? Or do you think the rule gave too much away of the plot away?
4. The author uses many religious terms in this novel e.g. salvation, damnation, faith. Create your own glossary of these terms.

# Characters

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1. Select four adjectives to describe each of the following characters:
  - Rebecca
  - Rachel
  - Mr Pilgrim
  - Mrs Pilgrim
  - Elder Stephen
  - Ira
  - Kezia
  - Saul
  - Malachi
  - Sister Jerushah
  - Daniel
  - Kirby
2. How would you have described Rebecca at the beginning of the novel? Select four key events in the novel that you think are turning points for Rebecca and describe the effect of each of these events on her.
3. Write at least 400 words comparing and contrasting Rebecca and Rachel.
4. How are the 'worldly' people presented in this novel? Do you think the author is too kind or complimentary in her portrayal of people and life outside the Children of the Faith? Why or why not?
5. To what extent are all the men in the sect sexist in their attitudes and behaviour? What evidence (if any) is there to suggest that the younger men are less so? To what extent is life in the Children of the Faith sect better for men than for women?

# Themes

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1. Write a paragraph on each of the following themes and how they are explored in *I am Rebecca*:
  - The role of religion in people's lives
  - Family bonds
  - Being true to oneself
  - The use and abuse of power
  - Moral choices
  - Betrayal
  - Manipulation and religious indoctrination
  - Intolerance of difference
  - Personal freedom
2. Religious freedom is a human right. However, after reading this novel, do you think there should be laws preventing people from forming religious sects or from choosing a religious faith for their young children? You may like to debate this topic in front of the class. Or, you might like to create a short film or PowerPoint presentation explaining your views.
3. In the Children of the Faith sect, marriage partners are chosen by the Elders, with the parents' approval. Arranged marriages are not unusual in many cultures. Can you see any advantages in allowing others to choose your marriage partner? Explain in detail your reasons for and against.
4. Similarly, in this sect, people marry at a very young age. Currently in New Zealand you may marry at the age of 16, with the consent of your parents. Explain why you think this is an acceptable age for marriage or why you think it should be changed. Should there be a law preventing people from marrying when the age gap between them is more than twenty years? Explain your view.

# Creative Responses

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1. Write a newspaper article about Rebecca's escape from the sect.
2. Write the report that the police would have written after interviewing both Rebecca and Elder Stephen.
3. Imagine that you are Edwin and write his report on Rebecca and her progress.
4. Create a visual presentation (poster, short film, animation) focusing on one of the themes in this novel.
5. What do you think could or should happen in the sequel to this novel? Write a one- to two-page outline of the plot for the sequel you would write. Be sure to include a possible title for this sequel.
6. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the readership of your favourite magazine or website. Alternatively, write a comparison between this novel and another with a similar plot or theme. See the reading list overleaf for suggestions.
7. Choose a chapter from the novel and turn it into a scripted drama that you could present to the class.

# Research Topics

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1. Watch the documentary *Children of Gloriavale* (available on YouTube). Compare and contrast this community with the Children of the Faith. Present your findings as a PowerPoint or Prezi.
2. Research the beliefs and lifestyle of one of the following religious groups and present your findings to the class as an oral presentation:
  - The Cooperites (see *Sins of the Father* by Fleur Beale)
  - The Exclusive Brethren
  - The Open Brethren
  - The Amish
  - The Mennonites
  - The Moonies
  - Heaven's Gate
  - Scientology
  - Destiny Church
  - Jehovah's Witnesses
  - Falun Gong
  - Friends and Workers (also known as 'The Truth')
3. You may like to comment on whether or not you think the group you are researching is a cult. Also worth watching is the documentary *How to Spot a Cult* at <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/inside-new-zealand-how-to-spot-cult>
3. In fundamental religions (not just Christian sects) women are often regarded as being inferior to men. Why might this attitude have developed and how are some religious denominations and faiths trying to change this?
4. All the members of the Children of the Faith have names taken from the Bible. Find out the meanings of these names and where they appear in the Bible.
5. Research the origin of the rules of the Children of the Faith. See if you can find out which of them come from biblical teachings (the Old Testament) and which were made up by the author.

# Reading List

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## Fiction

*Abomination* by Robert Swindells  
*Armageddon Summer* by Jane Yolen and Bruce Coville  
The *Blood of the Lamb* series by Mandy Hager  
*Brides of Eden* by Linda Crew  
*The Chosen One* by Carol Lynch Williams  
*The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham  
*The Patron Saint of Butterflies* by Cecilia Galante

## Non Fiction

*Sins of the Father* by Fleur Beale