

THE BOY I AM

BY K.L. KETTLE

Reading-Group & Discussion Guide

PERFECT FOR

Reading groups & KS4 classrooms · ages 14+ · see the note on p.2

TALK ABOUT

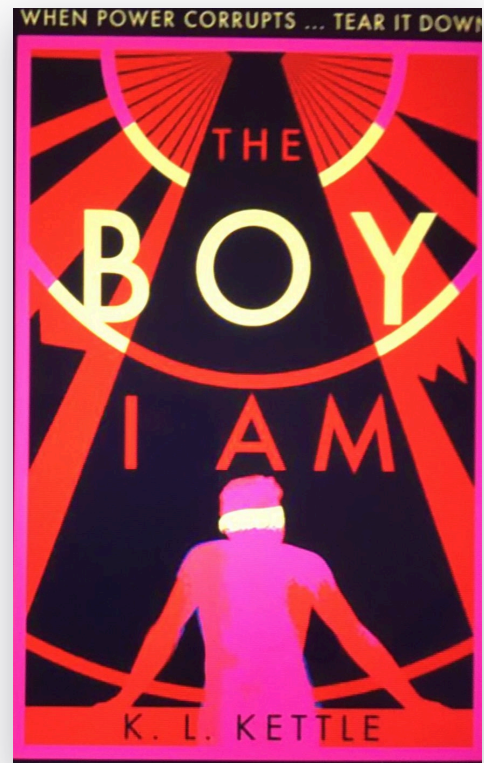
- ✓ Power, and what happens when you flip who holds it
- ✓ Worth and merit — who decides what a person is worth?
- ✓ Story versus truth, and how propaganda works
- ✓ Masks, performance and the self we hide
- ✓ Grief, conscience and the courage to refuse
- ✓ Freedom that only counts when it's shared

SUBJECTS

English

PSHE / RSHE

Citizenship



Cover shown for reference

ABOUT THE BOOK

Once a year, lucky young men in the House of Boys are auctioned to the female elite — and if Jude fails to be selected before he turns seventeen, a future in the mines awaits. Since the death of his best friend at the hands of the all-powerful Chancellor, Jude has been desperate to escape. Drawn into a plot to assassinate the Chancellor, he finally has a chance to win his freedom. But at what price?

A note, out of respect. A dystopia that flips gender and power, in the tradition of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Noughts & Crosses* — and gentler than Atwood. This guide covers the whole novel; it suits reading groups and classes from KS3 up (you know your group best). Fuller note on p.2.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How to use this guide

The Boy I Am is, in the publisher's words, "an ideal reading-group title" — a speculative thriller that flips gender politics to explore power. It rewards talking about. This guide gives you a short way in, then discussion questions grouped by theme, some bigger debate questions, creative responses and comparative reading. Pick and mix; you don't need all of it.

A quick way in. Before the first meeting, ask everyone to note the moment they first felt the world "click" into focus — and the moment they first felt uneasy. Compare notes: people rarely pick the same two.

The world, briefly. The story unfolds inside **High House** — a walled tower-city in a desert, cut off from a fog-choked Outside. Here women hold all power and boys are raised in the **House of Boys**, taught to be silent and "good", and auctioned once a year to the female elite. Those not chosen by seventeen are sent to the mines. A banished resistance — dismissed as **Hysterics** — survives Outside. Our narrator is sixteen-year-old **Jude Grant**, "lot one hundred and fifty".

Jude Grant — the narrator; the "good boy" who must decide what kind of man to be.

Vik — Jude's lost best friend, spoken to throughout as "you".

The Chancellor — soft-voiced supreme ruler of High House.

Romali Vor — red-haired rebel, the "Rain Girl"; a way Outside.

Mr Walker — Head of the House of Boys; the showman who recruits Jude.

The Hysterics — the banished women branded terrorists; the resistance.

IN THE AUTHOR'S WORDS

"If we are all equal, are we all equally capable of abusing the power we have?"

"Power coupled with fear leads to control labelled as protection."

— K.L. Kettle, on writing *The Boy I Am*

A note, out of respect. This guide covers the whole novel and reads well with groups from KS3 up. As with any dystopia — think *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Noughts & Crosses* — read it yourself first and pick what suits your group; the book carries real stakes, including a suicide attempt and sexual assault, handled with care. If a theme ever raises a concern, follow your school's usual process.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Power, and the flip

A world with the gender rules reversed

- 1 The book puts men in a place usually reserved, in our world and our stories, for women. What did that reversal make you notice that you'd stopped noticing?
- 2 Did you find yourself more shocked by things happening to Jude *because* he's a boy? What does your own reaction tell you?
- 3 Power in High House is total — it even controls the "night". Where does the book show power in small, everyday things rather than big cruel ones?
- 4 Is anyone in this world truly free — including the women at the top? What holds each of them in place?
- 5 The author has said she wrote the book asking, "If we are all equal, are we all equally capable of abusing the power we have?" How does the novel answer that question — and how would you?

Worth, merit and fairness

"Showing your worth"

- 1 Women are born with "a thousand merits"; boys inherit debt. How does calling this a "meritocracy" hide what's really going on?
- 2 Where in our own world do we decide a person's "worth" by numbers — grades, followers, money, likes? What does that miss?
- 3 Jude is taught to be "good". Who benefits when someone is trained to be good, quiet and grateful?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

continued

Story, truth and propaganda

Who holds the pen?

- 1 Jude slowly learns that "almost nothing he has been told is true." Which revelation hit you hardest — and why did you believe the lie in the first place?
 - 2 The Hysterics are branded dangerous terrorists. How does a society decide who gets called a "monster"? Who is doing the naming?
 - 3 "A name is a story that gets passed down and twisted by time." How do names, labels and stories carry power all through the book?
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Masks, performance and Identity

The self we show

- 1 Jude has a numbered repertoire of smiles. Where else does he perform — and when, if ever, do we see him without a mask?
 - 2 The title is *The Boy I Am*. By the end, who is that boy? How would you finish the sentence for him?
 - 3 Which character surprised you most by not being who they first seemed? What did that twist do to your sympathy?
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Grief, conscience and choosing

What kind of person to be

- 1 Jude is told boys are "born" violent. The whole book tests that. How does he finally answer it — and do you believe the answer?
- 2 He is handed a chance at revenge. Why is *refusing* to kill the harder, braver choice?
- 3 Grief drives much of what Jude does. Where does grief make him stronger, and where does it nearly undo him?

BIG QUESTIONS & CREATIVE RESPONSES

Freedom and resistance

Questions worth arguing about

- 1 The book ends on *collective* freedom — "freedom for as many of us as possible" — not a private happy ending. Is that more hopeful, or less? Would you have written it differently?
- 2 "There's more power in that than anything." What kind of power does Jude mean, and how is it different from the Chancellor's?
- 3 Can a good person survive a bad system without becoming part of it? Point to the moment where Jude is most at risk of becoming what he hates.
- 4 Is a system with no rebels a perfect one — or a warning sign? Debate both sides using the novel.

Creative responses

Ways to answer the book, not just talk about it

- **Flip it.** Take one everyday rule or expectation and reverse who it applies to. Write the opening scene of that world.
- **Missing voice.** Write a page from the Chancellor's, Vik's or Romali's point of view. What does the story look like through their eyes?
- **The manifesto.** Using the book's final page as a model, write a short rallying paragraph for a cause you believe in — building from "I" to "we".
- **Propaganda & counter-propaganda.** Design a poster the House of Merit would print — then the one the Hysterics would paste over it.

GOING FURTHER

If your group loved it

Where to read next

Readers who take to *The Boy I Am* tend to enjoy Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses*, Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* and Dhonielle Clayton's *The Belles*. For confident older readers (16+), it's a natural gateway to Naomi Alderman's *The Power* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* — both adult novels containing sexual violence, so check suitability before recommending. And K.L. Kettle's second novel, *Control Alter Delete* (2026), turns the same eye on technology, gaming, grief and hope.

Comparative questions

For groups reading more than one – the adult comparisons below suit 16+

- 1 Both *The Boy I Am* and *The Power* reverse who holds power. What does each book conclude about whether the abuse of power is about *gender* — or just about power itself?
- 2 Set beside *Noughts & Crosses*, how does each novel use a familiar, everyday setting to make injustice feel close rather than far away?
- 3 Compare Jude's quietly hopeful last lines with the ambiguous ending of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Which stays with you longer, and why?

Running the session

A loose plan for an hour

- **Open (10 min):** the "way in" above — first click, first unease.
- **Explore (30 min):** choose one or two theme groups; don't rush to cover everything.
- **Argue (10 min):** pick one "big question" and take sides.
- **Close (10 min):** everyone finishes the sentence "The boy I am is..." for themselves, or shares one line they underlined.

A note on content. *The Boy I Am* is a dystopia in the tradition of *The Handmaid's Tale*, taught from KS3 up. It carries real stakes — including a suicide attempt and sexual assault — handled with care; preview and pick what suits your group. Free classroom resources (activity pack, lesson plans) at klkettle.com.