

Educator's Guide  
*Just Myrto* by Laurie Gray

## About the Book

After caring for her dying father, Myrto is left with nothing upon his death: no dowry for a marriage and no home. In ancient Greece, women had no rights, no respect, and no control over their lives. Now Myrto's older brother must decide her fate, and he chooses to give Myrto to his teacher and friend, Socrates, as a second wife, one who can bear him more sons. Neither Socrates' wife nor Myrto is pleased with the arrangement, but since Myrto has no choice, she will make the best of it. Socrates wife, however, is cruel to Myrto and will not allow her into their home. Myrto is shocked when Socrates is kind to her and treats her with respect. He allows her to come with him into the city every day and to take part in his students' studies. Socrates asks his son to teach Myrto to read, and together Socrates' son and Myrto study the ancient writings. Soon Myrto realizes she has come to love Socrates, and she gives birth to a son. But after their second son is born, officials in Athens charge Socrates with corrupting the young men of Athens with his philosophy and throw him in jail to await trial. Once again Myrto's life will change as a result of a man, but she will rise up and be who she is - just as Socrates would have wanted her to do.

## Pre-Reading Activity

The references to Greek gods and goddesses, mythical and physical locations, and food and literature used throughout mythology are listed in the glossary. As a way to familiarize your students with the terms in the glossary, divide students into groups of three and assign each group the same number of terms. Ask students to create a poster with a picture illustrating and explaining the importance of each term their group has been assigned. Display the posters in the classroom for quick reference as the students read the novel.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why does Myrto so willingly marry Socrates even though she does not truly want to marry him? How do Socrates' behavior and kindness surprise Myrto?
2. How do Myrto's feelings and attitude change from, "Socrates had absolutely no feature that one might call attractive" on page 11 to those of love, respect, and admiration? When does her love for him begin to grow?
3. Why do the people of Athens disapprove of Socrates' influence over young men? Why is it worse to teach a young woman? How do the people of Athens respond to Myrto coming into the city with Socrates?

4. What secret does Socrates tell Myrto that helps dissipate her fear of Xanthippe? How does knowing the secret help Myrto overcome her fear?
5. What helps develop the relationship between Myrto and Lamprocles? How does he react to the news of Myrto and Socrates' baby?
6. What role does Myrto play in the education of the girls in Socrates' home? How does teaching Korinna to read affect all of the girls in Socrates home? How does Xanthippe plan to achieve the goal of the girls learning to read?
7. On page 151, Aspasia advises Myrto to use her head, but follow her heart. How does this advice help Myrto make her decision about marrying Plato?
8. How do Xanthippe's feelings change toward Myrto? What brings about the change in Xanthippe's attitude?
9. Why does Socrates refuse to quit teaching when he knows he will be charged with a crime? What does his family want him to do?
10. How does the title reflect Myrto's character? How can you justify that the title is appropriate to the novel?
11. In what way does Myrto's dream in the Prologue play out in her life with Socrates?

Correlates to Common Core State Standards Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.9-10.1 and Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.9-10.1

## **Classroom Activities**

### **Illuminating Quotes**

Ask students to work in small groups of three to four students and to jointly choose three meaningful quotes from *Just Myrto* that the author uses to help convey an idea she wants the readers to understand from the text. The quotes can be spoken by the characters or taken from the narration. Each student should respond independently to the three quotes explaining the relevance the quote has to the novel and the meaning or idea the author is trying to convey. Then have each group place their three selected quotes on poster board and place the different student responses alongside each of the "illuminated" quotes. Display the poster boards in the classroom. Have students do a "gallery walk" of the "illuminated quotes".

Correlates to Common Core State Standards Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.9-10.2 and Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.9-10.1 and Production and Distribution: W.9-10.4; Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9-10.1

## **Socratic Discussions**

Divide the class into five groups and assign each group one of the topics Socrates discussed with Myrto, Lampocles, and the young men of Athens: fear, tradition, honor, love, and wisdom. Before the discussion, each person in the group should find references in the book to their topic and take notes - including the page number - so they can refer to the text during the discussion. Then each person should write open-ended questions about their topic to discuss with others in their group. Have the remaining groups observe and record their personal responses as each of the groups conducts their discussion.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9-10.1 and Craft and Structure: RL.9-10.4 and RL.9-10.5 and RL.9-10.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.9-10.1

## **Socrates, Plato, Aristotle: Early Philosophers**

Show students the following website and read the brief description of each philosopher:

<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/socrates-plato-and-aristotle-the-big-three-in-gree.html>

Then ask students to select one of the three philosophers and to research his life and the contribution he made to modern society. Have students create a series of writings in different genres that, together, convey the essence of the philosopher and his contribution: letters, essays, diaries or journals, autobiographies, poems, eulogies by those who knew him, or others. Post writing collections in the classroom, library, and hallways of the school.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.9-10.1 and L.9-10.2 and Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.9-10.2 and Production and Distribution: W.9-10.4 and Research to Build and Present Knowledge: W.9-10.7; Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9-10.1

## **Myrto Evolves**

Myrto's character changes over the course of the novel. Ask students in small groups to analyze her character, discussing her interactions with other characters and how she helps advance the plot and develop the theme. Then have students create a series of diary entries that convey the milestone events and decisions that help convey the author's theme. Divide students into two or three large groups and have students share their diary entries in a large group "read-around".

Correlates to Common Core State Standards Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.9-10.1 and L.9-10.2 and Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.9-10.2 and Production and Distribution: W.9-10.4; Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9-10.3.

## **Facebook Page**

Ask pairs of students to select one of the characters and to create a “fictional” Facebook page for that character. Students should complete a full profile and write at least two status updates. Have students share in groups of four to five students and post character pages in the classroom.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9-10.1 and Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.9-10.1, W.9-10.2, and W.9-10.3.

## **Thematic Quotes**

In a group discussion, ask students to identify three underlying themes of *Just Myrto*. Then, using the Internet, ask them to find a quote that appropriately expresses one of the themes. Have students write the quote and an explanation of how it relates to the novel. Students should also include a symbolic or literal visual representation from the book to accompany their thematic explanations. Have students share their quotes and representations in small groups.

Correlates to Common Core State Standards Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.9-10.2; Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing: W.9-10.4. Research to Build and Present Knowledge: W.9-10.7