

Educator's Guide

THE PAST IS A MAZE. SHE IS THE KEY.

THE  
MEMORY  
THIEF



LAUREN MANSY

# The Memory Thief

by Lauren Mansy  
Educator's Guide for grades 7-12

*“Sunsets are ten times prettier after a storm.  
They're proof that good can come  
out of something bad.” (301)*

## Summary (Blink):

In the city of Craewick, memories reign. The power-obsessed ruler of the city, Madame, has cultivated a society in which memories are currency, citizens are divided by ability, and Gifted individuals can take memories from others through touch as they please.

Seventeen-year-old Etta Lark is desperate to live outside of the corrupt culture, but she grapples with the guilt of an accident that has left her mother bedridden in the city's asylum. When Madame threatens to put her mother up for auction, a Craewick practice in which a “criminals” memories are sold to the highest bidder before being killed, Etta will do whatever it takes to save her. Even if it means rejoining the Shadows, the rebel group she swore off in the wake of the accident years earlier.

To prove her allegiance to the Shadows and rescue her mother, Etta must steal a memorized map of the Maze, a formidable prison created by the bloodthirsty ruler of a neighboring Realm. So she sets out on a journey in which she faces startling attacks, unexpected romance, and, above all, her own past in order to set things right in her world.



## About the Author:

Lauren Mansy lives in the Chicago area, where she's spent years working with youth, from young children to high schoolers. When she's not writing, Lauren is usually with her family or exploring the city to find the best deep dish pizza. *The Memory Thief*, which was inspired by Lauren's own journey with her mother, is her first novel. You can visit her online at [laurenmansy.com](http://laurenmansy.com).

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## Pre-Reading Activities:

Along with pre-reading questions, these activities allow students to build connections to the novel.

1. **Letter** - Write a letter to someone meaningful in your life. What would you want the person to know if you knew you were going to lose him/her? Explain the person's importance. Be sure to include some of the memorable experiences you shared?

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10]

2. **Collage** - Have students bring in images that depict the themes within the book. They can be placed in a collage format on bulletin boards or poster boards to initiate conversation as to how these themes impact all of us. Have students reflect upon the similarities and differences between the images in a written response.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4]

## During Reading:

Have students use a dialectical journal to explore their thoughts and feelings in response to the novel. Students create the journal by dividing pages into two columns. On the left side, they record quotes (with page numbers) that spoke to them while they read. The right hand column is where they react and offer insight to the text. Encourage students to record passages that were impactful, made them wonder, or initiated thought. You may choose to have them focus on one aspect (vocabulary or theme) or allow them to record sections that they connect to personally (through memories or hardships of life).

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1;  
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.10]

## Literary Elements:

### Theme

Theme is a universal, broad truth or lesson that binds a story. These truths give the reader a look at how the world works. Themes connect readers to a story and are the big takeaway. Authors present themes through the experiences, events, dialogue, and thoughts of the characters. If you choose to focus on theme, you may have your students narrow in on one theme throughout the novel or explore elements or the entirety of all the themes. Students could jigsaw discussion (see post-reading option below). These themes are presented in the novel: Courage, Memory/Tradition, Classism, Morality.

### Quotes

Quotes are a good way to explore a theme. Encourage students to find quotes while reading that are impactful and support the themes. They can become a part of the dialectical journals or utilized in the other activities that follow each theme. A quote is provided at the beginning of each theme to use as a launching point of discussion.

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## Themes Exploration:

### Courage

**Definition:** The ability to do something which frightens one

**Defining Quote:** “Being brave doesn’t mean you aren’t afraid of anything. Just that the fear doesn’t stop you from fighting for something you believe in” (289).

## Pre-reading Questions:

1. If you learned that someone close to you was gravely ill, what would you sacrifice to ensure that the person would survive?
2. Reflect upon a time that you had to deliver bad news to someone. How did you approach telling the person? How did you feel? What was the person’s reaction?
3. Have you ever been afraid to do something? How did you overcome your fear?

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10]

## Post-reading Questions:

1. Etta realizes that “it’s not the hardships of life that define us, but the strength we find in getting through them” (301). Which hardships allowed her to find her greatest strength? Telling Reid of his brother’s death was not only her hardship but one for him as well. How did her strength grow through this telling?
2. Etta says of Ry, “Why squash a courageous spirit before its grown sturdy roots?” (15). Both Ry and Etta show growth in courage throughout the story. Compare and contrast their changes.
3. Etta says, “Being brave doesn’t mean you aren’t afraid of anything. Just that the fear doesn’t stop you from fighting for something you believe in” (289). Give examples in the story that show where Etta or other characters demonstrated bravery in the face of their fear.

[CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.11-12.1]

## Activity:

1. Slide Show - Put together a slide show (Google slides) depicting individuals who have demonstrated courage. Research and summarize their accomplishments. Share the slide show with your class.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.6; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.6; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.6; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6]

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## Memory/Tradition:

**Memory Definition:** the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information

**Tradition Definition:** the transmission of customs or beliefs from one generation to the next

**Defining Quote:** “Once those memories are gone, scattered among the highest bidders, it’ll be as if my mother never existed” (32).

## Pre-Reading Questions:

1. What is the strongest memory you have? Explore which elements make it the strongest (sensory details, the emotion connected to the event, the person who was with you)?
2. Should experiences be bought? How does that lessen or increase their value?
3. What traditions do your family follow? Which traditions are important enough that you will continue?
4. Which memories would you be most afraid to lose? Explain why.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10]

## Post-reading Questions:

1. Etta says, “I wonder what kind of painful memories she’ll transfer into him so she can forget about them” (26). If you could get rid of painful memories, would you?
2. Technology is often blamed for taking us out of the present and giving us a false reality or view of someone. Compare this to the memories that are stolen within the novel. In Craewick, memories of experiences are taken from one person and given to another for entertainment, until everyone has overused the memories and becomes tired of them. How does this connect to our reality today, especially where social media is concerned?
3. The author writes, “Memories are a tricky captor” (33). What do you think she meant by this?
3. Etta realizes she is afraid to lose the memories she has of her mother, saying, “Once those memories are gone, scattered among the highest bidders, it’ll be as if my mother never existed” (32). Why does she fear the loss of these memories?

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9]

## Activities:

1. Survey - Conduct a short research project that answers a self-generated question regarding memory. Survey several people, asking questions which focus on strong memories from childhood, concern for memory loss,

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using mnemonic devices to retrieve memory, or another area of interest. You may conduct experiments to test those surveyed, utilizing an app such as Lumosity. As a follow-up to the research, list what other questions their feedback generated.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7]

## 2. Making Literary Connections

- a. *Macbeth* (Shakespeare) - Etta's grandfather says of Madame, "Our past has a way of finding us, doesn't it. Now she's caught in the memory of that night, experiencing the horror she committed over and over again" (296). How does her reaction compare to that of Lady Macbeth's after the murder of King Duncan. Consider their actions, situations, and thoughts in the comparison.
- b. *The Lottery* (Shirley Jackson) - In this short story, people blindly follow a tradition that greatly impacts society. A mob mentality takes control, and a scapegoat (someone made to take the blame) is removed in order for renewal to occur. In Craewick, Madame uses the auction as a way of controlling the citizens. As readers, we see how truly threatening it is. What similarities can you find between the Auction and the Lottery.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.7]

3. Research - Research memory loss. Determine the reasons that people lose memory. Write a brief description of each reason. Graph the percentage of elderly who suffer memory loss to show how this percentage has changed over time.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2]

4. Interview - Sharing memories with grandparents allows us to connect between generations while building a broader understanding of our world. Conduct an interview with an elderly relative or neighbor. Explore StoryCorps (<https://storycorps.org/>) and listen to history being shared. Find interview questions, ideas, and suggestions through their Great Thanksgiving Listen. (<https://storycorps.org/participate/the-great-thanksgiving-listen/>).

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2]

5. Our sense of smell is perhaps our most powerful sense and closely linked to memory. It allows us to evoke memories related to a specific event in our past. (<http://www.fifthsense.org.uk/psychology-and-smell/>). One of the first glimpses we have of Etta's mother is found in the cloak she wears. Etta reflects, "My throat tightens at the warm scents of honey and violets buried in the wool" (9). Conduct an experiment with smells and memory. Offer several natural scents (vanilla, chocolate, lilies, etc.) to someone without identifying the scent. Record the memories they associate with the smells.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2]

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6. Research - Every culture and family has traditions. Because they are passed from generation to generation, it is easy to forget their original meaning. Research some traditions within your culture. Determine their origins.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1]

## Memory/Tradition:

### Classism

**Definition:** *Prejudice against or in favor of people belonging to a particular social class*

**Defining Quote:** “Most Ungifted orphans are forced to make a living this way, offering up their minds” (26).

## Pre-Reading Questions:

1. Are there some people in society who have advantages based on an ability? Imagine how you would feel if you had an ability beyond what others have. How would this impact your life and your interactions with others?
2. Prejudice can occur in many ways (classism, sexism, ageism, racism, etc.). Have you ever experienced discrimination or watched it happen to another person? Research examples of discrimination within our society.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10]

## Post-Reading Question:

1. Etta thinks, “I’m not sure there’s much difference between the amount of Ungifted and Gifted lawbreakers. It’s just that the latter usually gets away with it” (16-17). Why are the Gifted allowed to get away with something? How does that create disparity for the people of Craewick?
2. Greer describes most of the Gifted as hollow, saying there is “nothing left of them, of who they once were . . . they’ve lost themselves to become someone else” (25). Even those more privileged are at risk of loss in this society. In what ways is this similar to our society? Give examples of people who lose themselves in their attempts to achieve more, become more, experience more.
3. Etta realizes that with “all the rules and regulations of Craewick, Madame sets her people up to fail, then punishes them when they do”(37). How do prejudices in our society set people up to fail or punish them when they do?
4. The author shows how those with the least advantages have the most to lose. She writes, “Most Ungifted orphans are forced to make a living this way, offering up their minds” (26). How do those who have the least without our society have the most to lose?

[CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.11-12.1]

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## Activities:

1. The four Realms in *The Memory Thief* are imaginary worlds. Because Etta spends most of her time in Craewick, the novel is rich in details for this Realm. Design a map based on the descriptions of the Realms in the novel. Include details such as landscape, the differences between the classes (those who have and those who don't), include the areas surrounding the Realms. Add quotes that describe the areas you illustrate.

[CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.11-12.1]

2. Research articles that show examples of how classism (or another -ism shown in the novel) exists within our society. Create a one-pager that illustrates and defines classism. Your one-pager should include a bold title, the definition of the -ism, a quote from the novel supporting the definition, illustrations of news events you researched (one depicting the -ism and another showing someone combatting the -ism) as well as bullet point summaries for each. Be sure to fill the entire page.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1;  
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2]

## Morality

**Definition:** Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior

**Defining Quote:** “Not doing the right thing feels an awful lot like doing the wrong one” (186)

## Pre-reading questions:

1. Reflect on a time when you thought something bad would happen but it actually turned out to be good. Why did you anticipate the bad? What caused the experience to become good? What made you realize the difference?
1. When were you faced with a conflict that made you choose between right and wrong or good and bad? How did you make the final decision? How did that impact the outcome?

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10]

## Post-reading questions:

1. Greer says of Madame, “She fails to realize the highest calling we’ve been given is to serve” (148). How is service an example of a mature moral action?
2. Madame says, “A society is only as strong as the morality of its citizens, and we must protect the wisdom of the past to ensure a prosperous future” (17). Do you believe this to be true? Why does the author utilize the antagonist to deliver this message?



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3. Etta makes the effort to show kindness to the man in the asylum who is near her mother. When he wakes with cold feet, she wraps a blanket around them, and even though he doesn't understand much, he smiles in response (34). What other actions does Etta take that show her making good choices that benefit others?
4. Etta admits they "stole from the wealthy to give back to the poor" (37), and she sees theft as a talent (41). Is there ever a time when stealing (or another illegal act) is necessary?
5. Porter says, "Not doing the right thing feels an awful lot like doing the wrong one" (186). His behavior changes significantly throughout the story. How did other characters experience significant changes?

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1]

## Activities:

1. The culture of a society influences how individuals behave. Watch a popular sitcom for each of several decades, beginning with the 1960's. Is there a clear message of right and wrong shown within the sitcom? Who teaches a lesson within the plot? How is that lesson delivered? Create a graph that shows changes and consistencies in moral choices throughout the decades. Be sure to document specific examples of good choices (being of service to others, putting the needs of others first) that characters make.

[CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.11-12.1]

2. Examine Lawrence Kohlberg's levels of moral development. Create a chart that identifies the six different levels. Find a character within the novel that represents each level. Add a quote or an example supporting your analysis.

[CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.11-12.1]

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## Whole Novel Post-Reading Activities:

1. **Jigsaw** - Students will be working in two groups, a Response Group made up of four members (each with a different theme) and a Theme Group (all members have the same theme). After reading the novel, place students into Response Groups, assigning one theme to each member of the group. Each member responds to the questions for his/her assigned theme. Then all students who responded to the same theme meet within a Theme Group and discuss their answers, taking notes so as to expand their ideas. They then return to their original Response Group and report on all of the different ideas discussed. Have students take notes on the different themes. Use a format similar to the chart provided. Students can write an essay response, developing a thesis based on one or all of the themes. They should provide quotes that support their thesis.

| Assigned Theme   | What I thought | What my Theme Group thought | Notes on theme after discussion with Response Group. |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Courage          |                |                             |  |
| Memory/Tradition |                |                             |  |
| Classism         |                |                             |  |
| Morality         |                |                             |  |

[CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.11-12.1;  
[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1]

2. **Character Attributes** - Find examples of how characters represent the Realm that they are from. Depict these attributes in a way that represents the Realm. Craewick (Trade), Kripen (Training), Blare (Arts), Aravid (Science, Math, History). Be sure to add quotes that support your illustrations.

[CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.8.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.9-10.1; CCSS.ELA.Literacy.RL.11-12.1]

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