

## 5 key ideas in Swim the Stars

### 1. Parental Grief

- a. Ryan the main character is 14 years old and grieving the loss of her father. He was close to her and encouraged her to do great things with her life. He was also the protector when her mother was being abusive. His loss took not just a parent and mentor from Ryan, but it took her safe space as well. She joined the Academy because her dad did the pre-work to make it happen. She will achieve her dreams and freedom because it was what her dad wanted for her.
- b. The book includes snippets of memories that Ryan has of her dad that illustrates not just their family dynamic, but how proud he was of her, and how much he wanted her to get away from her toxic family.

### 2. Difficult classmates

- a. Trius is a spoiled rich kid who sees this mission as an opportunity to enrich himself. If something isn't serving his personal agenda, he is vocally and enthusiastically opposed to it.
- b. This creates a clash with Ryan, the main character, who is excited to be learning new things and getting an opportunity she never imagined before. While Trius grew up in the same society as Ryan, he was rich from a powerful family. She grew up poor in a family of known swindlers.
- c. Ryan and Trius don't magically become friends by the end of the book. They have an understanding between them and a growing mutual respect. You're not going to be best friends with everyone in your class.

### 3. Family abuse & alienation

- a. When Ryan's father died, he left behind 7 years of a work debt. Ryan's mother dropped her on a foreign planet to work off that debt on behalf of the family. Ryan got an illegal cranial implant to work that debt in six months and free herself from this family obligation.
- b. The removal of that cranial implant left Ryan with crippling headaches and a fear of doctors because her secret would be discovered, and her future plans would disappear.

- c. When Ryan refuses to return to the Forge with her mother, her mother puts a bounty on her head. At first it is to bring her home, then it is a death contract. Her mother would rather see her dead than happy on her own.
  - d. Ryan's grandmother knows about the contract but does nothing to protect Ryan. She calls Ryan to tell her to handle her own mess. Ryan has no adult relative that she can count on to take her side or support her.
4. Mentors can enrich a child's life
- a. Bill the Great is the captain of the ship and responsible for the children's safety and lives. They understand the stakes when something goes wrong, but they insist on living with an outlook of positivity that is often infectious.
  - b. Doctor Caspian does not hide his righteous anger from Ryan. He is furious with the doctor that mutilated her when removing her implant and he reassures her that it is not her fault. He is not angry with her. He is angry FOR her.
  - c. This realization that someone could care about you so much that they would be enraged on your behalf becomes a key moment for Ryan as she's trying to encourage Nimue, the teenage girl who they thought was a villain, to fight for her own life. Nimue's family abandoned her in the name of unlimited profit. Ryan knows that pain and encourages Nimue by acknowledging that some adults are worth trusting.
5. Different cultures are worthy of respect
- a. Ryan doesn't come from a home world. She is a child of the Vespuccana nation, where many different life forms and worlds come together to create a homogeneity of criminal enterprises and profiteers. Her home is on the Forge, and her life and culture are built around knife-making and weaponry. She carries multiple knives on her at all times, and she knows how to fight and hold her own against more experienced fighters.
  - b. Sa'Naiba is a servalkin girl who is used to being treated as less-than-sentient. She got a notice in her permanent record for biting a classmate who petted her like an animal. She is hard to trust others with pieces of her home and her heart. She makes Ryan blood soup to comfort her in her darkest moment, and Ryan is both grateful and appreciative of Sa'Naiba sharing it with her.

- c. Both Sa'Naiba and Raimi understand that Ryan's knives are important to her. They're the only thing she has left of the family that did not want or support her. They make a point multiple times to let Ryan know, "I like your knives." They don't make her weird. They make her who she is.