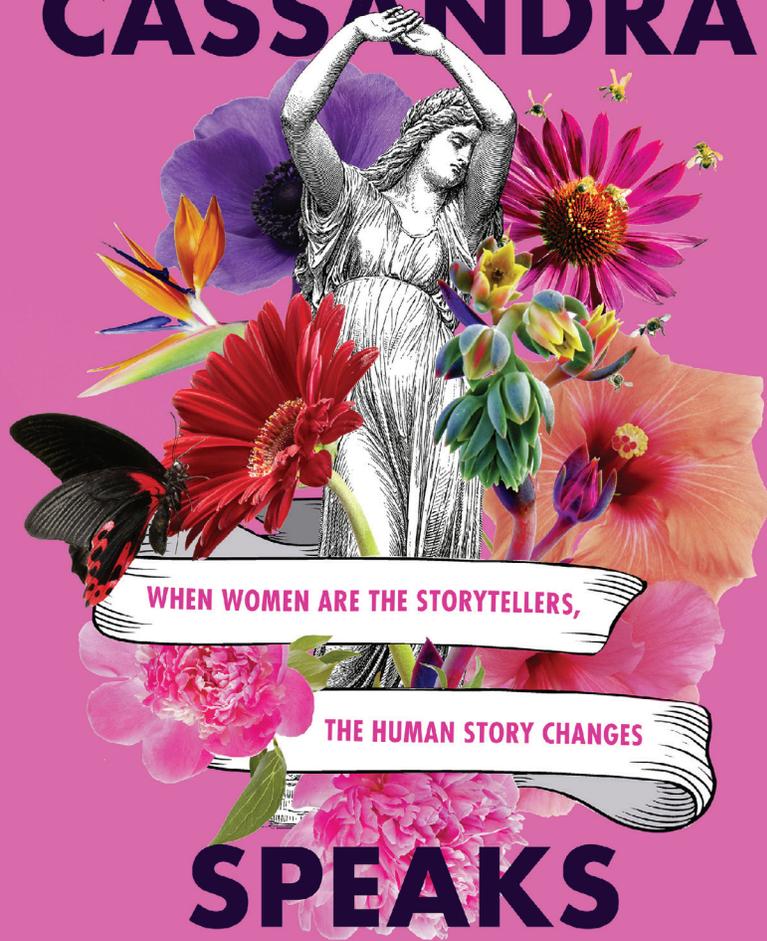


TEACHER'S GUIDE

CASSANDRA



ELIZABETH LESSER



## About the Book

What story would Eve have told about picking the apple? Why is Pandora blamed for opening the box? And what about the fate of Cassandra who was blessed with knowing the future but cursed so that no one believed her? What if women had been the storytellers?

Elizabeth Lesser believes that if women's voices had been equally heard and respected throughout history, humankind would have followed different hero myths and guiding stories—stories that value caretaking, champion compassion, and elevate communication over vengeance and violence.

*Cassandra Speaks* is about the stories we tell and how those stories become the culture. It's about the stories we still blindly cling to, and the ones that cling to us: the origin tales, the guiding myths, the religious parables, the literature and films and fairy tales passed down through the centuries about women and men, power and war, sex and love, and the values we live by. Stories written mostly by men with lessons and laws for all of humanity. We have outgrown so many of them, and still they endure. This book is about what happens when women are the storytellers too—when we speak from our authentic voices, when we flex our values, when we become protagonists in the tales we tell about what it means to be human.

## About the Author

Elizabeth Lesser is the author of several bestselling books, including *Broken Open: How Difficult Times Can Help Us Grow* and *Marrow: Love, Loss & What Matters Most*. She is the cofounder of Omega Institute, recognized internationally for its workshops and conferences in wellness, spirituality, creativity, and social change.

## About this Guide

This Teaching Guide is intended as an instructor supplement for course adoption of *Cassandra Speaks* and does allow students to pull in information from other course books as compare/contrast points for Lesser's book.

It is divided into two parts: The first is a group of discussion questions designed to stretch across the whole of Part I of *Cassandra Speaks*. The second part can be used as questions for deeper discussion, for short writing prompts, or a combination of reflective writing for discussion participation, and is based off ideas Lesser raises in Part II of her book.

## Discussion Questions

- Why is it important to think about how western culture represents women in its early texts and writing?
- Divine feminine vs 'real' woman dualism: what are some ways in which contemporary feminist theory discusses this paradox? How does feminist theory offer a way of reading and reacting to this dualism?
- How do the stories Lesser describes from western Judeo-Christian compare to stories of women from non-western traditions? What are similarities and differences among them?
- Modern retellings of these myths and stories: how do they reframe these classic stories? What do their retellings do to how we see the originals?
- What are the ways in which women's books can challenge the traditional canon? If you were to redesign the western literary canon, which books and authors would make your list? In what variety of ways could the traditional western canon be diversified? How would making the western canon more diverse change how we talk about "great books"?
- In what ways do we memorialize women (or women's actions or accomplishments) different to men? How do this memorialization, or its lack, contribute to the creation of narratives about women?
- What does Lesser mean by "innervism and activism"? How do women use both to create and maintain power?
- In what ways is women's power shown in popular culture? Why is it significant to create more and diverse representations of women's power in what we consume as popular media?
- Do you agree with the values Lesser calls "the values of the feminine"? Would you add any to her list?

## Questions for further discussion or for writing prompts

- In the second half of *Cassandra Speaks*, Lesser talks about women's stories we may not be as familiar with. Who are some lesser-known women whose stories you think would, as Lesser describes, "flip the script"? Why should we know these women and what should we know about them?
- Make your own List of Books That Changed Me. What books are on your list? Why did you choose these titles? How did they change you, and how do you think they work in your life now?
- Lesser talks about the Oath of Allegiance naturalized citizens must take when becoming citizens of the United States. If you were rewriting the oath, what would you include? What values would you want the oath to reflect? And in what ways does your oath differ from the one that is usually administered to new citizens?
- Spend some time in a week really listening to how other people tell stories in conversation. From what you have read in *Cassandra Speaks*, especially in Part II of the book, what are some patterns you notice? Are they similar to what Lesser points out in the second half of her book? As a listener, how do you respond to what you hear? Do you think it influences how you communicate with someone in conversation?

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