



A Pinch of Magic: Teaching Ideas

A Pinch of Magic is probably best suited to readers aged 8-12, depending on ability. Here are some suggestions for ways it could be used in a classroom.

Pre-reading activities:

1. Look at the front of the book. What do you think the curse could be, and the worst that could happen? Can you think of any other stories about curses?
2. Who illustrated the book's cover? Can you find out the titles of two more books this artist has created the covers for? Are there any in your classroom?
3. Look at the back of the book and read the blurb (the writing which tells you about the story). Does it make you want to read the story? Why, or why not?
4. Study the front and back covers. What do you think the three magical objects in the story could be? What do you imagine they do? Make up your own list of three objects, and their magical powers.
5. Look at the map in the front of the book. Which of the islands do you think will be the most important to the story? Find other words with the same meanings as Lament, Repent, and Torment.

Research:

1. Read the author's note at the start of the book. What does the word 'widdershins' mean and what is it linked to? Have you ever heard of this word before? Can you find out a word meaning the opposite?
2. Research the history of Halloween. Can you find other names for it? Where do the traditions of trick or treat, dressing up, and carving pumpkins come from? Is there any significance to Betty's birthday falling on this day?
3. What clues point to the Widdershins being an unlucky family? Are there any numbers, objects or creatures mentioned in chapter one that signal good or bad luck? Research and write down five more superstitions.
4. Research your local area. Is there any interesting history or folklore? Write down the names of five real places that you could imagine in a story. Think of towns, forests, street names, beaches and even pubs! Give reasons for your choices.
5. How were people who were suspected of witchcraft treated throughout history? What sort of tests did 'witchfinders' do to determine whether someone was a witch? What are your thoughts on this?

Activities:

1. Design a flyer for the Halloween Fayre in Marshfoot. What kind of words and images might it use to appeal to someone like Betty?
2. Write a letter from Prisoner 513 to Granny, convincing her to visit him in jail. How would he persuade her to help him?
3. Rewrite the scene where Betty and Charlie are given their magical objects, but from Charlie's point of view. Imagine what she is thinking and feeling, as someone who is much younger than her sisters.
4. Write a secret diary entry for Prudence. What are her feelings towards her sister – and herself? Is she proud of her actions, or sorry?
5. Write a cautionary poem or verse to warn travellers away from the Misty Marshes. Think of the way the author has written about the marsh mist as a living thing, and add your own descriptions to this. Consider other dangers such as will-o'-the-wisps, and escaped prisoners! It doesn't have to rhyme.

Other relevant stories:

Snowglobe by Amy Wilson

Sky Song by Abi Elphinstone

Secrets of a Sun King by Emma Carroll

Wood Angel by Erin Bow

The Crowfield Curse by Pat Walsh