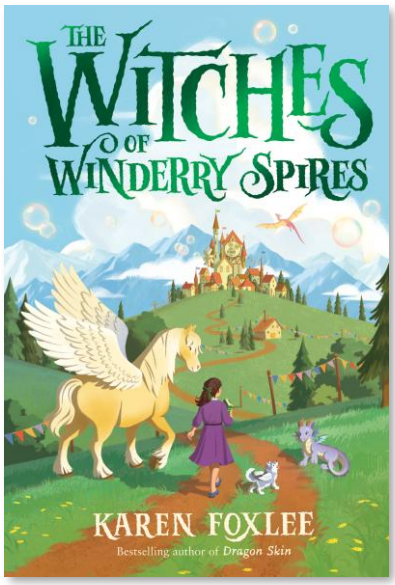


THE WITCHES OF WINDERRY SPIRES
Written and illustrated by KAREN FOXLEE

BOOK RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 9–12

TEACHER NOTES RECOMMENDED FOR: Years 4–6, MIDDLE PRIMARY and UPPER PRIMARY

GENRE: Fantasy

THEMES: personal growth, identity, friendship, kindness, responsibility

CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- English: Literature, literacy and language
- Health and Physical Education

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INTRODUCTION

No one ever knows what happens to the Clock Tower Girls . . .

The last thing Lucy Broadmeadow expected was to become the Clock Tower Girl and be sent to live with the witch at faraway Winderry Spires.

But when she arrives the witch is missing, the clock won't stop chiming and an injured winged wolf-pup appears – all signs that there is a Rift tearing the world apart.

Lucy might not be magical, but she is kind and brave. And she does have the help of her new companions – Sig the water dragon and Mustard the gloomy Pegasus.

Can Lucy and her friends find the witch, save the wolf-pup and heal the Rift before time runs out?

PLOT SUMMARY

Lucy is plucked from the obscurity of the South Kingdom to travel to the Middle Kingdom to take on the role of Clock Tower Girl at Winderry Spires and help the Ticking Witch, though mystery surrounds the job and all it entails.

All the elements of traditional fantasy (trolls under the bridge, witches, travelling by carriage) foreshadow the magical story that unfolds across the three sections of the book, *Beginnings, Inner workings* and *Becomings.* These sections trace the narrative arc that sees Lucy become braver, act on her convictions and discover her 'reason'.

Teaming up with unlikely and unheroic companions, Lucy shows that kindness is more powerful than cruelty and that love can overcome great obstacles to save the Kingdoms from evil.

Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

Q: What do you see as the major themes of *The Witches of Winderry Spires*?

A: The themes of the book include friendship, finding self, kindness, magic and resilience. I also think it looks at female strength and power.

Q: Can you tell us about how you came to write this book?

A: The story was the idea of my daughter, Alice, when she was nine. She was constantly drawing a character called Midnight (a winged wolf) who lived in a faraway place called Winderry Spires. She asked me if I would help her write it. What followed were years dreaming up the story. Eventually I took over the story in 2022 and after many rewrites it arrived at its current form.

As I wrote I began to realise that this story was set in the same world that the Marvellous Boy came from in *Ophelia and the Marvellous Boy* (published over a decade ago). I was so excited and knew that The Boy would play a role in this magical story. I've had so many children ask me what The Boy's name was over the years and it felt like the perfect time to answer their questions.

The story became a really moving one for me as I wrote. I especially loved Lucy's relationship with the past Clock Tower Girls. Lucy is such a beautiful character, really strong, brave and kind and with such a good sense of humour. I hope I've done my daughter's original idea justice.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

BEFORE READING

- Share books of the fantasy genre such as the Narnia series by C.S. Lewis, the Nevermoor series by Jessica Townsend, or the Kingdom and Empires series by Jaclyn Moriarty. Discuss the conventions and motifs in this genre.
- Research Pegasus from Greek mythology.
- Use the Folded Stories activity to hypothesise a fantasy story. Build on this idea to make composite fantasy characters.

AC9E4LE01 AC9E5LE01 AC9E6LE01 AC9E4LY01 AC9E5LY01 AC9E6LY01

DURING READING

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE and LITERACY

- Genre conventions

Based on the class's understanding of the fantasy genre, make predictions about the characters, setting and plot. Check on these predictions and add nuance to further predictions as the reading progresses. For example, notice on p 10 that the audience is prompted to ask questions regarding the Ticking Witch and the clock tower that foreshadows the mysterious element of the plot and the important role this character and setting will play in the story broadly. Pause at the end of Chapter 2 and reflect on the fantasy conventions that are becoming evident in the plot. For example, discuss:

  - the reference to the Kingdoms
  - the focus on travelling great distances in a relatively short period of time
  - the old-fashioned mode of transport
  - the mention of witches and wizards, and the introduction of Sig.

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- Quotable quotes

As you read the book aloud to the class, gather quotes that stand out to you as meaningful or to encapsulate the key ideas of the story. E.g.:

  - *'Let's live in each other's courage.'* p 317
  - *'You're a good egg, Lucy.'* p 325
  - *'Knowing that the magic is there is enough to begin. And that your heart is good.'* p 326

AC9E4LE03 AC9E4LY05 AC9E5LY05 AC9E6LY05

- Pause and reflect

During the reading, pause at key points in the story to allow students to talk in pairs or small groups to reflect on themes or character's actions, or to make personal connections. Some suggestions:

  - p 9 Have you ever doubted yourself or worried that you are not good enough at something?

- p 13 When have you felt like Lucy and not wanted to leave home and family? How did you cope?
- p 19 When have you been dramatic? Was it justified?
- p 37 Have you ever felt like you failed at something? How did you get through the challenge?
- p 65 Describe a time you had to be brave.
- p 100 Why do you think it is important to ask someone if they are okay?
- p 149 When have you felt the need to give or receive a hug and how did receiving a hug help the situation?
- p 174 How do you choose to make decisions of importance? To what extent do you listen to your head versus your heart? How do you know when your decisions are the right ones?
- p 191 What would you say to someone to make them happy, to glow?
- p 246 How hard is it for you to find good in someone else? What do you find helps?
- p 272 Should Lucy do as she's told by the council of wizards or do what she wants? Is it easier to do as you are told or to follow your heart?
- pp 316–317 Share bad beginnings or difficult endings.

AC9E5LY02 AC9E6LY02 AC9E4LY05 AC9E5LY05 AC9E6LY05

AC9HP4P01 AC9HP6P01 AC9HP4P06 AC9HP6P06 AC9HP4P07 AC9HP4P10 AC9HP6P10

- Character diagram

Create character diagrams that you can add to across the reading as you learn more about each character. As a class, jointly create a diagram for Lucy and allow students to use this as a scaffold for other diagrams that they can create in pairs or independently. Start by sketching an outline of the character based on initial descriptions. Gradually add information about the character's actions, speech, thoughts, relationships, inner conflicts and challenges they overcome.

AC9E4LE03 AC9E5LE03 AC9E6LE03

- Word study

Choose unfamiliar vocabulary to focus on at different parts of the reading. Investigate the morphology and etymology of these words. Conduct word building, discuss connotations and definitions. Use the words in games of bingo, patience, crosswords, etc. Some suggestions:

Page	
61	purposively
67	pandemonium
82	invisibility, potent
83	dire
138	abomination
140	reluctantly, apologetically

Page	
143	medallions
165	malevolence, unparalleled
274	haughty, monumental
282	reverberated
284	clamorous
291	paradoxical
297	contraption, circumnavigate
336	placate

AC9E5LA08 AC9E6LA08 AC9E4LY09 AC9E5LY08 AC9E6LY08

- Modality, graduation, hyperbole

Use the examples on p 9 to discuss the concepts of modality (language used to express certainty), graduation (use of language to intensify meaning) and hyperbole (language used to exaggerate and persuade). E.g. *'She really, truly, completely, wholeheartedly, without a doubt, did not want to leave her home and everything she knew.'* Practise using the language of graduation to intensify meaning during the 'Pause and reflect' talk activity for p 9. Listen out for further examples of these types of language and which parts of the story Foxlee uses them. Hint: they come at points of high protagonist emotion and/or heightened plot tension.

AC9E4LA01 AC9E5LA01 AC9E6LA01 AC9E5LA08

- Description

Notice the way setting is described in depth at different points in the story. Highlight for students how some scenes are described only briefly while others are described in great detail, such as The Spires on pp 17–18, the kitchen in The Spires on p 22. Hypothesise why Foxlee would choose to build clear mental images of these scenes for readers. Watch out, across the reading, for other settings that receive a detailed description (e.g. the woods on p 280). Highlight the way extended noun groups *'wild tangles of mismatched and gnarled trees, knotted and bent backwards',* simile *'Limbs outstretch like arms'* and personification *'Reaching, shocked'* is used to build mental images and elicit emotions from the reader.

To help with visualising the scenes, you might like to read the description several times and ask students to draw what they see in their minds' eye. Compare illustrations and discuss how different listeners/readers will imagine slightly different scenes based on their own experiences of the world and stories.

Choose scenes that are not richly described in the story and have students brainstorm then write a description of the scene using noun groups, simile and personification to include sights, textures, sounds and sensations to build a mental image.

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- Dialogue

Highlight the dialogue in Chapter 3 and discuss what it tells the reader about Lucy. Compare this to the dialogue of other characters as you read. Use the dialogue in Chapter 5 to aid a Readers' Theatre reenactment of Lucy meeting Thornberry. Return to a focus on dialogue when reading

Chapter 17 and highlight the difference between the bogles speech and Lucy's. Consider how the bogles talk about Lucy, The Boy, Celia Shelley and themselves.

AC9E4LA01 AC9E5LA01 AC9E6LA01 AC9E4LA07 AC9E4LA12

- Summarising

After reading Chapter 7, discuss the concept of summarising and gathering key ideas. As a class, jointly construct a summary of the story so far to demonstrate how to write using this strategy. You might make dot points of the key elements of the plot and turn one or two points into sentences. Assign further dot points to pairs or groups of students to continue writing the summary. After reading each further chapter, ask groups of students to take turns writing a sentence or two to add to your story summary.

AC9E4LY02 AC9E4LY03 AC9E5LY03 AC9E6LY03 AC9E4LY05 AC9E5LY05 AC9E6LY05

- Writing encouragement

As you are reading the story and come across the words of encouragement the different Clock Tower Girls have left each other, highlight for students the manner of these notes and how they achieve their purpose of encouraging future Clock Tower Girls. E.g. pp 173 and 214, Introduce letter-writing conventions and layout to students and have them write encouraging letters to each other or to students in other classes. Talk about the importance of encouragement and how a few words can be tremendously supportive.

AC9E4LA01 AC9E5LA01 AC9E6LA01 AC9E4LY06 AC9E5LY06 AC9E6LY06

AC9HP4P01 AC9HP6P01 AC9HP4P06 AC9HP6P06 AC9HP4P07 AC9HP4P10 AC9HP6P10

ASSSESSMENT

Assess students' inferential comprehension of the story by listening in on their Pause and Reflect discussions to understand the extent to which students are able to make connections between the experiences of the characters and their own background knowledge.

At the culmination of the reading, pose the following questions to students to assess their interpretive comprehension.

- *How are the characters in this story typical of characters in the fantasy genre?*
- *How has Lucy as the protagonist undergone transformation across the narrative arc?*
- *How can Lucy's experiences stand in for childhood rights of passage?*
- *How does this story act as a bildungsroman (coming-of-age) story?*
- *What message might Karen Foxlee hope readers gain from reading the story?*
- *What messages about personal growth, identity, friendship, kindness and responsibility do you gain from the story?*

Collect students' writing samples and assess them for use of the literary features learnt about during the activities.

As summative assessment, ask students to write a letter to an imagined friend or relative who is going through particular challenges. Have students use the layout and conventions of a letter as

taught in the Writing Encouragement activity. Ask them to write offering encouragement and support of their friend/relative and to use vocabulary learnt through the reading.

Use or adapt the following rubric to assist with assessment of writing.

Feature	**Working towards**	**Achieving**	**Working beyond**
Sophisticated vocabulary	A few inclusions of taught vocabulary	A range of taught vocabulary included	A wide range of taught vocabulary used and innovated on
Modality, graduation, hyperbole	An attempt to include some language to express certainty, intensify meaning or persuade	Inclusion of language to express certainty, intensify meaning and persuade	Creative use of language to express certainty, intensify meaning and persuade
Description	Extended noun groups, simile or personification	Extended noun groups, simile and personification	Extended noun groups, simile and personification included effectively
Summarising	Attempt at summarising key points	Correct summarising of key points	Key points well summarised

Additionally, consider students' writing as a way to assess Health and Physical Education outcomes. Notably, to what extent do students' letters indicate:

- an understanding of how success, challenge, setbacks and failure strengthen resilience
- an understanding of how we can create positive self-identities through positive relationships and positive self-talk
- an ability to explain how and why emotional responses can vary and apply strategies to manage emotions
- an ability to apply positive behaviours that contribute to relationships and wellbeing

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Karen Foxlee is an Australian author who writes for both children and young adults. Her multi-award-winning books include *Ophelia and the Marvellous Boy*, *A Most Magical Girl*, the Miss Mary-Kate Martin's Guide to Monsters series, *Lenny's Book of Everything*, *Dragon Skin* and *The Wondrous Tale of Lavender Wolfe*. Karen writes and lives in Queensland with her daughter, cats and parrots. She loves books, swimming in the sea, planning holidays she can't afford, and baking cakes whenever she has more important things to do.
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ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Jennifer Asha is a lover of children's literature. Picture books are her absolute favourite. When she is not immersed in a good book, Jennifer is an academic at the Australian Catholic University where she enjoys sharing her passion for literature, language and literacy with her Initial Teacher Education students. Jennifer is also an experienced primary school teacher who has taught in the classroom and in the library, across all grades. Jennifer has conducted classroom-based research and published articles and books that encourage teachers to teach literacy and language using rich literature resources. Her areas of special interest include the teaching of grammar, multimodal texts and visual literacy.

CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

A Most Magical Girl by Karen Foxlee

Ophelia and the Marvellous Boy by Karen Foxlee

The Stolen Prince of Cloudburst by Jaclyn Moriarty