

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

THE UNDERGROUND CITY by Anne Forbes



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Themes/issues addressed in this book

Mary King's Close, Edinburgh, Middle East, djinns/genies, loneliness, plague, friendship, magic, ghosts, bank robbers, pantomime

Book Summary

Just before he returns to Scotland from the Middle East with his family, Lewis Grant unwittingly becomes host to a djinn. Upon his arrival in Edinburgh, strange things start to happen, for this djinn is none other than Prince Casimir, father to the renegade magician, Prince Kalman, and he is desperate to be free from his bonds. Meanwhile, underneath the Old Town in Mary King's Close, the ghosts are out of their ghostly minds with worry – there are bank robbers tunnelling under the Mound, and they look set to accidentally unleash the ghosts of the Plague People upon the city. However, help is at hand when Neil and Clara MacLean stumble upon both problems, and before long The MacArthurs, Arthur the dragon, and the rest of the gang are caught up in another crazy adventure. This is the third book in the 'Dragonfire' series.

BEFORE READING

Group Activities

- Discussion: what is a djinn/genie? Do you know any stories about them?
- Discussion: what do you know about the plague/black death?
- Discussion: where is the Middle East? What do you know about the Middle East? Can you name any countries in the Middle East? How do you feel about the situation there just now?

AFTER READING (note, contains spoilers!)

Individual Work

- Write a paragraph on the thoughts and feelings you had when
 - a) The ghosts make the school bully – Graham Flint – cry (chapter 3)
 - b) Lewis asks if Casimir can make somebody like him (chapter 5)
 - c) Casimir emerges from the lamp (chapter 23)
 - d) Kabad saves Neil and Clara (chapter 29)
 - e) Wullie decides he wants to go to night school (chapter 35)
- If you had three wishes, what would you wish for? Write at least two paragraphs on the things you would wish for and why you would wish for them. Remember you can have anything at all...
- In chapter 4 the Bedouin are mentioned. Who are the Bedouin? Where do they live? What do you think it would be like to live as they do? Write at least three paragraphs on the above.

Group Activities

- Group activity: Using the Internet and your library, find out more about how the plague affected Edinburgh. If you're lucky enough to live in Edinburgh, see if you can visit Mary King's Close itself. Who lived in the Close? What kind of houses did they live in? What might have happened to them if they got ill with the plague? Each group should adopt the persona of someone living in Mary King's Close at the time of the plague. Write a letter to someone living outside Edinburgh and tell them what's happening in the Close. Include details of everyday life, and how the letter-writer feels about their surroundings and their future.
- Group activity: One of the things Lewis wishes for is a painting called the 'Mona Lisa'. Each group should find out the following about this painting: a) Who painted it? b) When was it painted? c) Where is it? In which gallery? Many people are undecided as to whether she is smiling or not – what do you think? Write a report on all the above. You may use the Internet and your library to do some research.

(continued overleaf)

KELPIES

Series Summary

The award-winning Kelpies series is Scotland's favourite collection of children's fiction. Floris Books took over the list in 2001, republishing classic works by authors such as Kathleen Fidler and Allan Campbell McLean. Since then, we have continued to add to the series with a range of highly successful new Scottish novels for children. Of these, *Chill* by Alex Nye won a Royal Mail Award in 2007 and *Hox* by Annemarie Allan was nominated for a Royal Mail Award in 2008.

CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS COVERED

5-14 Curriculum (Scotland)

Years: P4-P7

Listening:

Listening in Groups

Listening for Information, including instructions and directions

Reading:

Reading for Information

Reading to Reflect

Awareness of Genre

Talking:

Talking in Groups

Talking about Texts

Talking about Experiences, including feelings and opinions

Writing:

Functional

Imaginative

National Curriculum (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

Key Stage 2

English: Reading

Reading Strategies

Response to Texts, including

analysing and evaluating

Reading for Information

National Literacy Strategy:

Text-Level Reading

Text-Level Writing

Vocabulary

- Class activity: Stage your own version of 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves' but make it Scottish. Set the scene in your local town or city, and adapt it accordingly. Perform it for another class in your school.
- Class discussion: At the beginning of the book we learn that Lewis wants people to like him, and that is why he's always showing off. In reality he's very lonely. What do you think about this? If people want to make friends, how should they go about doing it?

Vocabulary

- Check you know what the following words mean (page numbers of example words in brackets):

arrogant (66)	assertion (54)	banshee (161)	bazaar (164)	bedouin (32)
bereft (236)	compassion (66)	compromise (46)	deign (66)	deplorable (116)
deprivation (30)	distraught (107)	dubious (49)	emanate (217)	epidemic (192)
escapade (44)	exasperation (97)	fervently (106)	ignoble (66)	impassive (200)
imperious (144)	implicit (145)	instinctive (177)	insubstantial (158)	jovial (182)
mediaeval (255)	meteoric (19)	obliterated (41)	palatial (267)	perceptive (83)
picturesque (141)	precarious (103)	predicament (167)	preen (216)	reproduction (263)
resemblance (55)	sardonic (122)	saunter (26)	sundry (24)	tenterhooks (209)
ungainly (21)	unintelligible (83)	unobtrusive (167)		