



Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Creatures of Magic

Author: Maree Fenton-Smith

Illustrator: Lilly Piri

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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

Creatures of Magic, noun, the preferred name for modern witches.

Witches next door. Strange transformations in the night. Hooded figures on the street. And a new friend. When Violet Brown and her magical family move in next door, Anna's world becomes much more exciting – and dangerous. Violet needs Anna's help to fight off the Inquisitors who want to destroy her family. But can Violet be trusted?

Author/Illustrator Information:

Maree Fenton-Smith grew up in Wagga Wagga in south-western New South Wales with four siblings, two parents and lots of animals. She studied English and Social Work at university and now lives in the inner west in Sydney with four children, one husband and a cat called Rosebud. *Creatures of Magic* is her first novel.

Lilly Piri is a visual artist and illustrator from Queensland, Australia. She moved to Germany in 2007, and wandered home in 2011, with three solo exhibitions and fluent Deutsch under her belt. Her work has been featured in *Frankie*, *Yen*, *Empty*, *Semi-Permanent*, *Curvy* and she has worked with clients like Oxfam America, MILK Japan, Poketo, Harper's Bazaar, Ironfist, and Saatchi & Saatchi. She is represented by the Jacky Winter group, in Melbourne, and Retrospect Galleries, in Byron Bay. *Creatures of Magic* is her first title with Walker Books Australia.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary year 3-6
- Ages 8+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Illustrated fiction

Themes/ Ideas:

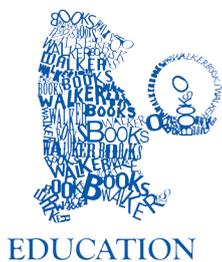
- Magic
- Friendship
- Family
- Trust
- Persecution

National Curriculum Focus:*

English content descriptions:

Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
ACELA1476	ACELA1498	ACELA1502	ACELA1525
ACELT1601	ACELT1605	ACELT1610	ACELT1614
ACELT1594	ACELT1794	ACELT1798	ACELT1800
ACELT1791	ACELT1607	ACELT1609	ACELT1613
ACELT1599	ACELY1694	ACELT1608	ACELT1617
ACELT1600	ACELY1687	ACELT1612	ACELY1709
ACELY1675	ACELY1690	ACELY1704	ACELT1801
ACELY1682			
ACELY1676			

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.



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Maree Fenton-Smith on *Creatures of Magic*

Initially *Creatures of Magic* was narrated by Violet Brown. It started at a much earlier point in the story during Violet's Unfortunate Past. I found writing as Violet difficult and I abandoned the story after a few months because it didn't seem to be going anywhere.

A few months later I had the idea of a fairy story with no fairies in it and I worked backwards thinking about the kind of person that would make this observation — I thought I could still use some of the ideas from the Unfortunate Past and have a book about Violet and her magical family but it could be told through the eyes of her best friend, Anna.

My family had recently moved house — our new neighbours were really nice and our children were always hopping over the fence between the two terraces. These comings and goings reminded me of my childhood and the fun we had with the other children living on our street, particularly through the long summer holidays.

When we moved house our cat for some reason started to follow us everywhere, including doing the school run with me in the morning. One day when she persisted hanging around the school yard I had a phone call from the school asking me to take Rosie the cat home (one of my daughters was worried about her staying in the playground — I'm not quite sure why). I can remember walking down the hill from the school with Rosie the cat under one arm, my baby in a sling and pushing a pram with my toddler in it with my one free arm. Rosie the cat felt like a fifth child. It was this feeling that really sparked the whole idea of transmutation of *Creatures of Magic* into cats.

Lilly Piri on *Creatures of Magic*

Maree Fenton-Smith's wonderful story, *Creatures of Magic*, reminded me of being 10 years old, and going on adventures my red-headed and bespectacled cousin and brother. What I loved about the book was that Anna was sceptical about magic, and had to take quite a long time to trust Violet and her intentions. The abundance of cats in the story also appealed to me so much, because they are one of my favourite animals to draw and cuddle!

The quirkiness of the Brown family was so much fun to imagine and make drawings of, especially Wocky and the giant strawberries. When I was drawing Violet and Anna reading the spell book in the study, I had to think of my cousins and I sitting in our little nook under our grandparent's staircase writing out 'detective' cases in a lined schoolbook. *Creatures of Magic* is the first book I've illustrated, and I'm sure it would have enchanted me as a child as much as it does now!

Discussion Questions and Activities

Before reading *Creatures of Magic*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- » The title of the book
- » The author
- » The illustrator
- » The publisher
- » The blurb.

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end?

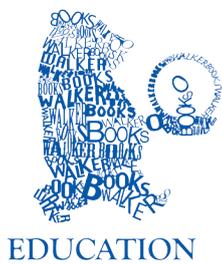
What are the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Identify the orientation, complication and resolution of the story. Ask students to try to identify this structure in other books or movies. As a class, discuss how these narrative features give meaning to stories.

In small groups, make a mind map of some of the characteristics of the fantasy genre. Consider settings, characters, events and themes. In what ways does *Creatures of Magic* resemble a typical fantasy novel? How is it different?

Keep a "Vocab Journal" while reading the novel. Make a note of any words you come across that are unfamiliar and look up their meaning. Also keep track of any words or phrases that you particularly like and write a note next to each explaining why you like that word/phrase.

Create a comic strip of a key scene from the novel.



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Choose a scene in the novel and rewrite it from the perspective of another character. For example, the scene where Violet surrounds Anna with the invisible cage and leaves her to go to Rita Raton's house.

Each chapter opens with a definition of a word. Are these definitions the same as what you would find in a dictionary? Why would the author choose to make up definitions rather than use existing ones? What does each definition tell you about the chapter that follows? Collect interesting words from the novel and write your own definitions.

Chapter 1 opens with Anna telling the reader that *Creatures of Magic* is a "fairytale with no fairies in it." (p.7). What is a fairytale? What are the common elements in a traditional fairytale? How does this book fit in with the fairytale genre?

Anna uses rhetorical questions when narrating the story, for example, "Why is this so?" (p. 8). What is a rhetorical question? How do they affect the reading experience? Identify and make a list of rhetorical questions used in the novel.

Draw a family tree of Anna's family and of Violet's family. Write a short description of each character next to their name. Draw a family tree of your own family and write a short description of your family members.

In Chapter 1, Anna introduces herself as the narrator and a main character of the story. Imagine you were the narrator and main character of a story and write a similar introduction where you can mention your favourite word, your likes and dislikes, where you live and anything else you'd like to include.

"We prefer the term *Creatures of Magic*," said Violet (p. 41) Why do you think they prefer the term "*Creatures of Magic*" to "witch"? Why is "*Creatures of Magic*" spelled with capital letters?

Pamela Brown is a *Creature of Magic* and her husband John Brown is non-magical. They both come from different worlds, and to stay together one must live in a world where they feel like they don't belong. How would you feel if you had to move to a magic land where you were the only non-magical person there? Do you

ever feel like the only one who can't do a certain thing? How does it make you feel? List five strategies to help overcome these feelings of not belonging.

Do you think Anna invaded the Brown family's privacy by looking over their fence at night and asking Violet lots of questions? Give reasons for your answer. What are some strategies to deal with someone who is invading your privacy?

Creatures of Magic can transmogrify into a cat. If you had a choice, what animal would you like to be able to transmogrify into? Write a short story about discovering you can turn into this animal, or an adventure you go on as this animal.

Imagine you were a *Creature of Magic* deciding whether to live as a cat or a human. Make a list of advantages and disadvantages for both to help you decide whether you will live as a cat or a human.

How does Anna and Violet's relationship change throughout the novel? What plot points affect their relationship?

Hold a class debate about the Browns being exiled to Antarctica in Chapter 28. One team should take the side of the Browns and the other team take the side of the Bureau. The debate topic is: It was unfair that the Bureau exiled the Brown family when they were only using magic to protect themselves.

By the end of the novel Anna and Violet have become good friends, but then Violet and her family are sent away to Antarctica. In pairs, with one person in the character of Anna and the other in the character of Violet, write letters to each other as if they were being sent during this time apart.

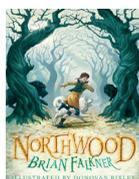
Describe a stereotypical witch and compare it to how witches are portrayed in *Creatures of Magic*. List several other books and films that have witches in them and describe the different ways that witches are portrayed.

How do the illustrations enhance the reading experience? How do you think the story would be different if there were no illustrations? Choose a key scene from the novel and illustrate it in your own style.

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