



Jinxed!: The Curious Curse of Cora Bell

By Rebecca McRitchie, illustrated by Sharon O'Connor

Summary

Cora is eleven-years-old and missing one eye. She lives with an elderly lady named Dot in a room hidden behind a wall. In a crowded, industrial city, where everyone looks out for themselves, Cora and Dot hunt and sell rare and exotic things – apple seeds, silver forks, shoe polish. Until one day, Cora finds a few words scribbled on a piece of paper.

She takes it home and says the words aloud. Then two plump, hairy fairies named Tick and Tock crash land in her path to warn her that she is in terrible danger. Cora has unknowingly summoned a sinister creature known as a Jinx. Jinxes eat magical beings and once they have a scent, they never forget it. But Cora isn't a magical being ... *is she?*

Quickly, Cora is thrown headfirst into a world filled with magic, necromancers, shape-shifters, enchantresses, fairies, nightwalkers, witches and giants.

Key Learning Outcomes

ACELA1512, ACELT1780, ACELT1603, ACELT1605, ACELT1606, ACELT1794, ACELT1612

Themes

Friendship, Loyalty, Secrets, Magic, Self-Confidence

Recommended Ages: 8+

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Notes by: Bec Kavanagh & Jemma Myers

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Before Reading

What makes a book fantasy?

- What are the things that you would expect to find in a book that was classified as 'fantasy'?
- Why might an author set a novel in a fantasy world rather than the real world?
 - How might this change the story they tell?
- Record **four** descriptions from the first two chapters of the novel which show that this is not the real world.
 - What literary techniques are used in these examples?

During Reading

Prologue

The author, Rebecca McRitchie, opens *Jinxed!* with a prologue that gives us a glimpse of a scene that takes place separate to the rest of the story.

- What is the purpose of a prologue?
- Why do you think an author might include a prologue?
- What does the prologue lead you to expect from the novel?
 - From what you have read in the prologue, write **6-8 points** about what you think will happen in the rest of the book:
 - Who will be the main characters?
 - Where will the action be set?
 - What problem or question might need to be dealt with?
 - What do you think might be the main themes of the novel?

Setting

Jinxed! is set in many different places, even a number of different lands. This is important, because these places provide the characters with homes, secrets, opportunities and escape.

- Are some of the locations easier for you to picture than others? Why do you think this is?
- If someone asked you to draw a map of the important places in the book, which places would you put on it?
 - How would you arrange each of the locations?
- Try to draw a map of all the places you encounter in the book.
 - Compare your map with the maps drawn by others in your class – have you imagined it in the same way?
 - Mark out the significant moments of the novel on your map.

Characters

Because *Jinxed!* is a fantasy text, there are many types of characters in the novel that do not exist in the real world. However, the author has even played with what we would expect of many of these fantastic creatures, so they are also not quite what we would normally imagine.

Cora

- As the main character, Cora is the person we get to know the best. Identify **three** personality traits (e.g., happy, angry, friendly, fun) that you think best describe Cora. For each trait, find **two** quotes which support your point of view.
- In lots of ways, Cora is just a normal kid. What are some things that Cora does, or that happen, that any child might experience?
- On the other hand, Cora lives in a magical world. How does living in this world change Cora from the sort of child you might expect to encounter at your school?
 - Does living in a world with magic change Cora across the events of the novel? Provide evidence of your opinions with quotes from the book.

Tick and Tock

- What kind of creatures are Tick and Tock?
- Why is Cora surprised when she discovers what they are? What do you think she expected?
- What would you normally expect this kind of creature to look and be like?
 - Why do you think the author has played around with our expectations of this sort of creature? What effect does it have on the novel?

Fantastic Creatures

- Select a character from the novel – other than Cora, Tick and Tock – who is a fantastic creature:
 - How do we know they are ‘fantastic’? (don’t forget that the novel has illustrations as well as words to tell the story)
 - In what ways does this character fulfil what we would expect of this kind of creature?
 - In what ways is this creature different from what we would expect of this kind of creature?
- Think about the way that the author has played around with a creature we’re familiar with to come up with characters that are surprising and unique. Choose a character you’re familiar with from a fairy tale, and make a list of what you would expect from this kind of creature or character.
 - How might you play around with your list to create something surprising to delight your reader?
 - Write a half-page description, or draw a labelled diagram, of your new fantastic creature. Don’t forget to give it a name!

Emotions

How important are emotions as a reader? Would you enjoy a story that only made you feel one thing?

- Find a scene in the book where you feel sad, one that makes you laugh, and one that makes you feel afraid.
 - What has the writer done to make you feel each of these things?
 - What happens before and after the scene you've described?
 - Do you feel the same as the character/s in the scene or differently?
- Write about a time in your life when you've felt sad.
 - Now write about the same time, but try to include something that would make you feel happy as well (maybe a colour, maybe seeing someone you love).
 - How does your writing change?
 - What other ways can you use emotions to add complexity to your writing?

After Reading

The book ends on a cliffhanger.

- What do you think this means?
- What questions are still unanswered?
- Why do you think the author has chosen to do this?
 - Think about the questions the author has left unanswered – perhaps she will answer them in the sequel.
- Imagine you are the author, and write Chapter 1 of the second book in the series.
 - Where would you start?
 - How much time has passed since the end of the first book?
 - What do you think your reader wants to know?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Rebecca McRitchie would love to tell you that she was raised by wolves in the depths of a snow-laden forest until she stumbled upon and saved a village from the fiery peril of a disgruntled dragon. But, truthfully, she works as a children's editor and lives in Sydney. *Whimsy and Woe* and the sequel, *Whimsy and Woe: The Final Act*, were her first fiction titles.

Sharon O'Connor is a freelance illustrator who lives in Melbourne with her husband and triplet sons.

After graduating from R.M.I.T. Graphic Design, she has spent many years designing and illustrating in publishing, textiles and packaging, with a particular love for character design. In her spare time she likes to paint, bake, hang out with animals and take lots of photos.

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