

Review, Mandy's Book Nook

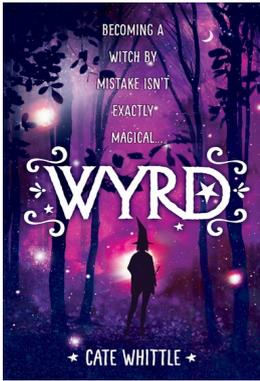
'WYRD' by Cate Whittle is an imaginative middle grade novel written by an experienced middle grade school teacher. As such the novel hits the mark **identifying the kinds of social and familial challenges preteen girls face. This is an engaging exploration of bullying, the transition of two single parent families to one blended household. Also explored are the young protagonists' internal conflicts in the midst of growing personal responsibility.** If these were the only themes of the novel, 'WYRD' would definitely have a place on the shelves of the tween reader. Whittle however, takes her novel further by introducing the captivating and engrossing ideas of witches and magic.

In the midst of facing numerous, challenging middle grade situations, two young female leads, Pip and Emma find themselves grappling with a supernatural power that has the capacity to be both destructive and enriching. The genius of Whittle's world building lies in her introduction of the idea of balance; For every magical act that is induced by Emma, the young and reluctant witch, there is an equal and opposite force felt elsewhere. The impact of this balancing act can have unforeseen, problematic consequences for innocent bystanders. Emma quickly learns that responsible use of magic is essential if she does not want to inflict unintended harm on others. **This law of balance in the imaginative world building of 'WYRD' perfectly reflects the growing independence and responsibilities that middle grade readers are discovering in their own lives.**

For example, if a child chooses to be a bully what are the consequences for others? If a child chooses not to communicate his/her emotions in an effective manner what are the consequences for him/herself and the community in which they live?

This novel has the potential to be used in the classroom as a great **catalyst for discussion about personal responsibility, family conflict, emotional challenges, communication styles and behavioural choices in the context of middle grade reader's increasing agency in their own lives.** It is an emotionally engaging read that will be devoured purely for the enjoyment of reading and being swept up in the adventure that unfolds throughout the narrative.

Just for Teachers



How many different ways could you use **Wyrđ** in your classroom? Here are some ideas with examples of how it can link to the Australian National Curriculum:

- use it to talk about **story arc**, deconstructing the text to find the main plot points and how tensions increased. Plot it on a story mountain or in a storyboard. Talk about the ending, and whether it is 'happy ever after'? Was there a resolution to the problem?
Y4 Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension ACELT 1605
- use it to look at how **characters** change and develop through the novel. How do they see the two main characters? What were some of their personality traits that made them so different to each other? Was Emma the same person at the end of the story as at the beginning? Was Pip? Think about Pip's role. Was she the antagonist or was she an anti hero? Was her behaviour justified?
Y4 Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension ACELT 1605
- use it to talk about **setting**? Where was the story set? Did it meet their expectations as a place where magic might take place? Think about the most magical places in the story (eg. the bookshop, Pip's bedroom, or under the tree) and what made them magical. Compare them to some other magical places (Hogwarts, Narnia, the Wild Woods)
Y4 Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension ACELT 1605
- use it to discuss magic in **literature** - comparing it with other books such as *Harry Potter*, *Matilda*, or even *Nevermoor*. What was similar about the magic? What was different? Do the students believe in magic? How can they tell the difference between fact and fiction? Do they think that Pip really believes in magic? What about Emma?
Y4 Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (ACELT1602)
Y6 Analyse and evaluate similarities and difference in texts in similar topics, themes or plot (ACELT 1614)
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- use it as a stimulus for students to create some **narratives** of their own
Y4 Create literary texts by developing storylines, characters and settings ACELT 1794

Y5 Create literary texts using realistic and fantasy settings and characters that draw on the worlds represented in texts students have experienced
ACELT 1612

Y6 Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways
ACELT 1618

- use it as a link to **poetry**... each of the spells and excerpts from the magic book in the story are created as a form of poetry based on Celtic blessings. What other forms of poetry could have been used? Would they have the same impact if, for instance, they had been written in haiku? Try it and see!

Y6 Identify the relationships between words, sounds, imagery and language patterns in narratives and poetry such as ballads, limericks and free verse
ACELT 1617

- act out some of the scenes as **drama** fun. Compare the scene where Emma 'catches' magic with other magical scenes (eg. the three witches from Macbeth)
Y3&4 Explore ideas and narrative structures through roles and situations and use empathy in their own improvisations and devised drama
ACADRM031

Y5&6 Explore dramatic action, empathy and space in improvisations, playbuilding and scripted drama to develop characters and situations
ACADRM035

- use it as a launching pad for looking at **social relationships** for many students (girls in particular) in that pre-teen stage – ask your class if they think the way Pip treats Emma is okay? Ask them if Emma's response to Pip is healthy? How can students support each other even if they are not BFFs? What does it say about someone who is constantly putting another person down?

Social Awareness

Level 3: discuss the value of diverse perspectives and describe a point of view that is different from their own / describe factors that contribute to positive relationships, including with people at school and in their community

Level 4 :identify the differences between positive and negative relationships and ways of managing these

- use it to talk about **communication** and **resolving conflict** & taking **responsibility** for your own behaviour

Social Awareness

Level 4: explain how means of communication differ within and between communities and identify the role these play in helping or hindering understanding of others

- use it as a way to look at different kinds of **families** – both Emma and Pip have come into a blended family from a single parent family, but both have very different histories. Emma barely remembers her mother who died when she was very young, but Pip still feels the rawness of her parents’ divorce. How would they each feel as their lives change? Think about the challenges that both Emma and Pip face, how they are the same and how they are different. They both dislike each other, but have been thrown into the most intimate of childhood relationships as siblings. What sort of support do they need? Did they receive it from their parents? From each other? What other kinds of families are there? What sort of challenges do they face?

Social Awareness

Level 3: discuss the value of diverse perspectives and describe a point of view that is different from their own / describe factors that contribute to positive relationships, including with people at school and in their community

Level 4 :identify the differences between positive and negative relationships and ways of managing these

- use it – even at a pinch – to discuss the **physical law** of the universe that every action has an equal and opposite reaction (Y10 Physical Sciences) – then take this one step further and discuss it as a **philosophical** question! How does this law of balance reflect the growing independence and responsibilities that students of this age are discovering in their own lives.

Exploring Values, Rights and Responsibilities

Level 2: Identify their rights and associated responsibilities and those of their classmates

- use it to talk about the elements and how this was an important part of **history and culture**, attributing different aspects of the behaviour of the natural world (and people) to earth, wind, fire, and water (all under the overarching ‘aether’) and consider together how this is brought into contemporary culture (eg. someone might have a fiery temper, or emails that disappear into the ether never to be seen again!)

Y5 Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details of information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts (ACELT1613)

or

- use to to just **enjoy** reading it together (it **is** a fun book to read out loud with lots of gentle humour) – and see what comes up!

Check out where Michael Rosen (UK children’s laureate 2007-2009 and author of *We’re Going on A Bear Hunt*) talks about fostering a passion for reading and just reading for the sheer of joy of it (and the role this plays in developing literacy and understanding, as well as a lifelong love of reading):

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pH-CZ1eEcXs>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/feb/06/michael-rosen-cardiff-school-reading>
- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/10852437/Michael-Rosen-Children-are-no-longer-encouraged-to-read-for-pleasure.html>