



Dragons' Bane by Linda McNabb

A classroom English unit from



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Intrigue, mystery, friendship, disappointment, danger, courage, discovery, treachery, magic, calamity, delight, excitement, fantasy, and of course, dragons – are all part of the mix of this enthralling children's adventure from the pen of Auckland's Linda McNabb. Linda's dragon-centric novels have captivated children in the 9–14-year-old age group ever since her extremely popular *Dragon's Apprentice* novel in 2003. Since then readers have been asking Linda just what has become of Toby, the young boy with magical powers, who became dragon Kel's apprentice. *Dragons' Bane* continues Toby's story and we find that his amazing ability to attract trouble has not diminished. Good versus evil is again the central theme and this lively fantasy story moves along at a cracking pace with surprises and plot twists that will captivate and delight young readers, up to the very last climactic page. *Dragons' Bane* is perfect for shared or individual reading, as a classroom serial, or to provide that hook to capture a reluctant reader. Such is the skill of the writing and the power of the genre, young readers will again be asking 'What happens next?'

Story synopsis

Toby, who possesses the power of magic, is now living in the Dragon Valley where he is apprenticed to Kel, a golden dragon. Things are not going well, and several of Toby's spells have wrought havoc on the valley. A surprise visit from his friend Sanelle confirms that Toby's magic has made the gateways between Dragon Valley and the other worlds very unstable. These gateways must remain closed to protect the valley from human sorcerers and evil blue dragons. The Dragon Valley Council's solution is to strip Toby of his magic powers, banish him to his homeland of Arandyl and send dragons to search Arandyl and other worlds for the stolen dragon stone, needed to close the gates permanently. Back in Arandyl, Toby, Sanelle, Kel and Princess Khylene suspect the evil Prince Blaise and his assistant Lark of having the stone and plotting to turn the people against all dragons, claiming falsely that they will give all humans dragon sickness. To do this, Blaise and Lark poison village wells making the villagers sick and turning them against the dragons. Winter weather in Arandyl abruptly vanishes, confirming that magic is leaking out of Dragon Valley endangering the lives of all the dragons. The stone must be found quickly. Toby discovers that Lark is his father and also the person who stole the dragon stone from Dragon Valley. Blaise wants to rule the valley but Lark wants to destroy it as revenge for his ex-communication from Dragon Valley. Toby and his human and dragon friends must try to stop Lark and Blaise and get them back through the gate to Arandyl. Toby, using a mixture of bravery, magic and determination, pushes them through the broken gate and saves Dragon Valley. Sanelle finds she is chosen to rule Dragon Valley along with Tryx, a golden dragon, and remains behind. Dragon Valley is saved and the gates resealed. Toby is now permanently in Arandyl looking for a new trade to ply.

Teaching and learning activities

Focus on dragons

- Before reading begins, have students brainstorm a list of all books they have read that have a major dragon component. Through class discussion, speculate on why they are such popular creatures in children's literature.
- Challenge students to write a description of a dragon that would appear in a dictionary. How does their description compare with the dictionary definition?
- Have students describe their 'perfect dragon'. What special powers, abilities and features make it perfect? Share ideas.
- Have groups conduct web research into dragons. Use the following sites to begin with:
 - www.kidskonnnect.com/content/view/439/27/
 - www.amnh.org/exhibitions/mythiccreatures/dragons/
 - www.factmonster.com (type in 'dragons' in search box)
- Have groups report their findings back to the class. Can they say why people in the olden days believed in dragons? Do dragons differ between cultures – are there similarities?
- Visit www.google.com and type in 'dragons'. Click on images to view a large selection of dragon pictures. Use these for motivation and have groups paint colourful dragon murals for a classroom display. Individuals or groups can construct cardboard and/or 'stuffed stuff' (stockings) dragon mobiles to add to the colourful classroom dragon theme.

Focus on fantasy – where anything can happen

- Have students plan the outline of a fantasy story by visiting Linda McNabb's website www.mcnabbnz.com > click on 'Writing help' and use the following ideas as the basis to explore the basic fantasy story concepts.
 - How do you tell if it is a good idea?
 - What is and what isn't fantasy?
 - What rules are there for writing fantasy?
 - Do you create the world first or the characters first?
 - Mixing the real and fantasy worlds.
 - Fantasy creatures and naming your characters.
 - Planning a basic fantasy story.

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