



Mountains of Fire

by Linda McNabb

A classroom English unit from



HarperCollinsPublishers

Best described as a rollicking and exhilarating adventure, *Mountains of Fire* will appeal to children of a wide age range as a teacher-read class book and for individual reading for students in the years 6 - 9 age range. *Mountains of Fire* is true to the fantasy and magic genre in which Linda McNabb excels. Children of all ages just love magic, adventure, dragons, excitement, good defeating evil (at the last possible moment) – all set in a vivid and wild landscape that stimulates the imagination. In this, the first of *The Dragon Charmers* series, Linda introduces her readers to the concept of being able to exert control over others. Students will be challenged to consider the ethics of this – even though it initially appears to be a normal occurrence in the setting of this book.

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Story synopsis

Logan lives in Shanoria – the Kingdom of Dragons – and is apprenticed to an elderly absent-minded wizard called Zared. Logan appears to have little talent for wizardry, as most of his spells simply explode leaving a terrible mess.

Logan's best friend is Alyxa – a young girl who has a rare ability as a dragon charmer. She can soothe and entrance dragons, which enables them to be commanded by humans. The dragons of Shanoria are mostly used for transport and for racing. The dragons farmed in the kingdom come in three colours – yellow, green, and the highly prized blue. The charm slowly wears off and they have to be re-charmed to make them compliant.

Not all dragons in Shanoria can be tamed, and the feared red dragons who live in the Mountains of Fire stage regular raids and carry off young boys – never to be seen again. No rescue attempt has ever been mounted until a young prince is carried off by a large red in front of Logan, Alyxa, the king and his arrogant son, Prince Myles. The king demands that Zared rescue his young son by casting a spell. Zared seems to have lost all grip on reality and it is now up to Logan to try to cast a 'seeing spell' so they can find where the young prince has been taken. They are short of one ingredient for the spell – a white dragon's heart. In a brief lucid moment, Zared tells Logan, Myles and Alyxa they must locate his old friend, a white dragon called Silverhorn. The dragon's heart is in fact a rare mountain flower and the spell is completed and the prince's whereabouts is traced to the red dragon-controlled city of Radolk Falls.

Zared (reunited with Silverhorn and restored to normality), Logan, Prince Myles and Alyxa race to Radolk Falls before the Red's evil leader uses the kidnapped prince as a final ingredient to cause a volcanic upheaval which will fill the world with flames and rid it of all humans. In an action-packed finale, Logan finds that he is the son of the king of Radolk Falls and was the human that the Reds have been seeking all along. Logan saves the day, wins the respect of a humbled Prince Myles, and with Alyxa returns to the burning Radolk Falls to try to rebuild the shattered city for his people now it is free of the fearsome red dragons.

Pre-reading motivational activities

- **Visual Language.** Develop the idea that we can often learn something about the content of a book by its name and by its cover. What can we tell about this book? List ideas.
- What previous fiction books have students read that have dragons? Have groups discuss and prepare a definition of a dragon that would appear in a dictionary. Read definitions to the class. What does the dictionary say?
- What ancient creatures that did exist on earth could have been the basis for fictional dragons?
- Would students like to live in a world inhabited by dragons? What do they think would be the dangers in such a place?

Post-reading activities

- After reading the first half of the book, have students place the good and bad (evil) characters they have met to date on a double list. Re-visit the list at the conclusion of the story. Have any changed sides? Why is this?
- Locate and list the traits and distinguishing features of all the types of dragons that are in the story.
- Discuss the work of Alyxa as a dragon charmer. How does she treat and value dragons? Contrast this with the way the royal family treat and value dragons.
- Discuss the meaning of the phrase *at the beck and call of* and find the meaning of the word *compliant*. As a class, discuss and debate the proposition that it is all right to charm dragons to make them compliant and at the beck and call of humans.
- Do the students think that this can be related to having a cat or a dog. Do we give them respect and love in return for the pleasure they give us? Locate and read out the parts of the story when the human to dragon relationship began to change. Was it for the better? Why?
- What were the student's first impressions of Prince Myles? Can they make any suggestions as to why he comes across in this way? Discuss how Prince Myles changes in character by the end of the story. Have students locate and list incidents that brought about this change.
- Point out that this is the first in a series of two books. Why do they think that it is important for the future book that one of the red dragons escaped the explosion?