

The Seventh Son

by Linda McNabb



Teaching Guide

Introducing *The Seventh Son* – the fourth children’s fantasy novel by Linda McNabb. Her first novel, *The Dragon’s Apprentice*, was a finalist in the 2003 New Zealand Post Children’s Book Awards. This was followed by *The Puppet Master* and *The Stone Keeper’s Daughter*. As with the other three novels, *The Seventh Son* is firmly set in the fiction genre of fantasy and magic, and enables children to suspend their modern-day belief systems and enjoy the fascination that they have for magic powers and the triumph of good over evil.

The characters are strongly portrayed and children will easily identify with the problems they confront and be drawn in to the fantasy world they inhabit – distant in time and real-ity, but full of good human values. *The Seventh Son* is action-packed and will appeal to the most reluctant reader, and is perfect as a class serial reader.

Story Synopsis

We are immediately introduced to Jaxon – a young, ex-apprentice wizard who is on the run and trying to discover just who and why someone is offering a 100-gold-coin reward for finding him and returning him to his home village of Pinehill.

Jaxon’s only friend is a wonderful (but at times petulant) young dragon called Smokey. As an apprentice to Wizard Argus, Jaxon had attempted a firestick spell to impress his co-apprentice, Tess. The spell went disastrously wrong and set many fires in his village and the next. Argus and the villagers expelled him from Pinehill and his wizard apprenticeship is over – or is it?

Jaxon meets up with a young boy called Sef who is travelling to Pinehill to apply to Argus to become his wizard apprentice. Jaxon agrees to take him there. Jaxon is apprehended by Wizard Argus who turns out to be the person offering the reward. Rather than punish Jaxon, Argus reveals that the magic of the world and those of the wizards is getting weaker and weaker, and that he needs Jaxon’s help to find out why so he can halt the decline of magic. Jaxon is not yet fully aware of his magic powers, but finds out that, as he is a seventh son of a seventh son, he does

not need to draw on the world for his magic, and only he will be able to save the world.

Sef, now accepted as an apprentice, Tess, Jaxon (dressed as a servant) and Argus set off on a journey to meet the council of wizards, but they are all captured by the evil wizard Kramar who is trying to gather all the magic and rule the world. Argus knows that unless Kramar's spell is destroyed, the world is doomed and that only Jaxon has the power to save the world. In a powerful and fiery climax involving the Desert Witch and dragons, Shadow and Smokey, Jaxon casts the magic sand into the Dragon's Breath volcano, saves Argus, saves the world's magic, impresses Tess and shows the council of wizards that Kramar should be expelled forever. Jaxon is forgiven for his past wrongdoings and given the unheard of second chance of becoming a wizard apprentice.

Pre-reading Motivational Activities

- Find out and list the books, television series and films students know about where magic plays a large part in the story, eg - *Harry Potter*, *The Stonekeepers Daughter*, *Peter Pan*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* ...
- Can students say how these books, films or TV series are enhanced or improved by having magic as a central part?
- If each student could have one magical power, what would it be and why? Have students justify their choice.
- Have students speculate on why we like magic – even though we know it is not true.
- Have the students ever heard of *the seventh son of a seventh son*? Do they think this is possible? How likely would they be to meet such a person? Tell students that because this was so rare, these people were believed to have magical powers.
- Introduce seventh son Jaxon using story synopsis paragraphs one and two.

Post-reading Activities

- List incidents in the story where magic is used for good, for evil, and for entertainment purposes.
- Have students construct a sequential flow chart of the main incidents in the story.
- As radio reporters, deliver a live as-it-happens radio report to describe to listeners the final scene at the edge of the crater – or another exciting part of the story.
- Discuss the good versus evil nature of the story. Speculate on the consequences for the world if evil had triumphed.

- In groups, have students script and act out incidents in the story and present to the class.
- Have students design and draw the ultimate dragon flying machine. Include special features it would have: - *to protect itself* - *for speed and manoeuvrability* - *for passenger comfort* - *to overcome bad magic spells*
- Construct 3D wire/papier-mache mock-ups of these dragon flying machines for a classroom or hall display.
- Write and deliver the speech that Argus would give to the villagers of Pinehill to ensure that Jaxon was welcomed back.
- Have students write an advertisement or prospectus encouraging people to take up a career as an apprentice wizard with Argus. List career prospects.

Discussion topics

- Have the class discuss what it would be like living in a world where every day tasks are done by magic. Do you think it would make you lazy or just make time for more important things? What tasks would you want to be able to do by magic? Would you want to train as a wizard if you could? Why?
- The three friends have to go into the desert to find the Desert Witch. What do you think it would be like in the desert, and what would you need to take with you if you had to go there?
- In this story they use magical sand of different colours. What makes sand different colours? Where would you find it?
- Fantasy stories are full of characters, which cannot exist in the real world. Make a list of all the characters you have read about in fantasy stories that cannot exist in real life. Would you want any of them to exist in our world? Why?
- Smokey is a mischievous, talking dragon. What sort of fantasy creature would you have as a pet if you lived in a magical world like Jaxon?
- Create your own fantasy world. Start with a world similar to the one we have and make changes – what would you change? Draw a map of your new fantasy world and think up a name for it. What sort of people would live there? What sort of fantasy creatures would live alongside those people? Try to create a new fantasy creature for your world.
- Fantasy stories have things that cannot happen in the real world. Science Fiction stories start with the real world and explore ideas that ‘might’ happen. Look in the library and see if you can classify stories into either fantasy or sci-fi based on that distinction. Can you find some which are difficult to classify?