

# WEDNESDAY WEEKS

and the Dungeon of Fire



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TEACHERS RESOURCES



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## and the Dungeon of Fire

Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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# INTRODUCTION

'And I know I cannot have it either. I cannot use it. I cannot control it. Because Grandpa was wrong. The difference between a good sorcerer and an evil one isn't what they do with their power. It's what their power does to them.' (p 214)

*Wednesday Weeks and the Dungeon of Fire* (Book 3) is third in the series and a sequel to *Wednesday Weeks and the Tower of Shadows* (Book 1) and *Wednesday Weeks and the Crown of Destiny* (Book 2). Wednesday is 'technologically challenged' as her best friend Alfie puts it. For whatever she tries to do in class turns into a disaster involving fireballs and other dangerous developments.

In **Book 1**, Wednesday's grandfather Abraham Mordecai Weeks 'Protector of the Realms, Master of the Seven Transformations, Custodian of the Five Ungovernable Charms, ArchExcellency Order Enchanter, Wonder Warlock, and Black Belt Magician to the Queen's Royal Order' (p 12) mysteriously disappeared after encountering evil Gorgomoth, the Goblin King, leaving Wednesday with his Ruby Ring, as his Apprentice Protector. Wednesday was determined to rescue him, and her best friend Alfie wouldn't let her go alone. Their quest led them into several perilous realms and into encounters with frightening figures and seemingly impassable challenges. Their erstwhile sidekick Bruce, a snarky disembodied skull, added to their adventures! [See [Teachers Notes](#).]

In **Book 2**, Gorgomoth the Unclean was on the loose – again! And it was up to Wednesday and Alfie to save the day – again! When Gorgomoth stole the Crown of Destiny and turned Grandpa into a frog, it was up to Wednesday and Alfie – with help from Bruce and their new friend Adaline – to track him down. But wormholes, giant pinball machines and a stolen crown were only the beginning. Throw in a floating fortress full of goblins, some misbehaving magic and a missing pair of eyebrows, and Wednesday and Alfie took their magic – and their science – to the next level.

Now, in **Book 3**, Gorgomoth the Unclean is back and he's up to no good, of course. Just when it seems like Wednesday and Alfie might finally be free to get on with their lives without Gorgomoth ruining everything, the Unclean one rears his ugly head – again. This time Gorgomoth is on the trail of the long-lost Stone of Power, one of the Seven Stones of Saranon, which he will be able to use to rule the nine realms and bring about the Third Age of Never-Ending Darkness. Now Wednesday and the gang must beat Gorgomoth to the Stone and pass three trials to see who is worthy of its ancient power. If they don't win, it might just be the end of the world.

This, like earlier books in the series, is littered with fantasy concepts and the world described is cunningly detailed. The adventurers visit The Realm of Unfriendly Cats, The Cave of Words, The Dungeon of Fire in the Goblin Realm, and the Endless Stair of Zagaroth. They encounter devices such as the Luminating Globe of Lost Tarimos, the anti-magic bracelet, the Sword of Reckoning, and the iron wand of Queen Penelope which all play their parts in this magical and yet hilarious work. In this fast-paced fantasy adventure series, Wednesday and Alfie are really 'up against it', but in a world of magic, can science actually save the day?

## BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the cover of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?
- After you have read the novel, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?
- After you have read the novel, read reviews and articles about it and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.



# THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (HASS, Science, and English Language and Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

## HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

### MAGIC/SCIENCE

This series plays with the concepts of magic and science and the interplay between them, in an intriguing and often ironic way, for example:

Alfie and I have tried to explain some basic science to Grandpa, like the internet and solar panels and how toilets flush. But he insists all good things come from magic. 'Look,' he says. 'I push a button, and abracadabra. It all disappears!' (p 10)

OR

I shake my head. I mean, I've told him about antihistamines a hundred times. But oh, no. If it's not magic, he's not interested. I think he thinks he's too old to change. (p 31)

OR

'Grandpa,' I say. 'How do ley lines work?'  
Grandpa makes his voice go all billowy. 'They rely upon invisible fields that shift and guide the flow of magic.'  
'Okay.' I nod. 'And Alfie, how does the collider work?'  
'Pretty much the same way.' He shrugs. 'Invisible fields that shift and guide the flow of particles. Magnetic fields, actually.' (p 103)

OR

'Science is not the only magic,' Grandpa says primly (p 104)

OR

Even Grandpa is shivering now. 'You're asking me to trust this entire mission to a miniature mechanical car?'

'No.' I grin. 'We're asking you to trust the mission to science.'

'And magic,' Alfie says. 'Science and magic.' (p 116)

OR

In science, energy is transformed all the time. And magic's the same. I transform the energy of magic into the energy of movement every time I levitate a stone. I turn magic into light when I conjure the Globe of Tarimos. And I turn magic into heat when I conjure a fireball. (p 232)

**Discussion Point:** Discuss any of these quotes and what they suggest about magic and science.

## COMING OF AGE & RITE OF PASSAGE

**Discussion Point:** Wednesday and Alfie have always felt like outsiders in their class – she because her magical abilities cause mayhem when she is presenting any assignment, and he because he loves nerdy scientific things. But they ultimately learn that the other class members and their teacher Mrs Glock have qualities of their own – even the annoying Colin Murphy. How important is it to develop respect for others as part of maturing?

## BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

**Discussion Point:** Fantasies rely on the conflict between forces of good and evil, just as Alfie's computer games do!

'We can't choose the lives of the few over the fate of the many,' I tell Gorgomoth. 'We'll never let you have the stone.' (p 129)

Why is Alfie aghast when Wednesday says this? What does Wednesday ultimately learn about defeating evil powers?

## SCIENCE

**Discussion Point:** This novel and series is as much about science as it is about magic. Topics covered include Robotics, Mathematics, and Quantum Physics. Discuss with students any aspect of science that the novel explores.

**Discussion Point:** STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. There are many concepts you can explore from the examples of STEM found in this book. For example, discuss how Alfie solves the problem of escaping the cave and the trogs:

Alfie gives me a look. 'No, I mean, a river-crossing problem is a class of logic puzzle in which some combination of people or items have to be transported across a river or bridge, subject to certain rules.' (p 83)

See also STEM Activities, prepared by the authors, at the back of the novel.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

Study the writing style employed in this narrative and examine the following sub-topics:

### NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE

**Discussion Point:** This is told in first person present tense from Wednesday Weeks's perspective. This gives the narrative immediate appeal. From her narration, what can you ascertain about her character?

### GENRE

This novel contains several features of the **fantasy genre**, which has several recurring features [See Jane Mobley's 'Toward a Definition of Fantasy Fiction' in Bator, Robert, *Signposts to Criticism of Children's Literature*, Chicago, ALA, 1983, pp. 249–260]. Teachers

might examine each of these features in relation to this novel, as below:

a) It relies on **creating convincing and entertaining details in a 'secondary world'**, with details, for example, such as the following describing The Realm of Unfriendly Cats:

The cats are all ordinary-cat-sized in this Realm, but everything else is at least a dozen sizes too big. I'm talking a metropolis of cat hotels like skyscrapers. A towering mishmash of carpet-covered scratching posts with stuffed mice dangling from on high. There are tall platforms to glare from. Fake windows to sleep in. Giant curtains to shred and expensive furniture to scratch. And endless sunshine. It's basically cat paradise. And then, when they're ready for a bowl of Friskies, they portal back to the Human Realm to mewl at your feet. (p 25)

**Discussion Point:** Discuss these 'secondary world' details with students and invite them to comment on which fantasy details they found most enticing.

b) **Essential Extravagance** or spectacle is another aspect of the fantasy genre, for example:

He barks an order and his minions race towards the *STUFFED CRUST* conveyor belt. Ground beef, pepperoni, sausage and hot chillies rain down on the pizzas below as goblins start sprinting along the conveyor towards us. (p 191)

**Discussion Point:** What 'extravagant' details made this an exciting fantasy world for you?

c) **Poetic quality** is shown in the language used in this novel, for example:

*Saranon's Stones, forged in times long forgotten  
The magical seven, for good or for rotten  
The blood Stone of Passage, the ice Stone of Sight  
The Stone of Protection, the lost Stone of Life ...* (p 38)

**Discussion Point:** Which other passages were poetic in this book?

d) **Multidimensionality where time and space overlap**, for example, Bruce constantly speaks of events centuries earlier as if they were yesterday.

**Discussion Point:** Discuss the concept of multidimensionality in this novel, for example, how Grandpa seems to have lived for centuries.

e) **A spirit of carnival or ritual or dance** also enriches fantasy (Mobley, in Bator, 1983, p 257). For example, this description of the trogs is carnivalesque:

Three pairs of yellow eyes kindle in the darkness, and three hulking monsters prowl from the shadowed depths of the cave. Taller even than Gorgomoth, they're heavily muscled, long-limbed and big-headed, with huge frog-like mouths and bulging leathery bellies. Each of the three has a distinctive tuft of coloured fur on its head – one red, one blue, and one green. (p 74)

**Discussion Point:** What scenes in this third novel were particularly carnivalesque?

f) **Mythic dimension** and the inclusion of archetypes, for example, the quest is referred to, and trials are used as tropes:

'Congratulations!' The tricycle's tinny voice is tinged with pride. 'You have solved the three trials.' (p 118)



**Discussion Point:** What other fantasy archetypes or myths were referred to in this novel?

## SYMBOLISM

**Discussion Point:** The Stone of Power is a symbol of evil power. The pizza ovens are metaphors for moral challenges. What other symbolism did you notice in this novel?

## LITERARY DEVICES

**Activity:** Find examples the following literary devices in this novel. Record them using the table below.

<b>Simile</b>	Which sounds like the snoring of a hibernating sasquatch. (p 33)  ... as empty as a vampire's tomb at midnight. (p 107)
<b>Metaphor</b>	
<b>Personification</b>	
<b>Word Play and Pun</b>	Realmflix (p 19)  'This is cat-astrophic,' he says, winking an orange eyelight at me. 'Get it?' 'Seriously?' I whisper. 'Now?' 'Cat-egorically,' Bruce smirks. I grit my teeth. Tybalt arches his back. 'Bruce,' Grandpa whispers. 'The future of the Nine Realms is at stake.' The old skull rolls his eyelights. 'Okay, I get it. No need to cat-erwaul.' (p 32)  'Silence, you clack-jawed coconut!' he roars. (p 72)
<b>Other</b>	

## HUMOUR

**Activity:** Some of the humour in this series and novel was reminiscent of the exaggerated quirky humour found in cult classic *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979) by Douglas Adams. See this example from *Wednesday Weeks and the Dungeon of Fire*..

'Queen Penelope set her prisoners to work in these cages,' Grandpa continues. 'Kneading dough, slicing salami . . .'

'It was a terrible time,' Bruce says. 'Prisoners chopping onions, tears rolling down their faces. Others chopping pineapple . . .'

'Pineapple?' Alfie looks horrified. 'On a pizza?'

'Bruce, please.' Grandpa shoots Bruce a look. 'They're still apprentices.' (p 139)

**Activity:** Identify techniques by which humour is provoked. Add quotes to the following table.

<b>Sarcasm</b>	<p>I'd like to think the investigator is coming because Mrs Glock is in the running for Highest Number of Fire Extinguishers in a Year Six Classroom. Or maybe she's being recruited for the next season of <i>I'm A Primary Teacher . . . Get Me Out Of Here</i>. (p 2)</p> <p>'Ugh,' Bruce mutters. 'Stones preserve us from overly optimistic apprentices. Honestly, it's like going on a quest with Pollyanna and Ned Flanders.' (p 66)</p>
<b>Irony</b>	<p>I feel like screaming out the lyrics to the thrash-dragon hit 'Everything Sucks and Now I Wanna Scream'. But I only know the chorus. (p 202)</p>
<b>Exaggeration</b>	<p>Before he turned into a frog, Gorgomoth was not only the stinkiest bad guy in the Nine Realms. He was also the meanest. Owner-operator of the Pit of Extreme Discomfort, inventor of the Sardine and Strawberry Cake, and winner of every year's vote for Evil Semi-Genius Most Likely to Pitch Us All into a Third Age of Never-Ending Darkness. (p 15)</p> <p>'Until Gorgomoth took top spot, Penelope was the wickedest, most spiteful goblin ever to wear the iron crown. So evil, she forced all her minions to learn the recorder. So unclean, she sealed up her shower and ordered that it never be opened again. So cruel, she invited guests for ice cream but served only non-fat rice-based sugar-free frozen desserts.' (p 137)</p>
<b>Black Humour</b>	
<b>Bathos</b>	
<b>Other</b>	

## STRUCTURE

The structure of the story can be analysed in terms of key narrative features used to engage the reader's attention and to shape the work:

a) *Strong beginnings and endings to chapters* are one way of structuring a narrative, for example:

Beginning: There's no time to waste. (Ch 16, p 154)



Ending: 'Oh, *man*. I *hate* it when we're doomed.' (Ch 22, p 221)

**Discussion Point:** In your opinion, which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping?

b) *Suspense* is the key to any narrative's structure.

**Discussion Point:** What were the most intriguing and suspenseful elements of this work?

## SETTING

**Discussion Point:** Description in setting can be evoked by appealing to a range of senses including sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. Read any passage in the novel and discuss which senses are appealed to in that passage.

**Discussion Point:** What aspects of setting were explored using literary devices such as simile or metaphor?

## CHARACTERS

**Major Characters:** Wednesday Elizabeth Weeks; her best friend Alfie (Afraz Nizami); her grandfather Abraham Mordecai Weeks; Gorgomoth, King of the Goblin Realm, who lives in the Tower of Shadows; Bruce, a talking skull aka Chuckles aka Skully McSkullface.

**Minor Characters:** Colin Murphy; Sasha Hammond; Allie Crenshaw; Hasan Douglas; Mrs Glock; Rixon, Special Investigator for the Board of Education; Tybalt the cat; Gorgomoth's two assistants Kevin and an unnamed goblin; three Trogs; the eyeballs with feet which were Queen Penelope's enforcers.

**Activity:** Draw up a character chart and find key quotes which give a clear picture of any of these characters, and identify the events that demonstrate their natures. Then write a brief character study of the person using the quotes and events to illustrate the points made in your summary.

**Question:** Which character was most intriguing and why? Which character would you like to have heard more about?

**Question:** Adaline, the faery attendant at the ALL-POWERFUL MAGICAL ITEMS counter in the Realm of Lost Things doesn't appear in the third book. Did you miss her and why?

## WRITING TASKS

**Activity:** This novel was written collaboratively by two people – Denis Knight and Cristy Burne. Conduct a classroom exercise inviting one student to write a short incident and then to hand it on to another student to continue the story, repeating the exercise until the entire class has contributed.

**Activity:** Write a diary entry by Alfie describing his feelings when Alfie Junior goes missing.

**Activity:** This novel ends with what once again might seem to be the beginning of a new adventure. What might a fourth novel be called? Write a synopsis for what might happen in it.

## VISUAL LITERACY

**Activity:** Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

**Activity:** Design a new cover for this book.

**Activity:** Create a book trailer for this novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

## FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'Remember, Wednesday, the difference between a good sorcerer and an evil sorcerer is—'  
'What they do with their power,' (p 15, Book 2)
2. 'These humans saved my life,' he says. 'So if it's all the same to you, I think I'll go with them.' (p 92)
3. 'When you fight with monsters, be careful not to become a monster yourself.' (p 119)
4. Well, we just fought the biggest monster I've seen in a while. And how did we defeat it? With samosas. With home cooking and kindness and a shared meal.  
We didn't need an all-powerful stone to subdue the monster. We didn't need to harness the energies of the universe. We just did the right thing.  
So what's the right thing to do now? (p 151)
5. Alfie was right – these are my friends. These are my *people*. I brought them here to protect them. And that's exactly what I'm going to do.  
I reach for the magic and it pours into me, hot and wild and strong. (p 186)
6. Grandpa always thinks he has to protect everyone, but the truth is, he can't do it alone. Not anymore.  
Luckily, he doesn't have to.  
I step forward to stand at Grandpa's right hand. (p 197)
7. 'Don't call me that, okay?'  
Colin frowns. 'Why not?'  
'Because I don't like it,' Alfie says, looking the taller kid in the eye. 'Also, research has shown that the whole "sticks and stones" thing isn't true. Turns out, the names we call each other really matter. In fact, labelling theory suggests that we each come to behave in a way that reflects the labels that others put on us.'  
He gives Colin a pointed look. 'So just call me Alfie, okay?' (p 206)
8. I reach out again, and this time I do something I've never done before. I reach past the magic, extending my senses further than they've ever been. At first there's nothing but cloudy confusion. But then, I start to notice . . . things.  
Alfie, a warm and comforting presence less than an arm's length away.  
The Sword of Reckoning, strapped to Alfie's back, shining in the darkness like a needle of light.  
I reach out further.' (p 223)
9. For the first time I begin to understand what it must've been like for Alfie. He's been going to school with these kids since kindy. And yet he never really had a friend, not until I came along. So as bad as I had it at school, Alfie's had it worse. And despite all that, it was Alfie who



wanted to save our class. It was Alfie who knew they could be our friends. (p 245)

10. 'What reminder?' Alfie asks.

Grandpa smiles at him. 'The reminder that our differences make us stronger. You and I may not wield the same magic, but I see now there is a place for science alongside sorcery after all.'

Alfie smiles back, then shrugs. 'Except what I do isn't really magic, is it?' Grandpa squeezes his shoulder. 'It is to me, Apprentice. It is to me.' (p 268)

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. **Compare** this novel to other fantasy novels. [See **Bibliography**.]
2. **Design** a poster to advertise this book.
3. What other title might this book have had?
4. **Debate** any of the topics covered in these notes or suggested by the novel.
5. Locate and study **poetry** which explores fantasy themes. [See **Bibliography**.]

## CONCLUSION

This third book cements the series as an inventive and highly entertaining fantasy adventure which traverses the fine line between magic and science in a totally original way. Wednesday and Alfie make a formidable team, together with Wednesday's grandfather Mordecai, Bruce, Mrs Glock and their classmates. And as Protectors they will surely be called into action again!

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Science fiction and fantasy author **Denis Knight** is a computer programmer who grew up geeking out about the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Terry Pratchett and Douglas Adams. He has also worked as a technical writer, a delivery boy, a tutor, and, for one glorious summer, a tour guide on Rottnest Island. He lives in Western Australia with his wife, his two children, and his extensive collection of *The X-Files* DVDs. He has never been stalked by a laundry kraken, eaten by space wasps or abducted by aliens – as far as he knows.

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Children's author **Cristy Burne** has worked as a science communicator for nearly 20 years across Australia, Japan, Switzerland, the UK, US, South Africa and beyond. She has performed in a science circus, worked as a garbage analyst, and was a reporter at CERN when they turned on the Large Hadron Collider. Her latest books include *Beneath the Trees*, *Zeroes and Ones*, and *Aussie STEM Stars: Fiona Wood*. Cristy is a popular presenter and is passionate about empowering our next generation of creative, science-savvy citizens. She also loves chocolate.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM** operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011 she was recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).