



Fiction

Oxford Level 15

A Spell of Trouble

Author: Alan MacDonald

Range: Fantasy school story

Theme: Being out of one's depth

Teaching notes authors: Gill Howell and Vicky Yates

Synopsis

Franklin hates school as he gets picked on, so when he discovers his gran is a witch, he uses her book of spells to get his own back. Unfortunately, he doesn't know enough about magic and his spells get out of control causing mayhem at the school.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book

- Look together at the cover and read the title. Ask: *Where do you think the story is set? What sort of trouble do you think it might be?*
- Ask the children to read the blurb on the back cover and ask them to speculate further on what might happen in the story.
- Read the author's name and ask the children if they have read other books by this author.

Strategy check

- Ask the children to tell you which strategies they can use to make sense of the story.
- Find the first two sentences on page 4, 'Fey all pickomee . . .'. Ask the children to read them aloud and say what they think they mean. Ask them to turn back to page 3 and read the last sentence, ' . . . spoke with his mouth full'. *Does it make more sense now?*
- Remind the children to reread sentences, and to read on, to help them make sense of their reading.

Independent reading

Focus: Explain that you want the children to think about this question while reading: *Why do you think Mr Lumsden behaves differently at the end of the story?*

- Observe the strategies the children use when they meet new vocabulary, and prompt them as needed.
- Check their understanding of any difficult words or phrases, e.g. 'bespectacled' on page 58.
- Praise the children for reading with expression.

Returning and responding to the text

- When the children have read the whole story ask them to explain what happened to Mr Lumsden when he was in the playground as Franklin. Ask the children to describe Mr Lumsden and how he behaved towards his class. *How does Mr Lumsden change by the end of the story? Why do you think Mr Lumsden's behaviour altered?*
- *What made Franklin suspect his gran was a witch?* Ask the children to find the evidence in the text.
- Ask the children to describe the spells Franklin used, in their own words.
- *How would you describe this story to someone who hasn't read it?*



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Speaking and listening activities

- Ask volunteers to put themselves in the 'hot seat' and play the role of either Mr Lumsden or Franklin.
- Ask the other children to imagine they are news reporters who had heard of the strange events and come to interview Mr Lumsden and Franklin for a newspaper report.
- Ask the children to say how the first person accounts differ from the text.

Further reading activities

- Ask the children, in pairs, to read the dialogue in the story in an expressive tone, beginning with Josh's words on page 4.
- Ask the same pairs to read Chapter 7, reading alternate paragraphs aloud and taking account of punctuation to read expressively.
- Ask the children to look through the story and read all the spells that Franklin read. Encourage them to note down all the noun phrases from the spells in their reading diaries.

Suggestions for using ICT

- Prepare a text file with scrambled sentences from the rhyming spells. Ask the children to rearrange the words so they make sense.
- Ask the children to use a word-processing program to write their newspaper report from their writing activity, displaying it in columns.

Writing activities

- Remind the children of the 'hot seating' activity.
- Ask the children to suggest a headline for a newspaper report about the strange happenings at the school.
- Brainstorm a list of main points to include in the report.
- Ask the children to suggest two quotes to use in their reports, and how to include them, i.e. direct speech or reported speech.
- Demonstrate how the two styles of quoting someone differ from each other, e.g. 'Mrs Gammage said she was very . . .'; "It was very odd," commented Franklin.'
- Remind the children how to set out their writing in a journalistic style.
- Ask them to write a short report on the events in no more than 200 words.

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(We see Arthur backstage at his school's spelling bee, looking very nervous). Arthur: Do you think everybody gets nervous before they do something important to them? Francine (as Deborah Franklin): Benjamin, do you think you should do this? Arthur (as Benjamin Franklin): I have to. Ouch! Ouch! I did it! Ouch! Ouch! Ouch! Heyyy! Ouch! Arthur: This is nothing compared to a lightning storm, so I shouldn't be afraid either, right? Herbert Haney: Next, Arthur Read. A Spell of Trouble and Spell Disaster are books 1 and 2 in the Silver Hollow series of "paranormal cozy mysteries"™. The best way to explain the sub-genre is what you get if you cross Miss Marple, Mills & Boon (minus the sex), and witches. Each one has a murder-solving plot in the setting of a small, close-knit, old-fashioned community, with the usual red herrings and authorial sleight of pen to avoid the reader guessing whodunnit too far ahead of the amateur sleuth/s. Definition of spell trouble in the Idioms Dictionary. spell trouble phrase. What does spell trouble expression mean? Definitions by the largest Idiom Dictionary.Â to signify future trouble; to mean trouble. This letter that came today spells trouble. The sky looks angry and dark. That spells trouble. See also: spell, trouble. Want to thank TFD for its existence?