

The Wednesday Wizard

Author: Sherryl Jordan

Synopsis

Denzil is a mischievous young wizard in training. His master Valvasor has been away for several weeks and Denzil is getting hungry for his favourite honey and hedgehog pie. He doesn't consider himself a thief but on the odd occasion he has been known to be a burglar (being a burglar is fair more honourable and daring than being a thief). So he visits Mother Wyse's cottage and tries to find her stores of honey. Unfortunately Mother Wyse catches Denzil in the act and informs him that he is in mortal danger. She has had a strange and violent dream where Denzil is attacked by a ferocious dragon. She warns him to stay away from a big town on Rue Wednesday – the day foretold in her dream. At first Denzil dismisses the old lady's warning as the ravings of a mad woman. But then a thought occurs to him. What if the warning is not meant for him at all, but for Valvasor, who is away in London town? He must warn his master. The only problem is that Denzil has no idea how to get to London town. He will have to use magic to get his message to Valvasor.

Denzil spends hours working out the calculations for the complicated spell needed to send him through time and space to Rue Wednesday. It all seems to go well until Denzil realises that he has arrived in the New Zealand town of Londfield - 720 years in the future! Here he meets 11-year-old Sam and the rest of her family. Living in the modern world proves to be exciting and strange for the young wizard. He is very taken with the new technology- especially the television that allows him to see new worlds.

Sam's sister's boyfriend Adam is a maths whiz and he begins to help Denzil rework his calculations so that he can return to Rue Wednesday and warn his master about the dragon. However this proves easier said than done. Denzil is very vague about when Rue Wednesday actually is. Without this information Adam can't fix the spell. Then Adam begins to wonder. What if the warning from Mother Wyse is for Denzil after all? Maybe the warning wasn't actually about a dragon but a modern machine that Mother Wyse was unfamiliar with. Will Sam and her family be able to figure out a way for Denzil to return to his own time or will he fall victim to a horrific tragedy, as foreseen by the wily old woman?

Text Type

The Wednesday Wizard is the first novel in a series written by New Zealand author Sherryl Jordan. The novel is highly readable with enough action and humour to keep even the most reluctant reader engaged. Set in modern New Zealand and England in the 1200's *The Wednesday Wizard* is full of magic, spells, wizards and enchantment. Delightful illustrations mark the start of each chapter in the book.

In this first novel the reader is introduced to Denzil and Sam, the main protagonists. Denzil is a likeable rogue. He has a hugely dramatic personality and constantly becomes entangled in silly antics, which invariably have hilarious outcomes. Sam is more than a match for Denzil. Clever and headstrong she refuses to be pushed around by her strange visitor. Sam is open-minded though and easily believes Denzil's fantastic explanation for his sudden appearance in her life. It takes Sam's family a bit longer to believe that Denzil is really who he says he is, but eventually Denzil's magical abilities begin to erode their doubts.

Themes include time travel, magic, friendship, premonitions, fate and helping a stranger.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 9-18), Chapters 2-5 (pp. 19-69), Chapters 6-10 (pp. 70-134) and Chapter 11-Epilogue (pp. 135-188).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas. Have them make predictions about what is going to happen in the story. Students should read closely and make inferences.

Students need to be able to identify the elements of the novel that make it a fantasy. Encourage them to make the leap of imagination necessary to become engrossed in Denzil's world of wizards and magic. Have them compare Denzil's own time with the modern world.

Readers should examine the main characters Denzil and Sam and compare and contrast them. The minor characters Travis and Adam are also interesting in that Travis is a strong ally to his sister and although he is older he is still open-minded and whimsical. Adam is not what he initially seems and teaches the reader the importance of not judging a book by its cover.

Encourage students to identify and discuss the main themes and issues raised in the text.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What kind of novel do you think this is? What do you expect from a novel of this genre?
- Who is the main character in the novel? What do we learn about him from the blurb?

- Who is Sam? Why do you think she will be important in the story?
- If you were a witch or a wizard what kind of spells would you want to cast?
- If you could travel through time to any place that you wanted where would you go and why?
- Make some predictions about what is going to happen in the story.

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 9-18) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 9-18)

- Why doesn't Denzil consider himself a thief? What happens to a thief if they are caught? What is Denzil more worried about?
- Who is Valvasor? Why does Denzil admire him so much?
- Why does Denzil decide to break into Mother Wyse's cottage? Why is he so sure that he won't be caught?
- Describe the inside of Mother Wyse's cottage. Who disturbs him while he is hunting for the honey?
- How does Denzil feel when Mother Wyse catches him in her cottage? What lie does he invent to explain his presence? Why doesn't Mother Wyse believe him? Why does Denzil find it so frustrating talking to the old woman?
- What does Mother Wyse warn Denzil about? When will this event occur? Why doesn't Denzil take Mother Wyse's warning seriously?

Discussion

- When is the story set? What clues are included in the text that tells you this?
- What do we know about Denzil so far? How old is he? What sort of person is he? What is Valvasor training Denzil to be? What does Mother Wyse think that he lacks?
- Do you believe that it is possible to predict the future? Why/why not? Do you believe that Denzil does the right thing when he disregards Mother Wyse's warning? Explain your answer.
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2-5 (pp. 19-69) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2-5 (pp. 19-69)

- Describe Valvasor's cottage. Where is Valvasor? What has Denzil been doing while Valvasor is away? What does Denzil think the best thing that he made since his master has been away is?
- Why does Denzil suddenly become very worried about Mother Wyse's warning? Why does he decide to use magic to try and solve his problem? Why is the spell that he wants to use so complicated?

- What does Denzil remove from Valvasor's cupboard to help him with the spell? Describe the item.
- Why is it so important that Denzil doesn't make a mistake while he is reading the spell? What happens to Denzil after he recites it?
- Describe the first things that Denzil sees after he has been transported.
- Why is Denzil so amazed when the girl walks out of the house? What is he wearing on his head that confuses her? Why is Denzil so surprised to see that she is wearing trousers? In what way does the girl speak to Denzil that makes him think she must be important? Why does he think she must be an angel?
- How does Denzil prove to Sam that he is a wizard?
- What year is Denzil from? How many years did Denzil skip when he travelled through time? How does Denzil react when he realises that he got the spell so wrong?
- Why does Sam try and hide Denzil when her mother comes out of the house? Where does she say that he can sleep?
- Who is Travis? How old is he? How does Sam feel about him?
- Who is Theresa? How old is she? How does Sam feel about her? Why is Theresa so angry with Sam? What does Theresa threaten to do to Sam to get her back?
- Why is Sam so annoyed when she climbs into her tree house in the morning? Where does Denzil suddenly appear?
- Why does Denzil think that Sam is different from other girls?
- How does Denzil react when Sam tells him that he will need to clean up the tree house? What does Sam threaten him with?
- What does Denzil see Sam's parents doing from the tree house? Why does he accuse Sam's dad of being a Chicken-livered Milksop?
- How does Denzil get into Sam's house? What havoc does he create when he gets inside?
- What does Sam see when she goes into her tree house after school? How does she show Denzil her displeasure?
- What clothes does Denzil steal from the house? Why does he think they are the best clothes that he has ever had?
- Why is Denzil so worried that someone might come into the tree house?
- What does Sam notice when she looks out the window at the house across the road? Why does she run over there? Who does Sam meet at the house? What does she borrow from her?
- What does Theresa do to Sam's tree house? Why do you think she does it?
- How does Travis react when he sees Denzil?
- Why does Denzil believe that everyone is mad?

Discussion

- Denzil has travelled forward in time to what seems like a completely different place. What kinds of things does Denzil see in the modern world that astounds him? How would you feel if you left behind

- everything that was familiar to you? If you lived in Denzil's time what modern piece of equipment would you miss the most and why?
- Describe Sam. Why do you think she is so quick to believe Denzil's story? How does she try and help her new friend? What does her behaviour suggest about her as a person? How is she a match for Denzil?
 - Describe Sam's family. Why does she love Travis so much? What is her relationship like with her sister? Do you have brothers or sisters? Do you get on with them or do you often squabble? Why do you think that there is often conflict between siblings? What are Sam's parents like?
 - What is Mrs Utherwise like? Do you believe that it is a coincidence that she has moved into the empty house at the same time that Denzil turned up? Why/why not? Does she remind you of anyone?
 - Predict what is going to happen in the story next.

Students read Chapters 6-10 (pp. 70-134) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 6-10 (pp. 70-134)

- What chaos does Mrs MacAllister discover when she arrives home from work? How does she restore order?
- Why does Sam believe that Denzil is the cause of all her problems? Is she correct? Why/why not?
- What do Sam and Travis talk about outside? What does Sam love best about her brother? Why do you think that Travis can't see Mrs Utherwise or the things outside her house?
- What did Sam's dad used to do? What does he do now? Why does Sam feel sorry for her dad? Why does Sam's mum think that she is like her father? Who would Sam rather be like?
- How does Travis react when Sam explains to him about Denzil? What does Travis offer to do to help?
- What announcement does Theresa make to her family after dinner? Why does Mrs MacAllister believe that this might not be a bad idea? What makes Mrs MacAllister suspect that Denzil is up to no good?
- Why doesn't Sam's father like Adam?
- How does Denzil get in the house? Why does Travis decide that he can stay for now? What does Travis tell Denzil he has to do if he wants to stay?
- What does Denzil insist on wearing when Travis tries to give him jeans? How does he react when he sees the bath?
- Why does Sam's mum arrive home so early? How is Mrs MacAllister alerted to Denzil's presence in the house?
- Why does Travis tell his mother about Denzil? How does Sam feel about this?
- Who does Theresa arrive home with? What does she give him? How could this create problems for Denzil later on?

- What comes and sits on Adam's car? Why does Theresa believe that there is something unusual about it?
- How does Mr MacAllister react when Adam comes inside with Theresa? How does Mrs MacAllister treat him?
- Why is Denzil so upset when he bursts into the kitchen?
- Why does Mr MacAllister think that Denzil ran away from home? What information does Denzil tell him about himself? How does Sam's dad react to Denzil's confession? How does Sam react when her father threatens to call the police?
- Who knocks on the backdoor and interrupts the bedlam? What does she do to try and help Sam and Denzil?
- Who gives Denzil advice about his calculations? Why is this so surprising?
- What does Denzil discover when Mr MacAllister stays home to look after him?
- How does Denzil react when he watches *Star Wars*? Why does his behaviour convince Mr MacAllister that he has never seen a television before?
- Why does Adam believe that showing Denzil *Star Wars* was a silly thing to do? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?
- Why does Mr MacAllister decide to perform a comedy show for everyone? How does he feel about the project? Why does Mrs MacAllister think that Denzil is good for the family?
- Why does Adam have so much trouble helping Denzil with his calculations? Why isn't Denzil able to help him?
- How does Denzil behave when Adam and Mr MacAllister refuse to turn the television on for him? How does he get inside the television? Why is everyone so surprised when they see him sitting on top of the television? Describe how each person in the room reacts. Why is Denzil so upset by what he finds inside the television?
- How does Sam's dad react when he enters the living room and sees the disorder? What does he threaten to do if there is any more nonsense?

Discussion

- How does Sam show tolerance and understanding towards Denzil? Use examples from the story to back up your ideas. Does her patience towards him wear thin at any point? If so, explain why.
- At what point in the story does Travis begin to wonder if Denzil might actually be a wizard? What kind of person is Travis? Does Travis do the right thing when he tells his mother about Denzil? Why/why not?
- What do you think might have happened if Mrs Utherwise hadn't turned up when she did and disabled the phone? Why do you think that only Sam is able to see her new neighbour?
- How is what Adam looks incongruous with what he is really like? Why is Adam so concerned about the effect that being exposed to the modern world will have on Denzil? How could Denzil's knowledge of the future affect history? Why do you think Adam is so willing to believe

that Denzil really comes from the year 1285? If he believes this so easily why does he have trouble accepting that he is a wizard?

- What do you think is going to happen next in the story?

Students read Chapter 11-Epilogue (pp. 135-188) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapter 11-Epilogue (pp. 135-188)

- Why is Mr MacAllister's play such a success? How does Denzil contribute to the play? Why is Sam concerned about Denzil's input?
- Do you think Sam's mum believes Denzil is really a wizard? Why/why not?
- Why does Denzil decide that he no longer wants to return home? How does Sam's father feel about this?
- Why does Adam begin to get irritated with Denzil?
- Who does Sam go and talk to after school? What does she bring back with her? Why does this remind Denzil of Mother Wyse? What does Denzil tell the others about the witch? Why does Adam believe that the warning was really for Denzil? How does Denzil react to this news?
- What does Sam suggest that the dragon might really be? What does Theresa think that it might be?
- Why is dinner that night such a sombre affair? Why does Adam have to leave after dinner? Why does Denzil believe that the spell will be no good even if Adam can figure it out?
- Who turns up at the back door while everyone is watching the DVD? What message does she give Sam? How does Denzil react when Sam gives him the message? When is Rue Wednesday?
- Why does Travis decide to go over to Adam's? Why does he take Denzil with him? How does Sam convince Denzil to wear the helmet? What does Denzil do with the helmet?
- Why doesn't Theresa believe that Denzil's spell is really magic?
- Why does Theresa apologise to Sam while they wait for Travis and Denzil to get back? What does she promise to do for her?
- Why do Sam and Theresa get so worried when they ring up Adam? What time does Travis get home? Why isn't Denzil with him?
- How does Sam's family feel when they realise that it is Rue Wednesday? What does Sam think that Mother Wyse may have seen in their world that he thought was a dragon?
- Where does Sam's family search for Denzil? Where do they eventually find him? Why does Travis try to stop Sam from calling out to Denzil? Why does Denzil crawl under the barrier and into the path of the train? Who rescues him? Why isn't Denzil more grateful to him?
- How does Sam feel while Denzil prepares himself to return home? What does she see as she listens to him recite the spell?
- Why is Travis so astonished when he picks up the hot cross buns? Why is Sam surprised when she looks over at Mrs Utherwise's house? What realisation do Sam and Travis come to about the old woman?

- Who does Denzil go and visit when he arrives back home? What does he talk to her about? Why does Mother Wyse give him a knowing smile when she closes the door?

Discussion

- What positive effects does Denzil's visit have on Sam and her family?
- How might the story have turned out differently if Mrs Utherwise wasn't Sam's new neighbour?
- Identify the climax of the novel and explain why this is important.
- What lessons do you think Denzil might have learnt from his experiences? What do you think he will miss the most about modern times and why?
- Do you agree with Travis when he says that Denzil had to go back to where he belonged? Explain your answer.

Activities

Writing – Write an alternative epilogue for the story where Denzil ends up in another time rather than back in 1285.

Static Image – Design a poster advertising *The Wednesday Wizard* that would be appropriate for displaying in your school library. Remember to use verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

Writing – Imagine that you are a witch or wizard and you want to cast a spell. Write an original spell using figurative language to create imagery. Present your spell attractively.

Research – Conduct a research assignment on an aspect of life in the 1200's. Formulate focussing questions to guide your research. Use a range of written, oral and visual to gather your information. Present your findings on a poster, as an essay or as an oral presentation.

Plot – Design a storyboard that shows 10 important events from the story in the order that they occur. Under each illustration write a brief explanation.

Talk Show – Imagine that Oprah Winfrey has found out about Denzil and wants to feature him, Sam and the rest of the family on her show. Choose members of the class to act in role as each character. Choose someone to play the host of the show (this might be a good role for the teacher). The rest of the class needs to formulate questions to ask the characters.

Drama – Choose an exciting section from the book and write a script for it. Remember to include a cast of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Character – Choose 5 items that are important to Denzil. Explain why each is significant.

Symbolism – Choose an important symbol from the novel. Draw the symbol and write a paragraph explaining why it is significant.

Theme – Choose an important theme from the novel and design a static image to convey this idea. Include a quote from the text that helps reinforce the theme.

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