

Charlie Bone and the Time Twister

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Background

Long ago The Red King arrived in the North. It was said he came out of Africa and he was a powerful magician. All ten of his children inherited a small part of his magical powers, but five of them turned to wickedness and the other five left home. Brokenhearted, the Red King disappeared, accompanied by three leopards. He had lived for several centuries when he made a marvelous glass sphere which he could use to travel through time, but in any other hands this Time Twister is dangerous and unpredictable. The powers of the Red King have come down to his descendants, each one having a special trait. These powers often appear in those who have no idea how they acquired them; they are known as the Endowed.

About the Book

In the first book, *Midnight for Charlie Bone*, Charlie Bone's grandmother and three Yewbeam aunts pack him off to Bloor's Academy once they find that he has the power to hear people talk in photographs. At school, he meets other "endowed" students, learns more about his mysterious family background, and becomes involved in the struggle between the good and evil descendents of the Red King,

At the beginning of the second book, *Charlie Bone and the Time Twister*, it's January 1916. Henry Yewbeam and his younger brother James have been sent to stay with their relatives at Bloor's Academy. One day while playing marbles, Henry is tricked by his nasty cousin Zeke, the son of the headmaster, into using the Time Twister. Suddenly he vanishes and is sent hurtling through time. He lands in the year 2002 at the same school where he is discovered by Charlie Bone, who recognizes him from an old family photograph.

Charlie and his friends at the Academy work together to keep Henry hidden, especially from their nemesis, Manfred Bloor, who is the head boy and whose great-grandfather Ezekiel is Henry's cousin Zeke, now over 100 years old. Henry finds help from the kind Cook, who has a mysterious background of her own, and from the strange Mr. Pilgrim, a music teacher who keeps to himself in a tower. The Time Twister falls into the hands of a shadowy woman in black, Mrs. Bloor, and she uses it to escape her abusive family who run the school. Charlie rescues Henry through the growth of his own magical powers and with the help of his "endowed" friends.

Discussion Points

Characters

1. Why does Zeke trick Henry into using the Time Twister? What makes him dislike Henry so much in the past? Why does he dislike Henry in the present?
2. What is the connection of Charlie's grandmother and great aunts to Ezekiel Bloor? What does Paton mean when he tells Charlie that Ezekiel "holds the power"?
3. Who is the Cook, and what is her part in the story? What is her connection to Mrs. Bloor? Why does Mrs. Bloor trust her? Why was Mrs. Bloor treated so badly by her husband and son?

4. Who do you think runs Paton down in the street? Why would they want Paton harmed?
5. Emma Tolly has discovered her secret power of flight, but how does she know exactly when to appear in her bird shape to rescue one of her friends?
6. Why do Lysander and Tancred quarrel early in the story? Tancred says later he is tired of being angry, but he can't help it. Why can't he control his feelings and what are the consequences?
7. Why doesn't Charlie trust Billy Raven? What is the power that old Ezekiel exerts over Billy? Why is Billy willing to spy on the other students?
8. In the first book, *Midnight for Charlie Bone*, Charlie learns he can hear people talking in photographs. This time Charlie actually enters the painting of Skarpo, interacts with the sorcerer, and brings something out. What does this growth of power mean for Charlie and the other "endowed" students? Compare Charlie's growth in power to changes the others are experiencing in their powers – Emma, Tancred, Lysander.

Plot

1. Why can't Henry use the Time Twister to get back to his own time?
2. How many characters would like to use the Time Twister? Why does Mr. Pilgrim give it to Gabriel after he finds it, and why does Gabriel give it to Mrs. Bloor?
3. What other stories do you know in which characters travel backward or forward in time? Compare the time travel devices in those stories to the Time Twister and discuss their similarities and differences.
4. Why do Charlie's aunts and Ezekiel Bloor want Charlie to go into the painting of Skarpo? Why does Charlie choose the wand to bring out of the painting?
5. What part do animals play in the story — Runner Bean, Blessed, and the flame cats? Why is the Pet Cafe important to the plot? Which characters can turn into animals and how do they affect the plot?
6. At the end of the book Charlie tells his mother, "Dad will come back." What has happened to make Charlie believe in his father's return? Why does his mother begin to believe him? What do you believe about Charlie's father?

Theme

1. What is the significance of the mysterious vanishing tree that Charlie sees in the entrance to the ruin and in the Red King's portrait? How many references can you find to trees in the story? Why are trees important?
2. The theme of family continues to be important in this story as it was in *Midnight for Charlie Bone*. Discuss the ways in which Charlie's understanding of his family has changed. What is the meaning of family to Henry, Emma Tolly, Tancred Torsson, Cook, Billy Raven, Manfred Bloor, Mrs. Bloor?
3. Courage is another theme that pervades this story. Who exhibits the greatest courage, and in what way? Which characters do not act courageously? What does courage mean to you?
4. In the world of Charlie Bone, it's often hard to know who is trustworthy and who is not. Discuss

issues of trust that arise in the story. How does Charlie determine who can be trusted? How does Henry know he can trust Charlie? Why does Mrs. Bloor trust the Cook? What makes Charlie trust Mr. Pilgrim?

5. Cooperation is an important element in the plot. Discuss ways in which characters cooperate with each other and ways in which they help each other to reach a common goal. What does cooperation mean to you?
6. What is the role of magic in the story? When is magic used for good and when is it used for evil purposes? How is Charlie's magic power becoming stronger? Compare the good and evil uses of magic in *Charlie Bone and the Time Twister* with other books you have read: some examples might be the *Harry Potter* books, the *Narnia* books, Legends of King Arthur.

About the Author

Jenny Nimmo was born in Windsor, England, and attended boarding schools from the age of six until she turned sixteen. At that point she ran away to become a drama student. She has acted in repertory theatre, tutored in Italy, and worked for the BBC in a variety of jobs. She now lives with her Welsh artist husband in a very old converted watermill in Wales. They have three grown children.

An Interview with Jenny Nimmo

In other books, you have used Welsh legend and creatures from folklore interwoven with contemporary stories. Is the Red King based on an older legend or is he your own creation?

The Red King is my own creation. In previous books about Gwyn, the boy magician, I used a Welsh wizard as an ancestor. This time I wanted my hero's progenitor to be more powerful and yet more mysterious. I felt he had to come out of Africa, where we all began.

Missing relatives are a major plot element in this story. Do you think children have a fear of relatives disappearing, like Charlie's father?

Missing relatives are a major plot element in a great many of my books. Initially I was unaware that I had been influenced by events in my own childhood. My father, an orphan, died when I was five, and it was my husband who pointed out that I was, perhaps, searching for the lost part of my family.

Magical powers and happenings exist very close to Charlie's everyday real world in this story. What made you interested in magic and its effect on the ordinary world?

When I came to live in Wales, the fantastic landscape of the Welsh legends about magic beasts, giants, witches and disappearing castles suddenly seemed very real. The place names resonate with images of a mysterious past. If I stand on a wild, mist-shrouded mountain, I would be unsurprised to see a giant emerging from a rock, or a knight in glittering armor ride across a lake. And this magic slips quite easily into our home, which is very old. I like to explore the excitement that magic would create in an ordinary, everyday environment.

Is Bloor's Academy based on a school experience in your life?

Bloor's Academy is not exactly like my own boarding schools, but there are many similarities. In my first school, dormitories were freezing cold and cheerless, and the grounds extended into mysterious never-ending woods. We felt completely detached from the real world. The second school I attended specialized in Music, Art and Drama, and the matron was horrendous. My children were always begging me to write about my boarding schools, but I couldn't find a way to do it until they grew up.

What books did you enjoy reading when you were young? Do you think they influenced the types of books you write as an adult?

The books I enjoyed as a child were the Arabian Nights, Hans Christian Andersen's Tales, Grimm's Fairy Tales and Beatrix Potter. My favourite was C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. And, yes, I'm sure that last book has influenced the type of book that I write now.

What other influences on you as a writer have contributed to your choice of plots and characters?

Two of my children are dyslexic. They had terrible struggles at school, and many of their problems seeped into my earlier work. Being different created a loneliness that I could only describe by using a character with positive aspects of separateness. Magical powers were one of my solutions. Now that my children have all graduated from University and are leading positive and successful lives, I can use magic with an element of fun. By being optimistic and successful, my children have set me free.

Other Books to Compare and Contrast

Books by Jenny Nimmo

The Snow Spider. Dutton, 1987

Gwyn discovers that he has special powers, as he strives to bring back his sister who disappeared 4 years earlier. He accomplishes his task with the help of a magical snow spider named Arianwen.

Orchard of the Crescent Moon. Dutton, 1989

Nia, the middle girl in a large Welsh family, discovers her own special artistic talent as she uncovers the dark secret shared by the Llewelyn and Griffiths families. Sequel to *The Snow Spider*.

The Chestnut Soldier. Dutton, 1991

To purge the anger from an ancient Welsh demonic god that he had helped release, and to soothe a moody, troubled soldier, Gwyn Griffiths draws on the strength of his namesake and ancestor in Welsh magic, Gwydion Gwyn.

Ultramarine. Dutton, 1992

A brother and sister learn about their past when a mysterious man walks out of the sea and helps them rescue birds endangered by an oil spill.

Rainbow and Mr. Zed. Dutton, 1994

On an island owned by the wealthy, eccentric Mr. Zed, Nell learns more about herself and her connection to the sea, meets the ghost of her grandfather, and deals with Zed's unusual powers.

Griffin's Castle. Orchard, 1997

Dinah, at age 11, is tired of moving around and is determined to make her mother settle down, but the wild beasts she summons from sculptures on a stone wall to protect her suddenly turn against her.

Books by Other Authors

Bond, Nancy. *A String in the Harp*. Puffin Newbery Library, 1987

Peter resists the year he must spend in Wales until a strange object he finds in the sea rocks that moves him back and forth in time to the early life of the bard Taliesin from centuries past.

Cooper, Susan. *The Dark is Rising*. McElderry, 1973

Will discovers he is one of the Old Ones, those who can travel back and forth through the ages to battle the

forces of The Dark. This series of five books draws on ancient Celtic legends to tell a classic struggle of good vs. evil. The series includes *Over Sea, Under Stone*; *Greenwitch*; *The Grey King*; and *Silver on the Tree*.

Crossley-Holland, Kevin. *The Seeing Stone*. Scholastic, 2001

12-year-old Arthur de Caldicot, living in a manor house in England at the turn of the 13th century, finds connections between his life and that of King Arthur in the 6th century through a mysterious stone, a gift from the mysterious Merlin. The story continues in *At the Crossing-Places* (Scholastic, 2002)

Pierce, Tamora. *The Circle of Magic* Quartet. Scholastic, 1997-2000

Four misfit children learn to use their special talents and become powerful mages in this fast-paced series that includes *Sandry's Book*, *Tris's Book*, *Daja's Book*, and *Briar's Book*.

Pierce, Tamora. *The Circle Opens* Quartet. Scholastic, 2000-2003

The mages of *The Circle of Magic* books return to influence others who must become aware of their own magical powers in *Magic Steps*, *Street Magic*, *Cold Fire*, and *Shatterglass*.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic, 1998

Harry Potter learns to accept his magical powers when he attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. With his friends and fellow students he thwarts the evil intentions of his nemesis Voldemort. The story continues in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Scholastic, 1999), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Scholastic, 1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Scholastic, 2000), and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Scholastic, 2003).

Wells, H. G. *The Time Machine*. Introduction by Ursula K. Le Guin. Modern Library, 2002

A man invents a way to travel through time and finds himself enmeshed in a social and political struggle of the future.

Websites

www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/time/

A companion web site to PBS's Nova program on time travel, with explanations of how time travel could be possible and experiments with Einstein's theory of time.

www.timetravelinstitute.com/

Is Time Travel possible? Follow links to many aspects of scientific research as well as mass media — stories, TV shows, and magazines that promote time travel.

To order *Charlie Bone and the Time Twister* (0-439-49687-X, \$9.95) by Jenny Nimmo, the second novel in the Charlie Bone series, contact your local bookstore or usual supplier. Teachers and librarians may call toll-free 1-800-SCHOLASTIC. Prices and availability subject to change.

Also available: *Midnight for Charlie Bone* (0-439-47429-9, \$9.95), the first novel in the Charlie Bone series.

Discussion guide written by Connie Rockman, children's literature consultant, adjunct professor of literature for children and young adults at the University of Bridgeport and Sacred Heart University, and editor of *The Eighth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators* (H. W. Wilson, 2000).

- Subjects:

Cooperation and Teamwork, Family Life, Plot, Character, Setting, Reading Response, Literature Appreciation, Courage, Bravery, Heroism, Creativity and Imagination, Determination and Perseverance, Equality, Fairness, Justice, Magic and Supernatural

- Skills:

Literary Elements, Plot, Character and Setting, Theme