

Midnight for Charlie Bone

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Discussion Guide

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. Eventually the Red King disappeared, taking with him his three faithful cats. His powers have passed down through his descendants, often appearing in those who have no idea how they acquired them.

About the Book

Charlie Bone lives with his mother, two grandmothers, and his reclusive Uncle Paton. His father, he's been told, died in a car crash when Charlie was very young. Until the opening of the story, Charlie's life has been uncomplicated. His best friend Benjamin, and Benjamin's dog Runner Bean, are his constant companions. Grandma Bone, Charlie's paternal grandmother, and her three frightening sisters, the Yewbeam aunts, insist that Charlie attend a school called Bloor's Academy when it becomes clear that Charlie possesses a mysterious skill — he can hear the voices of people in photographs. Once at Bloor's Academy, Charlie realizes that some of his classmates have equally mysterious powers. Charlie's quest to discover the meaning of his strange power leads him to a bookshop near a cathedral; he is asked to hide a large case that Miss Ingledew, the proprietor, gives to him to guard. The case, it seems, has the power to awaken a hypnotized girl at Bloor's Academy . . . but why is Charlie drawn into her story . . . and who else might be under the spell of Manfred Bloor and his hypnotizing eyes? The mystery deepens as Charlie learns more about Bloor's Academy, its teachers and students, as well as his own mysterious family on his father's side.

Discussion Points

Characters

1. Why does Charlie try to resist his magical ability to hear voices in photographs?
2. Compare Grandma Jones and Grandma Bone. How are they different? Are there any similarities between them?
3. Why does Uncle Paton only come out of his room at night? What do you think he has been working on that keeps him so busy? Why does he start to help Charlie?
4. Why do the Yewbeam aunts have such a strong interest in Charlie? Why is it so important for them to send Charlie to Bloor's Academy?
5. Charlie immediately makes friends and enemies when he starts attending Bloor's Academy. Discuss each of his friends and their part in his story: Fidelio, Gabriel Silk, Billy Raven, Olivia Vertigo. Who are Charlie's enemies and why do you think they are after him?
6. What do we know about the Bloors? Why would they want to keep Emilia Moon (Emma Tolly) hypnotized? Why does Manfred treat Charlie so badly?
7. Charlie and Emma have both had harrowing experiences at Bloor's Academy, yet both decide at the end of the book that they will return to the school. What reasons do each of them have for wanting to return?

8. What do you know about the Red King by the end of the story? How many descendants of the Red King do you think we have met in the story?

Setting

1. How many ways does the Cathedral appear in the story? What is the significance of the Cathedral?
2. In what way is Bloor's Academy similar to Hogwarts School in the Harry Potter books? In what way is it different? Compare it to your own school - the rules, the food, the students, the teachers.
3. Why does the game at Bloor's Academy take place in the ruins next to the school? Who wants Charlie hurt during the game? Who rescues him and how do they do it? What is the significance of the ruin?
4. The importance of family is a pervasive theme throughout this story. Discuss the different families in the book, and how family life affects each of the characters: Charlie's family, Benjamin's family, the Tolly family, Fidelio's family, Olivia's family, the Bloors, the Moons.
5. There are many secrets in this story. How many secrets can you identify, and how many secrets remain at the end of the book?
6. The theme of magic appears in many ways. How many types of magic can you identify in the story?
7. When is magic used for good and when is it used for evil purposes? Compare the good and evil uses of magic in *Midnight for Charlie Bone* with other books you have read — the Harry Potter books, the Narnia books, the legends of King Arthur, and other favorites.
8. Why do the descendants of the Red King only inherit one part of his magic? What happens when several of the "endowed" team up to use their magic together?
9. Friendship is another important theme in this story. Which friends are most important to Charlie Bone? What does the story tell us about the true value of friendship? Which of the characters remind you of friends in your own life?

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, or simply not being available to them, as in the case of Benjamin's parents?

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. In Benjamin's case, I liked the idea of a boy in the care of a dog. Lonely children often get comfort and companionship from animals.

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 armour 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 favorite 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 four 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

Avi. *Midnight Magic*. Scholastic, 1999

Mangus the magician is commanded to free a princess from a troublesome ghost. He is determined to prove the ghost doesn't exist, while his servant Fabrizio is sure that it is very real indeed.

Bond, Nancy. *A String in the Harp*. Atheneum, 1976

Peter resists the year he must spend in Wales until a strange object he finds in the sea rocks begins giving him visions of 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 battle the forces of The Dark in this series of five books that draws on ancient Celtic and Welsh legends in a classic struggle of good against 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 King Arthur's through a mysterious stone, a gift from Merlin. The story continues in *At the Crossing-Places* (Scholastic, 2002)

Ibbotson, Eva. *Island of the Aunts*. Dutton, 2000

Three elderly "Aunts" live on an Island where they care for endangered fantastic creatures. Needing help with their work, they kidnap three children from England; two of the children are happy with their new life, but the third causes an upheaval in the peaceful Island life.

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).

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

- Subjects:

Reading, Language Arts, Family Life, Ghosts, Monsters, Vampires, Witches, Literature, Reading Comprehension, Literature Appreciation, Adjusting to School, Life Experiences, Popular Culture, Magic and Supernatural, Grandparents and Grandchildren, Friends and Friendship, School Life

- Skills:

Reading, Reading Comprehension