

River Magic

By Ellen Booraem

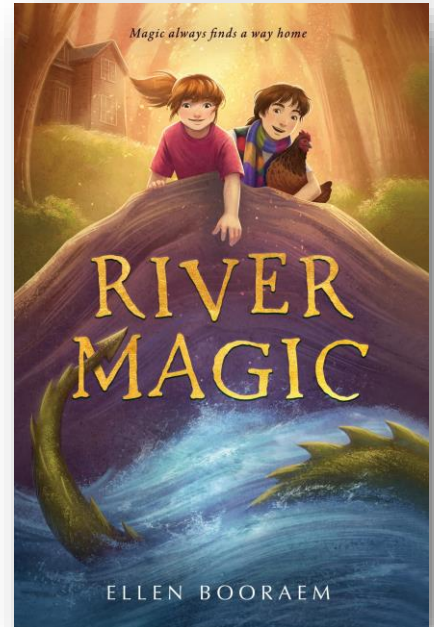
Essential Elements Guide

INTRODUCTION

Imagine finding out one of life's greatest fantastical experiences is right outside your back door.

And those you loved are never really gone, just different.

Ellen Booraem makes all of this possible in her book, *River Magic*. Booraem has been recognized on many Best of the Year Lists, from *The Washington Post* to *Publisher's Weekly*, and her books have been Scholastic Book Fair and Junior Library Guild selections. Reviewers have praised her books, including *River Magic*, for their creativity and humor.



River Magic introduces us to Donna, who is going through some of life's toughest experiences: She lost her aunt whom she loves and adores; her best friend has deserted her; and her family is struggling financially and emotionally at home. Most of all, Donna, would do anything (really, anything!), to stay at her home for the summer and avoid going to dreaded Cousin Betty's house with Betty's terrorizing twins.

Donna learns that when you feel like everything is your fault and you have no friends left in the world, a little change in perspective (and a wee bit of magic!) can possibly change your course.

This educator guide is aligned with the Common Core Standards and the activities and discussion questions can be adapted to fit the needs and ages of



your students, since you know your students best. The guide, along with your sensational teaching instincts, will help your students dig deeper into Booraem's craft and *River Magic's* universal themes and unique characters—as well as who your students are as individuals—and will remind them to look for the magic that life has to offer, even when it sometimes feels the world has gone a bit crazy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ❑ The loss of her aunt has deeply affected Donna. Describe how she has been affected. How do we know this? How has losing someone (either a person or pet) affected you or someone you know? *Teachers: this question can be traumatic for some young people. Be sensitive that not all will want to share. And "losing" someone can also mean from a move, a friendship ending, or another type of loss.*
- ❑ Ellen Booraem's writing addresses the complexity of friendship. Sometimes it takes being changed into a chicken to realize how much you have hurt someone else. What qualities do you look for in a friend? How do you know this friend will be one that will stick around through tough times? Which characters (creatures and humans!) do you consider a "good friend" to Donna? Why?
- ❑ What folktale or tall tale do you wish would come true? Why?
- ❑ How would you make the world a better place? How can you leave the world a better place?
- ❑ Rachel let Donna know she was a chicken by stamping her foot three times. What would you do to let someone know you had been changed into an animal? Which animal would you choose to turn into (just temporarily of course!) and which would you never want to turn into? Why?
- ❑ Vilma loves to use the word "betrayal." We hear her use it throughout the book. What does betrayal look like to her? What does it look like to you?
- ❑ Donna talks about perspective and how we see the world on the ground and from the sky. How do you think the world would look if you were on a dragon? How might that make you see things differently?

- ❑ Vilma loves to use the transmogrification spell when someone upsets her. What spell would you create to use when someone upsets you? What would happen?
- ❑ Margily warned Donna about the curse of the gold and the greed you can't escape. Donna didn't think it would happen to her, yet, she slowly succumbed to the power of it. What are some other items that "hold" us? How have these items changed us as individuals and as a collective society?

INTERDISCIPLINARY CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

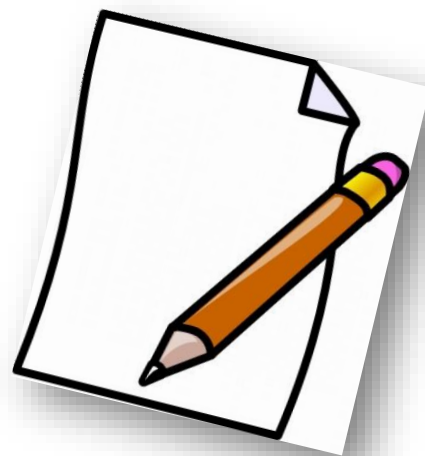
Your Guide to Anything

River runs free, river runs free, like a glittering seam of stars (pg 36).

Subject: English Language Arts

Materials: paper, pencil, computer (optional)

Life can be tough! A little bit of guidance can help make it a bit more manageable. Donna's Aunt Annabelle leaves her guide book behind to help Donna navigate the challenges in life. She has appropriately named it Annabelle's Guide to Everyday Household Mechanics. This guide is something Donna uses for everything! Discuss as a class the struggles Donna is facing and how her aunt's guide supports her in her



journey. Her aunt's guide is an instruction manual created from the mind of Aunt Annabelle - whom Donna misses terribly.

But some of Donna's biggest successes come from within her own self and what she learns along the way. Like Donna, students are often looking for "the right answer." But sometimes the answers lie within themselves. They are so knowledgeable about so much! For example, how to survive school or how to create the best morning routine before school. How to develop skills in a special and loved sport. Or how to forgive a friend when forgiveness sometimes seems unattainable. For this activity, your students are going to create their very own guide for others to read and learn from - just like Aunt Annabelle's.

- ❑ *Cover Page:* Begin with a cover page, a picture, the title, and student's name to draw in readers to this guide.
- ❑ *Poem:* Next should be a poem that resonates with the student. Annabelle loved to quote from the poem *River Runs Free* by David Windle. Give your students time to find the poem that resonates with them and to discuss with a partner what about the poem speaks to them.



- ❑ *Guidance:* The remaining pages can be anything and everything your students would like to give guidance about. Have them brainstorm what makes them special. What hobbies do they have? What are they good at? If a student is a bit shy about highlighting what makes them so awesome, have them interview a friend or a classmate about themselves to help them along. Some ideas for your students: taking care of or getting along

with a sibling, surviving elementary/middle school, becoming the best

gamer, chef's skills and their favorite recipe, choreographing a dance, writing a rap...

- ❑ *Artwork:* Encourage your students to add pictures, digital images, collages to their guide to help others understand better what guidance they are sharing.
- ❑ *Share!* All of this awesome knowledge cannot be kept hidden. Share away! Set aside time for students to share their guides with their peers. Your students can travel around the classroom reading the guides of others and gathering more knowledge. And what a gift these life guides could be if shared with younger students, possibly a local first grade class. Aunt Annabelle would be proud. And your students will shine.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

A Small Act of Kindness

No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted (pg 21).

Subject: English Language Arts, Math, Science/Engineering

Materials: variety of rocks (including shapes and sizes), grass, recycled materials, notecards, construction paper, cardboard, blank white paper, glue or tape and any other found materials you can gather

Donna, Janice, mom, and Aunt Annabelle create houses by the river for the pixies (pg 36).

Although when they built these, Annabelle was the only one who believed they were real, each person put care into maintaining these wonderful little houses. We even find out that seemingly crabby Janice had been going down to fill up the basins each day!



Whether or not your students believe in pixies or fairies, they have come across creatures, such as ants/worms/caterpillars/flyes, that are small. If your students have never seen one of these little creatures, consider reading a few picture books highlighting them and their characteristics. How incredible would it be to build a special place for these small creatures? By creating a structure for this creature, your students will be conducting a small act of kindness - just like the characters in *River Magic*.

❑ **Imagine it!**

Allow your students to work in groups of four. Hand them a blank piece of paper and pencil. Give them time to discuss what creature they want to build a structure for, the characteristics of the creature, the structure they want to build that will support the creature's characteristics, and how they will build it. All of this information will be recorded on the paper.

Remind them of the materials (rocks, grass, recycled materials, construction paper, cardboard...) they will have to build.

❑ **Build it!**

It's time for your students to construct their masterpiece! As a group, they will build their structure using the materials provided, along with their plan. It's not always easy putting together a structure, but the creature will be forever grateful for their kindness. Patience and teamwork will get the job done!

❑ **Share it!**

These incredible structures can't go unnoticed! Give your students time to share what they built, who it is for and how it supports that tiny creature. You can do this as a gallery walk. Give each group an index card. Have them fold it in half (like a tent) and write down who the structure is for and one sentence describing why they built it. Consider placing these new structures around the school, or even better, finding the perfect dry spot outside on school grounds where their structures might actually be explored by real little creatures. (After a specified period of time has passed, as a class be sure to pick up the little structures to help Mother Nature keep clean - another kindness!)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5

Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARD 4-LS1-2

Use a model to describe that animals receive different types of information through their senses, process the information in their brain, and respond to the information in different ways

A Fantasy Walk

Subject: English Language Arts

Materials: clipboard, blank map of school or blank paper, pencil



The mysteries that unravel throughout *River Magic* are skillfully created by the talented writing of Ellen Booraem. She makes the reader wonder just what is real and what is fantasy. Donna and her family live in Maine by a beautiful river. As we soon learn, there is nothing ordinary about the river or the town. Thunder Mages, dragons, and pixies reside in this place thanks to the ley line that runs through it.

Your students probably see their school and everything around in their everyday lives as nonfiction. However, what if they look a little closer and use their imagination to find the fantasy around them? For this activity, your students are going to go on a fantasy walk. A chance for them to get out of their seats, go on an adventure and think outside the box! They will need a partner, blank map of the school or a blank piece of paper to record the exact places they find the mystical and magical things. This walk will take their ordinary school and make it extraordinary.

- Tell students they are going on a fantasy walk today and need to find a partner.
- Have students gather their supplies: clipboard, map of the school or blank paper, pencil.
- Share with them this list below of items to look for. Have the students write down the list on the back of their paper.
 - Thunder Mage(s) - someone who doesn't quite fit in but seems to have powerful, magical powers
 - Dragon - do you see spikes sticking up anywhere?
 - Pixies - small thing that you see out of the corner of your eye
 - Pixie houses - small house made out of stones or junk
 - Empty candy wrappers left behind by the pixies
 - Something that went through transmogrification - an animal or object that looks oddly familiar
 - a ley line - an imaginary line with lots of energy
 - Water for pixies
- When they find something from the list, they can record where and what they found on the map. Again, if there are no school grounds maps available, students may draw their own maps with locations they see.
- Gather the students to go on the fantasy walk.
- When you return to the classroom, give students some time to share what they found and where they found it.

Don't stop there! Now that students have their imagination sparked, they can capture it on paper. Students can write a fictional story using all of these wonderful new discoveries. What characters, conflicts, settings, and plots will they create? Have students write first drafts and share them with one another, reacting to one another's work with praise and constructive criticism. What creative, imaginative lines or characters have they come up with? How are the characters and conflicts similar to or different from their peers' creations? Are there any places where a story could be clearer or more smoothly written? Have students evaluate the critiques they've received and revise their stories accordingly.

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This educator guide was created by Room 228 LLC with public school teacher Michelle Assaad as lead teacher. We at Room 228 sometimes hear talking dragons, but we thought we were the only ones! To learn more, visit rm228.com.