



# TEACHERS' NOTES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 8 to 12; year 3 to 6

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- This gorgeous new standalone novel by Sydney-based author Deborah Abela celebrates book-lovers, storytellers and readers.
- Has important themes about grief, letting go, courage and what 'home' means.

## THEMES

- Home and belonging
- Storytelling and books
- Grief and family
- Courage and resilience

## PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and Deborah Abela

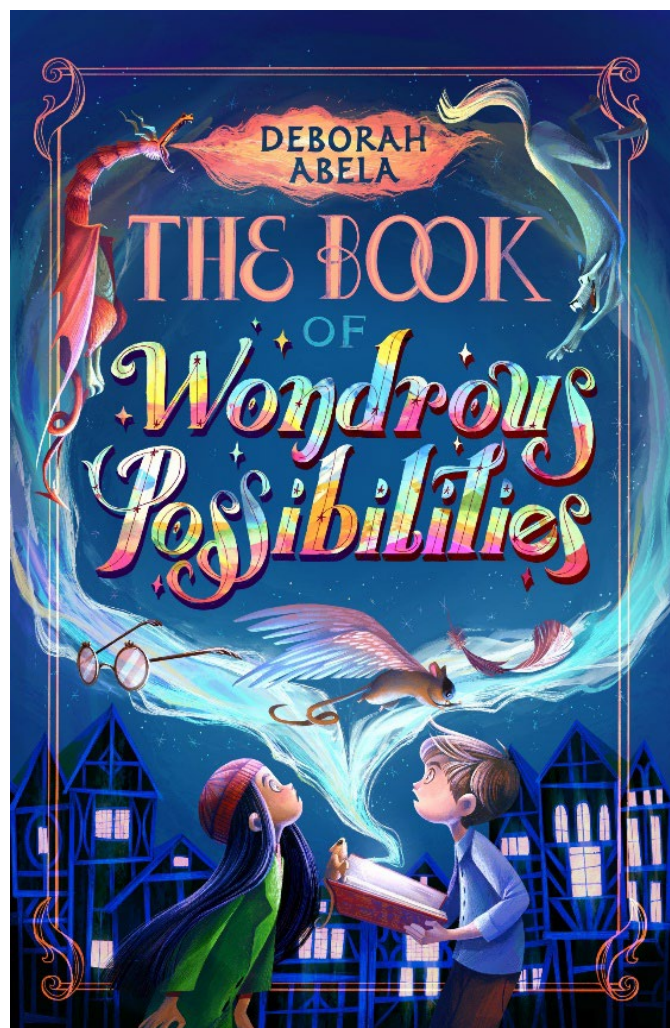
## PUBLICATION DETAILS

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## The Book of Wondrous Possibilities Deborah Abela

## PLOT SUMMARY

Arlo Goodman lives with his Uncle Avery in a run-down flat above their bookshop. He has no friends, except for his pet mouse, Herbert.

But when a girl called Lisette bursts into the shop and begs him to hide her from a murderer, Arlo's life changes forever.

He's swept up into an adventure involving kidnappers, car chases and a story in *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*, where Arlo and his skymouse battle dragons. But can Arlo find the courage to battle an even greater enemy, who threatens to destroy everything he loves?

## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

**'This magical and delightful story spins along at a perfect pace, knowing just when to pause for tea and cake.'** – Jaclyn Moriarty, author of the Kingdoms and Empires series

**'Warm-hearted, adventurous and funny. I adore this book!'** – Lian Tanner, author of The Keepers trilogy

**'What a wondrous story this is! A heartwarming, thrilling reminder of the power of books and friendship.'** – Sarah Armstrong, author of *Big Magic*

**'A fast-paced, funny and surprising book with original characters, dastardly plots and wondrous possibilities. You'll want to read it all night.'** – Tristan Bancks, author of *Two Wolves*

**'This lively adventure draws you right in.'** – Zanni Louise, author of *We Are All People*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



After training as a teacher, Deb travelled to Africa where she was harassed by monkeys, caught in a desert sandstorm and thrown in jail . . . twice! She's worked as a child wrangler and a rides operator at Luna Park, but her first real job was as writer/producer of a national children's TV show at Network TEN.

She has since become an internationally published and awarded author of 28 books including her cranky climate change trilogy, *Grimsdon*, *New City* and *Final Storm*. Her family's survival in WW2 and migration to Australia inspired *Teresa A New Australian*.

*The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee* and *The Most Marvellous Spelling Bee Mystery* were inspired by her fantabulous Grade 4 teacher, Ms Gray. She's also written picture books: *Wolfie*, *An Unlikely Hero* and the 2021 CBCA Notable, *Bear in Space*. Deb's won awards

for her work but mostly hopes to be as brave as her characters. She's a proud ambassador for the charities, Room to Read and Books in Homes.

*The Book of Wondrous Possibilities* is her love letter to books, booksellers, librarians and readers.

Find out more at [deborahabela.com](http://deborahabela.com)

## AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION



Deborah says:

I have always loved books and libraries. I remember as a kid, being fascinated by the artwork and the squiggly black lines in books and was desperate to learn to read. Books and libraries offered whole worlds of possibilities and a safe place whenever I felt lost or sad.

I wondered about kids who also use books as a refuge and started thinking about an orphan called Arlo, who lives with his uncle in a bookshop he rarely leaves, because he finds the world outside frightening. But what if one day, the world outside comes bursting in and a girl called Lisette needs his help and gives him a book called a grimoire. Popular in 18<sup>th</sup> century France, grimoires were said to have special properties, but what makes this one special, is that inside is a story written by Arlo's mum that will change his life.

### Questions

1. Have you ever experienced a time when the outside world has felt overwhelming?
2. The author mentioned that books and libraries have been safe havens for her ever since she was a kid. What do you have in your life that creates the same feeling?
3. Do you have a favourite early memory around books or libraries or reading?
4. If you had to design your perfect library, what would it be like? HINT: research some amazing libraries online, such as some of the libraries here: [www.elesapiens.com/blog/inspirational-children-libraries-from-around-the-world/](http://www.elesapiens.com/blog/inspirational-children-libraries-from-around-the-world/)





## PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- Before reading the book, look at the cover. What do you think the story will be about? What does the design tell you about the book? (For example, think about the colours, the characters and objects, the font choice, the use of light and shade.)
- What genre do you think this book will fall into?
- Are there any unusual objects on the cover? What do you think might be their role in the story?
- How many characters can you see? What kind of personalities do you think they might have and how do you think they might fit into the story?
- Who do you think the book is aimed at? Why?
- What do you think the main story elements will be? What about the cover makes you think this?
- Before reading the blurb on the back cover, write your own blurb, based on the cover. Give a location for the novel, the characters' names and tell the reader what problems they are going to face in the story.
- Write a first paragraph that you think would match the cover and your blurb. Would you start with a quiet opening paragraph or would you have something exciting happen straightaway? Remember, it's important to intrigue your reader as soon as you can.

## WRITING STYLE

*The Book of Wondrous Possibilities* is written in third person perspective and in past tense – a classic fiction writing style.

### Questions

1. How would you describe Deborah Abela's writing style? Do you think her writing style suits this type of story?
2. There are two parts to the narrative in *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*: the regular story and then the excerpts from the grimoire called *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*. Do you think there are differences in the writing style between these two sections? How has the author made these sections look and feel different when designing the book?
3. The narrative changes points of view between Arlo, Benedict and Viola. Why do you think the author decided to give space in the narrative for their voices as well as Arlo's? Are there things that the reader needs to know that we couldn't get from Arlo's point of view?

## Activities

- Write a scene from Lisette's point of view. Don't forget to include how she is feeling and what she is thinking within the scene.
- Write a scene from Herbert's point of view. How does writing from an animal's point of view differ from that of a human? What different things do you have to take into consideration when writing from the point of view of an animal? Especially a very small one like Herbert!



## KEY STUDY TOPICS

### A book about a book

As well as being about Arlo's journey to find his inner courage and Lisette's wish to get her grandma's shop back, *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities* is about a book within a book. Stories featuring remarkable books, or about special books or bookshops, are very popular.



### Questions

1. Can you think of other stories that involve a particular book (or books in general) within the plot? For example, *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende, *Matilda* by Roald Dahl, *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke. Why do you think these types of stories are so popular?
2. What do you think books mean to the characters in the novel? Do you think books mean the same thing to Arlo as they do to Silas? Does Uncle Avery love books the same way that Benedict does?
3. In the novel, Lisette's book, *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*, is a grimoire. Did grimoires exist in real life? Or is this something the author has made up for the story?
4. Why do you think the author has decided not to include the story Lisette wrote for Marcellus? Do you think including 'The Legend of Queen Viola and Sir Muttly' would change the climax of the story? How do you think it would have affected pace and tension?



### Activities

- Choose a section from the climax of 'The Courageous Adventure of Arlo Goodman' (pp. 272–275) and draw a picture of that scene. Include a brief description of what would happen if you looked at the picture using the pink glasses from the back of *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*. Think of all the senses, including touch, taste and smell!
- Create a timeline to show how the events in the narrative reflect the events in 'The Courageous Adventure of Arlo Goodman'. Do events often overlap?
- Write your version of 'The Legend of Queen Viola and Sir Muttly'. Once you have finished, swap with a classmate and read their version. Are there places where you wrote similar things? Why do you think that is? (Or isn't!)
- Research the grimoires mentioned on page 14 of the novel. What part did they play in changing the landscape of printing and book making at the time?

### What's in a name?



There are many ways an author can help to build a well-rounded character: background, description, voice, dialogue style. But are there others that the author can employ?

### Questions

1. Do you think a character's name can affect what the reader thinks of them? For example, what impression do you get when you find out the main character's name is Arlo Goodman? Compared to finding out the villain is named Silas Gray?
2. Can you think of other books you have read where the name of a character reflected their personality? Some examples you might explore include Roald Dahl's books, or the Harry Potter series.
3. Can you find examples of a character suiting their name in *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*? (They don't have to be main characters either!)

### Activities

- Find two examples of names reflecting the character's personality and draw a mind map showing why you think this might be so. For example, why do you think Deborah named one of the main 'villains' Silas Gray? How does his name reflect his personality and his status within the story?
- Why do you think the author gave Jonathan Wolf his name? How does his name build on the narrative and help create tension? Can you find other examples of this type of use throughout the text? To create either more tension or humour?
- Go back through the book and find out what Griselda's and Uncle Avery's 'theatrical' names are. What is it about these names that makes them theatrical?

### Banana cake, scones and pecan pie



In the story, Lisette talks about banana cake a lot. And there are several times when various characters all share a meal or morning tea together.

#### Questions

1. Why do you think the author has used so many descriptions of food in the story? Do you think it adds to the narrative or to the character building?
2. Look at the food that Griselda, Avery, Arlo and Lisette eat on page 72 and compare it to the meals Benedict eats on page 183. How does their choice of food reflect on their character and the tone of the story at the time? If the meals were swapped – if Griselda, Avery, Arlo and Lisette ate the pheasant pie, etc, and Benedict ate cheese toasties – how would the scene be different? Would it be a big enough difference to change the narrative and effect events in the story? Why or why not?
3. What are your favourite recipes that remind you of home, family, or a special memory?

#### Activities

- Although Lisette's fondness for banana cake can be read as humorous, is there another side to her passion for this particular cake? Find evidence in the text for your reasoning.
- Write a list of other novels you have read where food is important, or a major feature of the story. Some examples you might have read include: *The Golden Tower* by Belinda Murrell, featuring Italian-style feasts, or *Mr Bambuckle's Remarkables* by Tim Harris, where Mr Bambuckle's pancakes in the classroom are a fun feature!
- Take a look at the description of banana cake that Lisette gives on page 8. Try to write up the recipe starting with the ingredients Lisette mentions, and try to fill in the rest yourself. Then research the recipe for banana cake. How many ingredients did you have right? Does it match the description Lisette gives in the book?

### Courage and resilience

Throughout the story, Arlo overcomes his fears and shows himself to be brave and courageous. Other characters also show great bravery, such as Lisette in standing up against Silas and trying to get her grandmother's bookshop back, and Viola in researching her father's activities and standing up to Silas.

#### Questions

1. Does the story of 'The Courageous Adventure of Arlo Goodman' in the grimoire help Arlo become more brave, or does he become brave for other reasons?
2. How does Herbert help Arlo to overcome his fears? Do you have a pet who helps to comfort you and make you feel safe?
3. Why is it so important to Lisette to stand up against bullies?

#### Activities

- Make a list of instances of bravery and courage in the story.
- Research real-life people who have stood up against bullies or unfair laws or systems, or overcome challenges in their lives, and what they did to initiate change in the world or to show great courage in their lives. Some people you could choose for your research include:
  - Malala Yousafzai
  - Greta Thunberg
  - Marley Dias
  - Mick Dodson
  - Mahatma Gandhi
  - Martin Luther King, Jr
  - Rosa Parks
  - Turia Pitt
  - Mary Mackillop

### Home and belonging

Arlo and Lisette have both lost their homes and are trying to find a new place to call 'home'.

#### Questions

1. What does 'home' mean to Arlo? What does it mean to Lisette? What does it mean to you?
2. What things do Uncle Avery and Arlo do to help Lisette feel safe and comfortable in their home above the bookshop?





3. Is 'home' about a place or about people?
4. Lisette is determined to get her grandmother's bookshop back and feels that it is the only thing that will make her happy. What changes her mind?

### Activities

- Draw a mind map with yourself in the centre and all the different things that make up your feeling of 'home' around you. Make sure to include people, places, pets and objects!



### KEY QUOTES

*Suddenly, she turned and said, 'Can I trust you?'*

*Arlo had never been asked that before. It felt like something people said to each other in books.*

*Just before something dangerous happened.*

(p. 5)

\*

*Arlo had a feeling that taking the parcel from this girl would change his life.*

*What a strange idea, he thought. How could a parcel change your life?*

(p. 6)

\*

*Griselda fixed him with her bright green eyes. 'Why do you read?'*

*'Sorry?'*

*'What do you want from a book when you read?'*

*Arlo took a few moments to answer. 'To go somewhere exciting. To be someone else.' He whispered the next part, 'To escape.'*

*'The creator of this grimoire was no different from you,' Griselda said. 'They wanted what we all hope for in books, except this is the ultimate book, because the stories can become real.'*

*'But how?' Arlo didn't mean to sound annoyed, but all this talk of his mum and magic made him want to rush home and dive under the blankets and hide from everything and everyone.*

*'I'm no expert on magic,' Griselda said. 'But as to the wondrous possibility of books, that is the greatest magic of all.'*

(p. 23)

\*

*Arlo shivered. This man was like every criminal and bad guy he'd read about in his books. His eyes brimmed with malice, with never wanting to lose and always having the last laugh.*

*Characters like him often got what was coming to them, but not before they'd done a lot of damage.*

*And innocent people got hurt.*

(p. 51–52)

\*

*'He can't be allowed to get away with it, Arlo. Bullies shouldn't win all the time. It's not fair.'*

*She was right. Arlo couldn't deny it.*

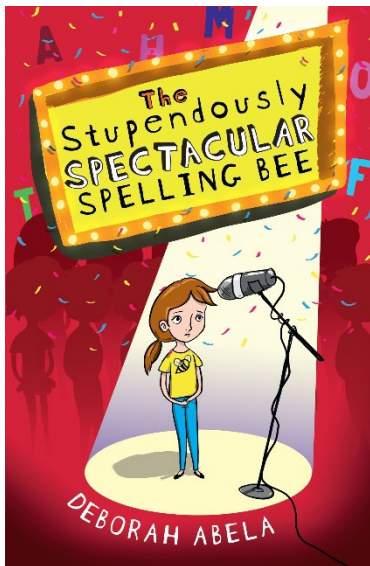
*'What if we think of a way to find proof that doesn't break the law?'*

*'Okay,' she said. 'But it won't be as much fun.'*

*Arlo was starting to realise Lisette's idea of fun might not be the same as his. 'Yes, but it'll be safer.'*

(p. 105)

FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



*The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee*  
by Deborah Abela

India Wimple can spell. Brilliantly. Every Friday night, she and her family watch the Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee. When the Wimples suggest she enter the next Bee, India says she's not good enough – but her family won't hear it and encourage her to sign up.

There are plenty of obstacles to reaching the finals: something in India's past has made her terribly shy, and moving on to each round involves finding the money to make it happen.

And finally, there's Summer Millicent Ernestine Beauregard-Champion, a spoilt rich girl who is determined to win – and isn't afraid to step on anyone who gets in her way.

*Teachers' notes available.*



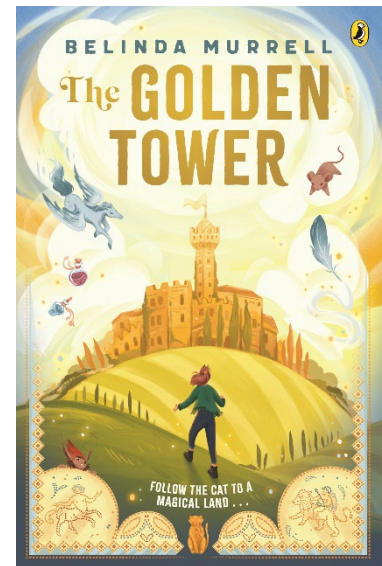
*Grimsdon*  
by Deborah Abela

Grimsdon is in ruins. Three years ago a massive wave broke its barriers and the sea flooded this grand city. Most were saved, some were lost – and some were left behind.

Isabella Charm and her best friend, Griffin, live with three other children in the top of an opulent mansion. They've survived with the help of Griffin's brilliant inventions, Isabella's fighting skills and their vow to look after each other.

But what will happen when a newcomer arrives in his flying machine? Grimsdon is full of hidden perils, from bounty hunters to sneaker waves. Could Xavier's daredevil risks put all their lives in danger?

*Teachers' notes available.*



*The Golden Tower*  
by Belinda Murrell

*In her wildest dreams, Sophie never thought she might be kidnapped by a cat and taken to a world of flying horses and wonder – but also magic, mystery and danger!*

Transported to the land of Tuscia, Sophie accidentally saves the daughter of a wealthy family and is swept along on their journey to the Golden Tower.

Now she is the only one standing between sisters Isabella and Bia and the terrible fate their stepmother has planned.

Sophie doesn't think she is brave enough, but with the help of a talking cat, a stableboy and some very tiny mischief-makers, she might be able to save the day.

*Teachers' notes available.*

[illegible]



A decorative rectangular frame with ornate scrollwork at the corners. Inside the frame are 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
<b>The Book of Wondrous Possibilities</b>	Deborah Abela	9781761044021	3-6	\$16.99		
The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee	Deborah Abela	9781925324822	3-6	\$14.99		
Grimsdon	Deborah Abela	9781760892548	4-7	\$16.99		
The Golden Tower	Belinda Murrell	9781760897093	4-6	\$16.99		
The Most Marvellous Spelling Bee Mystery	Deborah Abela	9781925324822	3-6	\$14.99		
New City	Deborah Abela	9781760892555	4-7	\$16.99		
Final Storm	Deborah Abela	9780143794462	4-7	\$16.99		
The Remarkable Secret of Aurelie Bonhoffen	Deborah Abela	9781742757438	3-6	\$22.99		
Max Remy Superspy 1 and 2 Bindup	Deborah Abela	9781742755670	3-5	\$22.99		
Max Remy Superspy 3 & 4 Bindup	Deborah Abela	9781742759265	3-5	\$19.99		
Ghost Club 1	Deborah Abela	9781742750804	3-5	\$18.99		
Ghost Club 2	Deborah Abela	9781742750835	3-5	\$18.99		
Jasper Zammit Bindup	Deborah Abela	9780857983206	3-5	\$22.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

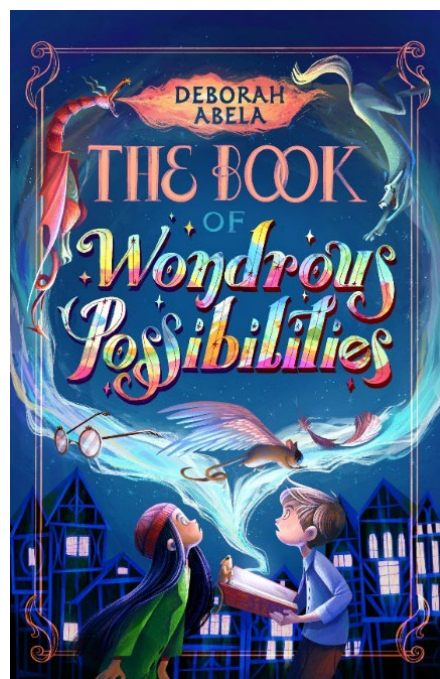
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## READING GROUP QUESTIONS

*The Book of Wondrous Possibilities* is Deborah Abela's love letter to books, booksellers, librarians and readers. That means it's perfect for anyone else who loves books too, with plenty for book clubs, reading groups and literature circles to chat about! Here are some questions to get your discussion started.



1. In the story, books and bookshops are seen as a safe haven for many of the characters, and the act of reading as a way to escape real life. The author has also said that books and libraries have been safe havens for her ever since she was a kid. What do you have in your life that creates the same feeling? Discuss the places that give you a sense of safety or calm.
2. Do you have a favourite early memory around books or libraries or reading? Are there books you read when you were younger that hold special significance for you? Discuss these with the group and see if there are any favourite books you have in common.
3. What do you think books mean to the characters in the novel? Do you think they mean the same thing to Arlo as they do to Silas? Does Uncle Avery love books in the same way that Benedict does? Are both their points of view valid?
4. Many of the characters are grieving in some way. Discuss how each of the main characters overcome their troubles or reconcile them by the end of the story. Do you think these were resolved in a realistic manner? Why or why not?
5. The narrative changes points of view between Arlo, Benedict and Viola. Why do you think the author gives space in the narrative for Benedict and Viola's voices? Are there things that the reader needs to know that we couldn't get from Arlo's point of view?
6. There are two parts to the narrative: the regular story and then the excerpts from the grimoire called *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*. What are the differences in the writing style between these two sections?
7. Why do you think the author has decided not to include the story Lisette wrote for Marcellus? Do you think including 'The Legend of Queen Viola and Sir Muttly' would change the climax or affected the story's pace and tension?
8. Does a character's name affect what the reader thinks of them? For example, what impression do you get when you find out the main character's name is Arlo Goodman? Compared to finding out the villain is named Silas Gray? Discuss other books you have read where the name of a character reflected their personality. Some examples to explore include Roald Dahl's books, or the Harry Potter series.
9. Why do you think the author has used so many descriptions of food in the story? Does it add to the narrative or to the character building? Discuss examples of other books you've read including food in the story, or meals that hold special memories for you.
10. As a group, discuss if the story of 'The Courageous Adventure of Arlo Goodman' in the grimoire helped Arlo find his courage, or if he became brave because of other reasons.
11. If you could write a story in *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities*, what would it be about? Share your ideas.

Find out more at [penguin.com.au](http://penguin.com.au)

