



THE Astonishing CHRONICLES of OSCAR from Elsewhere

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Recommended for: 10–14 years old

Themes: Magic, fantasy, myths, quests, spells, humour, courage, resourcefulness, family, friends, truancy, prejudice

Applicable to learning areas: English literacy, language and literature

Summary

The Astonishing Chronicles of Oscar from Elsewhere is the account of Monday through Friday of last week. That's when twelve-year-old Oscar Banetti found himself on a quest to locate nine separate pieces of a key, held by nine separate people, in order to unlock a gluggy silver spell that had trapped the Elven city of Dun-sorey-lo-vay-lo-hey. The quest was an urgent one. Friday at noon, the spell would become permanent, the Elves would be crushed to death and Oscar would be trapped in this magical world forever.

(The account, it should be noted, has been written at the request of a small public school's Deputy Principal. She wants to know exactly what Oscar considered more important than coming to school last week.)

From the award-winning Jaclyn Moriarty comes the magical fourth book in the rich and whimsical world of the Kingdoms and Empires. It is an enchanting tale of cryptic challenges, breathtaking danger and 360 kick flips.

In the Author's Own Words

'My favourite kind of fantasy books are those that are accessible to us in the real world – either because the magic is hidden here, just under that pile of blankets over there – or because we can visit the magical world if we only open the right closet, climb the right tree, run full speed towards the right wall...

'The whole time I've been writing series, I've known that children in our world will one day find their way there. In a half-waking dream one night, I saw a shy girl playing the piano in her house alone, her music

somehow carrying her straight to the Kingdoms and Empires.

I was trying to write that shy girl's story but having trouble with it when I happened to walk past the local skate park, where my son was skating with his friends. I realised that the shy girl wasn't quite ready. Instead, the first child to find their way to the Kingdoms and Empires is a wild boy on a skateboard who is skipping school.'

– Jaclyn Moriarty

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Before reading

- Before reading the story, examine the front cover and look for clues in the title, font, illustration, colours and focal points of light to help you answer the following questions:
 - What genre of book is *The Astonishing Chronicles of Oscar from Elsewhere*?
 - What characters and creatures will appear in the story?
 - Is the book going to be dark and scary or fun and adventurous?
 - What are the Kingdoms and Empires?
 - If Oscar is the boy holding the skateboard where might 'Elsewhere' be?
 - What is the large oval shape in the centre of the cover and what is unusual about the people reflected in it?
 - Why might keys be present on the cover?
 - What do the words *Astonishing* and *Chronicles* make you think about the story to come? What about the name *Oscar from Elsewhere*? Does this seem like a typical name for a hero in a story?

Prologue

- What is the immediate effect of starting the story with the heading 'The Monday After'? [Hint: makes you wonder what happened before this scene.]
- Read the opening of the book in class and discuss why some authors like to start a story with a **prologue**.

It seemed like a lifetime ago, that Friday, because my mind had been shut down and restarted since then (effectively) Still, I remembered it perfectly. (Page 5)

Foreshadowing

- Now ask why Jaclyn Moriarty might have decided to open Oscar's story with a scene set following the main events of the story? Did this scene make students want to turn the page and find out why Oscar missed a week of school? Introduce the concept of **foreshadowing** and discuss how it is used here.
- Read through this conversation between Oscar and Mrs Kugelhopf. Are Oscar's answer's to Mrs Kugelhopf's questions funny? What, in particular, makes you want to laugh?

'Do you understand what you are going to do?' she asked.

Big question, but I gave it my best shot.

'For my career? Play rugby league for Australia. For lunch today? Bolognese from the canteen. Next weekend? Well, I'm thinking—' (Page 5)

- What did we learn about Oscar from this exchange with Mrs Kugelhopf, and his comment below? Consider this: who would you normally expect to be in control in a conversation between a Deputy Principal and a student, and who is actually in control in this scene?

I'd known what she meant all along, to be honest.

Just messing with her. (Page 7)

Voice

As in real life, people in novels can have their own unique way of speaking – they may use a distinctive vocabulary, sentence structure or tone that tells us a lot about them and how they see the world. Authors create a character's **Voice** and when done well a reader can immediately recognise a character by these features.

Two guys. Older than me. About fifteen maybe. T-shirts, hairy arms. Their boards were lying in the grass and they were hunched over something.

It was a hot day.

Hazy air. Cicadas.

I coughed. They looked up at me. (Page 12)

- How would you describe Oscar's voice in Chapter 1? Carefully consider the sentence length, rhythm and vocabulary in his description of what happened at the skate park. Did his voice feel authentic? Did he seem like a funny and confident sort of person? Did the matter-of-fact way he described the skate park and the people in it suggest he was very comfortable there because he visited it often?
- Now consider Imogen's **Voice** in Chapter 2. What does her vocabulary, sentence structure and tone tell us about the sort of person she is? Compare and contrast (find similarities and differences) between Oscar and Imogen's **Voices** in Chapters 1 and 2.
- Write a short paragraph to describe the change in Oscar's **voice** in Chapter 3. Did this change intensify the drama of the scene?

Point of View (POV)

- *The Astonishing Chronicles of Oscar from Elsewhere* is told from two **points of view**, Oscar and Imogen's. Apart from different **voices**, how does the novel differentiate who is telling the story? [Answer: the font differs between Oscar and Imogen's stories. Also, each chapter has a different heading for who is the narrator.] What are three good reasons for using two people to tell a story? Does this literary device have any drawbacks, in your opinion? If you told the story from Gruffudd's **point of view**, how might the story change?
- What two literary devices is Jaclyn Moriarty using in the extract below? [Answer: **metaphor** and **zoomorphism**.]

It's a lion that sleeps in your throat and occasionally leaps up, roaring and gnashing its teeth . . . The lion rose on its haunches.' (Page 32)

Building Tension and Suspense

- How does Jaclyn Moriarty use countdowns of time to **build suspense** in her story? [Hint: think about the countdown of days (Monday to Friday), of hours (on the journey on the carpet), of minutes (to solve the puzzle of the key) and the climactic countdown of seconds in which Oscar saves the Elven city.] Read the final countdown on pages 384–390 and list as many things as you can that make this scene the most dramatic in the novel.

Anti-Climax

- **Tension and suspense** are also heightened when the reader believes a problem has been resolved, only to discover another, greater problem has arisen to block the success of a quest. List all the **anti-climaxes** in the story from the point at which the pieces of the key come together to form a G.

Puzzles

- Make a list of all the different puzzles that Oscar and his new friends must solve to succeed in their quest. Are readers meant to try to solve the puzzles as the story unfolds? How might adding puzzles to a story make it more interesting for readers?

Ending

- Did you like the book changing its style right at the end to finish with a news story? Did the ending surprise you?

Characters

- Which character did you like the most in the story and what was it about that character that you found so appealing?

Genre

- What subgenres of fantasy are there? For example, high fantasy, urban fantasy, magic realism, comic fantasy, historical fantasy, dark fantasy, fairytales, supernatural fantasy. In pairs or small groups, choose one subgenre to investigate further, considering its archetypes and prominent authors and their works. Gather your findings on a poster and present to the class.
- After completing the previous exercise, talk as a class about what subgenre (or subgenres) of fantasy *The Astonishing Chronicles of Oscar from Elsewhere* could be classified as. What expectations might you have about the book if you consider it as part of this subgenre/s? How has the author fulfilled or subverted your expectations?

World-building

- What is **world-building**? Why is it crucial to any story, but particularly to fantasy stories?
- What are some characteristics of the Kingdoms and Empires world that jump out at you? Some questions to consider:
 - How do the various people in this world interact with each other?
 - What things are fantastical to the reader but commonplace to its inhabitants?
 - What things in our world – a skateboard, for instance – seem extraordinary to the fantasy world?
 - What social structures do you observe in the story? (e.g. Does this seem to be a feudal society? An industrialised society? A patriarchal society? A matrilineal society?)
- What are some of your favourite worlds in books and movies?

Build your own world

- Write a short story in which you wake up in a world that is completely different to your own.

About the Author

Jaclyn Moriarty is the author of novels for children, young adults and adults, including the internationally bestselling *Feeling Sorry for Celia* and *Finding Cassie Crazy*, and the Colours of Madeleine trilogy. The first book in that trilogy, *A Corner of White*, won the NSW Premier's Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction, the Queensland Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction, and was short-listed for the Western Australian Premier's Awards. In the US, it was a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor book, was short-listed for the Nebula (Andre Norton prize), and was a Kirkus Best Book of the Year. The second in the trilogy, *The Cracks in the Kingdom*, also won both the NSW and Queensland Literary Awards, was short-listed for the Victorian Premier's Awards, and won the Aurealis Award for Best Young Adult Fantasy. The Kingdoms and Empires books, a series of standalone books for 10 to 14-year-olds, include *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone*, *The Slightly Alarming Tale of the Whispering Wars* and *The Stolen Prince of Cloudburst*. All of the books in the series have won or been short-listed for a number of prizes. A former media and entertainment lawyer, Jaclyn grew up in Sydney, lived in the US, UK and Canada, and now lives in Sydney again.