

Teachers Notes (Secondary)
by Jenny McMillan & Jenny Sargeant
Mr Monday
Garth Nix

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Recommended for ages 10 - 14.

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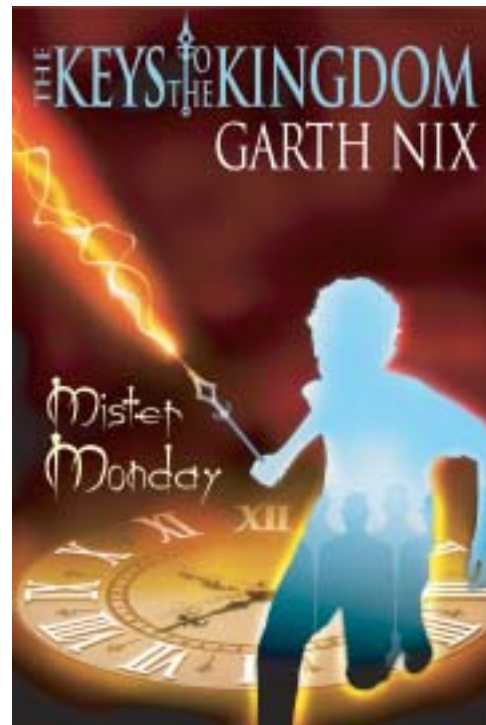
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INTRODUCTION

Arthur is starting seventh grade in a new school in a new town. Just his luck that every Monday every seventh grader must do a cross-country run. He tries to explain about his asthma, but the gym teacher just isn't listening.

Arthur Penhaligon is not supposed to be a hero. Thanks to his asthma, he is, in fact, supposed to die an early death. But then he is saved by a key shaped like the minute hand of a clock.

Arthur is safe—but his world is not. Along with the key comes a plague brought by bizarre creatures from another realm. A stranger named Mister Monday, his avenging messengers with blood-stained wings, and an army of dog-faced Fetchers will stop at nothing to get the key back—even if it means destroying Arthur and everything around him.

Desperate, Arthur ventures into a mysterious house—a house that only he can see. It is in this house that Arthur must unravel the secrets of the key—and discover his true fate.

This is a high-octane adventure—with a classic cliff-hanger ending, just as Tuesday dawns.

* * *

Mister Monday is the first book in The Keys to the Kingdom series by Garth Nix. The series will consist of seven books, each named after the day of the week on which Arthur faces and overcomes the traps set for him by the seven treacherous Trustees. These Trustees have broken the Will of the Great Architect of the Universe and usurped power over space and time. The Will has been torn and its separate pieces imprisoned—for the Words of the Will live; they are the literal embodiment of the Architect's will.

In this series, we are in classic fantasy territory, where religious and mythical archetypes provide deep resonances with the text. The Keys to the Kingdom also draws on literary tradition—the influence of the Bible, Arthurian legend, Dickens, Shakespeare and Milton are most apparent. Arthur, in fulfilling his role as the Heir, is more than a lost prince restored: he deals with betrayal, forgiveness and restitution and is a reluctant hero, participating in the adventure because it is the only way he can save his family and his own world. Exploration of *Mister Monday* in the classroom will be a rewarding experience for teachers and students, who will all enjoy the book.

To assist in a genre study of fantasy, these notes first summarise a number of the archetypal fantasy elements of the book. The writers then demonstrate how to use the novel in a Literature Circle in the classroom. Finally, they give examples of how the novel can be the basis of classroom activities across the major curriculum areas. They are familiar with Internet resources for the book and incorporate these into the activities presented.

MISTER MONDAY AND THE FANTASY GENRE

Prologue as dramatic landscape

They had tried to destroy the Will, but that proved to be beyond their power. So they broke it, in two ways. It was broken physically, torn apart, with the fragments of heavy parchment scattered across both space and time. It was broken in spirit because not one clause of it had been fulfilled.

[Prologue. p.1]

The setting of the Prologue is a dead star and a clock cage ringed by twelve metal sentinels, imprisoning a part of the Will for eternity. A line of the text of the Will escapes when a doddering Inspector takes a pinch of snuff and sneezes. This highly dramatic and intriguing scene starts off Garth Nix's *Mister Monday*.

The Child Initiate

The fantasy genre reveals itself immediately in the establishment of Arthur—not the King of Avalon this time, but a young boy with severe asthma being hectoring into a cross-country run by a teacher. He is vulnerable in so many ways: new at the school, no friends, frail from a recent hospitalization and, we discover, adopted, his birth parents having died in an epidemic. The burden of the story is to initiate Arthur into his destiny as The Rightful Heir. It is tough going and as he gasps for breath and life beside the school oval, the sword of destiny—the Minute Hand—comes into his possession; his asthma abates and his toughness and resilience become apparent. We come to like Arthur and the solitude and familiarity with suffering which mark him.

Alternative Reality

The opening world is the familiar one of school and libraries, but it has been invaded and polluted, so Arthur, with his minute hand in search of its hour hand, is driven to penetrate what we come to know as the world of the Lower Atrium. Architecture serves as a dynamic metaphor for the denizens of this world and indeed each world in the story. In the Lower Atrium we have a bureaucracy where purpose seems to be lost in a torrent of memos. The dress here is in the style of the nineteenth century and Arthur's fellow hero, Suzy Turquoise Blue, an Infiller, is encountered. She, too, is a lost child, although this time she has been seduced from her world by The Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Mystical Access

The pair seem able to scale the boundaries which confine others, gaining mystical access to the world at the top of the lift, 'the epicenter of all Creation', via wormholes, improbable stairs, weird ways, spider-wires and magic lifts.

Adult Authority Figures —The Good and the Ambivalent

The Will, having become flesh in a frog, leads them via announcements made in a strangely remote, god-like voice. Now hunted by Monday's Noon and other lieutenants, Arthur is finally tipped down the Coal Cellar where he encounters the terrifying Promethean figure of The Old One. This is the first adult figure to be shaped to sympathy by Arthur but we are aware that Monday's Dusk is also turning.

Symbolic Representation of Temptation

The Minute Hand is now beginning to weld itself more darkly into Arthur's psyche. He is touched by its shadow of power. His intuition becomes honed as he manages not only the Old One and the Improbable Stairs but also Suzy Blue and her ingratitude.

Fallen Betrayer Figure

Haunted by the betrayer figure of Praviil and by the imminent death of all his family, Arthur is compelled to trust Monday's Dusk. Arthur is tested time and again. The epic battle between Monday's Noon and Monday's Dusk which takes place in Mister Monday's Antechamber has resonances of Lucifer's biblical struggle and so, Milton's 'Paradise Lost'. Through it all, Arthur perseveres.

Sacrifice and Victory

But the final battle, fought after gaining Monday's House over the spider-wire and the moat filled with Bibliophages, involves not only swordsmanship but also courage to withstand pain and to still think clearly and the ability to remember the magic instructions. Arthur manages it all and is magnanimous in victory. With the two clock hands now joined and transformed into a sword, he is truly the Chosen One.

Resolution

Arthur, now with all power, faces his greatest test—to relinquish it. He hands over 'the key' and asks that a Steward stand in for him. His return home with the magical miniature centaur, the Nightsweeper, to cleanse his world, fulfils his true personal quest. Whilst he has asked for Monday to 'be healed'; he now is also 'healed' of his asthma. The last line of the story leaves us in Tuesday morning's dawn and with the Red Phone, the insurance against 'perfidious fate', ringing loudly.

A LITERATURE CIRCLES APPROACH TO CLASS STUDY OF THE NOVEL IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

1. INTRODUCTION TO NOVEL:

Establishing the literary landscape:

- Dramatic reading of prologue
- Discuss Key symbols: Creator; The Will; My Key
- Discussion: Lord's Prayer [7 days of creation; Thy Kingdom come; Thy Will be done]
- Discussion: Genesis Chapter 1

Activities:

- Design front page for folder (journal) with key symbols and explanations of them
- Research task: Dead stars, time travel, significance of seven – Seven Days, Seven Days of Creation, Seven Deadly Sins, The Menorah etc.
- Establish word bank to be extended as you read
- Extension: Write your own will

2. DESIGN:

- Establish 4 groups in the class
- Explain how the group will function
- Roles: Circle Director, Literary Luminary, Connector, Summariser.
- Roles to rotate after each section
- Each student maintains their own journal
- Guidelines to the discussion provided but not intended to be prescriptive

3. THE PROCESS:

The story divides logically into 5 sections, which would provide the target reading requirements for each literature circle session:

- Ch. 1-8 1st world – Arthur's reality
- Ch. 9-12 2nd world – Lower atrium of the House
- Ch.13-18 3rd world – The coal cellar

- Ch.19-22 4th world – Mister Monday's antechamber
- Ch.23-28 5th world – Mister Monday's house

First World: Arthur's reality

Discussion:

- How can you tell that Arthur is to be a hero?
- Explain Mr Monday's visit
- Read aloud pages 21-23 and comment
- What do you think the Fetchers are?

Activities:

- Write a curse in verse which you think might get rid of the Fetchers
- Choose the 10 most powerful words/phrases in this section.
- Create images which dramatise their significance.
- Design a Hero's Diamond for Arthur

Second World: The Lower Atrium

Activities:

- Look up and read *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. Explain any connections with Suzy Turquoise Blue
- Research and define "Worm Holes" (Internet)
- Read descriptions of the House pp.41-43, 55
- Draw a detail in cross-section of the House and explain its significance.
- Storyboard or Game – Getting to the Lower Atrium. Imagine the pathways or barriers that could exist.

Third World: The Coal Cellar

Discussion:

- Think about the idea of Hell. What would it be like?
- How is the coal cellar like Hell? Is there any hope in the coal cellar?

Activities:

- Research Fallen Angels. Why did they fall? Connections with Mr Monday.
- Look up the myth of Prometheus. How is he like the Old One?
- What do you think are the principles of the improbable stair?
- Continue your game showing and explaining all the stops on the stair.

Fourth World: Mister Monday's antechamber

Discussion:

- Betrayal and the epic conflict. Why does Dusk default? Why does anyone?

Activities:

- Look up Fantasy maps [eg. *Earthsea*]. Identify the key features of fantasy mapping.

- Create your own map of Monday's domain
- Include in your map a diagram showing the military purpose of Spiderwire

Fifth World: Mister Monday's pavilion

Activities:

- What is a bibliophage? Write a deterring curse.
- Words are everywhere. Check out your clothing – make new labels which will empower you in this story.
- Return to hero's diamond and add notes demonstrating his suitability as a leader now (Arthur as victor).
- "Be healed" – who does this remind you of?

4.EXTENSION: BEYOND THE TEXT

Speculate:

- The Nightsweeper cleanses the city but what do you think will happen next? List/dramatise 5 possible scenarios and link to clues already there.

Create:

- Your own hierarchical structure which reflects the power distribution in the student world.

Write:

- A hero's journey using genre markers.
- You are Suzy Blue or Pravuil – write your speech explaining the choices you made in the story.

KEY LEARNING AREA ACTIVITIES

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE

Looking further at the text:

- Go to the Keys to the Kingdom Internet site and complete the activities there [Crosswords, etc.]
- Search for and read online reviews. Do you agree? Write your own

Creative writing:

- Garth Nix, referring to *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* says, "You can open it at random, look at an entry and get a story idea". Go to *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* online. <http://www.bibliomania.com/2/3/255/frameset.html> Select a letter, select an entry, and use it for a story idea.
- Read Garth Nix Author Talk at www.KidsReads.com
 - Select one of the ideas he lists. How is this revealed in the book?
 - Setting – "very near-future America or Australia". What evidence can you find in Arthur's real world that it is a near future? Science, technology, government control, architecture?
 - "Then I started thinking about who the main character would be and I remembered something that happened to me when I was nine or ten years old". List the things you can remember (or use photos), create a character based on this experience

Literature connections:

- Creation myths.

- Greek legend, Celtic/Arthurian legend
- Fantasy genre: Students could read from a selection of fantasy novels and investigate/compare/contrast using some of the markers in Part A of these notes.
Suggested texts: *A Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula Le Guin, *The Book of Three* by Lloyd Alexander; *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, *Sabriel* by Garth Nix, *Northern Lights* by Phillip Pullman.
- Paradise Lost
- Angels as metaphor– In film [*Michael, Prophecy*], literature [*Skellig*] and art.

STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

History:

- (Read description of Suzy's world p. 246) Research plagues through history and their effects. Read fictional and non-fictional accounts and descriptions of plagues.
- Arthur's world is threatened by a disaster. Research disasters which have threatened or destroyed civilisations. Speculate what might threaten Arthur's world in future books.
- The steps of the Improbable Stair lead to worlds in other times. Create a diagram of your own History Timeline or Improbable Stair – which periods of history would be included? How would it be reflected in the world beyond the landing?
- The characters in the story wear clothes from other periods of history. Explain how the clothes declare character and story. Create a colouring book version of the characters in the book. Research clothes of historical period.
- Evolution of letters

SCIENCE/MATHS

- Research the Theory of Relativity
- Investigate the many theories of time (philosophy, physics/maths).
- Discuss: "Time in physics has one dimension. In art and poetry it can have many"
- "Seven keys, seven days, seven realms" Research the significance of seven – in maths and also in different cultures, myths and religions.

ART

- Images – look for images which reflect the ideas, themes, atmosphere of the story. Religious art, Fantasy art, Escher
- Architecture – based on description of House (pp.41-43, 55) – identify periods of architecture
- Book covers – compare covers of *Mister Monday* (search for them online), discuss, create your own for the next title in series *Grim Tuesday*. [Read synopsis of *Grim Tuesday* online at: <http://www.allenandunwin.com/shopping/product.asp?ISBN=1741142547>]

Adventure game

- If you were creating a Mister Monday Role Playing game, which roles would you have?
- Create the game storyboard or concept map.
- List the items/clues each player needs.

- Draw the characters.

MEET THE WRITERS

GARTH NIX

Garth grew up in Canberra. He has worked in the publishing industry and as a literary agent and for four years was a 'weekend warrior' with the Australian Army Reserve. He now writes for a living and lives in Coogee, NSW. Garth's recreational interests include fishing, bodysurfing, collecting books of all kinds, reading, films, writing and lunch.

Other Nix fantasy books published by Allen & Unwin are *Shade's Children*, *Sabriel*, *Lirael* and *Abhorsen*.

The next six books in The Keys to the Kingdom series will be published at intervals, beginning with *Grim Tuesday* in January 2004.

JENNY MCMILLAN

Jenny has been teaching and working in English curriculum and curriculum development for the last twenty years. As Head of English over fourteen years at Toorak College, she encouraged creative and dramatic responses to text as well as expanding the repertoire of texts through film and genre studies. As Head of English at Geelong Grammar School and afterwards Director of Learning over its four campuses, she acted to introduce change, progress and, accidentally, something of the instability of post-structuralism. She is hooked on genre study and the interconnections between image and imagination. As a way to fire real intellectual excitement, she would urge teachers to use Fantasy, the Gothic and Shakespeare. These stories inflame students to think and to write.

JENNY SARGEANT

Jenny Sargeant is Head of Information Services at Toorak College and has worked in Government and Independent schools at both primary and secondary levels as a teacher and then a teacher-librarian. She has also lectured on a sessional basis at Monash University in the School of Education, in the Language, Literacy and Literature unit of the Graduate Diploma (Teacher Librarianship) course. While much of her time is spent supporting the integration of information literacy and technology skills into learning, her passion and real commitment is to the crucial role of promoting reading and creating and maintaining a reading environment within the school library.