

Midnight Magic

Introduction

Suitable for: Children aged 6–9 years old in Years 1–4

Based on: The magical adventures of a black cat abandoned for her magical ways

Ideal for: Emerging readers, and especially reluctant readers

Includes: 4x lessons that build towards children writing their own poems

Themes: Poetry; Friendship; Anti-bullying; Supporting people of all backgrounds; Family; Pets

About Midnight Magic

In the middle of winter, three kittens are born in a barn. Two are ordinary, but the third, jet black and born on the stroke of midnight, is brimming with magic from whiskers to tail – even sparking life into a dusty old broomstick! While her siblings pounce at rats, Midnight perfects her flying skills on the broom, not noticing how her mother disapproves of her magical ways...

When Midnight finds herself abandoned, the little black kitten sets out to find a new home with only her loyal broom Twiggy at her side. The pair soon befriend a kind-hearted girl called Trixie. But how will Trixie's family react to Midnight's extraordinary powers and taste for mischief?

Told in rhyming verse that is a joy to read and illustrated in colour throughout, with themes of friendship and family, the adventures of Midnight, Twiggy and Trixie are perfect for fans of magical stories who are beginning to independently read chapter books.

About the author - Michelle Harrison

Michelle Harrison was born in Essex. She is the author of novels for children and young adults, most recently the best-selling *A Pinch of Magic* and its sequel, *A Sprinkle of Sorcery*. Her debut, *Thirteen Treasures*, won the 2009 Waterstones Children's Book Prize. She writes full-time and lives with her son and cats.

About the illustrator - Elissa Elwick

Elissa Elwick is a freelance children's illustrator and author who spends her days conjuring up strange oddities from her colourful desk in London's Fleece Station Studio. When she's not scribbling with her favourite pencil, scrawling and tapping on her computer or splashing watercolours about, she's sewing strange little monsters or gluing eyes on inanimate objects, all in the name of fun.

Teaching guide created by Scott Evans, 2020

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National Curriculum Objectives

English: Reading: comprehension

Develop positive attitudes to reading, and an understanding of what they read, by:

- i. listening to and discussing a wide range of fiction & poetry
- ii. discussing words and phrases that capture the reader's interest and imagination

Understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by

- i. identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning
- ii. drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence

Participate in discussion about books, poems and other works that are read to them and those that they can read for themselves, taking turns and listening to what others say

Recognising some different forms of poetry [for example, free verse, narrative poetry]

English: Writing: composition

Plan their writing by:

- i. discussing writing similar to that which they are planning to write in order to understand and learn from its structure, vocabulary and grammar

Evaluate and edit by:

- i. assessing the effectiveness of their own and others' writing and suggesting improvements

English: Spoken language

To participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education

To learn that there are different types of teasing and bullying, that these are wrong and unacceptable



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Lesson objectives and outcomes

Lesson 1: Being Different

Objectives:

- To understand and celebrate how personal appearances, traits and features make people different from each other
- To explain what bullying is and to give examples

Outcomes: Completed 'Similarities/Differences' statements about each other; a glossary of vocabulary associated with bullying and a poster or presentation about the positive features of black cats.

Lesson 2: Finding a Friend

Objectives:

- To consider actions and examples of friendship
- To identify any personal thoughts, feelings and emotions when making friends

Outcomes: Questions answered about the act of making friends using evidence from the book; listing the differences in reactions between characters; a discussion about the challenges of making friends; a 'Making Friends' illustration with annotations, labels and speech bubbles to show the experience.

Lesson 3: Caring for a Pet Cat

Objectives:

- To explore the basic needs of pet animals and what is suitable
- To identify what it takes to look after a pet cat

Outcomes: A class discussion about what welfare needs pet animals have; a memory game to remember the things an animal needs; a diary of events to look after a pet cat.

Lesson 4: Writing a Rhyme

Objectives:

- To be able to identify rhyming schemes and patterns in poems using syllables
- To write a poem in the style of Michelle Harrison using rhyming couplets

Outcomes: A group discussion about rhyming schemes and techniques used in poetry; reading another example of a poem about a black cat; writing a poem using rhyming couplets in the style of Michelle Harrison.



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Lesson One: Being Different

Questions:

- What does the word 'bullying' mean?
- What do you think a bully looks like and why?
- Do we have more similarities or differences to each other?

Task 1: When Midnight is born, it is clear to see that she is different from her mother and the other kittens because she is an all-black kitten. Look at the illustrations on pages 7, 8, 13 and 16, describe how we know that the mother cat is leaving Midnight out. On page 16 and page 19, the mother cat '**hissed**' at the broom and '**frowned**' at Midnight. These are negative actions which show Midnight is being treated differently because of the way she looks and acts. As a class, use mirrors and tablet devices with a camera to observe and take pictures of each other's features, for example hair, eye colour, skin tone and who wears glasses. Include both children and staff in this activity. Talk about how we are all different and that we all have similarities too but we all need a place to belong to, people to love and people to love us.

In pairs, ask children to write and complete the following sentence to recognise and celebrate each other's similarities and differences:

I am the same as you because... (for example, I have brown hair)

but different from you because... (for example, I have no brothers or sisters).

Ask the children to illustrate their sentence and repeat the activity with a different partner.

Task 2: In groups, work together to come up with words you might use to describe a bully. As a class, talk about what a bully looks like. Discuss with children that just because a person dresses a certain way that doesn't make them a bully and challenge any stereotypes linked to this. Create a glossary of words and actions associated with bullying. You may want to draw an outline of a person to place words to describe the bully on the inside of the person and actions on the outside of the person. Think about examples from *Midnight Magic* where the mother abandons Midnight, any you may have read in other stories or experienced in real life.

Empathy Extension: In pairs or small groups, act out the words and actions of a bullying scenario. Freeze frame those that best explain the words and actions described and take a digital photo of each situation. Print the photos and ask children to write about what is happening in the situation and to define the word or action. Laminate these and make them into a booklet. Have the booklet available to read in class to encourage children to refer to it when they need reminding about the meaning of a bullying term.

Task 3: Read the very last page of the book, page 92: 'A Note from Midnight', which shares how black cats like Midnight are often the last to be chosen from animal shelters. In the UK, April is National Pet Awareness Month, which makes it a great time to raise awareness about black cats. Create a poster or presentation advertising all the positive features of black cats like the range of breeds or the beautiful colours of their eyes. Use websites like Cats Protection to help you gather facts and information to include.



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Lesson Two: Finding a Friend

Questions:

- What does the word 'friend' mean?
- What do we mean when we say 'make friends'? How do we make friends with someone?
- Why is it important to make friends?

Task 1: All people make friends throughout their lives and we can make friends in different ways. Using Chapter 2, flick through the book and note down the ways that Trixie shows she is being friendly towards Midnight when she first meets her.

Answer these questions:

What does Trixie do to be friendly towards Midnight?

How does Trixie speak to Midnight?

How does Trixie make Midnight feel?

Then, compare and contrast Trixie's response to the reaction that Trixie's dad has when he sees the cat for the first time and the reaction that Trixie's nan has. In groups of three or four, can you act out these scenes to show how each character would be thinking and feeling?

Task 2: Close your eyes and take a few moments to think of a time when you made friends with somebody for the first time. Your memory could be from a time at school like your first day, at home, during a time when you were away from home or anywhere else as long as the memory is important to you. Try to remember as many details about it as you can like where you were and what you were doing at the time. Spend a few minutes summarising and sharing your memories as a class, talking about why they are meaningful and if you are still friends with that person today.

Task 3: Draw an illustration of your chosen memory to show how you were being friendly towards someone for the first time. How did you act? What did you say? Annotate and label your illustration with speech, expressions and bubbles to help you to think about and show your thoughts, feelings and emotions at the time and what you learnt from your experience.

Empathy Extension: Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. How might they have felt when you were making friends? What about being friendly towards animals? Make a list of the similarities and differences between making friends with animals and making friends with humans.



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Lesson Three: Caring for a Pet Cat

Questions:

- What is a pet?
- What are the things a pet needs?
- Why is looking after a pet important especially for young people?

Task 1: As a class, discuss the topic of pets, what animals are often kept as pets and which of them have a pet at their house. Record this data in the form of a pictogram or bar chart. In pairs, describe their pets and what they have to do to look after him or her. Explain that there are five basic needs of pet animals and that anyone who looks after animals must make sure that they have all of these things all of the time. These are: the need for a suitable environment or home; the need for a suitable diet or fresh food and water; the need to exhibit normal behaviour; the need to be housed with or apart from other animals and the need to be protected from pain, suffering and disease.

Empathy Extension: Focus on the first need: the need for a suitable environment or home. List and debate the reasons why the classroom is not an ideal place for a pet. Think about the size, shape and features of the classroom and the responsibilities, allergies and resources of the people within it.

Task 2: Play a memory game. In small groups and using a toy cat, children take it in turns to hold the cat and add to a list of what they need to do to look after it. For example, the first child could say: "I have got a cat and I need to... give them cat food every day." The second child takes the cat and says: "I have got a cat and I need to ... give them cat food every day and make sure they have clean water all the time." The third child takes the cat and says: "I have got a cat and I need to ... give them cat food every day, make sure they have clean water all the time and take them to the vet regularly for their injections so they stays healthy."

Empathy Extension: Using a toy animal cat, children learn how to pick up or handle it correctly so that neither they nor the animal gets scared or hurt. Stress how important it is to only touch or pick up an animal if its adult owner says that it is OK to do so. Children learn how to stroke the animal on its side and stroke the same way that the fur grows so the animal doesn't feel uncomfortable. They learn that they must be gentle so that they don't hurt the animal. They learn that they must not drop any small animals that they pick up. Using an appropriate brush, children could groom the animal, taking care to only brush the same way that the fur grows. Children learn that some pets need to be groomed regularly to keep their fur clean and healthy.

Task 3: Establish with the class that all pets need looking after every day. Point out that many people get a pet without thinking about how much time they need to spend looking after it every day. Have they heard the saying "Pets are for life, not just for Christmas"? Using all the work that you have done in this lesson to think about caring for pets, children are going to write a diary about looking after a pet cat. Include specific times when certain tasks need to be carried out, like feeding. Estimate how much time the pet owner would have to spend every day looking after the animal and if this is a commitment that children would want to take on.



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Lesson Four: Writing a Rhyme

Questions:

- What is a poem?
- Do poems always have to rhyme?
- Do you like writing poetry? Why?

Task 1: As a class, watch Michelle Harrison read *Midnight Magic* here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GvhLSOJMKM>. Listen to the way that Michelle reads it and for the rhymes at the end of every other line. Discuss together how these are called rhyming couplets which are a pair of lines that typically rhyme together. They are also roughly the same length due to the same number of syllables that are in each line. Count out the syllables in each line by clapping them out to hear the sound of them. Introduce that this is called the rhyme scheme or pattern of a poem and that the lines in *Midnight Magic* have an ABCB rhyme scheme. In small groups, work together to come up with a list of other poems, songs and rhymes that use rhyming couplets. For a challenge, you can practise acting them out as a group and then perform them in front of the class!

Task 2: In Task 3, you are going to write a rhyming couplet style poem about a black cat but before you do that, you will need to research some facts about them! Read 'Black Cat' by Jan Pollard, which is a poem that describes black cats using rhyming couplets. Identify and highlight where the rhyming words are used throughout the poem. Can you work out the rhyme scheme for this poem? Mindmap your ideas to note down lots of useful information and ideas about black cats (such as adjectives to describe their appearance, verbs and adverbs to describe how they move and more associated vocabulary) that you will be able to use when writing your poem. You can use books, computers or any other resources you have in your classroom or at home to find out as much about black cats as you can. You may even have a black cat yourself that you already know lots about!

Task 3: Looking back over all you have learnt in your lessons, write a short poem about a black cat using rhyming couplets. Try to include as much information in your own words as you can, referring back to your research and your mindmap from Task 2, which should have lots of ideas to help you. Remember to count out the syllables in each line to help you with the rhyming pattern. Use a rhyming dictionary to help you if required. When you are finished, read it out to a friend or for a challenge, perform it in front of your class with lots of expression and actions. Record the poems and give feedback as a group or as a class on the performances.



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Further ideas and activities

- Read more books about magical cats such as Gobbolino, the Witch's Cat by Ursula Moray Williams, Squishy McFluff by Pip Jones and Ella Okstad, and Carbonel by Barbara Sleigh.
- Go back in time to the Middle Ages and find out about the history of black cats and their association with witches and why they have played a major role in the celebration of Halloween.
- Learn more about the superstitions associated with black cats. Compare where in the world meeting a black cat is seen as good luck and where in the world it is deemed as bad luck. Why is there such a difference?
- The richest cat in the world, Tommaso, was once a stray cat in the streets of Rome. Write a balanced argument explaining whether you would adopt a black cat like him from the streets and learn more about how this black cat inherited his huge fortune from his owner. Extension: Write a story about a rich cat.
- Research five facts and five myths about black cats. Present your research in a table and compare the facts with the myths. Find out which myths are still believed by people today.

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