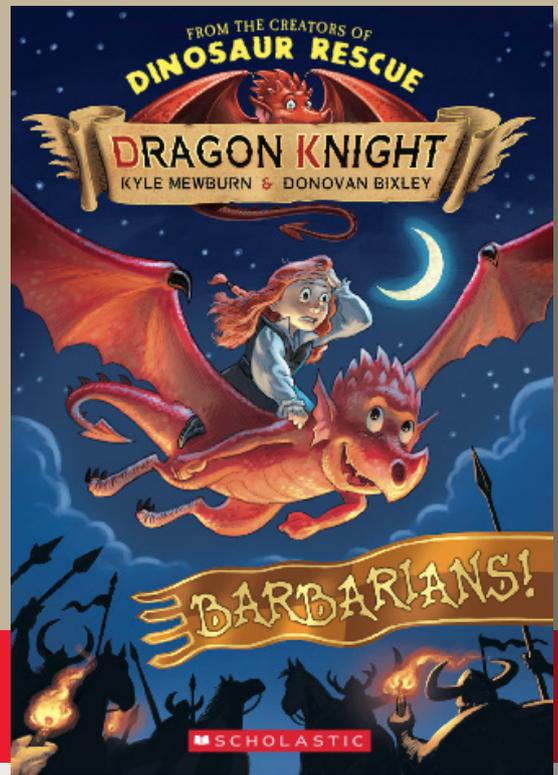


Dragon Knight: Barbarians!

Text by Kyle Mewburn

Illustrations by Donovan Bixley

• Reading • Writing • Visual Literacy



About the Book

Dragon Knight: Barbarians! is the sixth title in a hilarious series for young readers. The book's adventurous hero, Merek, is a shape-shifting dragon disguised as an ordinary boy. He is also an apprentice knight, and in this tale, he and his fellow apprentices are guarding Lord Crumble's castle while Sir Bragalot and the other top knights are away on an expedition. One night, Barbarians invade the castle, and the cruel Lord Crumble and his bullying son, Percy, encourage the apprentices to run for cover rather than defend the castle's treasure. Such uncharacteristic behaviour makes Merek's best friend Brin (really a girl called Breena) suspicious. She and Merek hide and watch as the Barbarians haul the treasure away. Merek then changes into his dragon form, and the two fly off to spy on the Barbarians. They find them in a field, but unfortunately they are caught and hung up by their feet. Breena masterminds a way for the two to escape, and Merek scares the Barbarians away by once again becoming a fire-breathing dragon. At this point, the 'real' Barbarians turn up and turn out to be pleasant people. Their king explains that their capturers had really been Lord Crumble's henchmen in disguise, and that the treasure actually belongs to his own people. Merek learns that Breena is the daughter of the brave Sir Bragalot, and the two fly off to find him and have another adventure.

About the Author and Illustrator

Kyle Mewburn has had more than 40 children's books published in nine countries. His titles include *Old Hu-Hu* (winner of the 2010 New Zealand Post Children's Book of the Year award), *Kiss! Kiss! Yuck! Yuck!* (Best Picture Book and Children's Choice at the 2008 NZ Post Book Awards) and *Melu* (Children's Choice at the 2013 NZ Post Book Awards). He is also the author of the popular series *Dinosaur Rescue*, his first collaboration with Donovan Bixley. Originally from Brisbane, Kyle now lives with his wife in Central Otago.

Donovan Bixley is a talented artist with a wide range of styles. His work brings another dimension to Mewburn's text, often adding additional humour to enhance the storyline. Donovan is the only artist to have ever had three books simultaneously shortlisted for the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults (in 2015), with Scholastic titles *Dragon Knight: Fire!*, *Little Red Riding Hood ... Not Quite*, and his debut comic book/novel as an author and illustrator *Monkey Boy*, which took out the top prize for junior fiction. Donovan lives with his wife and family in Taupo.

Writing Style

The *Dragon Knight* series comprises hilarious junior novels that will appeal to young boys (and plenty of young girls) in the 7-to-10 age group. Large dollops of disgusting details and toilet humour will make the most reluctant reader eager to turn the page. These 96-page novels based on fact and fantasy are set in the Middle Ages. They are broken into chapters, and every two-page spread is brought alive with action-packed illustrations. There are also maps, diagrams and humour-filled 'fact' boxes that allow young readers to learn about many aspects of non-fiction text in a fun way. Like the other titles, *Barbarians!* begins at the most dramatic part of the story (Merek and Breena have been captured by Barbarians), and then goes back in time to explain how the situation developed. It is written in the past tense with short, highly descriptive sentences that bring the scenes to life.



teacher toolkit

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Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. What are Barbarians? Who do you think will be the heroes, and who will be the bad guys in this book?
- Look at the cartoon on page 3. Do you think it's funny? Why?
- Look at the map. What jokes can you find in the names of the places? (pp.4–5)
- Which characters do you think you will like, and which ones could be mean? What clues are there? (pp.6–7)
- What sort of people are Barbarians? (pp.9–10)
- Do you think the five ways civilised people treat prisoners are very civilised? Why? (p.11)
- Merek thinks rescue is 'about as likely as an ogre fart smelling like a rose'. Does he mean rescue is likely or unlikely? How has the illustrator shown this idea? (p. 13)
- Can you find the jokes in the text about Penelope of Scoun? Hint: look at the spelling and punctuation. (p.15)
- Can you find the joke, or double meaning, in the chapter heading? (p.16)
- The story has gone back in time, but Merek is again uncomfortable. Why? (pp.16–19)
- What terrible things might be happening in the north? (p.19)
- Look at the diagram. Can you name one thing in each direction: north, south, east and west? (pp.20–21)
- Why isn't Brin reassured by Merek's comments? There's a clue on page 15. (p.22)
- What similes can you find on these pages? (pp.24–25)
- What do you think Merek should do: should he go to bed or do something else? If so, what? (pp.26–27)
- Percy is usually a selfish bully, so why isn't Merek suspicious that he might be up to something? (pp.28–29)
- Which of the five worst medieval jobs do you think is the worst of all? Why? (pp.30–31)
- What does Percy want the apprentice knights to do? What do the apprentice knights want to do? What do they think they should do? (pp.32–33)
- What is Brin telling everyone to do? Does Percy agree? (pp.34–35)
- What does Lord Crumble want the apprentice knights to do? (pp.36–37)
- What might Lord Crumble be up to? (pp.38–39)
- What is a diversion? What diversion does Merek create? (pp.40–41)
- Lord Crumble is not defending his treasure against the Barbarians. This is out of character. What could be going on? (pp.44–49)
- Why does the Northern War never end? Who are the Barbarians? (pp.52–53)
- Why does Merek think it is pointless, and perhaps dangerous, to fly after the Barbarians? Do you agree? Why? (pp.54–55)
- What senses help Merek and Breena find the Barbarians? (p.58)
- Why do you think Merek isn't keen to investigate what the Barbarians are up to? (p.61)
- Why is Merek calling to Breena? (pp.62–63)
- What has happened? How might this link up with the beginning of the book? (pp.64–65)
- What is the joke, or pun, in the chapter heading? (p.66)
- How might Breena be planning to escape? (p.68)
- What was Breena's plan? Were you right (pp.70–72)
- What does the author mean by the phrase 'counted their losses and fled'? (p.77)
- How does Breena show bravery here? How else has she shown bravery throughout the story so far? (pp.78–81)
- What sort of people are these Barbarians? What clues do the author and illustrator give us? (pp.82–83)
- Why is everyone calling everyone else Barbarians? (pp.84–87)
- Breena has just given away her secret. What was it? (p.87)
- Read about Breena's childhood. Why do you think she disguised herself as a boy? (pp.88–89)
- The author describes Lord Crumble's toothbrush as 'rarer than a bar of soap'. Does he mean it is rare or not rare? Why? What is the problem with keeping the toothbrush locked away? (p.91)
- Who were the 'Barbarians' who took Lord Crumble's treasure? Why couldn't Merek and Breena understand them? (p.92)
- What were the henchmen doing? (p.93)
- Why were the King's men on their way? What is booty? Who owned the treasure in the first place?
- What does the word 'barbaric' mean? Where does it come from? (p.95)
- Do you think the story had a happy ending? Why? (p.96)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: THOSE BARBARIC BARBARIANS

Discuss how the different warring sides in this book referred to one another as Barbarians. Talk about the reputation of the so-called Barbarians, and discuss how such reputations might have developed.

Now discuss how similar attitudes can easily develop in our own lives. Talk about the ways we often assume that the 'other' group is not as good or as nice as our group. The other group might be anything from another classroom, another school, another sports team, or people from another part of the country.

Together create a list of points to remember when meeting up with other groups. These points could include such things as:

- They probably think we look like strangers, too.
- They might be nervous about meeting us.
- They are probably friendly when you get to know them.

ACTIVITY 2: CRAZY CLIFFHANGERS

Together, look through the book, focussing on the endings of chapters. Help the students notice that many chapters end on a cliffhanger: a mystery arises, or the characters are in imminent danger.

Discuss how authors and screenwriters often use cliffhangers to encourage readers to read on and television viewers to come back next week. Encourage students to discuss other examples of cliffhangers that they know of.

Create fun class stories involving cliffhangers. The students could work in groups and write one or two paragraphs of a story involving Merek and Breena in which they are involved in an event that finishes on a cliffhanger. Each group then passes its story to the next group. After receiving another group's story, a group must resolve the issue and then continue the story so it finishes on another cliffhanger. Repeat this process two or three more times, then tell the students to bring the next story they receive to a happy ending.

Have some students read the stories aloud to the class so that everyone can enjoy following the ups and downs of the different adventures.

ACTIVITY 3: TOP TEAMWORK

In this story, Merek and Breena work together. Neither would have found or escaped from the Barbarians without the other. Write the names of the two characters on the whiteboard or on a sheet of chart paper. Then, as a class, compile a list of the strengths and advantages that each character brings to the team. Breena, for example, brings

intelligence, bravery and the advantage of being powerful Sir Bragalot's daughter. Merek brings his shape-shifting dragon skills, his loyalty and his kind heart.

If appropriate, liken the two characters' complementary strengths with those of the players in a sports team. Discuss how different players work together to win a game.

Help the students plan another adventure for Merek and Breena. The students could work in pairs or individually. Their stories should involve the two characters using their different strengths to solve a problem that neither could solve alone. When the students have come up with suitable plans, assist them in writing their stories and sharing them with one another.

ACTIVITY 4: INNOCENT BUT STILL PUNISHED

Reread the paragraph about the whipping boy from the *The Five Worst Medieval Jobs* on pages 14 and 15. Tell the students that this did in fact happen hundreds of years ago. The whipping boy was a high-ranking child and one of the prince's few friends. It was hoped that the prince would feel guilty seeing his friend being punished on his behalf and so he would behave. Discuss this system with the students. Ask: how would you feel if your best friend was punished for something you did? Allow them to give reasons why this was a bad (or good) system.

ACTIVITY 5: WHAT NEXT?

At the end of the book, Merek and Breena fly off to find Breena's father and to have another adventure. Encourage the students to plan and write the next instalment in Merek and Breena's story.

Assist the students in creating an adventure that involves the development of a problem that builds up in tension until it reaches a dramatic climax and then is resolved. If appropriate, some students could even structure their story in the same way as this book, by beginning at the most dramatic part of the story and then going back in time to tell the whole tale.

After students have planned, written and proofread their stories, bind them together to create a class book for students to read in spare moments.

Written by Mary Atkinson



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