

Bloodtree Chronicles

Sanspell

By Elizabeth Pulford

- Reading • Writing • Speaking
- Health



About the Book

Sanspell is the first story in a new fantasy trilogy for pre-teens by Elizabeth Pulford. Its main character, Abigail, is an ordinary story-loving child with few friends and many bullies in her life. On Abigail's thirteenth birthday, something astonishing happens. She is transported into another world – the frozen fairy-tale world of Sanspell, a story that has been cursed by the evil Zezmena. With the help of her seven eccentric great-aunts, Abigail becomes her storybook self, Spindale, and enters the story. It is believed that only she can remove the curse put on the Bloodtree and so save the Silvering Kingdom, the home of fairy tales. Spindale meets up with a boy named Flint, whose mother, Trinket, has been captured and held within the castle dungeon by the cruel and selfish Rackenard. Three drops of Trinket's blood are needed to save the Bloodtree, so Spindale must first rescue Trinket and then remove the curse. She has her great-grandfather's magical time locket to assist her, but Zezmena also has magical tools at her disposal and is determined to make the time locket her own. Zezmena captures Flint and holds him suspended within a shard of ice. Abigail, with the help of Flint's friend Bramble, must now also save Flint. By remembering the wise advice given to her by her parents and her great-aunts, Spindale is able to overcome each obstacle as it arises. She compares the unpleasant characters to the bullies back home, and draws strength from a determination never to allow others to treat her cruelly again. Flint and Trinket are rescued and the Bloodtree is saved, but then, right at the end, Spindale is propelled into the beginning of the next story.

About the Author

Elizabeth Pulford is the author of Scholastic's *The Littlest Angel* series, *Far, Far from Home*, *The Quest for the Rotten Egg*, *Can't Catch Me*, *On a Rabbit Hunt*, *Shut the Gate* and *Jelly-legs*. She was born in Canada, raised and educated in Dunedin, and currently lives in Waikouaiti, Otago. For more information, visit Elizabeth's website: www.elizabethpulford.co.nz

Writing Style

Sanspell is a fantasy novel written in the third person. Most of the book is told from the point of view of the main character and heroine, Abigail, who is also known as Spindale. Other parts are told from the perspectives of important characters such as Flint, Zezmena, and the great-aunts. This allows the reader to understand aspects of the story that Abigail does not yet comprehend. The parts of the story that Abigail reads rather than takes part in or views within a magical painting are set in italic type. They are written in the style of a fairy tale (e.g. *In the Silvering Kingdom there lived a king and queen who had a daughter ...*). The book is composed of 36 short, action-packed chapters, grouped into three parts. It ends at a satisfactory point, while also hinting at the next story in the trilogy, encouraging readers to seek out the next title in the series.



Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Answering the questions below will help your students more fully comprehend the story. Class or group discussions will help them identify details they might otherwise miss. This is especially true for students with comprehension difficulties.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the front cover. What do you think this book will be about? Look at both the title and the picture for clues.
- Now read the text on the back cover. What extra clues does it give you? What sort of novel is it? (Fantasy) What other fantasy stories do you know?
- Look at the first page. How has the cover designer made the series logo design match the words?

PART ONE

- What is special about the windows in Abigail's mother's bedroom? Why do you think Abigail isn't allowed to open them both at once? (*Chapter 1: So it begins*)
- Why hasn't Abigail's mother had time to tell her about what's happening and where she is going?
- What important pieces of advice does Abigail's mother give her? What might they mean?
- Where has Abigail ended up? What is it like there? How would you feel if you suddenly found yourself there? (*Waiting in the snow*)
- What clues does the author give to Abigail's personality and ordinary homelife in chapter two?
- Who is Spindale? What sort of name is it?
- What sort of person is Great-aunt June? Would you feel pleased if she picked you up? (*Travelling in Eternity*)
- Who are the relatives that Abigail learns about during the truck ride? Why do you think she didn't know about them before?
- What does Abigail learn about her parents that she didn't already know?
- What might Great-aunt June mean by 'I hope you're up to the task, little one. We are all depending upon you.'
- Who is April? What does Abigail think her name is? (*In the great-aunts' cottage*)
- Why has Abigail's mother not told her about Sanspell and her past? What could the danger be?
- What was so amazing about the bedroom? (*Up in the bedroom*)
- What keeps the Bloodtree alive, and how long has it been living?

- Who is Flint? What do we know about him? Who is Zezmena? What do we know about her?
- Why is Flint angry? Do you think he has good reason to be? (*Flint*)
- Does Flint have a kind heart? How do you know?
- How did Abigail find out about Flint's story? (*Abigail finds a story*)
- How did she find out about Eerena's story?
- What question does the author leave us with at the end of the chapter? Why do you think she finished the chapter with a question?
- Who is Vevaine? What terrible thing did she do? (*The story continues*)
- Do you think Flint is real or part of a story? What about the great-aunts and their world? Are they real?
- Flint stole food for himself and Gwilly? Should he have done this? Why? (*Birth of the Bloodtree*)
- How does the Bloodtree help Flint earn an honest living?
- Why doesn't he want people taking an interest in it?
- What is so special about the tree's leaves?
- The chapter ends with: 'Give it that which it loves the most. Feed its source and it will flourish.' What might this mean?
- What happened to Gwilly? How does Flint feel about it? (*The cruel tale of Gwilly*)
- What is so strange about Great-aunt Tuesday? What might this mean?
- How many names in this book are to do with time? List as many as you can. (*The spells*)
- How old are the great-aunts? What explanation do they give? What does this tell us about them and their world?
- What story did the great-aunts make up themselves? What story are they in? (See page 80)
- Why was Abigail confused?
- What spell did Zezmena put on the Sanspell story? Why did she do this?
- What was Abigail doing when the cloak appeared? (*The end of a beginning*)
- How did she know the locket piece was crystal?
- How did she activate the locket? What do you think the locket is able to do now it is activated?

PART TWO

- Why does Zezmena feel a connection with her pet raven, Ostle? (*Zezmena*)
- How did Zezmena get her most powerful spells?



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- Why does Zezmena especially dislike Bellina, Abigail's grandmother?
- Why does Zezmena want Abigail's locket?
- Why was a black bird circling Spindale? What bird was it? (*Another beginning*)
- Who do you think caused the storm? Who was watching Spindale? How would you feel if you were Spindale?
- What problems did Abigail have at home that came to mind when she was lost in the snow? Why were the situations similar? (*A strange meeting*)
- What did the autumn-tree woman show Spindale? How might this help her?
- Why is Spindale feeling so frustrated?
- What does Nyrah mean when she says Spindale has a mind of her own? Is this a good thing? Why?
- Is Flint real? How do we know? What about Nyrah? Is she real? What clues does the author give us? (*Rescued*)
- Why do you think Flint is so cautious about trusting Spindale?
- Where does Flint take Spindale? What do these people have in common? (*Being challenged*)
- Why do you think Bramble is rude to Spindale?
- What does Spindale learn about the locket?
- Why do the great-aunts want to continue telling the story of Sanspell? What is the problem? How do they overcome it? (*The great-aunts*)
- Who do the aunts decide will tell the story?
- What plan does Spindale make? (*Coming up with a plan*)
- What were the bullies back home saying about Spindale's father? Do you think they were right?
- How is Bramble's behaviour like that of the bullies?
- What does Flint mean by 'It'll be best under darkness'?
- Why doesn't Zezmena want to take the blame for her own mistakes? (*A visit from Vevaine*)
- What does the author mean when she says you need to have trust to have friends? Do you agree?
- Do you think Zezmena will make Vevaine the love potion that she wants? Why?
- What does the author mean when she says 'The Sanspell story was locked into winter'? (*Taking action*)
- Flint is said to be 'locked into a different time zone' when they reach Gwilly's field. What does this mean? Is he in the past, present or future? Why? (*Arriving at the Bloodtree*)
- Where was the key? Where was the keyhole?
- How does Spindale decide whether or not to open the lock? What happens next?

- Why did everything go black? (*The power of the locket*)
- What does the author mean when she says 'Her tormentors were always inside her head, waiting their chance to tease'?
- What happens when Spindale clutches the locket and remembers her childhood?
- What has Zezmena done to Flint? Why did she do it? (*Cooking up a trap*)
- How does Zezmena try to lure the girls to her house?

PART THREE

- What happened as Great-aunt June tried to tell the next instalment of the story? (*Setting Spindale loose*)
- Spindale is a character in the story, and now she is going to create the story herself. The great-aunts won't control her actions. Do you think this is a good thing? Why?
- How does Spindale work out where Trinket is? (*Bramble helps*)
- How is the relationship between Spindale and Bramble changing? Why do you think it is changing?
- Why do Spindale and Bramble change their plans? (*A turn in the plans*)
- How do the girls find out about the magic crystal mirror? (*Finding Flint*)
- How do they get Flint away from Ostle, the raven?
- How do the great-aunts know what is happening? Do they all feel the same way about the events? (*Zezmena plots revenge*)
- Why does Ostle do as he is told? Why can't he leave Zezmena?
- How do the girls get into the castle? (*Into the castle*)
- How has Trinket stayed alive all these years? Why hasn't she tried to escape? (*Saving Trinket*)
- Why does Eve feel sorry for Zezmena? Do you? Why?
- What does January mean when she says that Zezmena's nasty actions are necessary to the story? Do you agree?
- How does Trinket rescue Flint? Do you think a mother's love is powerful in ordinary life? Why? (*The return of Flint*)
- Why does the group split up rather than stay together?
- Did Treolle really give the crystal mirror to Zezmena? Why does Zezmena think so? (*Zezmena*)
- What potion had Zezmena given Vevaine?
- Spindale's father had written: 'Never be afraid of the dark. Remember it is always followed by light.' Can you think of two meanings for this? (Encourage students to give a literal and a figurative meaning.) (*Blood in the blizzard*)



- How does Spindale stop the blizzard?
- How does Zezmena try to stop them saving the tree?
- Why do you think some of the great-aunts want to start packing? Where might they be planning to go?
- Why does Spindale want to put the crystal mirror somewhere Zezmena can't get it? How does she know where that could be? (*The letter*)
- How does Spindale get the 'sword and the horse'? What two things does she get? How does she do this?
- What does the author mean when she says that the words Spindale's father wrote 'would never leave her. They were stored in a place that no one, not even Zezmena, could touch'? Where were the words stored?
- What do you think had happened when Spindale picked up the poppies that formed from the pieces of her father's letter? (*Back to the beginning*)
- Why do you think the sign for Sanspell is now missing? What do you think the other two place names might be about? How can we find out?

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: PLOT THE PLOT

It is likely some students will have difficulty following the plot as it unravels. To help them, create a chart as you read the story. At the end of each chapter, discuss what has happened. With the early chapters, model writing one to two sentences to summarise the chapter. Display them in a box on a flowchart/timeline. As you progress, encourage the able students and then the less able students to come up with summaries for the chapters. You could also add features such as colour coding for the different settings to make it more accessible.

Display the chart where the students can read it and watch it grow. As necessary, review it as a whole class.

ACTIVITY 2: BULLIES AND BAD GUYS

Talk about how the bullies in Abigail's real life compare with the difficult people (Bramble) and the baddies (Zezmena and Rackenard) that she meets in the story world. Discuss how Abigail/Spindale uses the things she has learned about bullies to help her cope and to give her the determination to keep going. In pairs, ask the students to discuss how Spindale's experiences in Sanspell might have changed Abigail. How might she be different when she next has to face the bullies back home?

This could be an introduction to a discussion on bullying. To help deal with this sensitive topic, first visit sites such as <http://pb41.tki.org.nz/Deter-Bullying>

ACTIVITY 3: TRAVELLING IN TIME AND PLACE

The concept of time as portrayed in this story can be difficult to comprehend. As a class, discuss the concept of time travel and how it is presented in other stories and movies that they know. Next, place the students in small groups to discuss the following questions, making sure they understand that the answers are not easy or straightforward:

- Why is time not real in the story worlds? How could the great-aunts have lived for thousands of years?
- Why do you think it is dangerous to meddle with time?
- How does Spindale travel in time? Why is this useful?
- Abigail/Spindale doesn't only travel in time, she also travels to different places. How many places does she go to? Which ones are real, and which are not?
- How can a place exist if it is not real?

Ask each group to present their thoughts to the class.

ACTIVITY 4: CHILD HEROES SAVE THE DAY

Point out that in *Sanspell*, a seemingly ordinary child is transported to another place where she discovers that she is special and has the power to save people there. Ask if they can think of any other stories that use this format (e.g. the Harry Potter stories and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*).

Discuss why this format is so popular (ordinary children enjoy imagining that they are secretly special). Encourage the students to plan a story using this format. Before writing, show them how to plan the title, introduction, rising action, climax and ending using bullet-pointed notes. Collect the finished stories and bind them together to make a book for the students to read in spare moments.

ACTIVITY 5: CHARACTER ANALYSES

Ask the students to each choose a character (or two very different characters) from the story. For each one, they should write the character's name at the top of a page. Demonstrate how they can then fill the rest of the page with four large rectangles. The rectangles should be headed something like: What he/she looks like; What he/she does; What he/she says; and What other characters say about him/her. The children can then fill in their character charts with details relating to their particular character.

Encourage the students to share and discuss their charts with one another and to fill in details that they missed. Then choose students to present their charts to the class. Choose ones who have analysed different characters.

Written by Mary Atkinson



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