

Dragon Knight: Fire!

Text by Kyle Mewburn

Illustrations by Donovan Bixley

- Reading • Writing • Visual Literacy
- Listening • Art



About the Book

Dragon Knight: Fire! is the first title in a hilarious new series for young readers. The book's adventurous hero, Merek, lives in a medieval village and is training to become a knight. He has a big problem, however: he's a dragon, and dragons and people are mortal enemies. Merek and his parents are shape-shifting dragons displaced from their cave home by zealous knights. They are hiding among humans just to stay alive. When Merek tries out for Knight School, he is unsuccessful, managing only to make an enemy of the castle lord's spoilt son, Percy. Assigned to become a squire rather than a knight, Merek dispiritedly begins polishing chain mail. But then he spies Percy setting the castle hunting dogs on Brin, a young apprentice knight. Merek transforms himself back into a dragon to save the boy, only to discover that Brin is, in fact, a girl whose real name is Breena. She is hiding her true identity in order to become a knight. Merek and Breena agree to keep each other's secrets and soon become firm friends. However, all the stress has left Merek so nervous that when he changes back into a boy, his dragon tail remains. He starts a fire to create a distraction, and ends up on the roof of a burning tower. With help from his fireman father, Merek manages to save a puppy and come out of the drama looking like a hero. In spite of his poor sword skills, he is allowed to become a knight after all.

About the Author and Illustrator

Kyle Mewburn is the author of more than 40 children's books. His works have been published in nine countries and have won numerous awards. His titles include *Old Hu-Hu* (winner of the 2010 NZ Post Children's Book of the Year award), *Kiss! Kiss! Yuck! Yuck!* (Best Picture Book and Children's Choice winners at the 2008 NZ Post Book Awards) and *Melu* (Children's Choice winner 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 has illustrated a number of picture books with Scholastic, including *Phoebe and the Night Creatures*, and the popular Kiwi titles *Wacko Kakapo* and *The Tuatara and the Skink*, as well as *Monkey Boy*, his debut comic novel as both an author and an illustrator. 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 plenty of maps and humour-filled 'fact' boxes that allow young readers to learn about many aspects of non-fiction text in a fun way. *Fire!* begins at the most dramatic part of the story (Merek is trapped on the roof of a burning tower), and then goes back in time to explain how the situation developed. It is written in the past tense with short, highly descriptive sentences, full of gore and humour.



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the map on pages 4 and 5. Which direction is north? What about south-east? Which direction do the poorest people live in? What about the richest, and those who are neither rich nor poor?
- Why isn't Merek afraid of the fire? What is his biggest problem when he is on the roof? (pp.9–11)
- *A Spot of Bother* is the first chapter in the book but not the start of the story. Why do you think the author started here, not at the beginning?
- Is the scene in the picture on page 11 really happening? How can you tell?
- Look at the things that frightened medieval people. How real were these fears? Which fear was the silliest? Why? (pp.12–13)
- If someone accused you of being a witch in medieval times, was there any way you could save your life? (p.12)
- Why did Merek's bedroom keep catching fire? How did he put out the flames? (p.14–15)
- Look at the shadows on the wall on pages 16 and 17. What do they show us?
- Merek's mum and dad are shape-shifting dragons, too. This morning, they are not completely one creature or another. What different creatures make up their bodies today? (pp.18–19)
- Why did Merek's dad join the fire brigade? What misunderstanding had he made? (pp.20–21)
- What jobs do knights and squires do? Why does Merek want to be a knight? Which would you choose? (pp.22–23)
- Look at the diagram on pages 24 and 25. Why is there a number 6 on the dragon's stomach?
- According to the text box on pages 26 and 27, what two creatures live in swamps? What two creatures do people think live in swamps but do not really live there?
- What was so unpleasant about the old medieval village? List as many things as you can. (pp.28–31)
- How does the illustrator show us that the stink in the village reminded Merek of a smelly ogre? (p.28)
- Why do you think the villagers gave their best produce to Lord Crumble? Did they want to? Was this fair? (p.33)
- Three bullies pick on Merek. How do their clothes compare to the peasants' clothes? What does this tell us about these boys? (pp.34–35)
- Why doesn't Merek choose to roast the boys alive? (p.36)
- Why can't the bullies find Merek? How does he get revenge without them knowing it was him? (pp.38–39)
- The peasant man thinks the mule is one of his team. Why is he angry with it for kicking Master Percy? (pp.40–41)
- Read the last paragraph on page 41. What hints does it give us about what might happen next?
- Look at the map on pages 42 and 43. Where is the East Gate? Where is the parade ground? Where are the kennels?
- How do the illustrations on page 45 help us understand the text? Why are they funny? If these accidents happened in real life, would they be funny? Why?
- Medieval peasants did not usually get a chance to become knights or squires. Why was Merek getting a chance? (p.46)
- What sort of person is Percy? Why do you think he has been able to get away with such unpleasant behaviour? (pp.48–49)
- Why do you think wealth and position are less important than bravery and humility for knights? (p.51)
- Why is Merek so confident he will get into Knight School? Do you think he will get in? Why? (pp.52–55)
- How did Merek's sword skills compare to the other boys' sword skills? Why did he lose his duels? Do you think he will get into Knight School now? (pp.56–63)
- Another boy saves Merek in his dual with Percy. Why doesn't Percy fight back? (pp.62–64)
- What were the good and bad points about being a squire rather than a knight? (You could create pros and cons lists on the whiteboard.) (pp.65–68)
- What might Percy be up to? (p.69)
- Look at the medieval dogs on pages 70 and 71. Which sorts of dogs do we still have today? What other working dogs do we have?
- What might Percy have been doing with the green cloth from the other boy's hat? (p.73)
- Why did the dogs chase the boy into the East Tower? (pp.74–75)
- Why can't the boy escape the dogs? (pp.76–77)
- How does Merek plan to save the boy, who is really a girl? Why does he look around first? (pp.78–79)
- How does the shape of each type of dragon help it live in the place where it is found? (pp.80–81)
- Why is Merek surprised when the girl smiles at him? What reaction might he have expected? Why? (p.82)
- What sort of girl is Breena? How can you tell? (pp.84–85)
- Why is it important no one knows Breena is really a girl? Do you think Merek and Breena will keep each other's secrets? Why? (pp.84–85)



- Read the last paragraph on page 85. What *could* possibly go wrong? How might this link up with the first chapter?
- Why do you think Merek starts sneezing? Why are his sneezes more problematic than most people's? (p.89)
- Why does Merek climb up onto the roof and pretend to look scared? (p.89)
- How does Merek's dad put out the fire? What devices do we have these days that use gases or chemicals to put out fires in a similar way? (fire extinguishers) (p.89)
- Why do Merek and his Dad rub soot into their faces? (p.94)
- Why is Merek's dad happy rather than angry? (p.94)
- Why does Sir Bragalot think bravery is more important than knowing sword skills? Do you agree? (p.95)
- Merek is pleased to have finally got into Knight School, but Percy doesn't seem as happy. Why does Percy run his finger across his throat? What do you think will happen in the next book in the series? (p.96)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: MEDIEVAL MELODRAMAS

Discuss how the author catches the readers' interest by starting at the most exciting part of the story and then going into a flashback to recount earlier events. Draw the students' attention to the last sentence on page 11: 'This is how it happened ...'. Talk about the use of the ellipsis, and elicit information on how this sentence links the first chapter with the rest of the book.

Next, talk the students through planning and writing their own story that begins with an exciting cliffhanger and then goes back in time to tell the story in chronological order. This will work best if they write a short, bullet-pointed plan first. Model this process with them, explaining how real authors always construct a plan to ensure their plots will work. Check the plans before the students write their actual stories. The finished stories could then be collated into a book of medieval tales for the students to read in spare moments.

ACTIVITY 2: FACT AND FANTASY

Discuss how *Fire!* is based on both fact and fantasy. First, ensure all the students understand the meaning of these terms. Then, either in groups or as a class, construct a list of things in the book that are based on real medieval life and another list of the things that were made up. As a class, decide if the book is based more on fact or fantasy.

Some ways you could extend this activity include:

- discussing other stories that are based on both fact and fantasy (e.g., the Harry Potter books, *Shrek*, etc.)

- holding a class debate about whether books like *Fire!* are educational. Does *Fire!* help us learn about medieval times or does it just confuse us?
- discussing how the design and writing style of the diagrams in this book are based on scientific ways of presenting information, while much of the actual information is fantasy (see pp.24–25 and 80–81).

ACTIVITY 3: DRAWING DIAGRAMS

As a class, study the diagrams on pages 4 and 5, 24 and 25 and 42 and 43. Make sure all the students understand how to use the keys to understand the diagrams. Talk about why numbered dots were used (adding lots of text to the diagrams would have covered up too much of the illustrations, making them hard to see).

Model the first steps in making a diagram of your own. Create an area for the key, before drawing a fantasy creature. Then, as a class, add some fun numbered labels to describe the creature. Next, allow the students to create their own medieval map or fantasy creature (not a dragon), and add their own labels. Provide plenty of time for them to share the finished works with one another.

ACTIVITY 4: FUN WITH PUNS/MAKING MURALS

Discuss how the illustrator has used puns and wordplay to add humour to the book. Which of the double meanings did the students notice? Elicit them in a class discussion, and consider the following:

- Stumblin Falls (stumbling falls) (pp.4–5)
- Sir Bragalot (Lancelot/brags a lot) (p.7)
- Knight School (night school) (p.11)
- Isle Beback Castle (I'll be back) (p.42).

(Older or more able students will also enjoy the other humorous place names on pages 4 and 5, but they may need assistance understanding them.)

Next, create a medieval mural for the classroom wall. One group of students could paint the village on poster paper, and others could draw people to stick onto the scene. You could include: pages, squires, knights, lords, ladies, monks, scribes, blacksmiths, bakers, tailors, jailers, messengers, farmers, minstrels, fools, rat catchers and even dragons.

Lastly, provide strips of coloured paper for the students to label the people and places on the mural with humorous (but not rude) names. Some students might find it easier to come up with names if they work in groups. Work with those students who find this task especially challenging.

Written by Mary Atkinson



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