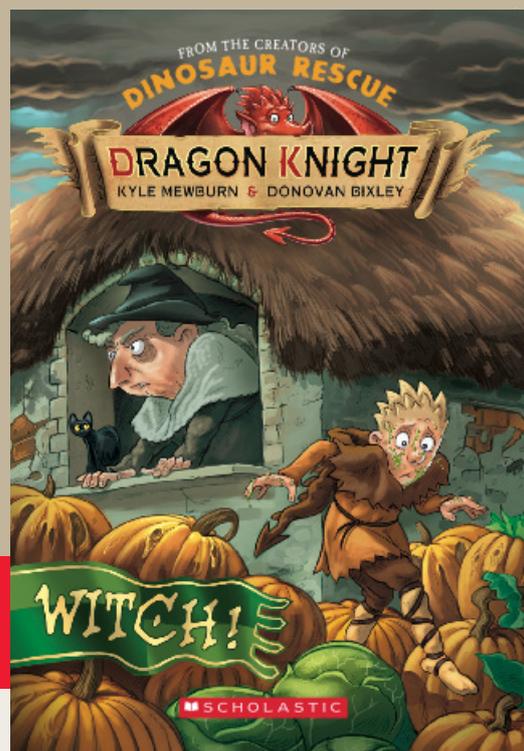


Dragon Knight: Witch!

Text by Kyle Mewburn

Illustrations by Donovan Bixley

- Reading • Writing • Visual Literacy
- Speaking • Drama • Health



About the Book

Dragon Knight: Witch! is the third title in a hilarious new series for young readers. The book's adventurous hero, Merek, is a shape-shifting dragon disguised as an ordinary boy. At the start of the book, Merek is covered in horrible green sores and is trapped in the town stocks. What's worse, his arch-enemy Percy is about to shoot him. Before readers can find out what happens, they are transported back to the start of this eventful day. Merek is disguised as a bat to avoid bandits when he notices Percy mistreating a large frog. Merek rescues the frog, and then makes a fool of Percy by becoming a ferocious dragon whenever Percy is alone, but turning into a lamb whenever Percy calls for help. At Knight School, Merek again ends up making a fool of Percy, but this time Percy knows it is him. Merek is instructed to shoot an apple off Percy's head. When he achieves this, Percy faints in front of the class. At lunchtime, Percy gets his revenge by chasing Merek with a bow and arrow. Merek hides in Granny Smith's vegetable plot disguised as a grub. There he nibbles a cabbage leaf, which turns out to be a brussels sprout – something he is allergic to. It brings him out in green spots and gives him terrible gas. What's worse, the town magistrate declares Granny Smith to be a witch who has put a curse on Merek. It is only with the help of Brin and Granny Smith herself that her innocence can be proven.

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 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 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 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, *Witch!* begins at the most dramatic part of the story (Merek is trapped in the stocks, about to be shot with a crossbow), 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.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the title page. Does the woman in the picture look like a witch? Why or why not? What is she holding? What sort of person do you think she is?
- [Ask your students to locate various places on the map and encourage them to work out the jokes in the place names as they do so.] (pp.4–5)
- Look at the characters on pages 6 and 7. Why do you think the author and illustrator showed these particular characters here?
- Granny Smith is the name of a character in this book. What else is Granny Smith the name of? (p.10)
- The magistrate thinks Granny Smith must be a witch because her garden grows better than his. What other explanation might there be for this happening? (p.10)
- Why was Merek locked in the stocks? (pp.11)
- Do you think the doctor would have sworn that Merek's illness was not a normal disease even if it was? What might happen to the doctor if he didn't agree with the magistrate? (p.12)
- What is an allergy? Why do you think these allergies are common among dragons? (p.13)
- What is Percy planning to do with the apple and crossbow? (pp.14–15)
- Merek is not in the stocks in this chapter. Why not? Has the story gone back or forward in time? (p.16)
- Why does Merek disguise himself as a bat? (pp.18–19)
- Why do you think he then changes into a huge frog? (pp.20–21)
- Do you think Percy deserves to be given such a fright? Why? (p.23)
- Why do you think the guards didn't bother to draw their swords? (p.24)
- What is a 'wild goose chase'? In this book, what do the authors mean by a 'wild dragon chase'? (p.27)
- What does the saying 'to pull the wool over someone's eyes' mean? (p.30)
- The guards say 'Wool you be all right, sire?' and 'Or should we sound the a-lamb ...' to Percy. How are they using words to tease him? (p.32)
- Which of the diseases on pages 34 and 35 would you least like to have? Why?
- Why didn't Asquith's students pay attention in his class? (pp.36–37)
- Which famous film character is the book character Double Oh Severn based on? (p.36)
- Who might Agent 'X' be? (p.37)
- What sort of soldiers are in the cavalry? Use a dictionary if you need help. (p.39)
- Why was Asquith pleased with Brin and Merek? (pp.40–41)
- Why do you think the illustrator chose to draw four narrow pictures for pages 44 and 45, rather than one big one?
- Is Sir Gerry a brave man? Does this make him a wise man? Why or why not? (p.49)
- How did the illustrator manage to show so much action on pages 50 and 51?
- On page 53, Sir Gerry says, 'I can handle an archery lesson by myself. What could possibly go wrong?' Do you think he is correct? Will everything go smoothly?
- What is a superstition? Do people today have superstitions? Can you think of any? (p.54)
- Why do you think the peasants thought that list-makers must be using witchcraft? (p.55)
- What does the title of this chapter mean? [Discuss the meaning of 'drawing the short straw' with your students.] (p.56)
- Why don't the arrows harm Sir Gerry's horse? (pp.56–57)
- The author wrote: His chest-plate was a porcupine of arrow shafts. What does this mean? (p.58)
- When do you think a knight would have worn ceremonial armour? How did you work this out? (p.60)
- What does 'Angel-maker' mean? Both 'angel-maker' and 'arbalest' start with the letter A. What is this writing technique called? [Alliteration] (p.61)
- Are all the important parts of the diagram labelled? What else could be labelled? (pp.62–63)
- How did Percy cheat? What do you think he wanted to do? What do you think is actually going to happen? (p.64)
- Why doesn't anyone in the class want to volunteer to take a shot with the Angel-maker? (p.65)
- What could go wrong for Merek if he misses the apple? (p.69)
- What different thoughts and feelings do you think were going through Percy's mind just before and after Merek shot the apple? (pp.70–71)
- Why do you think Percy is shooting at Merek? (p.73)
- What might the patch of green be? Why do you think this? (p.75)
- What does the author mean when he describes the garden as an oasis? What is an oasis? (p.76)



- Can you find two big examples of onomatopoeia on pages 76 and 77? Can you find any others?
- Who was the old lady? Why is she upset? (p.79)
- Why is Merek so full of gas? What problem is this causing? (p.81)
- Why is everyone so scared of Merek? (p.83)
- What would you do if you were in Merek's class? (p.85)
- What is the word 'cabbage' in quote marks? (p.86)
- Why did Merek tell a lie? Was he right to do so? (p.89)
- What do you think Brin is doing? Why? (p.91)
- How did Granny Smith help Brin save Merek? What sort of person is Granny Smith? What does she do with the plants she grows? (p.93)
- What do you think Merek's mum is up to? (p.95)
- Why did Merek think it had been such a memorably splendid day? (p.96)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: A MEMORABLY SPLENDID DAY?

At the end of the day, Merek decides his day has been memorably splendid. But did the other characters feel the same way? Investigate this idea by considering the day from the perspective of Granny Smith. Use shared writing to provide an example of what Granny Smith might have written in her diary at the day's end. Be sure to include both the events she witnessed and Granny Smith's thoughts and feelings. As you do so, discuss the features of a diary entry (e.g. first-person language, revealing of true feelings, etc.). Create a list for students to use as a checklist.

Ask the students to pick another character from the story, such as Percy, Brin or Asquith. Their task is to write a diary entry for that character describing the same day as he or she would have perceived it. Encourage the students to proofread one another's work. At the end, choose a variety of diary entries for students to read to the class.

ACTIVITY 2: DO WITCH HUNTS STILL EXIST?

Use *Witch!* as a springboard to discuss the concept of a witch hunt. Ask the students what they already know about witch hunts and list their ideas on a whiteboard or chart. As a class, discuss how in the past many women (and some men) were burned or hung as witches simply because they had skills, such as a knowledge of herbal medicines, that intimidated or frightened others. Talk about how once a witch hunt was underway, others were accused just because someone didn't like them and wanted to get rid of them.

Then discuss how, even today, we can bring misery to people who are different, especially if we see them as a threat. Talk about how this is a type of 'witch hunt'. Use a dictionary to explore the meaning of this term further.

[You could also provide titles such as the gory, but humorous, *Witches* by Terry Deary or the more serious *Witches: The Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem* by Rosalyn Schanzer for students to read. Online videos about the Salem witch hunts are also available, but take care to view a chosen video in its entirety first to ensure it is suitable for your students.]

Divide the students into groups to prepare plays based on the idea of a group of modern-day people (e.g. school children or neighbours) deciding to call someone a witch because they do something particularly well. Your students should demonstrate how this gets out of hand and leads to disaster. The groups should share their finished plays with the class.

ACTIVITY 3: STRETCHING THE TRUTH

Discuss the medieval diseases on pages 34 and 35 with your students. Talk about the way humour can be based partly on the truth and partly on exaggeration and pure invention.

Divide the students into five or more groups to research the different diseases shown. The goal of each group is to find out if the disease is real, what really causes it, and what, if anything, really cures it. They could use the Internet, encyclopedias and books to do their research. They should also consider how the author and illustrator made the information funny. Did they include any false information? The groups can then report their findings back to the class in the form of an oral presentation.

[It may help to choose a group with particularly able students in it to investigate the disease labelled 'ignorance'. Not all students may be able to understand the joke. Assistance may be needed even for able students.]

ACTIVITY 4: MEDIEVAL MEDICINE

Illness, healthcare and medicine during medieval times is a fascinating topic that many students would enjoy researching. Locate some books on this topic, such as *Dr. Medieval* by Laura Layton Strom. The books could be used as part of a guided-reading session or even as part of an inquiry learning project.

Written by Mary Atkinson



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC