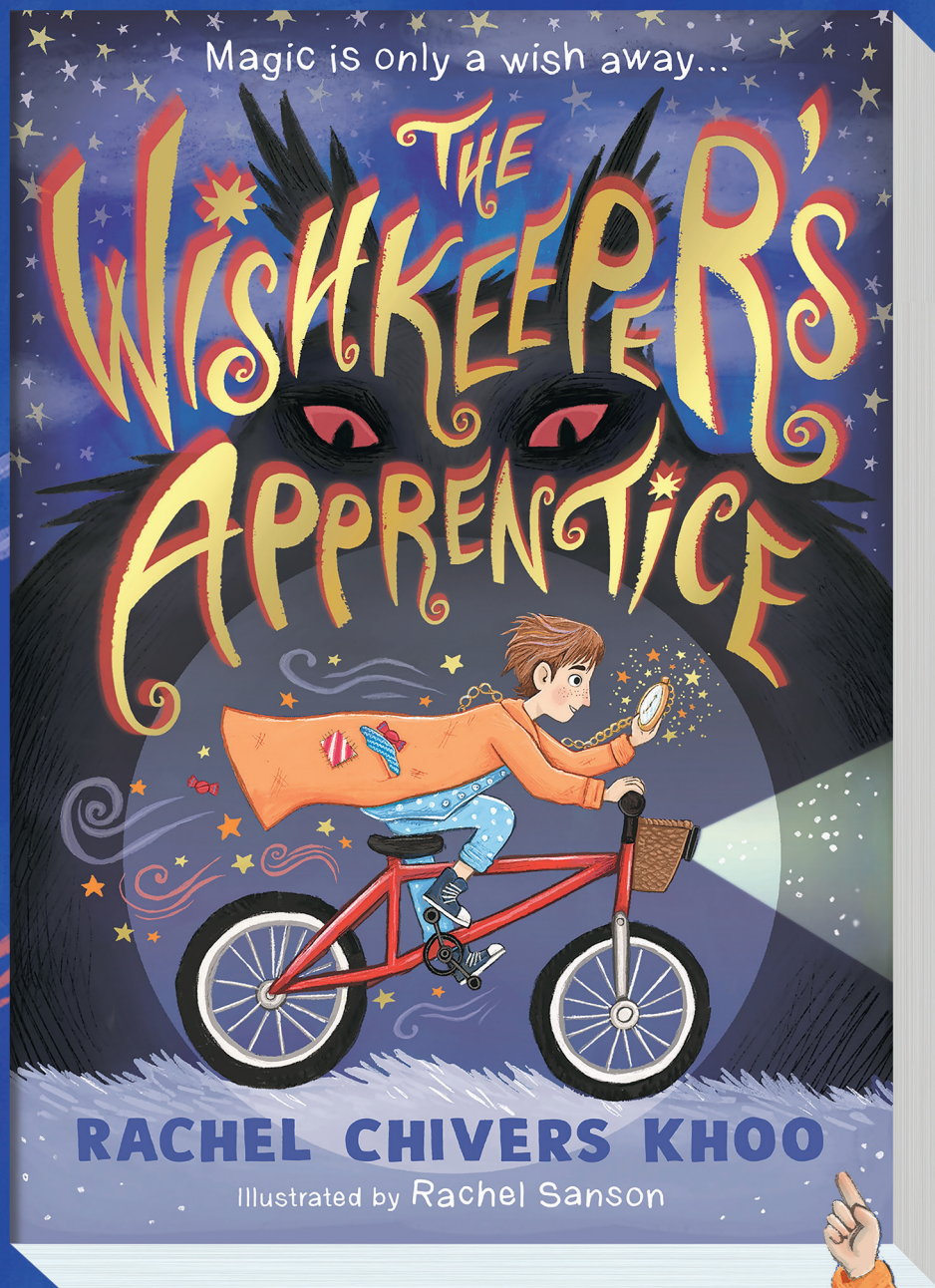


DISCUSSION GUIDE

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ABI ELPHINSTONE



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THE WISHKEEPER'S APPRENTICE

RACHEL CHIVERS KHOO

Illustrated by **Rachel Sanson**

ABOUT THE BOOK

A fast paced and classic children's fantasy, *The Wishkeeper's Apprentice* is a delightful book, just waiting for young readers to fall in love with it. Beautifully paced, with evocative illustrations bringing the narrative to life throughout, it is a perfect book for sharing and for emerging independent readers. Felix Jones never quite seems to fit in anymore, and with his big sister paying him ever less attention, life is becoming increasingly lonely. But when he finds the mysterious Wishkeeper, Rupus Beewinkle, fishing coins out of the wishing fountain, he little expects how much his life is about to change, or the perilous adventure that will follow.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Chivers Khoo was born in Belfast and spent most of her childhood sheltering in her local library from the endless Northern Irish rain. She studied English literature at Oxford before working in book publishing. Rachel now lives in London and writes stories in her tiny loft study. *The Wishkeeper's Apprentice* is her debut novel. You can say hello to Rachel online (Twitter: @Rach_Khoo; Instagram: @RachelChiversKhoo).

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Rachel Sanson is originally from a tiny town in the North of England, and she graduated from the University of Lincoln with a degree in illustration after 3 years in a little studio perched on the top of a very steep hill. She has illustrated a number of books for children, including *A Sea Otter to the Rescue*, which received the Gold Standard Selection Award from the Junior Library Guild.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

The Wishkeeper's Apprentice is a fantastic novel to engage young readers in book clubs and group discussion. Highly accessible but without feeling too 'young' it would work for a range of middle grade ages. Within are lots of topics and content to explore, but be aware that the book contains themes of loneliness and isolation, suggestions of parental loss, and childhood unhappiness. Ensure any required support is in place up front.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

To begin, ask anyone in the group to say something they like about the book. Can they explain why they liked it? How did the book make group members feel? What was anyone's favourite part? Was anyone reminded of anything else they've seen or read?

1. Felix Jones

'Felix knew that magical things didn't happen to people like him.' -p.17

What did anyone think of Felix at first – what are the readers' first impressions of the character? What did the group like about him? How did they feel towards him? How does Felix change throughout the book? Check understanding of the idea of a 'twist' in a book. Did anyone see the twist in this book coming? What hints or suggestions were there that Felix might be a wish? (Depending on the group you may wish to consider discussing the meaning of the name Felix and how this relates to the character.)

2. Rupus Beewinkle

'Tufts of white hair poked out from under the hood, framing his face in a fog of cloud.' -p.20

How does the author show the reader that Rupus isn't ordinary? That he's different from everything else in Whittlestone? You might like to think about his name, or his appearance, or his mannerisms. What is his character like? How does Rupus differ from the impression of other wishkeepers the reader gets from the Council of the Wishkeepers? Was Rupus right to grant Rebecca's wish?

3. Rebecca

'She was probably out with her friends and had forgotten all about him. She wasn't interested in spending time with him these days.' -p.16

What did anyone think of Rebecca? Why does anyone in the group think the Rebecca when the Jones family have forgotten Felix is so different from the Rebecca at the beginning of the book? What changes? Is it significant that both Felix and Rebecca's wishes are about each other? Is Felix's wish about his sister granted?

4. Wishkeeping

'Wishfulness, it turned out, was infectious.' -p.215

Who liked the idea of a being a Wishkeeper? Why? Did anyone not like the idea? Why not? Why are there so many rules about wishkeeping? What would happen if the rules weren't in place? What does the author mean that wishfulness is 'infectious'?

EXTENSION: Create a character profile for the Wishkeeper of the town your school is in – what would they be like? What name could they have? How would they look? What wishes might they be keeping? You could create an official Council of the Wishkeepers portfolio of all the new Wishkeepers.

5. Wishsnatching

'A wishsnatcher is the only creature I know of that can fill a place with this much misery.' -p.87

What attracts the wishsnatcher to Whittlestone? Look again at Felix's nightmare from p.46 together. Does it read any differently, once you know that Felix is a wish? Why does the author not reveal who Felix is before we first hear about the dream? Why would a wishkeeper without any wishes become a wishsnatcher, feeding on despair?

6. Whittlestone

'Would it surprise you to learn that Whittlestone was the most wishful place in the entire country until a month ago?' -p.67

Is Whittlestone a normal town? Does it sound like a normal town or a magical place? Why? What impression does the reader have of where Felix lives? Why might it be 'the most wishful place' in the country?

7. Apprenticeships

'Anyway, it's your moral duty to take on this apprenticeship. The very existence of Whittlestone as we know it depends on our work.' -p.71

What is an apprenticeship? What would it be like to be a wishkeeper's apprentice? What would be the best part? What would be the worst part? Do members of the group think there could be more adventures in Felix's apprenticeship? Look at the quotation given – what is a 'moral duty'? Do we have a moral duty to help people?

EXTENSION: Creative writing – write a new adventure for Felix and Rupus, as they deal with another wish in Whittlestone.

8. Wish boy

'Who needs a tank full of hope, bravery and wishfulness when you have an actual wish boy to save you?' -p.204

Why does Felix finding out where he came from give him such power against the wishsnatcher? Why is a *wish boy* the best protection Whittlestone could have? Depending on your group, you might explore what Felix 'represents' in the novel.