



Cursed!

Maureen Bush

Interest level: ages 8–11
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128 pages
AR Quiz # 141862

Consider the following question as you read *Cursed!*:

How does facing your darkest fears make you stronger?

Story

Jane is terrified of the masks hanging in her grandmother's stairwell, and even more scared of the Spirit Man in her grandmother's bathroom. After a week of avoiding him during a summer visit, she finally summons the courage to face him, minutes before leaving for the trip home. But her moment of triumph marks the beginning of a year of trouble for Jane and her family—trouble only Jane (and the Spirit Man) can fix.

Author

Born in Edmonton, **Maureen Bush** was raised there and in Calgary. She has worked as a public involvement consultant and trained as a mediator. Maureen is the author of *Feather Brain* (Orca, 2008) and two books in the Veil of Magic series. She lives in Calgary with her husband and two daughters. She can be contacted at www.maureenbush.com.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

- For the papier-mâché masks students make in Art (see below), have them write a short story or expository paragraph about how their mask came to be. Who made it? Why was it made? What was the mask used for? From what materials was it made?
- In the story, Jane writes Lewis lists of words to help him learn how to read. Have students set up a word bank from *Cursed!* and add new vocabulary items as they read through the story.
- Have students create sentences using several of the words from their *Cursed!* word banks.
- If only Jane could really explain what worries her so much about the Spirit Man! Have students write a letter from Jane to her grandmother that *really* describes the problem. Be sure to have students explain how Jane feels about the Spirit Man.
- Divide the class into 14 groups. Assign each group to expand a chapter into a screenplay for a movie adaptation of *Cursed!* Be sure to include important elements of a screenplay, such as *screen headings* and *parentheticals* (see link to screenwriting in Online Resources, below).
- Challenge students to write three new titles for the story that would give a good idea what it is about.
- Have students create an original character to add to the story. Have students include an illustration and description of their character, as well as information about how he or she would fit into the story.
- Have students write a newspaper article about a significant event that occurred in *Cursed!* Pre-teach the inverted pyramid style, and model for students how to lead with the main parts: who was involved; what, when and where the event occurred; why and how it happened. Start with the most important information at the beginning of the article, leaving supporting details closer to the end. The final part of the article should be a look ahead at what might happen next.
- Share some book reviews (online or in your local paper) with students. Using the book review website provided in Resources, below, for guidance, have students write a similar, critical review of *Cursed!* for the local newspaper.

Art

Make papier-mâché masks (see Resources, below, for guidelines). Have students decorate them in the style of the traditional masks of Papua New Guinea.

Social Studies

- As a class, study masks from different cultures. What is the significance of masks? Why were they used? How have they faded from importance as our societies move through time? Are masks still used and, if so, how?
- On a map of the world, have students locate Papua New Guinea. Review longitude and latitude by comparing the location of this country to where you live.
- Have students research Papua New Guinea. Who lives there? How do masks figure in the New Guineans' cultural history? Assign small groups to learn about the economy, geography, history and politics of this small country. Have the groups share their new-found knowledge with the class.
- Curses and spells have long been a part of many human cultures. Pair students up and assign them each a culture to investigate. Some possibilities include: Ancient Egypt; Hindu culture; Wicca; European culture; and Voodoo.

Science

- A heavy snowfall knocks out the power at Jane's house. Have students research the ice storm of 1998 in eastern Canada and the northeastern United States. What unique weather features combined to create such a dramatic storm? How did work crews manage to get the region up and running again?
- Discuss emergency preparedness with students. Investigate your province or state's emergency preparedness website. Encourage students to work with their families to create a disaster plan and an emergency supply kit.
- Invite a robotics expert to your classroom to talk to students about how robots are made and how they are used in modern society. Better yet, make some robots!

Math

- Invite a chess expert to teach students the game. (This might be a parent, another teacher, or even a skilled student.) Discuss strategy and planning in the game of chess.
- Chinooks are a unique weather feature of the Rocky Mountains. They can change temperatures quite significantly in a short period of time. Have students learn how chinooks work. Using data found online, have students graph temperature fluctuations as a result of chinook winds.

Health/Personal Planning

One day, when she's had enough hair pulling, Jane grabs Byron's hand and tells him to stop. What kind of courage does that take? How does Jane grow into having this kind of courage? Have students role play short skits where they take charge of a situation in which they are being bullied.

Drama

- Kara and Jane dig through Jane's basement to find costume ideas for Halloween. Have students create costumes from "found" items at home and in your classroom. With their costumes, students will work in groups to create original skits that in some way tell the story behind their costumes.
- Working in small groups, have students use their papier mache masks to develop a skit based on *Cursed!*
- Investigate with students the importance of masks and makeup in theatre over the years. For example, learn how masks were designed to amplify sound in Ancient Greece, or research why mimes do their makeup in a certain way.

Connecting to the Text

- Authors sometimes use *figurative* language to communicate meaning. In chapter 1, Jane describes the Spirit Man as seeming to be much larger than the toilet he stands beside. He "glowers and fills the room." He doesn't *really* fill the room—but figuratively speaking, he does. Work with students to brainstorm other examples of figurative language. (They don't have to be related to *Cursed!*, but it's okay if they are.) Can students find other examples from the book?
- Maureen Bush uses descriptive language throughout *Cursed!* to paint pictures in the reader's mind of what's going on in the story. Here's an example from chapter 6: "After a really awful day with Byron and Mrs. Von Hirschberg, I walked home with Lewis through a late-fall soggy day, gusts of wind dumping showers of water and wet leaves from the trees above us." Have students locate other examples of vivid description in the story. Then, have them rewrite sections of their own drafts using more descriptive language.
- Have students write about how Jane's character develops over the course of the story. They may choose to do this in paragraph form, or as a "growth curve" that's labeled with events in the story that contribute to her ability to conquer her fear. Alternatively, they may choose to do a Venn diagram that compares the "old" Jane with the "new" one.

- *Cursed!* is told from Jane's point of view. Have students choose a scene and flip-flop the point of view so that the Spirit Man is telling the story. Discuss with students: how does the feel of the story change when the narrator changes?
- Guide students through the creation of a plot diagram for a story that is familiar to them (*Little Red Riding Hood* or *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* are good ones). Divide students into groups and have them create a similar plot diagram for *Cursed!* Work with students to break the story into sections: the beginning; the rising action; the climax; the falling action; and the resolution.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Jane loves her old bear puppet, Old Moby. She tells it things and lets Old Moby “tell” stories to Lewis. Old Moby is allowed to say shocking things, whereas Jane can't. When you were her age, did you have a special toy or animal? What made it special to you?
2. Jane enjoys spending time with her little brother, Lewis. He always seems to understand Jane and know how to make her feel better. Her best friend, Kara, is a great friend to Jane too. Do you have someone in your corner like this? Explain.
3. Jane is terrified of the Spirit Man in her grandmother's bathroom, even though she knows it's just a statue. Have you ever been completely frightened of something that you knew just didn't make sense?
4. Jane's family knows itself to be brave and bold—with the exception of Jane. Her parents believe her to be a bit timid. How does your family view you? Are you happy with this, or do you wish you could change it somehow?
5. Jane finally summons the courage to show the Spirit Man that she's not afraid of him (sort of.) Tell about a time when you faced one of your big fears—and won.
6. When the Bartolomé's stay at the B&B with emus, fish, birds and cats, Jane says it's just the right place for her family. What would “just the right place” look like for your family?
7. As you see it, why does Byron like to bug other students so much?
8. At the end of the book, Jane feels that things are just a bit too perfect now that the Spirit Man is behaving again. But should she be rude to the Spirit Man again, just to make things interesting? What do you think?

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

When my girls were small, they were scared of the masks hanging above the stairs of their grandma's house. One day they snuck down the stairs, holding hands, so they could stick out their tongues at the masks. When my mom reminded me of this, years later, I thought it would be great for a story.

I created a timid girl, Jane, who's scared of the masks and even more scared of a statue in the bathroom.

The real spirit man lived in my mom's bathroom, until she gave him to my older daughter. He's too scary for her bedroom, so he stands on a ledge in our back entry and guards the back door.

I collected odd family stories for years and tossed them all into *Cursed!* I had pleurisy, and gave Jane's mom similar problems. My younger daughter had a birthday party where most of the guests didn't come, but it turned out to be really fun as they played a game with Egyptian curses and all died horrible deaths. She was also the inspiration for Lewis's reading problems, and *churtle* is her word (she's a great reader now, so don't worry about Lewis). I know a lovely large dog named Bear, who was written into my story. He's the only real "person" I've included in a story, although Jane's grandmother shares a lot with my mom (like the house in Sooke).

We have not, ever, been cursed. And we don't have all of Jane's dad's great toys, although we'd love to. We *ooh* and *ahh* over the catalogues that sell them whenever they arrive in the mail. I'd go for R2-D2 if I could choose one, although I think my daughters might want a Dalek.

Maureen Bush

Resources**Books***Fiction*

- Alexander, Lloys. *The Black Cauldron*
- Barrows, Annie. *Ivy and Bean*
- Coombs, Patricia. *Dorrie and the Witch Doctor*
- de Paola, Tomie. *Strega Nona*
- Dahl, Roald. *The Witches; Matilda*
- Fleischman, Sid. *The 13th Floor: A Ghost Story*
- Furlong, Monica. *Wise Child; Juniper*
- LeGuin, Ursula. *A Wizard of Earthsea*
- Lunn, Janet. *Double Spell*
- Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *The Witch Herself*
- Paolini, Christopher. *Eragon*
- Pratchett, Terry. *A Hat Full of Sky*

Rees, Celia. *Witch Child*
Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter series
Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*
Yolen, Jane. *The Bagpiper's Ghost*

Nonfiction

Barber, Elizabeth Wayland. *The Mummies of Urumchi*
Beahm, George. *The Whimsic Alley Book of Spells: Mythical Incantations for Magicians of All Ages*
Beyer, Mark. *Robotics: Life in the Future*
Causley, Charles. *The Puffin Book of Magic Verse*
Ching, Kaleo. *Faces of Your Soul: Rituals in Art, Maksmaking and Guided Imagery with Ancestors, Spirit Guides and Totem Animals*
Cook, David. *Robot Building for Beginners*
Copp, Gerry. *Great Papier Mache: Masks, Animals, Hats, Furniture*
Corazza, Iago. *The Last Men: Journey Among the Tribes of New Guinea*
Gillison, David. *New Guinea Ceremonies*
Jowers, Sidney Jackson. *Theatrical Costume, Masks, Make-Up and Wigs: A Bibliography and Iconography*
Nunley, John W. *Masks: Faces of Culture*
Rainier, Chris. *Where Masks Still Dance: New Guinea*
Schneebaum, Tobias. *Where the Spirits Dwell: An Odyssey in the Jungle of New Guinea*

Online

Papier-mâché Masks
www.kinderart.com/multic/machemask.shtml

Traditional Masks of Papua New Guinea
<http://www.art-pacific.com/artifacts/nuguinea/maskspko.htm>

Domestic Robots
www.robotshop.ca/personal-domestic-robots.html

The Ice Storm of 1998
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_American_ice_storm_of_1998
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ATA0009646>

Emergency Preparedness
<http://www.getprepared.gc.ca/index-eng.aspx>

Writing Book Reviews

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/bookrev/index.htm>

Makeup and Masks in Theatre

http://www.ehow.com/facts_4868752_history-makeup-theater.html

The World of Mime Theatre

<http://www.mime.info/>

Screenwriting

<http://www.screenwriting.info/>