



Walker Books Classroom Ideas



The Wonderling

Mira Bartók
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

Welcome to the Home for Wayward and Misbegotten Creatures, an institution run by evil Miss Carbunkle, a cunning villainess who believes her terrified young charges exist only to serve and suffer. Part animal and part human, the groundlings toil in classroom and factory, forbidden to enjoy anything regular children have, most particularly singing and music. For the Wonderling, an innocent-hearted, one-eared, fox-like eleven-year-old with only a number rather than a proper name – a 13 etched on a medallion around his neck – it is the only home he has ever known. But unexpected courage leads him to acquire the loyalty of a young bird groundling named Trinket, who gives the Home's loneliest inhabitant two incredible gifts: a real name – Arthur, like the good king in the old stories – and a best friend. Using Trinket's ingenious invention, the pair escape over the wall and embark on an adventure that will take them out into the wider world and ultimately down the path of sweet Arthur's true destiny.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Mira Bartók is a writer and artist whose New York Times bestselling memoir, *The Memory Palace: A Memoir*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography. *The Wonderling* is her first novel for young readers. She lives in Western Massachusetts.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary years 4-6
- Ages 9+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Middle grade fiction
- Fantasy

Themes/Ideas:

- Friendship
- Bullying
- Resourcefulness



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before Reading

View the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title
- The author and illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb.

What do you think the book might be about from looking at the title only? Do your ideas change after seeing the cover? Write an imaginative story using the title *The Wonderling*.

Read the book aloud to the class without showing the illustrations. Ask students to draw or make an image in their mind of the different versions of the octopus' rocket. Read the book again, showing the illustrations to the class. How do the illustrations change the story?

Exploring the Book

Is *The Wonderling* an imaginative, informative or persuasive text? Is it a combination of more than one of these types of texts? How can you tell? Who do you think the book was created for?

Keep a vocabulary journal while reading this book. Take note of unfamiliar words or words that you like. Find their meaning in a dictionary. Use the following list as a starting point:

- Inauspicious (3)
- Wayward (6)
- Misbegotten (6)
- Threadbare (11)
- Gamut (21)
- Etiquette (36)
- Ravenous (67)
- Flight (as in "...calling two young orphans to take flight.") (94)

What are the themes in *The Wonderling*? Write a statement of belief for each theme, then assess how *The Wonderling's* treatment of these themes makes you feel.

For much of his life Arthur doesn't have a proper name, just Number Thirteen and a selection of nicknames. What is the importance of having a name? How does not having a proper name make Arthur feel?

Have a class discussion about what it means to be a hero or heroine. What qualities of character do your favourite heroes and heroines have? Who are your favourite heroes and heroines in real life, in the news, in other stories? How do the characters in *The Wonderling* demonstrate these qualities?

Several characters show Arthur kindness that he had rarely experienced in his early life. What is kindness? Do you think kindness is an important quality for a person to have? Why? What characters showed Arthur kindness and why?

Trinket tells Arthur that he has a destiny. What does this mean? Can you think of other literary characters that have a destiny? How does this help drive the story?

During *The Wonderling*, the narrator talks directly to the reader, for example "And did this revelations make our young hero dream of escape? Did he try to imagine the Great White City? Of course he did. But what could he compare it to?" p81-82. What effect does this have on the reader? How might the story be different if the narrator did not talk directly to the reader? Or if Arthur or another character was the narrator?

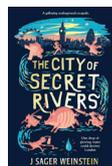
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