



The LANGUAGE of SPELLS

Garret Weyr illustrated by
Katie Harnett

978-1-4521-5958-4 • \$16.99 HC
Ages 10 and up • F&P Text Level Gradient: V
Lexile® Measure: 900L

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Sometimes, even today, magic still happens. Grisha is a dragon in a world that's forgotten how to see him. Maggie is an unusual child but thinks she is ordinary. They're an unlikely duo—but magic often makes unlikely friendships.

If you pay attention, you will understand why magic has chosen you. And magic has chosen Grisha and Maggie to solve the darkest mystery in Vienna. Decades ago, it was decided that there were too many dragons. As Grisha and Maggie navigate the inner bureaucracies of the Department of Extinct Exotics, negotiate with talking cats, and evade a dangerous magician, the two friends ask the question everyone's forgotten: Where have the missing dragons gone? And is there a way to save them?

Richly magical and tragically historical, *The Language of Spells* is an adventure about remembering old stories, forging new ones, and the transformative power of friendship.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide contains discussion questions designed to spark conversation about themes and ideas raised by this novel.

This guide was prepared by Sharon Haupt, District Librarian, San Luis Coastal Unified School District. For more information or questions about this discussion guide, contact Jaime Wong at jaime_wong@chroniclebooks.com.

◆ ◆ ◆ Discussion Guide ◆ ◆ ◆

1. As you study the title of the book and browse through the chapter headings and the artwork, what do you think this book is going to be about? What clues do you see in the pictures that could lead you to understand the setting, characters, themes, and issues that might be significant in the book?
2. The prologue is titled “The Famous and the Ordinary,” and gives us a hint of what is to come. What is the author trying to tell us about this story? Consider the following quote: “Magic is funny in that way: It chooses those who might not choose themselves. In fact, one of the many rules governing the world of magic is that if you pay attention, you will understand how magic has chosen you. And why” (page viii). What do you think the author is trying to convey here?
3. In the year 1803, Grisha the dragon is the last of his kind to be born. Why do you think he is the last? What is “the world of men” that the author is referring to, and why is this important for Grisha? What can you infer about this time and what the future might be like? What do you think will be special about Grisha? As you are reading, find examples in the story that support your answers.
4. At one point, Grisha becomes enchanted and turned into an object—what is that object? How did this happen? How does the “language of spells” play into Grisha’s journey? Is it a good thing that Grisha has changed? What are the positive and negative consequences of these changes?
5. Instead of being raised by his mother and father, Grisha grows up in the company of Leopold and Yakov. What parts of Grisha’s personality do you think would have stayed the same regardless of who raised him (i.e., the influence of nature), and what parts of his personality were shaped by Leopold and Yakov (i.e., the influence of nurture)?
6. The story starts out from Grisha’s point of view, and as we move forward we meet Maggie and hear her voice. Why might the author have chosen to tell the story from these different points of view? How did the different narrative voices change your experience of the story? Did you prefer one voice over the other? If yes, why?
7. Maggie grows up with a father who is a famous poet, and the faint memory of a mother who was a famous painter. What makes Maggie special? How would you describe Maggie? How is her life different from that of most kids growing up in a city?
8. What defines school for Maggie? How does she get her education? What are the most important lessons that she learns? Would you prefer to have this kind of education? Why or why not?
9. Maggie is also lonely and doesn’t have friends. Why do she and Grisha become friends? What do Maggie and Grisha provide for each other?
10. On page 101, Grisha and Maggie talk about stories. Grisha claims he doesn’t have a story, while Maggie says of course he does—everyone has stories. What does Maggie mean? What makes Grisha so reluctant to tell his story? If someone asked you the story of your life, what events would you include? What would you choose to leave out?
11. In Chapter 13, Grisha explains the rules of magic to Maggie. How is Grisha’s story essential to Maggie’s understanding about what is happening in the present? How does Maggie react? What does she do with her newfound knowledge? How would you react in this kind of situation? What would you do to help Grisha?
12. As Grisha’s story progresses, we learn that all the dragons were brought to Vienna and then separated into groups based on their eye color. Some colors were valued more than others, so some dragons had more freedom while others were “processed.” During this time period, what else was happening in Europe that mirrors what happened in Grisha’s story? How does the book change or add to your understanding of this period of history?



◆ ◆ ◆ Discussion Guide ◆ ◆ ◆

13. In the book, people have forgotten how to “see” dragons. What does this mean? Why has this happened, and could this have been prevented? Can you draw any parallels to the world today? What are some examples of how we don’t always “see” things for what they really are?
14. Many might call Grisha and Maggie’s adventure a “hero’s journey.” What is a hero’s journey? What motivations do Grisha and Maggie have that drive them to embark on their journey? Describe what happens as Grisha and Maggie move from the known to the unknown and back again. Define the adventure, the crises, the victory, and how they are changed as a result.
15. Before they begin their journey, Maggie must persuade her father to let her travel to London by herself (pages 198–199 and 204–206). What techniques does she use to convince him to let her go? Prepare a persuasive speech to convince your friend, teacher, or parent/grandparent that you need to go on a faraway journey. What would you do to convince them?
16. The author uses figurative language, voice, and a writing style that gives us a sense of time and place. How does her language and writing style contribute to the setting? What are the first three words you would use to describe the way Vienna is depicted in this book? Would you like to visit this world? Why or why not?
17. In the last chapter, Maggie reflects on what has happened—what might have been and what might be. She is sad, and disheartened that she can’t “see” Grisha. “After all, even when you can’t see it, magic is still there, tucked into shadows and corners. It’s visible, but only if you look” (page 295). What does this mean? How has Maggie changed through her friendship with Grisha and her experience with magic, and what will her future look like?
18. The author doesn’t always tell the story in sequential order. There are flashbacks, subplots, and backstories. Does this make the story clearer or more confusing? Why might the author do this? How do these elements fit the pieces of the story together?
19. If you could write a sequel to this story, what would it include? Brainstorm with a partner or group what you might include in the first chapter of your book. What do you imagine Maggie’s next adventure to be?
20. Imagine sitting down for hot chocolate and fermented Apfelsaft with Grisha and Maggie at the Sacher Hotel. What would you ask them, and why?



Garret Weyr

Garret Weyr is the author of six novels, some of which have been banned, translated into a multitude of languages, and included in college curricula. She has an MFA from NYU and grew up in New York City. She now lives elsewhere with a lot of books and too many teacups.

Katie Harnett

Katie Harnett is an illustrator based in the UK. She was the recipient of the Bologna Children’s Book Fair Ars in Fabula Grant Award 2015, and her work has twice been selected to be exhibited in the Illustrators Exhibition at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair.