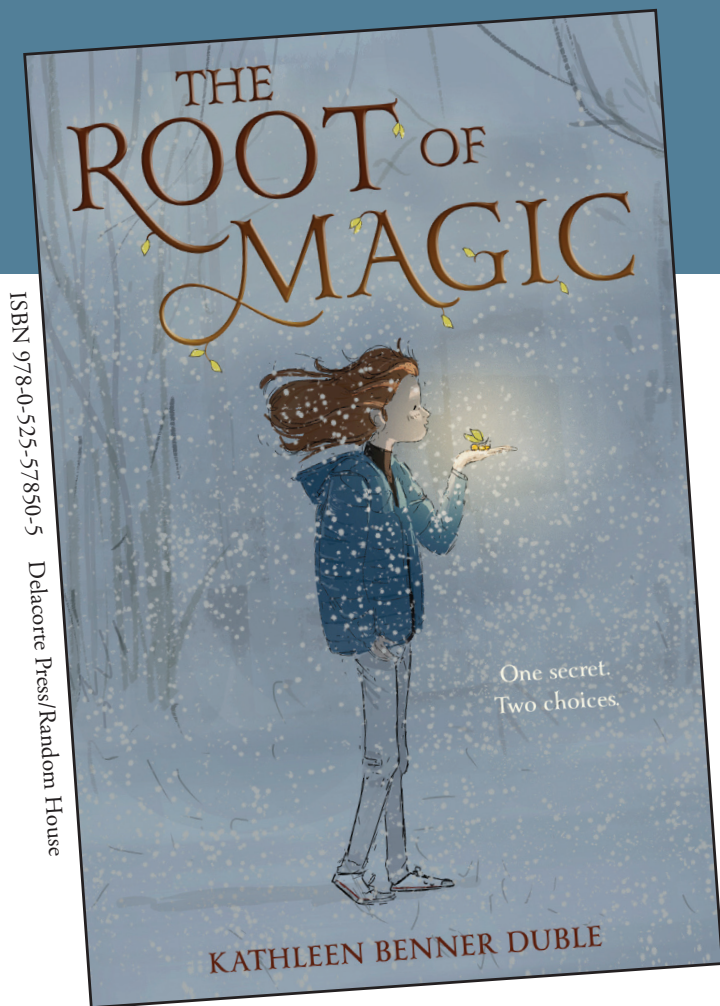


DISCUSSION GUIDE



THE ROOT OF MAGIC

BY
Kathleen Benner Duble



WILLOW KNOWS the unknown is scary. Especially since her little brother has been sick for a long time and nobody has been able to figure out why. All Willow wants is for Wisp to get better and for her life to go back to normal.

But when she and her family find themselves stranded in an unusual town in the middle of nowhere, strange things start to happen, and their life begins to change in the most unexpected ways.

After one too many coincidences, Willow discovers that the town isn't just unusual—it's magical. When her family begins to embrace the town, she finds new friends and hidden truths that aren't as simple as they seem. Then Willow must decide: Return home and leave the magic behind . . . or stay forever?

Kathleen Benner Duble's engaging blend of realism and fantasy will have young readers pondering if life is better lived with certainty or with endless possibilities.

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The Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are noted throughout. For more information on the Common Core, visit corestandards.org.









DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Unless otherwise noted, discussion questions are aligned with the following standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1

-  The novel begins with DuChard Unspoken Family Rule #1: “You are never, ever, to say the words ‘death’ or ‘die’ when Wisp is within earshot.” Discuss how this unspoken rule sets the stage for an important theme in the story.
-  Why is there tension in the car when Wisp mentions his father as the DuChard family drives in the blizzard?
-  The novel’s title, *The Root of Magic*, leads the reader to anticipate mysterious forces at work as the story unfolds. What aspects of the car accident and the rescue of Willow’s family in the snowstorm hint at the theme of unexpected, magical elements? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2**
-  The McHenrys deposit Willow and her family at a bed and breakfast run by Cora in the small town of Kismet, Maine. What does Cora do that seems to suggest she had been expecting Willow’s family to arrive at the inn that night?
-  Wisp’s mysterious illness not only affects his day-to-day life but also the lives of those in his family. How does the pressure of caring for a sick child affect the relationship between his mother and father? How does Wisp’s illness affect the relationships between Willow and each of her parents? Between Willow and Wisp? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6**
-  What unusual behavior does Willow witness when she looks out her window one night while staying at Cora’s inn?
-  Who is Topher Dawson and what role does he play in Willow’s life during her stay in Kismet?
-  How does having their fathers absent from their day-to-day lives affect Topher and Willow? As the eldest children in their families, what new roles and responsibilities are the two forced to assume? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3**
-  What odd things happen at Wallace Diner that hint that life in Kismet is not quite normal?

-  The DuChard family is initially eager to leave Kismet and get back home after their car accident. Why does Willow's mom have a change of heart and decide that the family should stay in Kismet for a while?
-  When Topher and Willow go ice skating on the lake, they cross paths with Angeline and Grace. Why do you think that Angeline and Grace are hostile to Willow? What role do these two characters play in the novel? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#)
-  How is the theme of the unknown versus the predictable evident in the catastrophe that Willow and Topher narrowly avert while ice skating on the lake? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2](#)
-  Angeline comes upon Willow inside of the brick building. When Willow questions why Angeline did not stop her from entering the forbidden room where the berries grow, Angeline replies: "You can't change the future, silly. You would have gotten in whether I tried to stop you or not. It's your fate." Discuss the contrast between what Willow's sees as exerting her free will and Angeline defines as fate. Is Willow's attempt to uncover the secret of Kismet a result of her free will or is it part of a larger frame of preordained events? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5](#)
-  Topher wishes to do something unpredictable for his thirteenth birthday. Why is Topher so strongly drawn toward spontaneity? How does this attraction to the unexpected reveal Topher's sentiments about life in Kismet? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#)
-  Topher's mixed feelings about his thirteenth birthday and impending decision about his life in Kismet center around the idea of fate. Discuss Topher's struggles with a life devoid of mystery and the power of decision. How do Willow's thoughts on free will versus fate compare to Topher's thoughts on the topic? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6](#)
-  Willow's mother is drawn to a life where each day brings an expected outcome. After the grinding stress of caring for Wisp, she welcomes a life of predictability. What are the hidden costs of such a life for Willow's mom? Discuss the pros and cons of her life where the next day is revealed but life's problems are not erased. Is it better to know beforehand when challenges lay ahead? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2](#)
-  Were you surprised by Topher's and Willow's final choices? By Mrs. DuChard's actions on the bridge? What choice would you have made if you were Willow? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.6](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.6](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6](#)

ACTIVITIES

Opinion Piece

At one point in the story, Cora tells Willow, “It would be nice to know what will happen, wouldn’t it? To be better prepared when hard times come your way?” What are your thoughts about Cora’s statement? Write an opinion piece that explores fate versus free will. State your opinion clearly, making sure to cite reasons and examples from the story to support it. If applicable, present a counter argument to your opinion.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1

Title Treatment

The author does not provide titles for the chapters in *The Root of Magic*. Work with a partner or small group to synthesize the information in each chapter in the novel. Use the main ideas from each chapter to create a meaningful title for each of the thirty chapters. Create a table of contents that lists your original chapter titles and the page numbers for each chapter.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2

Picture This

The author uses rich and vivid language to portray what Willow sees inside the forbidden room in the brick building. Re-read the last section of chapter 18, where the room and its contents are described. Use this description to create a detailed and colorful illustration of the secret room in the brick building.

Happily Ever After?

The Root of Magic ends dramatically with key decisions made and families reunited at the bridge that links Kismet to the outside world. Willow feels “that the true magic of life lies in those days that are not yet known.” Imagine what happens to the DuChard family and to Topher and his father as they leave a world of the known for a world of uncertainty. Write an epilogue to the story that details what happens to the friendship between Topher and Willow, to the health of Wisp, and to the relationships between family members.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3

The discussion questions and activities in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the global education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both master’s and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

QUOTE ME

Name: _____

Choose three characters from the novel. Select a meaningful quotation from the book for each character. The quotes should reveal or highlight an important trait for each character.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2

CHARACTER

CHARACTER

CHARACTER

Name: _____

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE SETTING

After a car accident during a snowstorm, the DuChard family spends time in the town of Kismet, Maine. During their stay in Kismet, the family experiences smaller settings within the town—Cora’s bed and breakfast, Wallace Diner, the skating pond, the bridge, the brick building, and many others. Select one of the smaller settings in Kismet to analyze in depth.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3



SETTING



Quotes describing the setting

Events that happen in the setting

Emotions that the characters and/or the reader feel/s about the setting

An illustration of the setting

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS



Select four characters from *The Root of Magic*. For each, identify a significant action that reveals something about his/her character. Then note why you believe the character acted in this way.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

CHARACTER

Action

Motivation

CHARACTER

Action

Motivation

CHARACTER

Action

Motivation

CHARACTER

Action

Motivation
