

Resources and Ideas for Using *The Magic Half* with Students by Christine Boral, educational consultant

WRITING PROMPTS:

These prompts can help you use *The Magic Half* to inspire writing. By making text-to-self connections in writing, children can interact creatively with literature. These writing prompts are suitable for papers or journaling.

1. On page 116, Miri imagines having to describe Astroturf to Molly:

She looked at the bright Astroturf in front of the fast-food place. Now that was totally weird. She imagined trying to explain Astroturf to Molly—it's fake grass that doesn't look like grass, and everybody knows it's fake, but they put it on the ground and everyone pretends it's real.

Think about something that has been invented or become popular in the last ten years (for example: iPods, cellphones, tapioca drinks). How would you describe it to someone who has never seen or experienced or even heard of it?

2. In Chapter 12, Miri thinks about time and whether the present day as she knows it would be different if she could go back in time and change something. She thinks about the chip in her kitchen floor caused by a frying pan that had been dropped in the past. She wonders "But if the past changes, wouldn't that make everything different in the present?"

If you could change something in the past, what would it be? Would it be something historical or personal? How would that change affect the present day as you know it? Would things be better or worse? Describe.

LANGUAGE ARTS:

In *The Magic Half*, author Annie Barrows uses homographs (a word with the same spelling as another or others but with a different meaning, and sometimes, a different pronunciation) to show differences between the eras in which characters Miri and Molly live.

Page 51:
Homograph: Great

Miri tried to remember what she had learned in fifth-grade history. 1935. What was going on in 1935? Was it flappers and the Charleston? No, that's the twenties, she thought. Uh-oh. The Depression. The thirties were the Great Depression. "Great!" she moaned.

Molly looked at her with interest. It was the first non-sobbing noise she had made in a long time. "What?"

"1935! Right in the middle of the Great Depression! I have to get stuck in the Depression! Sheesh!"

"I never heard anybody call it 'great' before," said Molly.

"Great like big, not like terrific."

"Oh."

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Homograph: Cool

"How do I work it?" Molly asked, frowning at the CD player.

Miri knelt besides her. "See, just press this button, right here—" She pressed, and Deathbag's howls and screams came, very quietly, from the speaker.

Molly was fascinated. "What's that? Why are they screaming like that?"

"It's music. Robbie and Ray think it's supercool." Miri rolled her eyes.

"What do you mean, cool?"

"Cool means—um—good, popular." Molly nodded, but Miri wasn't sure she got it.

Activity:

Create a homograph list or graph. List other homographs you can think of. Here's one to start:

Lick = taste, eat or defeat

Now use them in sentences to show different meanings and context:

You can lick an ice cream cone or lick someone in a fight.

VISUAL ARTS/SOCIAL STUDIES:

Comparing Periods in Time

Visuals can communicate information without words. In *The Magic Half*, the reader and characters travel between modern-day twenty-first century and the year 1935—or the decades of the 2000's and 1930's. Author Annie Barrows gives the reader clues to help him/her have a sense of what these time periods look, sound and smell like. For example, she uses an old iron bed, old doll carriage, a pigpen by the barn and books on the shelf like *Little Women* and *Eight Cousins* to give a sense of time and place to the reader. She also uses the sense of smell and sound: "Nothing buzzed or beeped or rang. The air smelled less like cars and more like animals."

Imagine you were transported back in time and landed in your house and neighborhood. Choose one of the following: 25, 50, 75 or 100 years ago. What year is it? Research details from the internet, books in the library or old magazines from that period of time. Were there cars and if so, what did they look like? What type of clothing was worn? What did product packaging look like (for example, gum or Coca Cola)? Hair styles? What were the popular books?

Folding a piece of construction paper in half, create a collage featuring the current time period on one side and the period from the past on the other. Cut out, photo copy or print out illustrations and images you find. Compare and contrast the similarities and differences.

Using the same media above, research details from present time vs. the period from the past. What was the cost of 1 gallon of milk? Cost of 1 dozen eggs? A car or bicycle? A suit or pair of shoes?

Make a chart or Venn diagram to illustrate the differences between current day and the time period chosen.

Creating a Time Capsule

Create a time capsule for someone your age in the future. What would you include in the capsule? What items could you include to give that person a sense of history, popular food or drink, literature, environment, clothing, pop culture like music or TV and activities you like?

MATH:

On the website, www.anniebarrows.com/magichalf/stuff/ author Annie Barrows wrote interesting facts about twins including the mathematical probability of having twins. The odds of having two sets of twins in one family is roughly 1 in 50,000.

Although it's not very common for this to happen, let's imagine your family had two sets of twins plus you:

Think about the last 5 things that were purchased for you. For example, the last pair of sneakers, the last birthday present, or the last book you bought.

Create a chart listing the last 5 things that were purchased for you. Research the cost of each item and list that. Calculate how much money would be needed to purchase all of these items for your new big family with two sets of twins.

Take this exercise further. Calculate how much your family's grocery bill would expand if you now had two sets of twins in your family. Would your current car fit all of you? If not, how much would a new car cost? What about your house? Is there enough room?