



The Seventh Wish

by Kate Messner

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An Educator's Guide for Classroom Use

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About The Seventh Wish

Charlie feels like she's always coming in last. From her Mom's new job to her sister's life away at college, everything else always seems to be more important than Charlie's upcoming dance competition or science project. Unsure of how to get her family's attention, Charlie comes across the surprise of her life one day while ice-fishing . . . in the form of a floppy, scaly fish offering to grant her a wish in exchange for its freedom. Charlie can't believe her luck until she realizes that this fish has a funny way of granting wishes, despite her best intentions. But when her family faces a challenge bigger than any they've ever experienced, Charlie wonders if some things might be too important to risk on a wish.

See more at: <http://bloomsbury.com/us/the-seventh-wish-9781619633766/#sthash.pSspg5vW.dpuf>

Teacher to Teacher

Dear Colleague,

The Seventh Wish is an important book in today's landscape of literature and young people. The story is both honest and heart-felt, weaving themes of wishes, fierce love for family, and acceptance of circumstances beyond our control. With respectful, age-appropriate writing, Kate Messner has given middle grade readers a lens into the realistic ache and struggle of Charlie Brennan and her family, who--like too many families in our country--are facing the tragedy of a loved one with opioid addiction.

The Seventh Wish opened the doors to conversation in my classroom, making it a safe space for asking questions and discussing together the dangers and risks that result from substance use. Befriending Charlie allowed students to approach this serious disease of addiction with care and empathy, which I believe will shape them to be more compassionate, understanding beings. I hope this for your classrooms and students as well.

Melissa Guerrette
Grade 5 Teacher



Chapter by Chapter Questions

Chapters 1 & 2

- What is Charlie's motivation for ice fishing?
- Why does Charlie forgo her fear of the ice?
- What is Mrs. McNeill's perspective on magic and luck? How does her perspective compare to your own?

Chapters 3 & 4

- Compare Abby's behavior in this chapter to her response when Charlie wanted her to go look for the ice flowers.
- Charlie seems undecided about whether to believe in the magic of the wish fish. What do you think? Why?
- Explain what Charlie is discovering about her wishes.
- As Charlie contemplates making a second wish, she evaluates the difference between selfish and selfless wishes. How would you classify her wishes?

Chapters 5 & 6

- If you were in Charlie's place at the end of chapter 5, what would you wish for next?
- The author introduces a new character, Leah, in chapter 6. How might this new character change or impact the story?
- Is Charlie growing too attached to the wish fish? Explain your opinion.

Chapter 7 & 8

- Name the feelings Charlie experiences in this chapter. Is she justified in these feelings? Why or why not?
- Why does Charlie go to the ice alone even though her conscience tells her not to?
- Charlie made a wish for Abby to come home, and now that she is, Charlie is unhappy. Can she be upset about her wish being granted?

Chapter 9 & 10

- Abby has been pretty absent from Charlie's life while she's away at college. Does she deserve Charlie's loyalty? Should Charlie keep her secret?
- How has Charlie's outlook about the wish fish changed?
- Mrs. McNeill has an honest conversation with Charlie about Drew's grandfather. What does Charlie begin to think about and understand more after their time together on the ice?
- What is heroin? What inferences can we make about Abby's choices?

Chapter 11

- Why does Charlie believe the university health center nurses are mistaken?
- How is Charlie's craving for the ice and ice fishing similar to and different from Abby's addiction?
- What do you imagine Charlie wants to say to Abby? What might you want to say if Abby were your older sister?
- Charlie had an image in her head of who a drug user was. How is her perspective changing?

Chapter 12

- What do Charlie's old text messages reveal about Abby's personality? What does Charlie miss about Abby?
- The sign over the door at Forest Hills reads, "You are no longer alone." Why would this sign cause Abby to be emotional?
- Sometimes more is said in what is left unsaid. What do you think Charlie is really saying in her simple goodbye? What is Abby saying?

Chapter 13

- Charlie keeps referring to "old Abby." Are there really two Abbys?
- Charlie has wished on the wish fish with good intentions. Have Charlie's wishes been helpful? Explain why or why not.
- List the things Charlie is doing to keep her mind off Abby. Is she succeeding?

Chapter 14

- When Charlie goes to Visiting Day, she does a lot of observing at the rehab center, especially while waiting for the AA meeting to begin. What assumptions does she make? How are her assumptions challenged?
- Charlie is beginning to realize the depth of Abby's lies and her effort to hide her addiction. Why do addicts work so hard to keep their addiction secret?

Chapter 15

- How is Charlie's perception of an addict changed by Carolyn, Leah's mom? By Jason?
- Does it surprise you that Charlie was straightforward with Leah? Why or why not?
- How is addiction a different disease than a cold, the chicken pox, or even cancer?
- Charlie wonders about the Serenity Prayer and its appropriateness for kids. What things about Charlie's situation is Charlie in control of? What can she change? What can she not change?
- What do you think about Charlie's decision to wish again, a sixth time?

Chapter 16, 17 , & 18

- What consequences does Abby pay for her addiction? What consequences do Charlie and her family face?
- Charlie claims that she doesn't need any more wishes. Do you believe she is through with wishing? Why or why not?

Chapter 19 & 20

- What does Charlie mean when she says, "Abby is Abby again."?
- Describe the range of emotions Charlie experiences in these chapters.
- What could be keeping Abby from watching Charlie dance?

Chapter 21 & 22

- Why is it relevant that Charlie keeps mentioning that her mother is a school nurse?
- Why does Charlie believe that the wish fish will be the answer to her family's problem? Can magic help Abby?
- Why did Charlie go out on the ice to find the fish even though she knew the rules? Why wasn't Charlie afraid to go out on the thin ice alone?

Chapter 23

- Why can't Abby make the promise Charlie wants her to keep?
- Why does Charlie's promise to Abby mean more than a signature on the D.A.R.E. car?
- What truth about Abby's addiction does Charlie finally begin to accept?
- Did Charlie's wishes reverse when her seventh wish attempt failed? Explain your opinion.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10]

Resources for Talking with Students about Substance Use & Addiction

Local Police Departments, Clinics, and Hospitals

Don't underestimate the power of community partnerships. Reach out to your local law enforcement and health care professionals in search of answers to tough questions. Consider inviting these guests to your classroom for age-appropriate discussions.

Al-Anon Family Groups - www.al-anon.org

A website of resources and supports for family members--including children--impacted by addiction.

D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) - www.dare.org

Since 1983, the D.A.R.E. program has been part of schools across America with law enforcement personnel delivering lessons about peer pressure, drug and alcohol awareness, and more recently bullying and internet safety.

National Institute for Drug Abuse - <https://www.drugabuse.gov/parents-educators>

The parent & educator pages of the NIDA site include publications/resources that educators can request free of charge and videos related to addiction science.

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids - <http://www.drugfree.org>

Resources at this site include guides and video supports with ideas for opening conversations with kids about drug and alcohol use, as well as answers to some frequently asked questions from kids.

For More Discussion

Charlie's seven wishes impacted many other characters in the story. Retrace each wish. Who did the wish impact, and was it a positive or negative effect for that character? Cite evidence to support your thinking. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2-3]

Reflecting on her own use of wishes, Charlie references other well-known stories of wishing: "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*," "*The Monkey's Paw*," and "*The Fisherman and his Wife*." Read one of these other wish stories. Compare and contrast the traditional tale to *The Seventh Wish*. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9]

Even though Charlie had a hard time understanding and accepting Abby's addiction, she kept her struggle to herself and chose not to tell her closest friends. What was Charlie's fear or reservation about being honest with her friends? If you were Charlie's friend, how would you have responded to her family's trouble? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3]

Throughout the book, Mrs. McNeill offers Charlie wisdom, but when she visits Charlie in the hospital at the end of the books, she sums it up like this:

"You know the thing about magic, Charlie? We can wish on clovers and shooting stars and ice flowers all we want. But in the end, the only real magic is what's inside of us and the people we love. Some things are beyond even that magic." (p. 210)

What was Mrs. McNeill trying to explain to Charlie? What does this wisdom mean for you? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5]

*"When the beat hits, I lift my knee and kick out.
"And I'm dancing. Dancing and stomping and kicking, and the loudness of these fast, stomping shoes fills the room. It fills me, until I'm out of breath but bursting with energy because even when I'm scared and worried about Abby, this...this is something I can do. I can fill myself with the energy of this dance, the sound of music and stomps and clicks, the feeling of flying over the floor with Dasha behind me."* (p. 223-224)

Charlie's passion for Irish dancing was her outlet for coping with complicated feelings and things beyond her control. What are some things you love and lean on when you feel like Charlie? What things can you do?

Charlie wants Abby to promise she will never use again. Abby can't. Abby wants Charlie to promise she will never use. Charlie does. Make a promise to yourself and your family and friends. Write a letter to your future self, say at age 18, reminding your future self what you think about substance use and why you want to make this promise.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCWA.W.1]

Enrichment Activities

Research the phenomenon of ice flowers.

What do ice flowers look like?

Under what conditions and in what locations might one discover this unique formation?

Learn more about Irish dance.

Watch videos of Irish dancing.

Investigate the market for Irish dance dresses.

Find out if you have any Irish dance programs in your community. Do they do demonstrations/performances?

Find out more about the pastime of ice fishing.

What equipment is used for ice fishing (auger, ice cleats, sled, etc.)?

Where do people participate in ice fishing? What kinds of fish do they catch?

Play the Brennan family's word game.

One person declares that they are thinking of a word, and everyone else gets one chance to guess.

Good luck deciding whose word is the closest!

Brainstorm good luck charms and ways to make wishes.

Learn about how these traditions and beliefs came to be.

Locate the Ukraine.

What can you learn about the culture of the Ukraine?

What challenges would someone face if they emigrated from the Ukraine to the United States?

Experiment with coding.

Get started at <https://code.org/>.

Find out if your school has a club for coding and computer science. Consider getting one started.

Research entomophagy.

What parts of the world incorporate insects as a regular part of their diet? Where are insects considered a delicacy?

Find a recipe of your choosing and try edible insects, insect powders, or insect snacks. (My students and I tried products from and recommend www.edibleinsects.com or www.cricketflour.com.)

An Interview with the Author: Kate Messner

***The Seventh Wish* is a brave book that exemplifies your respect and love for middle grade readers.**

Why was it important to you to write this book for a middle grade audience?

KM: Substance abuse - opioid addiction, in particular - is a scary topic for many adults to talk about. But it's also an issue that affects so many kids whose family members are struggling with addiction. I believe that when we're reluctant to have those tough conversations with kids, we're missing an opportunity to shine a light into some of those darker places of the world. I have a tremendous amount of respect for kids as thinkers and as empathetic people, and I really believe in opening up those conversations.



***The Seventh Wish* ends without a guaranteed resolution for the Brennan family.**

What do you say to readers who are wishing for less ambiguity and want to know for certain that Abby will be all right?

KM: I've written more than twenty books for kids, and I think this ending was the toughest for me to write. I love happy endings, but in the real world of addiction, people's stories don't end wrapped up in a neat bow. Even in the best of situations, relapse is common. So I knew that making a "happily ever after" promise to readers would have been dishonest. At the end of the day, Charlie understands that her biggest wish -- for Abby to be well and stay well -- is out of her control, but I still feel like the ending is a hopeful one. Sometimes, that's the best we can do if we're writing a story that feels honest and true.

Charlie and Abby--and their story--are going to live on with readers for a long time.

What do you most hope your readers will hold on to after reading *The Seventh Wish*?

KM: I hope they'll feel Charlie's resilience when they're facing their own struggles in life, whether that relates to a loved one dealing with addiction or something else. And of course, I hope that when they have to make their own choices about drugs, they'll think of Abby, wishing she could go back in time, and make a better choice for their own lives.

Because you can't write a book about a wish fish without being asked, what would you wish for if you caught a magical wish fish?

KM: I'm honestly not sure if I'd make a wish at all. The thing about writing about magic is that it kind of cures you of wanting that magic for yourself. I started writing *All the Answers*, my novel about a girl who finds a pencil that will answer any question, because I was wishing for a magic pencil like that myself. But writing that story, as well as *The Seventh Wish*, forced me to explore the way magic can backfire, and the way it can make a character turn away from real life. So even if I did catch a magic fish, I'd like to think I'd be able to resist wishing. If I couldn't, I'd try to wish for something very simple and clear, like a nice box of salted caramels, that would be hard for a magical fish to misconstrue.

