

EMBER SPARK

AND THE THUNDER OF DRAGONS

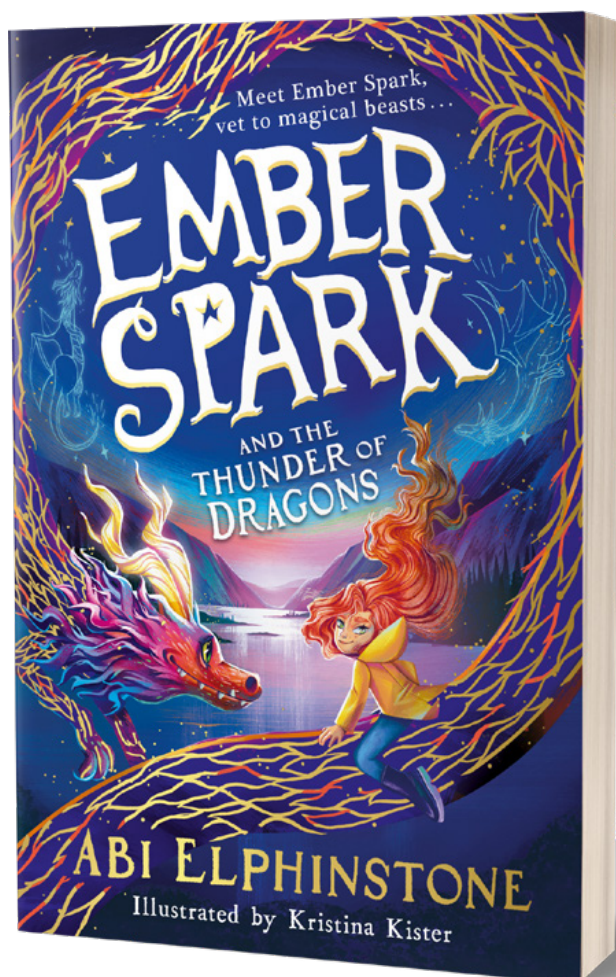
ABI ELPHINSTONE

AGES 8+ NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Explore Themes of: ✓ Magic and fantasy ✓ Adventure stories
✓ Mythical creatures ✓ Creative writing ✓ Friendship

Subject Checklist: ✓ Literacy ✓ Art and design ✓ P.S.H.E.

The activities included here are suitable for the classroom or library sessions.



ABOUT THE BOOK

A magical new story filled with adventure, wonder and edge-of-your-seat excitement, set in a world of daring dragons and magical maladies by the bestselling author of *Sky Song*, Abi Elphinstone.

Rusty Fizzbang, vet to magical beasts, needs an apprentice. Ember Spark, looking for adventure, is his newest recruit and together with an unlikely friend, Arno, she is sent to help a baby dragon whose parents have gone missing. But keeping magical beasts a secret isn't an easy task, especially with arch-villain, Jasper Hornswoggle, hot on their heels and keen to derail them...

CONTENTS

Theme 1 – Ember Spark

Activity: Create a character profile for Ember Spark.

Objectives: Infer information about a character from details stated and implied.

Theme 2 – Dragon Care!

Activity: Write a leaflet about how to take care of a dragon.

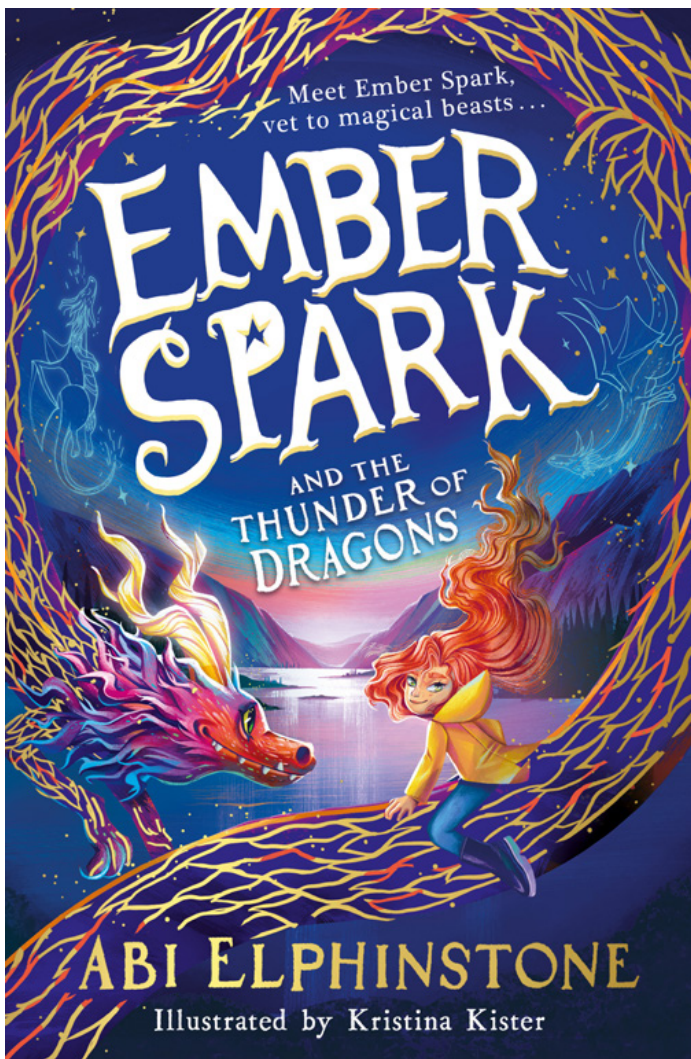
Objectives: Retrieve information from the book; plan and produce an information leaflet.

Theme 3 – Rescuing a Magical Creature!

Activity: Plan and write a magical rescue story.

Objectives: Plan a story by discussing and recording ideas; create characters, setting and plot; write a narrative using rich vocabulary.

Further Activity Ideas



BOOK COVER PROMPTS

- ★ Which genre do you think the book might fit within?
- ★ What do you like about the front cover?
- ★ Where do you think the book might be set?
- ★ What do you think might happen in the story?



EMBER SPARK

EXTRACT

Ember stared at the rodent, too stunned to speak. The leap had been enormous - at least ten metres. There was no way a rodent could jump that far! But the fisherman hadn't looked surprised. Perhaps he already knew that this was no ordinary hamster. Whatever the reason, he was no longer staring at the rodent. His cold, grey eyes locked on Ember - just for a second - then he pulled his hat down lower so that it covered his face.

Ember glanced at the shore. She could feel the current building. If she didn't start swimming now, there'd be no going home. But the fisherman was blocking the way. Then an enormous wave smashed over her, dragging Ember underwater and spinning her upside down. She scabbled to the surface, gasping for air and feeling for the hamster. Miraculously, it was still clinging to her shoulder. And to her relief, the fisherman was no longer standing in her way. He was wading back towards the shore - fast, as if in a hurry - and when he reached it, he hastened into the sand dunes and disappeared.

Ember didn't have time to piece things together. 'I'm going to swim for the shore,' she panted to the hamster, 'so hold on tight!'

But Ember was going nowhere fast. Her clothes were heavy, her limbs were frozen and the waves were growing too big to handle. Panic rose inside her as the Swirling Soup sucked her backwards once again. The adventure she'd been waiting for was now spiralling out of control...

'Help!' she whimpered. 'Help!'

The waves were too big for Ember to see if anybody else had ventured down to the beach but a reply came to her - if a voice whispering inside you could really be called a reply.

Forty Winks, the voice inside Ember whispered. Forty Winks. Forty Winks. Forty Winks.

And Ember knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that this was the name of the hamster clinging to her shoulder. She did not know how she knew this. She just did. And for some strange reason, knowing the name of the rodent who had trusted her enough to leap through the air and land on her shoulder, gave her a fresh burst of energy to try for the shore one more time.

On and on Ember swam, battling against the current and the waves until finally, she was aware of the sand beneath her. She could vaguely hear a noise beyond the waves and the rain - somebody shouting in the distance - but she was so exhausted and cold that when she staggered ashore, she collapsed in a heap. And she would've lain there for a good while longer, getting colder and colder and wetter and wetter, had Forty Winks not started chewing on her ear.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Ember think that the hamster is not an ordinary hamster?
2. What is your impression of Ember's character from the story so far?
3. Can you underline the verbs and adverbs the author uses in paragraph two? Why do you think she has chosen these words? How do they help you understand what is happening?
4. Who do you think the fisherman was and what do you think he wanted?
5. What gives Ember the extra burst of energy she needs to try and swim for the shore once more?

Activity: Create a Character Profile for Ember Spark!

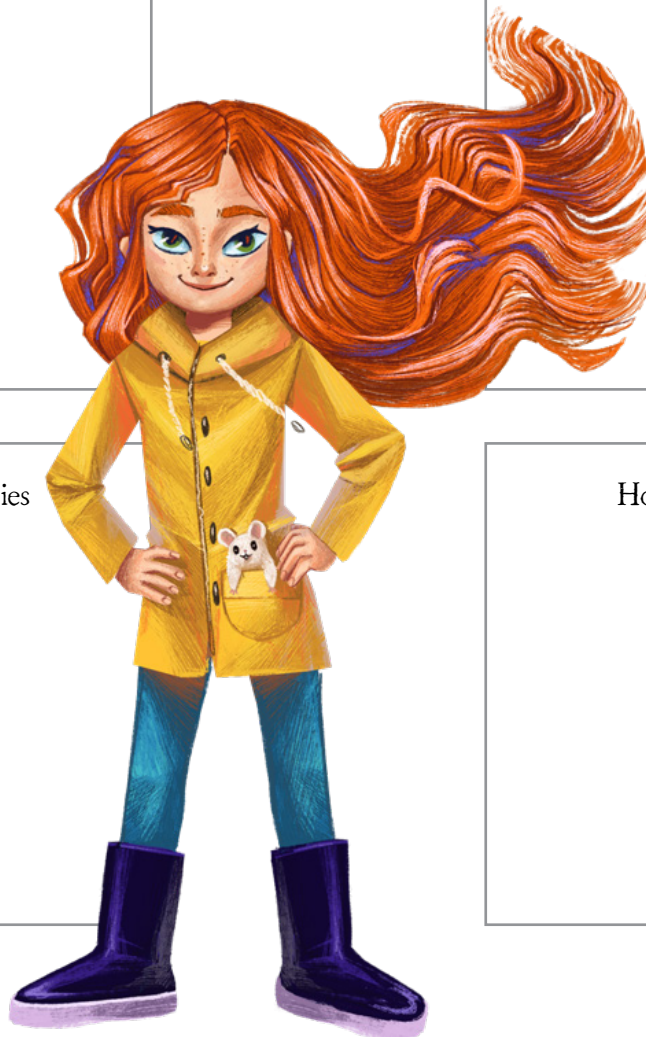
Complete the character profile below to help you understand Ember's character. Use everything you have learnt about Ember from the story so far.

Skills and talents

Interests

Problems or worries

Hopes and dreams



Challenge: Based on what you know about Ember, what do you think her bedroom at home might look like? Discuss with a friend or draw a sketch!



DRAGON CARE!

EXTRACT

‘Do something, Ember!’ he whimpered. ‘Ferocity might not be well enough to roar fire but she’s still strong enough to break our bones!’

Ember had no idea what you did to gain the trust of a poorly dragon who was quite clearly furious but somehow she’d known how to gain the trust of Chomp, the school guinea pig fond of biting the heads off stuffed toys, and Forty Winks and all the other animals she’d helped around Yawn. She’d kept calm, then moved slowly and used her voice to reassure.

Moving slowly was easy enough now because Ferocity was squeezing Ember and Arno so tightly they were struggling to breathe. But keeping calm when a dragon the size of a double-decker bus slams you against a tree for the third time in under a minute is slightly harder.

‘I’m, I’m sorry you’re unwell, Ferocity!’ Ember whispered.

Ferocity slammed Ember and Arno into the tree again and both children winced in pain. But Ember noticed that, on hearing her name, Ferocity had stopped thumping her tail.

‘It must be horrible having a temperature,’ Ember said softly.

Ferocity drew her fist back, ready to shunt Ember and Arno into the tree again.

‘But we’re here to help you,’ Ember added quickly. ‘If you’ll let us.’

Ferocity wavered for a second and in that moment, Ember saw that there was more pain in the dragon’s face than fury.

‘Keep talking to her,’ Arno whispered. ‘It’s working!’

‘We can only help you if we know what’s wrong,’ Ember said gently. ‘So, maybe you could set us down and I could take a look. If you’d be okay with that?’

Ferocity tossed her head from side to side then she raked the talons on her other hand over her stomach and sobbed.

‘It’s okay,’ Ember whispered. ‘We’re here for you, remember?’

A giant tear rolled down the dragon’s face then Ferocity uncurled her fist and dropped Ember and Arno to the ground. In seconds, Arno was set upon by the baby dragons who clambered up his jumper and began chewing on his hair. But they left Ember alone, as if they could tell that their mother needed her.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the dragon is named Ferocity?
2. How does Ember begin to gain Ferocity's trust?
3. In what ways do Ember and Arno work as a team?
4. Have you ever tried to gain the trust of an animal? How did you do it?
5. What would you do if you found an injured dragon?

Activity: Create a Leaflet About Dragon Care!

As one of the country's leading dragon experts, you have been asked to create an educational leaflet titled *How to Care for Dragons!* Your goal is to give your reader all the information they need to take good care of a dragon! Use your imagination and details you've gathered from chapters 7 and 8. Begin by making notes in the table below:

Gaining a dragon's trust:
Dragon food and nutrition:
Dragon health and hygiene:
Baby dragons:
Any extra information you think is important:



Now, use your notes to create your leaflet. You might like to include:

- * A large, clear title
- * An introduction to dragons and dragon care
- * Information clearly organised into paragraphs with subheadings
- * Imperative verbs telling the reader what to do
- * Illustrations or diagrams

RESCUING A MAGICAL CREATURE!

EXTRACT

'This is the spot,' Ember panted, slowing to a halt. They knelt down on the cliff edge and peered over. And there, twenty metres below them, was a baby unicorn, trembling on a ledge. It was the size of a puppy, and white as milk, and though it didn't look as if it was injured, it definitely seemed to be stuck. It kept peeping over the ledge then whinnying and standing up on shaking feet. It looked at Ember and Arno, its wide, blue eyes filled with panic. Then it stamped nervously and a little bit of the ledge crunched free and crashed into the Swirling Soup. The unicorn huddled into the cliff face, whimpering.

'It's all right,' Ember whispered. 'We're here to help you,' Arno said. 'We don't mean any harm.'

They stayed where they were, silent for a while as they remembered Rusty's rule of waiting for the beast to make the first move. Eventually, the baby unicorn stopped shaking and looked up at them again. It cocked its head then blinked slowly. And at exactly the same time, both Ember and Arno heard whispering deep inside them.

'Marble, Marble, Marble,' the whisper went.

'Her name!' Arno cried. 'She's called Marble!'

Ember grinned. 'It looks like she wants to trust us!'

There was another crunch then a little more of the ledge the unicorn stood on tumbled down and was swallowed by the sea. The unicorn whinnied and scabbled at the cliff with her hooves. But she was well and truly stuck.

Ember eyed the cliff face. There were a few crags and crevices to put her hands and feet on, but not many. It would be a tricky climb - much harder than anything she and the Alphabets had tackled in the past when mucking about on the climbing frame in the school playground. She found herself reaching into her pocket for Forty Winks. She gave him a little squeeze then she took a deep breath.

'We need to move fast, before the rest of the ledge crumbles. So, I'll climb down and lift Marble from the rock then I'll climb back up with her. I'll pass her to you before I reach the top as I don't think I'll manage that bit while carrying her too.'



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the baby unicorn need Ember and Arno's help?
2. What does the baby unicorn look like? Can you find a simile the author uses to describe the baby unicorn?
3. How does the baby unicorn feel? How do you know?
4. What advice did Rusty give Ember and Arno?
5. What do you think might happen next?

Activity: Write a Magical Rescue Story of Your Own!

In the novel, Ember and Arno save Marble, a baby unicorn who is stuck on the side of a cliff. You are going to become an author, just like Abi Elphinstone, and write a rescue story of your own! In your story, your main character will save a magical creature who is in trouble!

Use the story planner on the following page to help you plan your story.

- ★ First, invent a main character and give them a magical pet like Forty Winks to help them on their quest!
- ★ Tip – When thinking about what to name your character, have a look at the names of the characters in the book. What do the different characters' names tell us about them? Can you think of an inventive, descriptive name for your character?
- ★ Decide what magical creature your character is going to save. This could be a magical creature from the book such as a phoenix, griffin or unicorn, or it could be a made-up creature of your own!
- ★ Next, decide what problem the magical creature has. Why does it need rescuing? Is it lost, injured or stuck like Marble?
- ★ Finally, think about how your character will save the magical creature.

When you have completed your plan, practise telling your story to your classmates. Remember, your story needs a clear beginning, middle and end.

When you feel you know your story well, it's time to start writing! Can you make your writing sound dramatic and exciting like Abi Elphinstone does in the novel?



My Magical Rescue Story Plan!

Write notes and draw pictures in the boxes below to help you plan the different elements of your story.

Main character and magical pet:

Magical creature:

Problem:

Rescue:



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SCHUSTER



Further Activity Ideas

- ★ On page 60, Arno has appeared to help Ember, but Ember thinks having friends is 'pointless'. Do you agree with her? Why do you think Ember feels like this? Imagine you could speak to Ember at this point in the story. What would you like to say to her? Would you give her any advice? With a partner, role-play a conversation with Ember.
- ★ Create a diorama of the magical cave! On pages 66–69, Ember and Arlo enter the cave inside the cliff. First, take a cardboard box such as a shoe box and turn it on its side to make your 'stage'. Then, paint the inside of your box to create your backdrop. Next, use paper, card or modelling materials to create the different features of the magical cave! (You can search online for 'shoebox diorama' to give you creative inspiration!)
- ★ On pages 99–101, we learn more about nibblesqueaks. Design a magical pet that you would like to have. It might look like an animal you are familiar with but have special magical powers like Forty Winks! Draw a picture and write a description of your magical pet.
- ★ In Chapter 16, Ember and Arno visit Loch Ness to meet Nessie. Carry out some research into Loch Ness and its mythical monster. How deep is the Loch? When was the first alleged spotting of the monster? Write an account of a spotting from the point of view of Nessie!
- ★ As we learn on page 1, 'magic knows where to hide. And it's not in faraway lands or long-lost kingdoms. It's right here. Under our noses!' Go for a walk around your neighbourhood. Where are the places that magic might hide? What magical creatures might live here? Create a guidebook to the magical creatures of your neighbourhood!
- ★ Rusty Fizzbang's bad back is still not better and he needs to take on another apprentice to help him care for all the magical beasts. Apply for the position of apprentice vet to magical beasts! What qualities does the role require? Why would you be the right person for the job? Persuade Rusty to take you on as an additional apprentice!
- ★ Ember loves reading comics about her favourite superhero, Gutsy Wonder. But now Ember has become a bit of a superhero herself! Produce a comic strip about the adventures of Ember Spark!
- ★ What has Ember learnt by the end of the story? How do you think she has changed? What about Arno? Write a diary entry from the point of view of Arno at the end of the story.
- ★ If you could ask Abi Elphinstone any question, what would you like to ask her?

