



A PINCH OF MAGIC

Widdershins Gingerbread

The isle of Crowstone, home to the Widdershins sisters, Betty, Fliss and Charlie, is often damp and chilly thanks to the freezing fogs from the nearby Misty Marshes. So what better treat to stay cosy with than some warming, spiced gingerbread?

Ingredients

- 350g plain flour (plus extra for rolling out)
- 2 tsp ground ginger
- 1tsp ground cinnamon
- 1tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 125g butter
- 175g soft light brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 4 tbsp golden syrup

Method

FLISS: In a large bowl, sift together the flour, bicarbonate of soda, ginger and cinnamon. Add the butter and rub together with your fingers – CLEAN fingers, Charlie! – until it looks and feels like sand.

BETTY: Sand? That looks more like shingle from the marshes. Rub it in some more.

FLISS: Shh. This is my recipe.

CHARLIE: No, it's not. It's Granny's.

BETTY: Stop eating the sugar, Charlie.

FLISS: Stir in the sugar. I usually close my eyes and make a wish when I do this part.



MICHELLE HARRISON



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BETTY: Can you wish not to burn it this time?

FLISS: "Snorts" Lightly beat the egg and the golden syrup together in a jug—

CHARLIE: Make sure it's a free range egg. They're tastier and kinder to the chickens.

FLISS: —then pour the egg/syrup mix into the bowl. Combine until it begins to clump together, then remove from the bowl and knead until smooth.

BETTY: Sprinkle some flour on to your work surface so the dough doesn't get too sticky. When it's ready, wrap it in cling film and chill in the fridge for fifteen minutes. This stops it spreading out too much and losing its shape while it's baking.

FLISS: Ooh, yes. I always forget that part.

CHARLIE: Who cares what it looks like? Get it in the oven I WANT TO EAT IT!

FLISS: Pre-heat the oven to 180C/160C fan/Gas 4. Line two baking trays with greaseproof paper. Once chilled, roll out the dough to about 0.5cm thick on a lightly floured surface, and cut out the gingerbread shapes. Place them on the tray with a gap between them and bake for 12-15 minutes until lightly golden brown. This usually gives me just enough time to write a love poem.

BETTY: No, this is when you clean up the kitchen and keep an eye on the oven, feather-brain. The best gingerbread is a bit chewy, so don't overdo it! Once it's out of the oven, leave it on the tray for a few minutes, then move to a wire rack to cool.

CHARLIE: IS IT READY YET?

FLISS: You can decorate with icing, silver balls or sprinkles.

CHARLIE: Or just scoff it as it is. Jumping jackdaws, that's good!

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Reading Group Notes

A Pinch of Magic is the tale of the Widdershins sisters:

Betty, Fliss and Charlie

They set out to break a family curse which keeps them trapped on the small island of Crowstone. But the curse isn't the only unusual thing about the Widdershins. Three magical objects have been passed down their family:

**A set of wooden nesting dolls,
a mirror, and a scruffy carpet bag**

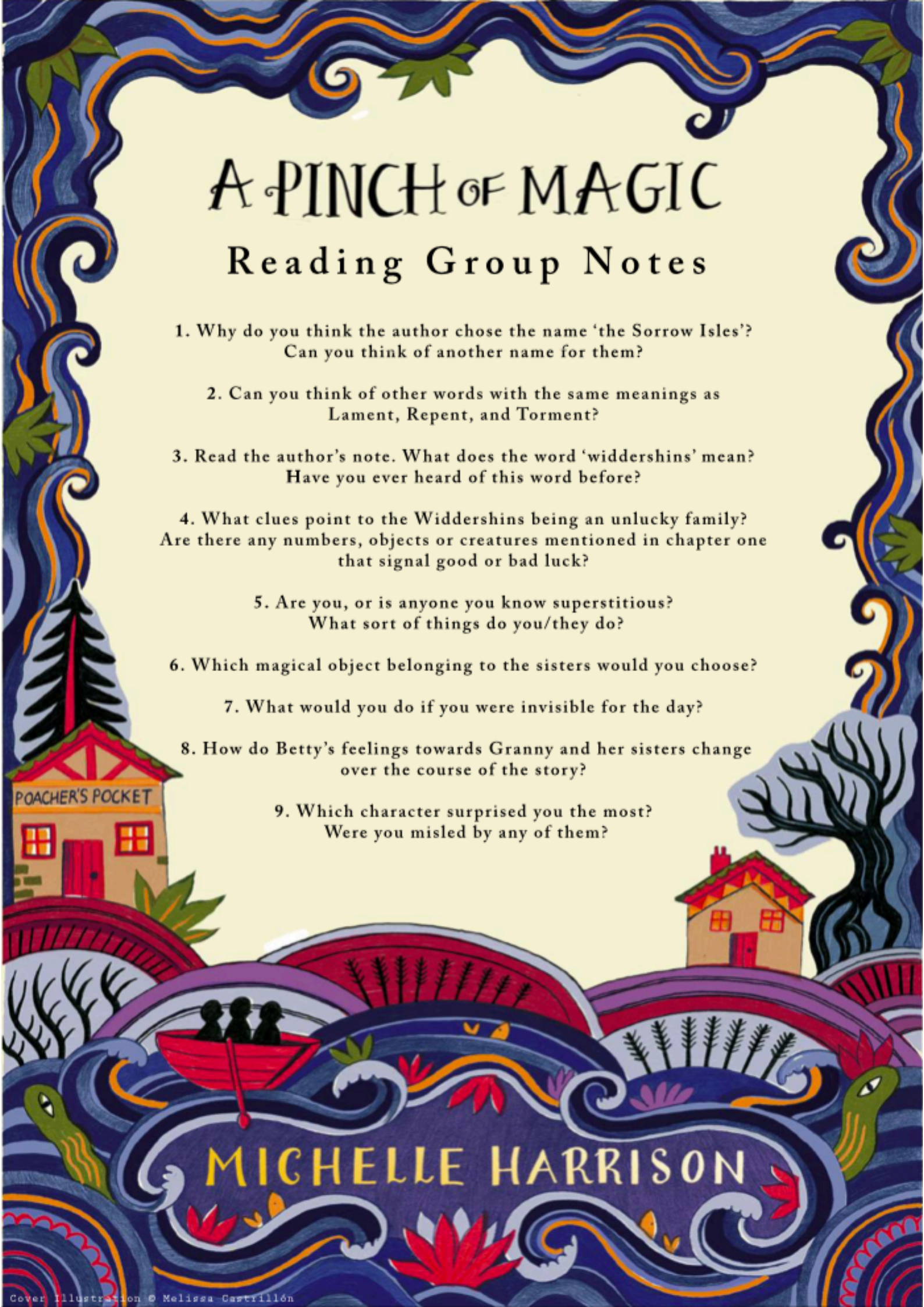
Will they be enough to break the curse? Or will the sisters have better luck with the mysterious prisoner who says he can help them... for a price?

This story is probably best suited to readers aged 8-12, depending on ability. Here are some talking points which could be used in a reading group.

Pre-reading:

1. Look at the front and back covers and read the blurb. Does it make you want to read the book? Why, or why not?
2. What do you imagine the three magical objects to do?
3. Study the map in the front of the book. Which three places do you think will be most significant to the story, and why?

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1. Why do you think the author chose the name 'the Sorrow Isles'?
Can you think of another name for them?
2. Can you think of other words with the same meanings as
Lament, Repent, and Torment?
3. Read the author's note. What does the word 'widdershins' mean?
Have you ever heard of this word before?
4. What clues point to the Widdershins being an unlucky family?
Are there any numbers, objects or creatures mentioned in chapter one
that signal good or bad luck?
5. Are you, or is anyone you know superstitious?
What sort of things do you/they do?
6. Which magical object belonging to the sisters would you choose?
7. What would you do if you were invisible for the day?
8. How do Betty's feelings towards Granny and her sisters change
over the course of the story?
9. Which character surprised you the most?
Were you misled by any of them?

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Reading Group Notes

10. What kind of atmosphere is created by the presence of crows?
What do they symbolise?
11. If you could only use three words to describe the story, what would they be?
12. The curse suggests that the Widdershins' destiny is unchangeable.
Do you believe everyone has a set destiny, or do we make our own?

Other books involving curses and enchantment:

Secrets of a Sun King by Emma Carroll

Wood Angel by Erin Bow

The Other Alice by Michelle Harrison

Snowglobe by Amy Wilson

Sky Song by Abi Elphinstone



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MICHELLE HARRISON