



# The Shadow Hunters

by Linda McNabb

A classroom English unit from



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Adventure, fantasy and magic again combine skilfully in this exciting new book from the pen of Linda McNabb. Twists and turns in the plot maintain the tension until the final page, making it compulsive reading for children of a wide age range (9–12+). Young readers, who previously delighted in the non-stop action of *The Dragon's Apprentice* and *The Dragon Charmers*, will be pleased to find that friendly, and not-so friendly, dragons again play a major part in the story. Linda McNabb places her characters in a vivid, yet believable environment. All the characters display the full range of human weaknesses, and a major underlying theme of prejudice against those who are different is explored, and finally resolved in a way that will satisfy young readers.

## Story synopsis

Once, elves lived openly in the human world. Today, they must exist secretly or risk being captured by human 'shadow hunters' who have the ability to sense them. Elves attract a bounty for their capture as the king wrongly believes he was nearly killed by an arrow fired by an elf when hunting for deer on the moors. Elves have physical differences and do not have shadows. These differences can be masked by wearing a magic black elfstone necklace, which also masks the vibrations of an elf that the shadow hunters can sense.

Rhonan and his sister Dyahn are children of a human mother, and elf father who ran away together to get married and own a small village inn. Rhonan's father, Bryn, must always wear his elfstone to remain undiscovered in the human world. A shadow hunter senses Rhonan's vibrations and follows his trail back to the inn. The family is now in great danger and plans to escape. While Bryn and his brother take off their elfstones and leave false trails for the hunters, Rhonan, Dyahn, and cousin Kheron make their way to Shaldoh, the village where most elves live. During their exciting journey they rescue a young dragon called Tryx and promise its dying mother they will return Tryx home to the world of golden dragons. Upon arrival at Shaldoh, they find that the large elfstone rock which masks the village from hunters has been struck by lightning and is losing its power to conceal the elves. They are not welcomed with their dragon. The three children and their uncle journey to the lair of the ferocious blue dragons and through a secret gate to Dragon Valley — home of the golden dragons. They manage a perilous escape back through the blue dragon's lair with the help of Tryx, who stages a diversion. They find a large elfstone rock which can save the village of Shaldoh but in order to save their lives they must leave it behind. Tryx, though handicapped by severe injuries, decides to accompany them to safety and bring the elfstone rock with her.

In a climactic conclusion, all the family are captured by shadow hunters and brought before the king. Corban — the elf leader — bravely challenges the king to abandon his bounty on elves and, if not, imprison all the elves of Shaldoh. With the help of some persuasive flames belching from Tryx, and the revelation that the son of the king may be 'part elf', the king and Corban agree to begin negotiating a pact of friendship between elves and humans.

## Pre-reading activities

- What do the students understand as 'fantasy'? What does the dictionary say? What is the opposite of fantasy?
- Introduce the concept of genre. What does it mean when talking about books? Have groups brainstorm and list all the books they have read that are based in the fantasy genre. What books have they read that are based in the reality genre? How popular is fantasy amongst the class? Why is fantasy so enjoyable?
- Discuss why magic so often plays a large part in fantasy books. Why would it not feature in books in a reality genre?
- Develop the idea that magical creatures are often a feature of fantasy books. Brainstorm a list of magical creatures that we might expect to find in a fantasy, **eg** fairies, dragons, ogres, elves, monsters ... Speculate on the magical powers these creatures could possess. What are the favourite magical creatures of class members? Why? Share reasons with the class.

## During and post-reading activities

- What magical powers do the elves have? What do they use them for?
- What reasons can students give for the hostile reception Bryn, Rhonan and Dyahn received from the elves at Shaldoh?
- Discuss the attitude that Kheron had towards Rhonan. Why did he have this attitude, even after he knew Rhonan was an elf? Have students locate incidents and actions (on Rhonan's part) that helped change Kheron's attitude towards Rhonan.
- Have each student write a brief summary of the parts of the story that they found were the most: exciting; sad; happy; suspenseful; action-packed; unfair; humorous. Who were their favourite characters? What made them stand out?
- Have students identify the factors that led to peaceful negotiations between Corban and the king. How large a part do they think the dragons had in bringing this about?
- Have the class take part in a shadow hunt. Can students explain (scientifically) why we have shadows? Try the following:
  - Go on a shadow walk around the school/local area and look for and draw different shadows (trees, birds, signs, cars ...).
  - How do shadows change at different times of the day? Why?
  - Have groups construct a simple shadow clock with a stick and mark the positions on an hourly basis. Do the positions change from week to week and month to month? Why?
  - Groups Google 'making a sundial' and complete the project.

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