



The Pendant of Epoch by Alan Blomfield

A classroom English unit from  HarperCollinsPublishers

Alan Blomfield is the well-known cartoonist who lives in the Waikato and *The Pendant of Epoch* is his first book. The book is a rousing and boisterous adventure that will have wide general appeal to year 4–9+ classes and with particular appeal to boys in the 8–13-year-old age group. Based on the premise of the reluctant hero, *The Pendant of Epoch* will capture and maintain the interest of readers as it races along at an increasing pace that makes it extremely difficult to put down. If you read daily to your class, your students will find the next day cannot come quickly enough. Delightfully sprinkled with humour, dark forces, unimaginable situations, vividly drawn characters and terrifying adventures, *The Pendant of Epoch* is a must-have book for the class and school library.

Story synopsis

Twelve-year-old Charlie Bloggs is not hero material. He dislikes school and school dislikes him. He is ignored by girls and sometimes teased. Charlie is summoned by his strange aunt Crystal who lives alone in Bleak House in Otago along with a scrawny one-eyed cat called Cyclops, who always shows displeasure at Charlie's presence. Charlie learns that a hundred-year curse was placed on the family because his great-great-grandfather, Thaddeus, fathered an illegitimate child called Destiny. Her son, Jabez, turned up years later and demanded half of the Bloggs fortune from Simeon, Thaddeus's grown-up son. This fortune was made by Thaddeus during the Otago gold rush, in part with the help of a mystical pendant — the Pendant of Epoch, which Jabez also demanded. During a violent fight, Simeon choked Jabez to death with the pendant's chain. As Jabez was dying, the magnificent precious stones in the pendant vanished and the curse fell upon the family. Simeon tossed the body onto a large fire but Jabez's strange green trousers would not burn. Simeon placed the trousers and pendant into a wooden box. From that time, misery and ill fortune had been the luck of the Bloggs family descendants. Crystal tells Charlie that he is the chosen member of the family who has thirteen days to lift the curse. Charlie is less than impressed. His task is to explore four strange worlds accessed through his aunt's cupboard and recover one pendant stone from each world. With the aid of his only friend Tommy and his personal robot Buz, Charlie battles unimaginable odds and dark forces in a series of fantastic adventures to recover the pendant stones and break the curse of the Bloggs family. At the same time, Charlie finds inner courage and exhibits extreme bravery. Things should be plain sailing now for the Bloggs family but there is a nasty twist in the tale. Jabez, who was destroyed by Charlie in the climactic finale of the adventure, was always present at Bleak House in the form of Cyclops, the one-eyed cat. When Charlie returns, Cyclops, the dark spirit of Jabez, is no longer there. A solitary magpie, however, is still sitting on the windowsill. As Charlie, Buz and Tommy relive their amazing quest, it peers in at them with silver and icy cold eyes and a force burning inside with wicked purpose. Watch this space!

Pre-reading and introductory learning activities

- Have students speculate on the plot of the book by viewing the cover, **eg** who are these characters and why is the young boy so scared? Use the dictionary to find the meanings of pendant and epoch. What might they be trying to save the world from? Record speculations for later comparison.
- Discuss the cartoon style of the cover. Tell students that the author is a well-known New Zealand cartoonist. Visit <http://library.thinkquest.org/TQ0312495/> (a website written by students about the art of cartooning) and have students complete the basic cartooning course on-site.
- After reading chapters 1–5, introduce the idea of word pictures. Challenge students to describe the physical appearances of Charlie, Aunt Crystal, Cyclops, the magpie, Buz and Charlie from the vivid word pictures used.
- Using a cartoon style, have students draw/paint pictures of these characters using the word picture clues.

During and post reading activities

- What is a hero? Discuss and identify different characteristics that a hero could possess. Introduce the idea that sometimes it could mean overcoming a fear a person may have. Have students write and share experiences of when they overcame a fear that they had and how they felt after they conquered this fear.
- Discuss which of the epic adventures (or parts of) appealed most to individual students. Why did they appeal? Introduce the idea that each adventure could make a wonderful radio play or even be filmed as a video. Have groups write/film their favourite adventure and present them in the sequence they occurred in the story. Present to other classes.
- Brainstorm words that will describe the dark forces and characters that Charlie, Tommy and Buz encounter in each adventure. Using these words, conduct a poll to list these characters, **eg** most evil, frightening, violent, dangerous ...
- Have each student invent a new and sinister character that could be lurking behind one of the doors not visited.
- Reread the epilogue. What clues can be found that suggest that the adventure is far from over? Do they think that there will be a sequel to this book? Have students imaginatively speculate on adventures that Charlie, Buz and Tommy may have in the future.

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