

Teacher's Guide

Fablehaven

By Brandon Mull

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About the Book

Welcome to *Fablehaven*, the first episode of the *New York Times* bestselling series by Brandon Mull. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, “The series is generating buzz as a contender in the fantasy-adventure genre to replace the Harry Potter franchise.”

For centuries, mystical creatures of all description were gathered into hidden refuges, like the one in Connecticut called Fablehaven, to prevent their extinction. The sanctuary survives today as one of the last strongholds of true magic in a cynical world. Kendra and her brother, Seth, have no idea their grandfather is the current caretaker of Fablehaven. Inside the gated woods, ancient laws maintain relative order among greedy trolls, mischievous satyrs, plotting witches, spiteful imps, and jealous fairies. However, rules get broken and arcane evil is unleashed, forcing Kendra and Seth to face the greatest challenge of their lives. To save her family, Fablehaven, and perhaps the world, Kendra must find the courage to do what she fears the most.

Fablehaven brings readers into a fantasy world that is closely tied to Greek and Celtic mythologies, as well as Jewish legends, allowing teachers to introduce students to classic myths and legends in relation to the *Fablehaven* text. While learning about myths and legends, students are following characters not unlike themselves—children who make choices each day that can change their lives and their surroundings.

What Is Fantasy, and Why Teach It?

Fantasy—the stuff of dreams. More than just a classification or literary genre, fantasy is a part of children’s lives from the moment they are born. From imaginative hours spent visualizing themselves as superheroes to the night terrors of the preadolescent, children experience the vivid world of fantasy, perhaps in a richer way than most adults realize or remember. Perhaps children know this inherently since they turn to fantasy naturally. It gives them a distance from reality that provides a safe place to explore.

Preview the Text

Making predictions based on cover art: Read the newspaper insert on the back cover. Ask students to choose words or phrases they feel give clues to the literary genre of this book. (Examples: fog giant, gnomish.) Have them identify key words for the setting. (Examples: *Fablehaven*, deluxe accommodations.) Do any words give a hint of character or characterization?

(Examples: caretaker, strong stomach required.) Finally, are there any words that might hint to an event or plot? (Examples: drowned, devoured, turned to stone.) Have students predict the genre as fantasy. Next, look at the front cover art. How does this illustration seem to support the genre? How does it tie into the words and phrases they previously discussed?

Website: Take students to the official *Fablehaven* website (BrandonMull.com) and allow them to explore.

Blurb: Publishers often include blurbs, or recommendations, from other authors as a selling point on the cover or in the first few pages of a book. What blurbs are used on *Fablehaven* to help introduce the genre, book, or author to new readers?

Discussion of the beginning quote: “None who enter will leave unchanged. Trespassers will be turned to stone.” Ask students to comment on this passage. What do they think it means? How might it play a role in the novel itself?

Introducing Fantasy Sample Lesson Plan

Objectives:

- The student will be able to correctly define the terms *setting*, *character/characterization*, *plot*, *fantasy*.

- The student will be able to independently locate words or passages that demonstrate each term.

Anticipatory set: Show a series of video clips from movies (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, *Willow*, *Stardust*, *Tinker Bell*, etc.). Ask students to define the common characteristics among these clips. Use a chart to help students recognize that each story has a similar setting that leads to the fantasy genre, characters who have been characterized within each short clip, and elements of plot that lead us to predict what happens later in the story.

Instruction: “Today we are going to learn about setting, character/characterization, plot, and the fantasy genre. It seems you already know quite a lot about them because you were able to apply these concepts to the film clips we just watched.”

Scaffolding: Ask students to give a definition for each concept. Double-check their definitions against those in a dictionary.

Modeling: Prepare a chart divided into four labeled squares: setting, character/characterization, plot, and fantasy. Using the idea of Think Aloud, demonstrate how you read the chapter, taking note of particular words as you read, placing keywords into slots on the

chart in appropriate categories. Have words end up in squares as assigned below:

- **Setting:** Connecticut, far from town, up a steep grade, lake, low forested hills, narrow road, private property signs, wrought-iron fence, birds' nests
- **Character/characterization:** Kendra—age thirteen; Seth—age eleven, sixth grade; Grandpa Stan Sorenson—hermit, traveler, importing business, white beard; Grandma Sorenson—hermit, college history teacher; Mom (Kate); Dad; Dale—groundskeeper; Lena—housekeeper, white hair with a few black strands, black almond eyes, Asian, slightly stooped
- **Plot:** Trip to grandparents' house, parents on a cruise
- **Fantasy:** castle, iron knocker, goblin, mystery of the tiny keys

Activity: Ask two students to leave the room for a few minutes. While they are gone, have the remaining students randomly select ten words or phrases from Chapter One of *Fablehaven* and list them on the board. Make sure at least one word fits into each category (setting, character/characterization, plot, fantasy) as being useful. Add additional words for this to happen if necessary. When ready, call the two volunteers back into class.

Ask them to choose words from the list that show setting. Go through the entire word list, determining which words show setting. Then move on to the concepts of character/characterization, plot, and fantasy until the students have correctly identified the words and their placement.

Guided practice: Assign student partners to locate at least two more words for each term, using Chapter Two, if necessary, to provide additional examples. Build a written list of key words or phrases for each trait (setting, character/characterization, plot, and fantasy). Share the new student examples and determine if the students' understanding is correct.

Check for understanding: "Now that you know the concepts, let's see if you can use this knowledge to apply them. Look more closely at Chapter One. Who are the main characters? What do you know about them? What is the story setting? Is this story a fantasy? How do you know?"

Assessment: Choose one of the movies from the clips shown earlier. Help students put together a plot outline for that story. Include a list of main characters, setting, and plot events. Check their work by teacher monitoring, partner share, and/or whole group share.

Independent practice: Students will draw a plot outline and word chart for *Fablehaven*, based on what they

already know. Students will add to this outline as they continue to read the novel.

Closure: Oral review of term definition.

During Reading

Studying themes: Authors often use thematic statements throughout a text. As students read and discuss *Fablehaven*, consider some of the following passages and what they mean in relation to both the text and our world.

- “Was life like that? You could look ahead to the future or back at the past, but the present moved too quickly to absorb.”
- “What do you suppose makes people so eager to break rules?”
- “Mortals were never meant to use magic,” Grandpa said. “We are nonmagical beings.”
- “I’ve been wondering: Is everything from mythology true?”
- “Around here, what you don’t know can hurt you.”
- “The curse of mortality. You spend the first portion

of your life learning, growing stronger, more capable. And then, through no fault of your own, your body begins to fail.”

- “Pride made me careless,” Grandma said.
- “Satisfying needs is the burden of the poor. The wealthy and powerful can afford to indulge their wants and whims.”

Visualization: One strategy good readers use to understand text is *visualization*. Encourage students to use the illustrations to help them make meaning from the chapters as they read. Students may also enjoy making their own illustrations. Use the following as a place to start.

- Kendra and Seth discover the fairies/insects looking at themselves in the mirror. (Chapter Two)
- Seth discovers the hag. (Chapter Three)
- Grandpa Sorenson’s office. (Chapter Four)
- Grandpa demonstrating how fairies play with bubbles. (Chapter Seven)
- The children discover Grandma is a chicken. (Chapter Thirteen)

- Muriel is released from her bonds. (Chapter Thirteen)

After Reading

The following questions may be useful in promoting discussion about some of the themes and ideas found in *Fablehaven*. They are intended as a starting point for interactions in classrooms and with reading groups.

- There can be great protection from exact obedience. How is this principle reinforced for Seth? For Kendra? What happens to each of them when they break the rules? How does the principle of obedience function in your life?
- Kendra is generally a rule keeper, Seth a rule breaker. How do their attitudes evolve over the course of the book? Are there advantages to both attitudes? Disadvantages? Would you generally classify yourself more like Kendra or Seth?
- Consequences serve an essential role for maintaining order, justice, and harmony. How do laws help to keep order in Fablehaven? How are Kendra and Seth affected by the consequences of their decisions? How have the consequences of past decisions helped or hindered you?

- Many of the problems in Fablehaven arise as a result of decisions the characters make, often without bad intentions. Sometimes what we don't know *can* hurt us. How is that true for Kendra and Seth? Are there similar examples in the world around you?
- It can be a challenge to find the courage to do what we fear the most. What enables Kendra to do something that terrifies her? What circumstances do you find most intimidating? How do you find the strength to make it through difficult situations?
- Circumstances arise where many of the characters in Fablehaven have to risk their lives. Which events stick out in your mind as being the most memorable? Do you think you would risk your life for anything? If so, what?
- Many of the creatures in Fablehaven have roots in various mythologies, particularly Greek and Celtic. Can you identify which creatures come from which mythologies? Did you recognize any vocabulary in the book with mythological roots? What are some common words that come from mythologies?
- Several of the creatures of Fablehaven personify specific character attributes. A character attribute

might be something such as vanity, cleverness, aggression, cheerfulness. (See <http://www.literacyrules.com/pdf/Character%20Attributes.pdf> for more suggestions.) What do the fairies seem to personify? The satyrs? The cliff troll? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these characteristics?

- Lena spends part of her life as a naiad, in an unchanging state. What aspects of mortality does she like? What does she dislike? How do you think she feels about being returned to the water? Is it fair for the fairies to take her without asking if she wanted to return to being a naiad?
- Fablehaven exists to help protect and conserve vanishing magical species. Why would this be worthwhile? Why do you suppose Grandpa Sorenson even wanted to protect the dangerous creatures? What nonmagical plants or animals in our world are in danger of extinction? What are we doing to protect them?
- There is a promise at the front of the book that none who enter Fablehaven will leave unchanged. How do their experiences at Fablehaven change Seth and Kendra? Were you changed in any way by reading *Fablehaven*?
- When Kendra and Seth first arrive at Fablehaven,

they notice a series of signs advertising they are on private property. Seth thinks the signs are funny; Kendra thinks they are creepy. The final sign reads: CERTAIN DEATH AWAITS. Which of the two children do you agree with about the tone of the signs? Do you think the signs have been effective? Do they indicate what the children will really find once they are at Fablehaven? If you were to have a series of signs leading to your house, what do you think they would say?

- Grandma tells Kendra and Seth about the Society of the Evening Star, which is the subject of the second book in the series. Based on what they learn, what do you predict will happen in the next installment? How do you think Kendra and Seth will be involved? What happens to them in this book that may play a significant role in the next one?
- Author Brandon Mull often uses the theme “Imagination Can Take You Places” when he gives school presentations. How does this statement ring true for *Fablehaven*? How might you use the theme to describe your own life?

Extension Projects

- **Fantasy A–Z lexicon:** Make a chart that has all the letters A–Z within blocks that allow space for students to write several words under each letter. Ask

students to think of all the words they can that indicate “fantasy” and add these words to the lexicon under the letter each begins with. (Examples: faerie, giant, gnome, witch, wizard, etc.) Try to get at least one word under each letter of the alphabet. How do these words act together to give us a collective understanding of the genre of fantasy? What other reading or viewing helped you know which words to supply?

- **Writing the fantasy:** Have students write a poem or short story that would fit into the genre of fantasy, using the words they gathered on the fantasy A–Z lexicon. Encourage them to use setting, characters/characterization, and plot in a way that enriches their ideas and expands upon the fantasy in their pieces.
- Lena tells the story of her life, including how she changed from being a naiad into living as a human. Have students choose any other fantasy character from the novel and write his or her story, explaining what it’s like to live as a fairy, gollum, witch, etc. Encourage students to include how this character came to live in Fablehaven.
- **Writing the script:** Using online scripts from familiar movies as a model, teach students about writing scenes, using slug lines to establish setting and genre, character lists and descriptions to support dialogue,

and plot points to provide story. Include symbols (interior (int.), exterior (ext.), cut to, pan to, etc.) to clarify each scene. Work together as a whole class to draft a series of scenes for their movie version of *Fablehaven*.

- **Making the movie:** Have student groups choose a scene from the script they prepared, then work together as a film production crew and actors to make the movie. Show two or three short home-produced videos from a server such as YouTube as examples. Try to have at least one clip be from an original idea or concept. If video recording equipment is not available, students might prepare a storyboard of what they envision instead. Share the final results with the rest of the class.
- **Additional reading:** Students who enjoyed *Fablehaven* might be interested in reading the rest of the series on their own. Make sure that copies are available either in the classroom or from the school library.
- Additional resources and videos for educators can be found at BrandonMull.com.

About the Author

Brandon Mull, a lifelong fan of fantasy, has wanted to write novels since childhood. The Chronicles of Narnia awakened his love of reading, and The Lord of the Rings

sealed the deal. Mull credits the Harry Potter books for helping him recognize the existence of an audience for his stories. His intention with the Fablehaven series and *The Candy Shop War* has been to provide family-friendly fantasy for kids and adults to share.

A graduate of Brigham Young University, Mull worked in marketing for an independent film studio while he wrote his first unpublished novel. Although that manuscript was not accepted, it attracted the attention of the publisher Shadow Mountain, which asked Brandon to submit something else. "I had been collecting ideas all of my life," Mull says, so after considering what they were looking for, he settled on a premise about a preserve for all sorts of magical creatures. Five months later *Fablehaven* was accepted by the publisher, and Mull's lifelong dream began to come true. His first project after quitting his day job was to write *The Candy Shop War*.

Brandon has worked with illustrator Brandon Dorman on all of his books so far, including the illustrated picture book *Pingo*, about a boy whose imaginary friend becomes his imaginary enemy. After the Fablehaven series concludes with the fifth installment, *Keys to the Demon Prison*, Mull will write three books for Simon & Schuster tentatively titled the *Beyonders* series.

Now Mull spends most of the year writing, giving presentations to school groups, and spending time with his wife and three children. More than a million Fablehaven books are currently in print.