

Teachers' Guide to *Upside-Down Magic*

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The book:

It's never easy when your magic goes wonky.

For Nory, this means that instead of being able to turn into a dragon or a kitten, she turns into both of them at the same time—a Dritten. For Elliott, the simple act of conjuring fire from his fingertips turns into a frozen failure. For Andres, wonky magic means he's always floating in the air, bouncing off the walls, or sitting on the ceiling. For Bax, a bad moment of magic will turn him into a ... actually, he'd rather not talk about that.

Nory, Elliott, Andres, and Bax are just four of the students in Dunwiddle Magic School's Upside-Down Magic class. In their classroom, lessons are unconventional, students are unpredictable, and magic has a tendency to turn wonky at the worst possible moments....

Grades: 2 - 5

Key Concepts:

- Embracing differences in learning styles and abilities
- Fitting into new environments
- Building community

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1:

Nory Horace, a 10 year-old girl who can transform into animals, is practicing for the entrance exam to Sage Academy, an elite magic school. Nory *has* to get in. Her brother Hawthorn and sister Dalia are both students at the school, and her father is the headmaster. Too bad her magic is wonky. Something always goes wrong. Nory tries to turn herself into a perfect black kitten, but somehow she ends up as a beaver-kitten and chews through most of her father's office.

For discussion: Have you ever felt pressure join a group or team that you worried wasn't the right fit? What happened?

Classroom Activity: Nory turns into composite animals such as the Bitten (beaver-kitten) and later, the Dritten (dragon-kitten). Have the students brainstorm other composite animals, create names for them, and even build or draw them.

Chapter 2:

Nory and Hawthorn clean up the mess that Beaver-Kitten-Nory made. When their father returns home, he is furious but instead of talking with his kids, he turns invisible. The next morning is the day of the Big Test. Nory waits nervously in line for her turn. A fellow applicant—Lacey

Clench—is rude when Nory tries to wish her luck. Lacey goes in to take the test — and runs out of the testing room in tears. Uh-oh. Nory is next.

For discussion: Doctor Horace made himself invisible when confronted with the mess. Have you ever made yourself “invisible” to avoid a situation? Were you able to stay invisible?

Creative writing activity: What happened to Lacey in the testing room? Invite students to write their own versions, then to share and discuss.

Chapter 3:

Nory takes the Big Test in front of a group of teachers and her father. She tries the Flicker, Flare, Flyer, and Fuzzy tests—and fails. There’s only one left: the Fluxer test. Nory’s magic is big enough that she just might get into Sage Academy—if she can just keep her magic from going wonky.

Review: The five kinds of normative magic talents in this world are Fluxers (shape-shifters), Flares (make fire), Flyers (can fly), Flickers (invisibility powers) and Fuzzies (communicate with animals). Nory is an upside-down Fluxer.

For discussion: Have you ever wished you had a magic talent? What kind?

Class Activity: Divide students into the five kinds of F-magic. Have each group write the advantages and disadvantages of having their talent and share with the class.

Chapter 4:

It’s the Fluxer test, and at first Nory turns herself into a perfect black kitten. Hurrah! But why does her father smell so delicious? Did he have fish for breakfast? Nory’s kitten brain takes over and she bites her father’s hand. Then, her magic goes *really* wonky and she becomes a Dritten — a dragon-kitten. She flies around the auditorium, breathing fire. Sage Academy is *not* impressed. Admission denied!

For discussion: Have you ever done badly on a test or try-out? Where were you and why did it matter?

Art and creative writing activity: In small groups, students create single-page comic strip versions of Nory’s Sage Academy Fluxer test. Have them use both dialogue and thought bubbles, using key quotations from the book. Encourage them to think about what the most important moments of this scene are, and to draw those moments. Which moments need close-ups? Which moments should be seen from far away?

Chapter 5:

At home, no one talks about Nory’s rejection from Sage Academy, and no one tells her what will happen when the school year starts. Then one day, Aunt Margo arrives. She is a Flyer and runs a magical taxi service. Aunt Margo takes a dejected Nory to live with her at her house in the small

town of Dunwiddle, where there is a public school that offers a class called Upside-Down Magic for students whose magic doesn't conform to the usual types.

For discussion: Nory is leaving home. Have you ever left home without your family? What were you worried about? How did you handle it?

Writing activity: Write a diary entry from Nory's perspective after she arrives at Aunt Margo's house.

Chapter 6:

Aunt Margo helps Nory get settled, and the next day, Nory's new classmate Elliott walks her to school. Nory and Elliott both have first-day jitters, but they talk to each other about their wonky magic. Elliott is a freezer: he can flare a little bit, but the objects he lights on fire always turn to ice. He tells Nory all about the other students who will be in their Upside-Down Magic class, including a terrifying kid named Pepper who has Fierce magic and frightens animals.

For discussion: Why do you think Elliott and Nory don't want the students with typical magic to see what they do?

Classroom Activity: Have each student invent a new type of magic, as well as the upside-down version. Invite them to share with the class.

Chapter 7:

Nory's first few minutes at Dunwiddle School are overwhelming. She takes shelter in a supply closet. To her surprise, another girl is hiding there, too and she also happens to be in the Upside-Down Magic class. Together they decide to leave the safety of the closet and on the way to class, Nory warns her new friend about the scary Fierce Pepper. They meet their teacher Ms. Starr, who introduces Nory and her new friend to the rest of the class. The new friend *is* Pepper! Oops. Ashamed at her unkindness, Nory accidentally turns into a bitten—a beaver-kitten.

For discussion: Unlike Nory, you don't turn into a beaver-kitten when you've made an embarrassing mistake. What do you do instead?

Vocabulary: Here are some unusual words from chapter seven of Upside-Down Magic. Have students look up definitions in the dictionary and share their findings. Consider creating a word wall to display the words in your classroom. Words: *deliriously*, *victims*, *posture*, *cardigan*, *thuggish*, *tingle*.

Chapter 8:

Beaver-Kitten-Nory chews things up all over Ms. Starr's classroom before transforming back into a humiliated Girl-Nory. Ms. Starr insists that unusual magic is nothing to be ashamed of, and wants everyone to follow Nory's example and demonstrate for the class what their own magic is. A few students demonstrate, including Andres, who is a flyer who can't get down from the ceiling. He would float into the sky if he weren't attached to a leash.

For discussion: Ms. Starr encourages her students to demonstrate their upside-down magic talents. Do you have any talents that might be called “wonky” that you’re willing to share with the class?

Writing activity: Ask students to rewrite the scene (the morning of the first day of school in Upside-Down Magic class) from the perspective of one of the other characters: Ms. Starr, Andres, Sebastian, Pepper, or Willa.

Chapter 9:

Ms. Starr asks to see the remaining students’ magic. A boy named Bax is particularly reluctant. He is an upside-down Fluxer like Nory, but can only turn into a rock. When he does, he gets stuck and has to be taken to the nurse’s office.

For discussion: Have you ever been reluctant to share something about yourself with your classmates or your friends? What happened?

Class activity: Make predictions. Now that you know the upside-down magic of all Ms. Starr’s students, what do you think will happen next in the story? You might have students write possible plots and invite them to read their ideas aloud to the class.

Chapter 10:

At lunch, Nory and Elliott sit with Elliott’s Flare friends from his previous school. They call themselves The Sparkies. One of them—Lacey Clench—was at the Sage Academy test with Nory. When the Sparkies tease Nory and Elliott for being in the Upside-Down Magic class, Nory turns into a Skunk-Elephant and sprays. Lacey and the Sparkies get covered in skunk spray.

For discussion: What are some ways to stop bullying that don’t involve skunk spray?

Art and Social Service activity: Have students make anti-bullying PSAs to put around the classroom or school. Work together to think of creative slogans and images.

Chapter 11:

The other UDM kids are mad at Nory for calling attention to their different magic in the cafeteria. Ms. Starr encourages them all to get in touch with their emotions through interpretive dance. But everyone is still mad. Later, Nory gets a call from Hawthorn and Dalia, who have a plan. If Nory can close off the “wonky” part of herself, she can get into Sage Academy and move back home. Nory agrees to try.

For discussion: What do you think of Ms. Starr’s lessons? Interpretive dance, headstands, and so forth.

Dance activity: Divide into groups of three or four and create a short, interpretive dance based on a single emotion. For example: fear, worry, embarrassment, loneliness, joy, gratitude, grief, surprise. Use a drum or shakers to provide a beat that can go with whichever emotion is being performed. Students should perform the dance for the class and see if the other students can guess the emotion.

Chapter 12:

Nory convinces Elliott that they should work together to improve their normal magic and squash their upside-down magic. Together, they ask Ms. Starr if they can be tested for the regular fifth grade classes. Ms. Starr responds that she thinks they would do better to accept their unusual talent and learn to make the most of them, but reluctantly agrees to ask Principal Gonzalez about testing.

Vocabulary: Return to the word-wall and the dictionary. Here are some unusual words from Chapter 12 of Upside-Down magic: *grooming, levitating, exception, route, calico, soothing, coaxing, pang.*

Physical activity: Ms. Starr tells the students that headstands clear your head, reduce stress, and give you another way of thinking about the world. Ask for volunteers to perform a headstand (against the wall is easiest! Tuck your shirts in!) or to drape themselves backwards over a chair. Then ask the students if they think Ms. Starr was right. How does being upside down make them feel? Do they notice anything different about the classroom?

Chapter 13:

After school, Nory and Elliott go back to Aunt Margo's to practice suppressing their upside-down magic. Aunt Margo thinks they should stay in UDM and be themselves, but lets them practice anyway. Things do not go well: Nory turns into a kitten-goat and eats half the back yard, while Elliott freezes all of Aunt Margo's flowers.

For discussion: Aunt Margo doesn't like that Nory and Elliott are trying to suppress their magic, but she lets them practice anyway. Why do you think she does that?

Research and writing activity: Have students research kittens and goats using non-fiction books from the library. Then consider what a kitten-goat would be like. What would it eat? What abilities would it have? Next, students can write persuasive letters to their parents asking to adopt a kitten-goat, highlighting the benefits of kitten-goats over other pets, and taking into account the additional maintenance a kitten-goat might require.

Chapter 14:

Nory and Elliott find out that Principal Gonzalez has approved their request to be tested for the regular classes. Hurrah! Too bad their practices are still disasters. At school the next day, Nory finds a book on her desk called *The Box of Normal*, which describes a technique for suppressing upside-down magic. Nory follows the book's advice, and it works! Amazing! She can maintain an ordinary black kitten for ten entire minutes! Nory discovers that Pepper is the one who left her the book. It couldn't work for her, because her magic is so unusual, but Pepper hopes it will help Nory and Elliott realize their goals.

For discussion: Elliott's father and Nory's father are very different types of parents. What is your own family like, and why do you think the adults in it make the choices they do?

Activity: Have students draw a box of normal on a sheet of paper. Are there parts of your personality that you would put in the box? What would stay outside? Consider, feelings, actions, physical qualities and more. Invite students to share.

Chapter 15: The *Box of Normal* suppression techniques also work for Elliott. He practices flaring eggs and marshmallows. He and Nory work on their normative magic during an activity in Upside-Down Magic class, annoying Ms. Starr. Finally, Nory and Elliott take the test with Principal Gonzalez. They do well at their skills, and await the decision.

For discussion: What do you think the word *normal* means?

Writing activity: Have the students write their predictions on how the book will end and share with the class. Once they've finished reading, ask if their predictions were turned out accurate.

Snack: Bring in marshmallows and hard-boiled eggs to share. Or just marshmallows.

Chapter 16:

Nory thinks about the things she might miss in UDM when she and Elliott are transferred. At recess, Elliott tells the Sparkies that he's transferring, and finds himself in trouble when they taunt him and threaten him with a flaming stick. The other UDM students come to his defense, but Andres ends up floating into the sky when Lacey sets his leash on fire. To bring him back to safety, Nory, Elliott, and Bax each have to use their upside-down magic creatively, and Nory turns into a giant bird with a human face. Thanks to Nory and the rest of UDM, Andres is saved.

For discussion: The UDM students have to work together creatively to help Andres. Can you think of a time when you had to work with others to creatively to solve a problem? What happened?

Community problem-solving activity: Uh-oh. One of the students in your class is stuck on the ceiling! How can your class work together to get the student down using classroom objects? Have students devise plans in small groups and share their collaborative solutions.

Chapter 17:

Principal Gonzalez lectures Lacey and the Sparkies for being intolerant and unkind. He pulls Nory and Elliott aside and tells them that they belong in UDM because if they leave Ms. Starr's class, they will not receive proper training for their unusual magics. Nory and Elliott are disappointed, but they realize that their upside-down magic does have interesting potential, and what's more, the community of Ms. Starr's classroom is important to them.

For discussion: At first, Nory and Elliott are disappointed that they can't switch out of UDM, but then they change their minds. Have you ever been disappointed about something, and then changed your mind later? What happened?

Creative writing activity: Ask students to create a dialogue between Lacey and Principal Gonzalez in his office. Encourage them to think about the different ways the two characters speak, and to imagine what each one of them wants from the meeting. Suggest they think about what Lacey would think and feel about what she did to Elliott and Andres.

Chapter 18:

A week later, Nory has a party for the UDM students in Aunt Margo's backyard. During the party, Dalia and Hawthorn call to ask about the test, and Nory tells them she is staying in the UDM class. She decides that it might not be so bad being upside-down after all.

For discussion: Why did Nory change her mind about Upside-Down Magic?

Creative writing activity: Epilogue! Ask students to write a scene that takes place one month later. Encourage them to make some predictions about what happens in book two of the series, and to hint at that in their epilogue. (By the way: Book 2 of the *Upside-Down Magic* series comes out in July, 2016!)

Snack: You probably can't make slushees (unless you have a freezer like Elliott in your classroom), but you can serve lemonade, just like Aunt Margo does.