

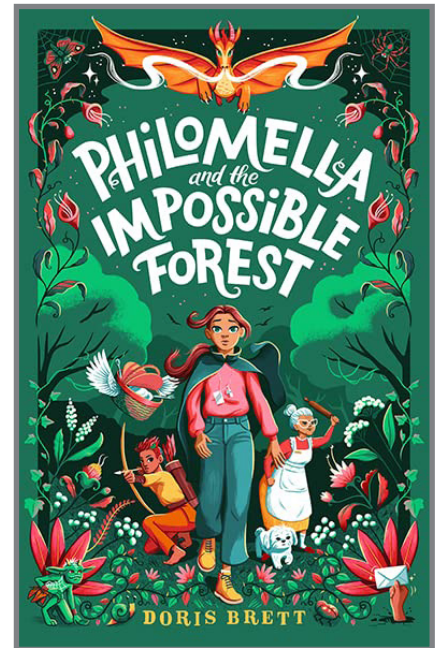
Philomella and the Impossible Forest

AUTHOR
DORIS BRETT

SCIS: 5441142

ISBN: 9781761211690

RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

When Philomella is drawn into the Impossible Forest—a place where anything can happen and usually does—she's headed for all the adventure she never wanted. There's a belligerent princess to rescue, trolls to battle and a treacherously bewitching river to cross . . . and that's just for starters. They're all part of a mysterious enemy's grand plan to destroy both the Forest and Philomella—and in this world of strange and dangerous magic, she'll have to beat her deadly opponent using only her brains.

And so, joined by some oddball companions (including a picnic basket with attitude, a boy whose ancestors were trees and a grandmother with weaponised kitchenware), Philomella sets out to do the impossible.

Can Philomella save the Forest? And can she also learn how to save herself?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doris Brett is a clinical psychologist as well as a multi award-winning author. To her publishers' dismay, she has been promiscuous about genres, publishing books ranging from novels to poetry to memoir, to narrative therapy for children and, in keeping with the trend of diversity, a book on bread-baking.

She lives in Melbourne with her husband and is altruistically devoted to keeping her house in a permanent state of untidiness in order to provide friends and visitors with an immediate thrill of virtue as they compare the state of their living spaces to hers.

THEMES

- Bravery
- Compassion
- Heroism
- Fitting in
- Imagination
- Self-acceptance
- Danger

STUDY NOTES

- Doris Brett uses a traditional quest narrative to explore themes of resilience, courage and confidence, and to develop the emotional literacy of readers. All of the characters have moments where they must reflect on their behaviour, or reconsider their attitude towards other people. Philomella in particular undergoes significant transformation in the way she sees herself. Discuss the way that Philomella's attitude towards herself changes, and which scenes in the story lead to this transformation.
- Philomella undertakes a hero's journey, a narrative structure coined by Joseph Campbell. In it, the hero goes on a quest that takes them from the known world to the unknown and returns them once more, changed. The quest begins with the call to adventure, and then follows a number of formulaic steps including meeting a mentor, undertaking a number of challenges, and going through a process of transformation and atonement. There are a number of visual interpretations of the hero's journey readily available online. Use one of these diagrams to map out Philomella's adventure:
 - What is the call to adventure?
 - What factors influence her decision to answer it?
 - What other stories can you think of that fit this kind of narrative?
- Answer the following comprehension questions after reading the story:
 - What does the Great Tree say to Philomella about danger? What advice does it give her about how to approach danger?
 - Does Philomella have a choice about whether or not to go on an adventure? What does she decide and why?
 - Why doesn't Ash like Philomella?
 - What power do names have over people and creatures? Discuss names you've been called that have made you feel good or bad about yourself. Has naming something ever changed the way you've felt about something (for example, made it less scary)?
 - What did Bill's anger cause him to lose?
 - What's dangerous about giving a memory to an Eater? Choose a bad memory of your own—who would you be without this memory?
 - What does Philomella want to remember about her father? Why does she find it confusing to think about him?
 - When he's talking about his anger, Bill says 'when you're angry all the time, you can't feel any of those [good] things. You can't love any of those things. Anger takes up all the room there is' (p 114). Have you ever been so angry that you couldn't think about or enjoy anything else? What did Bill fear he would feel if he let go of his anger? Have you ever felt this way?
 - When Philomella reflects on the Dancers, she realises that she wanted so much for them to be as perfect as they seemed, that she'd refused to see that they weren't. Have you ever thought that someone or something was perfect and not wanted to look any deeper to see their flaws? Do you think any of the characters in the book are all good or all bad?
 - Tricks reminds Philomella that 'lots of things are weapons. Words are weapons' (p 245). Have you ever used words as weapons? Have words ever been used as weapons against you? What do you think makes something a weapon?
 - Compare Philomella to heroes in other books you've read. How is she similar or different? Do you think anyone is truly cut out to be a hero? What are the most important qualities for a hero to have?
- When Philomella meets the Tree it tells her that 'safety is comfortable, but it is often only through mistakes, risks and even danger that we truly learn' (p 28). Do you agree? Write about a time that you've learned something useful through making a mistake or taking a risk. What was the danger? What was the reward? Was it worth it?
- As Philomella walks home from school, she is thinking that if she were to go to wizards' school, the spells she would like to learn are 'spells for turning back time. Spells for punishing people who were mean to you. Spells for making people never leave you' (p 4). What spell would you most like to learn if you could? What would you use it for? What would the risks be?
- Before they cross the Bridge, Gertrude tells the group to write down five things they would want to remember about themselves or their lives if all of their other memories disappeared. Think about five memories that capture

important parts of who you are and write them down. Discuss why each memory is significant to you.

- The Lady's brother (Tricks) tells Philomella that if he had helped her 'then you wouldn't have had the chance to help yourself' (p 191). Do you think his way is best? Do you agree with Tricks that if someone is always helping you then it's harder to learn how to help yourself? Rewrite one of the scenes imagining that Tricks has stepped in to help—how does this change the story?
- In the Impossible Forest, Philomella meets many impossible creatures. Which one is your favourite and why? Draw a picture that shows how you imagine it looks. Create another impossible creature to add to the Forest and write a scene where Philomella encounters it.
- Rewrite a scene from the perspective of one of the other characters. How might they see things differently?

AUTHOR OF NOTES
BEC KAVANAGH