

Smoke & Mirrors

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary

(Violence, Sexual References, References to Voluntary Assisted Dying)



SYNOPSIS

Grace cares about only two things: performing magic and her cantankerous gran. Gran shares her prickly personality and spiky sense of humour, and she's the only one Grace lets into her tightly locked heart—until she meets Simon, a schoolmate who promises to help her turn her magic tricks into a small business and social media stardom.

When Gran is diagnosed with a terminal illness, Grace moves in to become her primary carer. With the help of Simon and some sleight of hand, Grace is determined to bring joy back into their lives. And when she confronts her worst fear, she realises maybe her heart doesn't need to stay locked away after all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barry Jonsberg has won numerous awards for his books, both nationally and internationally. He has been published in twenty countries and translated into many languages. In 2019 his bestselling novel, *My Life As An Alphabet*, was made into an award-winning film, *H is For Happiness*, released throughout the world to great critical acclaim. The same production company is now working on an adaptation of his novel *Catch Me If I Fall*.

STUDY NOTES

- What might this quote from David Berglas mean: 'The impossible I do immediately; miracles take a little longer'? You can watch him here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCBdhuLG2sw>> (slightly poor quality, but the trick is clear). Have students confer and suggest ways the trick might have been done.
- The initial chapter is called 'Trick 1'—how might this title affect readers' understanding of what will come next?
- Having read 'Trick 1', explain, using quotes, how the author creates sympathy for the first-person narrator, Grace.
- Rewrite the scene in Trick 1 from the class teacher, Miss Smith's perspective.
- Look at 'Trick 2', where Grace's Uncle Mike is introduced. How is he characterised by Grace? Note four pieces of information that give you a clear impression of him. Consider if we can always believe other people's perspectives.
- Think about the description of the setting in 'Trick 6'. Describe a place you have been in that you felt was designed to make you feel a certain way. What colours, furniture, other objects were used and what was the overall effect on you?
- After reading 'Trick 8', write a personal opinion of Grace's mother, taking into account what we know happened to Grace's father, as well as her interactions with Grace.
- Grace is making TikTok videos: find your favourite TikTok video—that's appropriate for school—and share with your teacher, who may share some with the class. Why is this your favourite video?

- There is an important discovery on p 112 which is elaborated upon in the next few pages. What is it? How might it adjust your view of Grace?
- In 'Trick 18', we see Grace practising escapology. The chapter ends with her waking from a disturbing dream. What answers might she have been looking for in her dream?
- On p 180, Dr D'ath (Dr Death) outlines his reasons for not supporting Voluntary Assisted Dying for Grace's gran. For him, it's a question of ethical decision making. Do you agree with him? Do you know more about Gran than he does? Write your answer with evidence.
- In 'Trick 22', Grace is in distress. Readers know what her schoolmates don't (dramatic irony). How did you react to others filming her with their phones? Is that an okay thing to do? Why or why not?
- On p 120 we find out about what has happened to Grace's father and brother. What does this revelation, juxtaposed with her experience at school, position readers to think about Grace?
- Grace attempts to elicit the Placebo Effect suggested by Nurse Sonja in 'Trick 25'. You can read about it here: <https://eslbrains.com/the-placebo-effect/>. How far do you agree with Grace that this is a good idea for her gran?

AUTHOR OF NOTES
CAROLYN WALSH