



# The Best Witch in Paris

LAUREN CROZIER

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 8+

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## CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.



Credit: Marnya Rothe

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Crozier won the 2023 Text Prize for her debut novel *The Best Witch in Paris*. She lives in Sydney with her partner and their two children.

## SYNOPSIS

Luna Wood isn't sure who she is. She was found in the forest as a baby by three witches, and now, at almost thirteen years old, Luna still has no idea where she came from. Luna's also not entirely sure she's a real witch. She is a student at Grim's School for the Education of Young Witches, but her broomstick keeps crashing, her spells often fizzle, and she doesn't have a familiar. Then a bird seller in the Lost Forest trades Luna a boobook owl for her moonstone ring. The bird seller tells Luna she must keep the owl hidden, and Luna soon finds out why. Madame Valadon, the best witch in Paris, has lost her boobook owl, and suspects Luna of stealing it.

Luna is summoned to a meeting with the Secretary of the Magic Council of Paris, who informs her that because Luna has no proof that her mother was a witch, she is forbidden from using magic. Luna is determined to prove she is a real witch, and that the boobook is her familiar. As she searches for answers, Madame Valadon ramps up her attempts to retrieve the boobook.

Luna discovers that Madame Valadon is using the boobook's magic to be the most powerful witch in Paris. The boobook is suffering from the strain of being used by Madame Valadon. Unless Luna can find a way to undo the spell, the boobook will not survive.

With the help of her friends Saffie and Marielle, Luna attempts to find *The Grimoire*, a book of Bad Magic that holds the key to reversing Madame Valadon's hold on the boobook. Will they be able to decipher the code and undo the Bad magic before it's too late?

*The Best Witch in Paris* is a magical mystery story about courage and believing in yourself. A novel for middle-grade readers that is full of fun, fantasy, and adventure.

## BEFORE READING

1. Look at the front cover. What clues does it give you about the story? What kind of story do you think this will be? What questions do you have? What predictions can you make?



- The boobook is a native Australian owl. Use the internet to look at images of the boobook. What other information can you find about this bird?
- Have you read any other books or watched any films about witches? What are some common elements that stories about witches or magic share? Make a list of these elements: e.g. wands, broomsticks, etc.
- This book is set in both Paris and Melbourne. Look at maps of these cities, and research some of their landmarks. How are these cities similar? How are they different? In what ways could they be magical?

### WHILE READING

- What is baby Luna holding in her hand?
- What does Luna bring to class instead of a broom?
- Where is Luna's overdue library book? How do you think it got there?
- What does the word 'odious' mean? (p. 59) Why does Aunt Agnes use it to describe Madame Valadon?
- What does Luna discover on the boobook's collar?
- What is clause thirteen? Why is Luna accused of breaching it?
- How does Luna get to Melbourne from Paris without a broom?
- 'You should never put a collar on a familiar. They're not pets.' (p. 109) What makes a familiar different from a pet? Why would Madame Valadon put a collar on her familiar?
- What is Aunt Jessie's advice for dealing with monsters?
- How does Silver save Luna from the giant spider?
- What does Luna discover about Madame Valadon when she sneaks into her hotel room? How does she figure it out?
- What does Luna want Marielle to help her discover about her past?
- In what ways do the twins tell Luna that her aunts have changed? What does Octavia think it was that changed them?
- What does Etta Oh say Silver's feathers are a sign of?
- What does the feather Luna finds with her baby things prove about Silver?
- What is the reversal for the Nighttime Spell to Steal a Familiar?
- In addition to being the secretary of the Magic Council of Paris, who does Monsieur Noir work for? What does Luna discover about him?
- What happens to Madame Valadon's appearance when she grabs Silver?
- What does Luna learn about her mother from the bird seller?

### AFTER READING

#### CHARACTER

- Create character profiles for Luna's three aunts: Agnes, Henrietta and Jessie. How are they alike? How are they different?
- The name Luna means 'moon'. Why do you think the aunts chose this name for the baby they found? Why does it suit Luna? Do you know the meaning of your name and why it was chosen for you? Do you think it suits you?
- 'Luna looked away uncomfortably. She was starting to realise just how wrong she had been about Marielle.' (p. 181) How does Luna feel about Marielle at the start of the book? How does that feeling change? Why?
- Who are the characters that help Luna in this story? Who are the characters that hinder her? In what ways do they do this?

#### STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- This book is a magical fantasy story. Make a list of things that make it magical – i.e. things that wouldn't happen in the real world. For example, singing hot chocolate.
- 'Luna's cheeks glowed like full moons.' (p. 290) There are lots of great similes and metaphors in this book. Come up with some magical similes of your own to describe the following things: a forest, a broomstick flying through the air, an owl.
- What is a prologue? How is it different from the other chapters in a book? What is an epilogue? If this book had an epilogue, what do you think it might be about?

### THEMES

#### Self-belief and identity

- 'You know, sometimes I worry whether magic is in good hands. But then I look at you and I know it'll be okay.' (p. 63) Luna's Aunt Agnes believes in her. Who else believes in Luna and her magic? Who encourages and believes in you?
- 'Luna wasn't so sure. How could she be sure, when she was always forgetting spells, and she'd just lost a broom that had never done as it was told, anyway?' (p. 64) Luna receives the curse of doubt. What does Luna doubt about herself? How does she get rid of the curse?
- How does Luna use her pocket mirror when she's feeling doubtful? Have you ever tried talking to yourself like Luna does? Make a list of other strategies you might use to cope when you are unsure about something, such as writing things down or drawing.
- 'Sometimes a curse will show you something useful about yourself.' (p. 166) What does Professor Claire mean? What useful thing did Luna's curse show her



about herself? What about Saffie and Marielle? Can you identify a 'curse' that you have? What can you learn from it?

5. 'She'd lost her right to use magic and call herself a witch, her place at Grim's school and probably her only real friend with it. She couldn't lose Silver too.' (p. 109) Luna loses many of the things that make her who she is. How does she get them back? What are the things that make you who you are?

### Courage

1. 'Without fear you can't have courage.' (p. 165) What do you think Professor Claire means? Can you think of a time you've been afraid but have also shown courage?
2. 'Of all the perilous scrapes she had found herself in, this one had to be about the worst. Just as the flames were beginning to feel too hot for comfort, she heard a soft sound from within her pocket.' (p. 157) What gives Luna the courage to face the demons at her birthday party? What other scary situations does Luna encounter in this book? Who or what gives her the courage to overcome them? Who or what gives you courage when you need it?
3. 'Perhaps if she hadn't been so busy being afraid of Marielle, she might have learned the truth about Madame Valadon a long time ago.' (p. 181) Luna is afraid of Marielle until she gets to know her. Have you ever been afraid of something or someone you didn't know much about? Did learning more about that thing or person help ease your fear?
4. 'Almost impossible . . . is another way of saying a bit possible.' (p. 228) Have you ever been in a situation that felt almost impossible? How can changing the way we think about things help us deal with them?
5. 'Luna summoned all the magic she'd ever learned from her aunts, from Saffie and Marielle, from Professor Claire and Emmanuelle, from the witches of Paris and Melbourne, and from Silver.' (pp. 275—276) Luna gets help and advice from lots of different people and places. Try summoning all the 'magic' you have learned about coping in tricky situations. Where did you learn it? Make a list of advice for someone to use when they are feeling afraid?

### Belonging

1. 'I know you ask yourself if you're enough, Luna, but you don't need to. And though it doesn't always feel like it, you belong.' (p. 256) Professor Claire tells Luna that she belongs at magic school. Why is it so important to feel like you belong somewhere? Where do you belong? Who or what makes you feel this way?
2. 'Luna was about to explain that she couldn't possibly stop for tea at a time like this, with her aunts vanished and Silver so unwell, but her legs buckled beneath her and she found herself sitting. Emmanuelle passed her a familiar cup with a broom-shaped handle. It was warm and comforting

in her hands.' (p. 220) Luna is worried about Silver and her aunts, but she stops to have a cup of tea with Emmanuelle. What other things do we do with friends or family that comfort and strengthen us in difficult times?

3. 'Friends know that sort of thing about each other.' (p. 120) What does Luna know about her friend Saffie? What do you know about your friends? What do they know about you?
4. What was Marielle's curse? How did Luna help her break it?
5. What could you do to make people in your school and your wider community feel a sense of belonging? It could be something as simple as inviting someone to sit with you at lunchtime, or asking someone a question about their weekend. Make a list of ways to help people feel like they belong.

### RESPONDING

1. Make a list of all the characters and their familiars. What kind of familiar do you think would be 'exactly right for you'? (p. 18) Choose an animal that you think matches your personality in some way (rather than just an animal you like). Research your animal, and write your own Little Book of about them. Don't forget to give your familiar a name!
2. Create a spell. What is it intended to do? What special phrases does it use? What special ingredients or tools? How can your spell be reversed?
3. Marielle says her 'craft is the past'. (p. 181) Aunt Jessie's craft is monsters. What other special skills or interests do the witches in this book have? What is your 'craft'?
4. Create your own cipher. Try substituting some letters for others, or using numbers or symbols. Give it to someone else and see if they can decipher it.
5. At the end of the book, Luna still doesn't know exactly who her mother is. Write a final chapter that provides an answer to this mystery. Where does Luna find her mother? Why did she give Luna up? What do they say to each other?
6. Think about the place you live. What would it be like if it were magical? Make a list of some everyday things around you and give them a magical element. For example, the trees you walk past on the way to school might have singing acorns.