

Merlin's Candles

A Specifically Created Work
of Inter-Curriculum Fiction
for Grades 4 through 8

Preface to the Teacher's Kit

Welcome to *Merlin's Candles*.

This novel is an action/adventure story that incorporates magic and time travel.

For students: it is a modern re-telling of the much-loved tale of Merlin and King Arthur.

For teachers: it provides a highly flexible, extremely adaptable, source from which a “novel study” or “thematic unit” can be extended across numerous subject areas. *Merlin's Candles* has been augmented with sufficient elements from the new Ontario curriculum to allow teachers to choose from up to 40 % of the overall curriculum's expectations for their grade in order to create effective integrated lesson plans.

The Author's Goal

My purpose was two-fold: first, to create a novel that could serve as a rich resource for teachers from which to prepare cross-curriculum lesson plans; second, to write an exciting story that would draw students to the material.

Since a “novel study” or “thematic unit” continues over a number of weeks, it made sense to link the novel to as many areas of the curriculum as possible.

Which Came First – the Novel or the Curriculum?

The novel, naturally. A full story draft was completed before any curriculum elements were added. This was done to maintain the integrity of the novel (plot/character/setting). Since the character Merlin is a modern day elementary school science teacher, certain areas of the curriculum were an obvious fit. However, I was surprised to discover how well other areas of the curriculum enriched the novel (e.g., in chapter 2, the addition of specific examples of how Morgan Le Fay uses root words and word origins to understand modern English allowed me an opportunity to further reveal her character, as well as to add some background information about early medieval times).

Reading Level

The teacher’s assessment of his/her students’ reading levels should guide the decision to use this novel. The ideal reading level for the novel is grade 6. However, proficient readers in grades 4 and 5 will enjoy and benefit from its inclusion in their classes. Also, struggling readers in grades 7 and 8 will gain greatly from the integrated lessons that can be pulled from its pages — allowing their strengths and interests in other subject areas to help increase their skills in Language studies.

What's in it for the Teacher?

Merlin's Candles is the kind of resource that helps teachers meet current requirements to:

- “ - align learning activities with curriculum expectations;
- link content and skills to everyday life experiences;
- integrate a variety of teaching and learning strategies, activities and resources from different disciplines;
- draw from concepts in different disciplines for thematic study;
- plan and teach more than one subject with several applied concepts . . .”

(pg.29/30, Teacher Effectiveness)

Merlin's Candles provides a single source from which to generate integrated lessons on numerous topics of study. The Teacher's Kit for *Merlin's Candles* provides a detailed outline for preparing such cross-subject lesson plans as well as a fully developed “thematic unit”. This will help teachers to plan programs that meet the Ministry of Education's guideline of “emphasizing cross-curricular learning by:

- 1) coordinating the teaching of related content in two or more subjects;
- 2) providing opportunities for students to work towards expectations in two or more subjects within one lesson.”

(pgs. 8/10-11 Ontario Curriculum-Social Studies/Science & Technology)

What's in it for the Student?

There is a current movement towards raising literacy scores for boys. A “novel study” of *Merlin’s Candles* achieves this in three ways. First, by providing a subject matter of interest to boys; second, by allowing other areas of the curriculum to encourage the improvement of boys’ Language skills; and third, by incorporating non-fiction reading into class time.

Girls will be drawn to the book not only because its female characters are strong and decisive, but because its inclusion in a class study will allow them to explore curriculum elements from other subjects within a Language-learning context.

The Ministry of Education agrees that such an integrated approach benefits all students:

“The development of skills and knowledge in one subject area is often related to learning in other subject areas.”

(pg.8, Ontario Curriculum- Social Studies)

Merlin’s Candles packs tremendous learning potential into the pages of an exciting and magical story.

Language is the Key

Language is the primary skill that crosses all strands and all subjects. A novel incorporates information into a familiar and accessible format that can hold a student’s interest throughout the entire text.

Merlin’s Candles will appeal to anyone who loves to read fantasy or action/adventure. The Ministry recognizes the value of offering such genres to students:

“Reading experiences that invite students to discover new worlds and new experiences and to develop their own imaginative powers will go a long way towards convincing them that literature and other reading materials can be a rich source of pleasure and knowledge.”

(pg. 27, Ontario Curriculum - Language).

A “novel study” of *Merlin’s candles*, or the implementation of the “thematic unit” provided in the Teacher’s Kit, will not only provide ample opportunity for language use and learning, but will do so using details that draw on a broad range of curriculum-based expectations across all subjects.

How the Idea for *Merlin's Candles* Came About

In preparation for my studies in the Faculty of Education at York University (2002/03), I worked for a year as a classroom volunteer at Franklin St. Public School in Markham, Ontario. During this year, I noticed with interest the use of new “inter-curriculum” teaching materials in grade 6 (particularly, the integration of math with social studies).

While assisting with a grade 7 novel study unit, I began to wonder whether the same “inter-curriculum” approach could be presented as effectively in fiction as I had seen it presented in non-fiction. I read the new curriculum guidelines for grades 1 to 8 and came to the conclusion that such a work of fiction was possible.

Before deciding to become a teacher, I worked as a writer. I was just completing the first draft of *Merlin's Candles* when I decided to test the viability of “inter-curriculum fiction” by attempting to integrate appropriate elements from Social Studies/Geography, Science & Technology, Language, Mathematics, The Arts and Health (grades 4 through 8) into the novel.

Sample List of Subject Areas Included in the Novel

*(a complete list, including grade-specific expectations,
is provided in the Teacher's Kit)*

Amphibians
Classification Systems
Climate Patterns (coastal rain forest)
Diversity of Living Things (adaptations in nature and society)
Electricity
Energy (stored/transferred/transformed)
Environmental Issues (pollution/conservation)
Erosion
Food Chain/Food Web
Food Groups
Habitats/Ecosystems
Healthy Living/Active Participation (bullying/problem solving)
Human Organ Systems (circulatory/respiratory)
Light and Sound
Map Reading/Making
Matter and Materials
Mechanical Systems (mechanical advantage)
Medieval Times
Micro-organisms
Music
Natural Resources
Pulleys and Gears
Rate and Ratio
Rocks and Minerals
Root Words and Word Origins
Probability
Soil Formation
Vegetation Patterns
Weather

Quantifying Inter-Curriculum Content in *Merlin's Candles*

GRADE 4

17 out of the possible 18 curriculum strands within the 5 major subjects are represented. The exception being the Canada and World Connections strand of Social Studies.

There are 142 related expectations (out of a possible 308) for teachers to choose from when making integrated lesson plans or coordinating a “thematic unit”.

GRADE 5

16 out of the possible 16 curriculum strands within 4 major subjects are represented. Note: Social Studies is not represented here because the strands of “Early Civilizations” and “Aspects of Government in Canada” simply do not apply.

There are 133 related expectations (out of a possible 296) for teachers to choose from when making integrated lesson plans or coordinating a “thematic unit”.

GRADE 6

15 out of the possible 16 curriculum strands within 4 major subjects are represented. Note: Social Studies is not represented here because the strands of “Aboriginal Peoples and European Explorers” and “Canada and Its Trading Partners” simply do not apply.

There are 105 related expectations (out of a possible 294) for teachers to choose from when making integrated lesson plans or coordinating a “thematic unit”.

Quantifying Inter-Curriculum Content in *Merlin's Candles* (Cont'd.)

GRADE 7

15 out of the possible 16 curriculum strands for 5 major subjects are represented. Note: History is not represented here because the strands of “New France” and “British North America” simply do not apply.

There are 115 related expectations (out of a possible 290) for teachers to choose from when making integrated lesson plans or coordinating a “thematic unit”.

GRADE 8

15 out of the possible 16 curriculum strands within 5 major subjects are represented in *Merlin's Candles*. Note: History is not represented here because the strand of “The Development of Western Canada” simply does not apply.

There are 110 related expectations (out of a possible 296) for teachers to choose from when making integrated lesson plans or coordinating a “thematic unit”.

Works Cited

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge with heart-felt gratitude the advice, guidance, help and encouragement that I received from the administration team and the teachers at Franklin Street Public School, Markham, Ontario:

Jossett Sassoon, Principal
Mary Louise Icely, Vice Principal
Anetta Mastrangelo, teacher (E.S.L.)
Marina Cochrane, teacher (Grade 6)
Jay Wolkoff, teacher (Science)
Joan Miyata, teacher/librarian
Hilda Hutton, teacher (Reading Recovery)

I would like to offer a special thank you to Lynn Girdler (teacher) who was pursuing her Masters of Education in Curriculum at the time, and who shared with me numerous materials on curriculum theory and application.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Bette Walker (teacher/author/Language Arts consultant) for her considerable contribution to the editing of the novel and to the preparation of the teacher's kit.

A special thank you goes out to Jamie Boulding and Anne Feddick at the Strathcona Park Lodge in British Columbia for sharing their knowledge of the park with me — I particularly acknowledge Jamie Boulding's help in choosing the characters' route through the park.

I would like to send a joyous thank you to all of the students who read the novel, in its various stages, and who gave me valuable and detailed comments and suggestions:

- Sarah Cassman (Grade 8), who was the novel's first reader;
- The students of Mrs. Cochrane's Grade 6 class:

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|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Shawn Bradshaw | Kitty Law | Andrew Scheel |
| Nieshe Brooks | Kelly Lennon | Lisa Spring |
| Anthony Damtsis | Gordon Leslie | Natalie Tsigoulis |
| Eugene Dokoukine | Peter Meades | Alana Tufford |
| Michael Henry | Maria Menegakis | Amanda Wong |
| Katie Kicke | Tudor Minea-Manolachi | Jeffery Wong |
| Kody Hrynyk | Claire Nicholson | Bryan Wu |
| Kevin Iao | Andrea Nunez | Daniel Wu |
| Kathryn Kirwin | Melissa Peiou | George Zakrochkin |
| Jeremy Kwong | | |

I would like to thank my husband, Jim MacDonald, not only for the wonderful cover art he created for the book, but for his enduring love and support.

Finally, I would like to thank my sister, Inge Orf, who is a teacher (Shamattawa, Manitoba), for her creative and practical ideas for the teacher's kit. Inge: You have always been my hero!