

Study Guide

The Book of Second Chances

Part I. Story and Author

About the Author

J. Michael Blumer started writing in high school and carried around a spiral notebook where he jotted down simple musings, observations about people, and thoughts on life in general.

In college he took a creative writing class. His first assignment was to write a piece of nonfiction. He wrote about an adventure he had with a friend at an abandoned farmhouse they thought was haunted. The instructor gave Michael a “D” along with a note that said he had a creative and dramatic flair, but the assignment was nonfiction, not some wild story dreamed up in Michael’s imagination. His rebellious attitude took over and he dropped the class. His story was true. Well, maybe he did embellish it just a bit.

Over thirty years later things changed in his life and Michael finally took the time to do some serious writing.

Inspiration for the Story

The story started in an unusual way. Michael was helping his wife baby-sit at a friend’s home and he brought along a pencil and paper to play with ideas for a new story. Writing the “old fashion” way brought memories of how he wrote years ago, just using pencil and paper instead of a computer. He thought about how he wished he had pursued a serious writing career instead of dropping that first writing class. He was glad for this second chance to write. After thinking a bit more, he realized the chance was always there. The secret all along was to do what he was doing now –simply start writing. It didn’t take magic.

About the Story

Windslow, a boy in a wheelchair and his stepsister, Hillary, undo spells that hide the magic Book of Second Chances. When they sleep, the book transports them to the world of Gabendoor.

Windslow meets three wizards responsible for safeguarding the book. Fistlock, the evil ruler of Gabendoor, is determined to have the book at any cost. Everyone wants the book, but no one can solve the secrets to unlock the book’s magic which they believe grants unlimited second chances. Windslow wants the book to walk again. Hillary wants it to save Gabendoor. Fistlock wants it to expand his power.

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Hillary travels with three strange Sallyforth sisters who know many of the book's secrets. The trouble is, one sister always lies, one tells the truth, and one sometimes lies and sometimes doesn't. An oracle calls Hillary and Windslow the Children of the Summer Wind, and gives Hillary clues to understanding riddles that appear in the book each time Windslow survives a dangerous situation.

Fistlock captures everyone and takes the book, but not before the stepbrother and stepsister team solve the last riddle. Armed with the knowledge from the book, Hillary and Windslow defeat Fistlock and save the world of Gabendoor.

Main Characters

- Windslow Summerfield: Hillary's stepbrother and hero in the story.
- Hillary Windgate-Summerfield: Windslow's stepsister and heroine in the story.
- Fistlock: An evil wizard who rules Gabendoor and wants the Book of Second Chances.
- Bitterbrun: Fistlock's bumbling chamberlain and assistant.
- Haggerwolf, Fernbark, and Larkstone: Three retired wizards who help Windslow and Hillary battle Fistlock.
- Molly Folly Sallyforth: A strange girl from Gabendoor who sometimes tells the truth and sometimes doesn't. She is one of three triplet sisters.
- Nelly Never Sallyforth: The triplet sister who always lies.
- Tillie Truly Sallyforth: The triplet sister who always tells the truth.
- Trish Windgate-Summerfield: Hillary's mother and Windslow's stepmother.
- Bill Summerfield: Windslow's Father and Hillary's step-father.

Part II. Questions for Discussion Before Reading the Book

The book is about second chances.

1. What do you think a second chance is?
2. Describe a time when you wished you had a second chance to do something important to you.

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3. Tell why it was important.

Part III. Questions for Discussion During or After Reading the Book

A) The Book of Second Chances is a fantasy novel, but it teaches some lessons.

1. What is similar and different about your thoughts on second chances before reading the story and after?
2. Describe one lesson you learned from reading the story.
3. Describe what lessons Hillary and Windslow learned, and why the lessons were important.
4. Describe one or two other lessons in the story, who learned them, and why the lessons were important.

B) Sometimes stories make us think about things in our own lives or about people we know. In the end, the story teaches that second chances are there, we just need to take them.

1. Compare two or three parts of the story to similar events that happened in your own life.
2. Tell how the story has changed how you think about things in your past or what you might do about them now?
3. Describe a second chance you might take in your own life now that you've read the story?

C) Windslow and Hillary are step-brother and step-sister.

1. Identify the characteristics of Hillary and Windslow at the beginning of the story.
2. Describe Hillary's and Windslow's similarities and differences.
3. Compare and contrast their relationship at the beginning of the story to their relationship at the end of the story. Why did it change?

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4. How have Hillary and Windslow changed as people and what caused the change?
5. Describe how these changes might be good or bad.

D) In the beginning of the story, Windslow and Hillary's relationship centers on Windslow's accident and how they both felt about it.

1. Compare and contrast the guilt Windslow felt and the guilt Hillary felt. Discuss how it was different, even though guilt for both of them came from the same thing.
2. By the end of the story, how have their feelings of guilt changed?

E) Both Windslow and Hillary had certain feelings about themselves that changed by the time they finished their adventure.

1. Compare and contrast how Windslow felt about being in a wheelchair at the beginning, middle and end of the story. Why do you think his feelings changed?

F) At the beginning of the story everyone had different ideas about what the book could do for them.

1. What did the people of Gabendoor want to have happen to the book? Why?
2. What were Windslow's hopes for the book? Why?
3. What were Hillary's hopes for the book? Why?
4. What did the three wizards want to happen to the book? Why?
5. What did Fistlock want to do with the book? Why?
6. Even though no one knew how the book really worked, which character do you feel had the best idea for how to use the book? Defend your reasoning.

G) Each person faces challenges in a different way.

1. How did Molly Folly Sallyforth approach challenges and difficulties?

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2. Describe the characteristics of Molly and how they contributed to her attitude.
3. Compare and contrast the characteristics of Molly to the characteristics of Hillary and Windslow.
4. Compare and contrast the characteristics of Molly to the three wizards.
5. Discuss how Molly was different than most of the other characters.
6. What impact did Molly Folly have on Windslow, Hillary, and the three wizards?

H) Molly Folly Sallyforth taught people lessons in her own special way.

1. How would you describe how Molly Folly Sallyforth taught lessons to others?
2. How do you think Molly Folly feels about second chances? Why?

I) In part of the story Windslow feels very discouraged about himself. Molly tricks him.

1. How and why did Molly trick Windslow when he was locked in the dungeon? Describe what her trick made Windslow realize.
2. Do you think tricking Windslow was a good thing for Molly to do? Why or why not?

J) The three wizards didn't like the Sallyforth girls.

1. What is "prejudice?"
2. Explain the difference between prejudice and just not liking someone.
3. Decide if you think the wizards were prejudiced against the Sallyforth triplets or just didn't like the girls. What made you come to this decision? Give examples from the book that support your decision and explain the reasons for your thoughts.

K) Fistlock didn't like lots of things.

1. In your opinion, why did Fistlock split people up into different villages?

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2. Give some examples, in our world today, that are similar to what Fistlock did.
 3. For at least one of your examples, describe some possible solutions to keep this sort of thing from happening.
- L) When Windslow, Hillary, the Wizards, and even Fistlock thought they might have the book, it seemed to give them confidence and the ability to do or try things they thought they couldn't do without the book. It turns out the book really didn't help them the way they thought it would.**
1. What is a talisman?
 2. Why do you think the Book of Second Chances could be or could not be considered a talisman?
 3. Explain where you think Windslow's, Hillary's and the wizard's confidence and ability really came from.
 4. Tell about cases in our world where people think that having things, like a lucky rabbit's foot, will help them do special things.
 5. What does this tell us about ourselves or those special things?

Part IV. Topics for Research and Discussion

Topic 1: Character, Plot, Mood

A challenge in writing any story is developing the plot and deciding what changes a character will go through as they struggle to succeed in the end. Many times, when a character changes, there is a specific "turning point." The characters and setting work within a mood to help make the story feel more real to readers.

1. At what point in the story did Windslow feel like he was a failure?
2. When was Windslow's turning point? At what point in the story did he overcome his fear?
3. What mood or feeling does The Book of Second Chances create? Cite evidence from the story that the author used to create this mood.

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4. What visual images does the author use to help you picture the setting and the characters?
5. If you could be one of the wizards or one of the Sallyforth triplets, which one would you choose and why.

Topic 2: World Building

Fantasy and science fiction, authors do what is called, “world building.” The worlds their stories take place in don’t exist. The author must create them. They can invent things that don’t exist in the real world but everything must be believable to their readers. An author doesn’t always work out all the details of what they create. They work out enough to make their creation work in the story.

1. What period in time is the story set in? Give evidence that supports your answer.
2. What mode of transportation do Fistlock and the three Wizards use to travel from Gabendoor to earth? Cite passages from the story that explain how to use this mode of transportation and what it does to the person who uses it for travel.
3. What difficulties or advantages can you think of for using this mode of transportation that weren’t explained in the story by the author?
4. Name three of Fistlock’s shadow creatures. Which one do you think is described the best? Explain why.

Topic 3: Reader Perspective

There some parts of fantasy writing that are always hard decisions for a writer. How much detail to provide is one of those decisions. Find something or someone in *The Book of Second Chances* that you wish the author had given you more information about, such as a person, place, or thing.

1. What is the person, place, or thing you selected?
2. Why did you select it?
3. Tell what else you would like to know and why.

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4. Use your imagination and make up the missing detail for the person, place, or thing you selected. Write it down so that you can share it.

Topic 4. Main Versus Secondary Characters

In movies, sometimes an actor playing a supporting role wins all the awards. In books, there are usually major characters and minor characters. Sometimes a minor, or supporting, character steals the attention. They become a favorite character.

1. What books have you read where your favorite character wasn't the main character? Tell who that character is and describe what it was about this character that made you like them.
2. Compare and contrast what you like about your favorite character and the main character of that book.
3. If you could be one of the wizards or one of the Sallyforth triplets, which one would you choose and why?

Topic 5: Second Chances

Windslow helped his teacher with her secret wish for a second chance. Talk to some of your friends or a parent. Ask them what they would do with a magic second chance, or what they have done with a second chance.

1. Why did they want a second chance?
2. What keeps them from taking one or why did they take one they did?
3. If their wish is for something impossible, like doing something over that happened in the past, what could they do today that might be almost the same thing?

Topic 6: Perseverance

Sometimes people become successful after many failures. They keep trying, making their own second chances. Research a famous person's life who has succeeded after many attempts.

1. Who is the person and why are they famous?

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2. Describe the lessons they learned and how they learned them.
3. What was it that made them keep trying or helped them keep trying?
4. What lessons have you learned, after researching the person's life, which you can apply to your life?

-or-

Describe a situation where you used a similar lesson in your own life.

Topic 7. Changes in the Publishing Industry

Book writing and publishing is changing. For example, for the first *Harry Potter* book, many publishers turned it down. They thought it would not be successful, because it was a book for young readers, but written more like a book for adults. Research how *Harry Potter* has changed the way publishers think about books for young readers.

1. What are some of the changes predicted for writers and publishers of books for younger readers? Explain why you agree or disagree with those predictions.
2. If you have read Harry Potter, how does it compare to other books you liked to read before Harry Potter was published?
3. What should publishers and writers do differently to produce quality books for your reading taste?

Topic 8. Disabilities

Windslow is in a wheelchair yet he has a great adventure. Many people with disabilities have accomplished great things. Sometimes what they accomplished might not have happened if they didn't have the disability.

1. Research the life of a person who was born with a disability, yet accomplished great things.
2. Who is that person and what were her or his accomplishments?
3. Describe at least three things you discovered that you think helped them with their accomplishments.
4. Research the life of a person whose disability came later in their life.

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5. Describe at least three things that you think helped them overcome their disability.
6. Discuss what you think their life may have been like without the disability.
7. How are the lives of the people you researched similar or different?

Topic 9. Influence

Some people believe that excessive violence in movies and video games contributes to increased violence in the people that watch and play them. Some people say that science-fiction has led to scientific discovery, increased interest in science, and was partly responsible for the space program.

Describe the influence you think fantasy has, or has not had on people.

What do you think about the idea that fantasy encourages people to believe in magic solutions, or encourages them to hide away from real life problems?

1. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. What do you like most about reading fantasy? Why?
3. What do you like least about reading fantasy? Why?
4. What would you change in the way fantasy novels are written if you were a writer or a publisher? Why?

Topic 10. Stereotypes

Sometimes characters perpetuate stereotypes. All the heroes are tall, white, blond-haired men or boys. All the villains are dark and not so attractive men. Magic is all fireballs, windstorms, lightning bolts, and explosions.

1. What is a stereotype?
2. Describe some stereotypes.

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3. Select at least three fantasy books and compare the main characters. Describe how they fit, or don't fit a stereotype. Write about what you found or discuss it with a friend.
4. Compare the magic and magic spells in at least three books. Describe how they fit or don't fit a stereotype.
5. Compare and contrast what you learn about stereotypes to the magic and characters in *The Book of Second Chances*. How do the characters and magic compare to stereotypes you found in the other books?
6. What do you think fantasy authors could do to get away from stereotypes?

Part V. Class Activities

Radio Show Activity:

Have one student be a radio show announcer. Have two or three students be characters from *The Book of Second Chances*. Have the announcer conduct an interview, and accept call-in questions from the listeners (other students).

Poster:

Create a poster that compares and contrasts the characteristics and attributes of three characters.

Diary or BLOG:

Create diaries that Molly or another character might have kept during their adventure in Gabendoor. Record entries that might have been written by the character, describing their thoughts and feelings.

Online Author Interview:

Have the students prepare from five to ten questions to ask J. Michael Blumer online. Schedule a time and method for an online chat or for back and forth email to answer the questions.

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I've Got a Secret – Yes, no, maybe so:

In *The Book of Second Chances*, Tillie Truly Sallyforth always tells the truth. Nelly Never Sallyforth always lies. Molly Folly Sallyforth sometimes tells the truth and sometimes doesn't.

Give three students a secret name of a person, place or thing for the class to guess. Student (1) must always lie. Student (2) must always tell the truth. Student (3) can decide to tell the truth or not for each answer they give.

Split the class into two or more groups. Each group takes a turn asking a question following the order, student (1), student (2), student (3). The first group to discover the secret, wins.

Wacky Inventor:

The Forge-Twiddlers are a group of dwarfs who invent and manufacture many things found in the world of Gabendoor. Nearly all of their creations are a bit “wacky.” Most work in strange and unexpected ways, or have flaws that keep them “fun.” For example, they make locks of all kind, but every key is the same. If you have one key in Gabendoor, you can unlock just about anything. Another example is their Forge-Twiddler Reversible Paint. Put the lid upside down on the can and the paint disappears.

Have students invent their own Forge-Twiddler product. Tell how the product is used and explain what is “wacky” about it. Products can be described on paper, presented on a poster or made as a “mock-up.”

You could also have a Forge-Twiddler Science Fair.

Part VI. Author Participation

You can continue your discussion and ask the author questions at:
www.jmb-publishing.com

The author, J. Michael Blumer, also has limited availability to work with your class or book club. Availability depends on his schedule and your needs. To request his participation or support, email him at:
studyguide@jmb-publishing.com.

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Part VII. Resources

Visit the author's website: www.jmb-publishing.com

There you will find:

- Chapters and information not included in the book.
- A list of Fistlock's shadow creatures and the opportunity to create your own.
- All about Dream-slipping, sample dream-slip bands not in the book, an explanation of how they work and a place to submit your own band idea.
- Maps: A map of the world of Gabendoor, plus close in views that trace Windslow's and Hillary's route, where the wizards live, the location of Crystal Mountain and much more.
- A glossary of character names, places, creatures and plants unique to the story.

The Secret Books of Gabendoor

If you enjoyed *The Book of Second Chances*, watch for *The Book of Broken Promises*, book 2 in the series; The Secret Books of Gabendoor. You can find out more and even preview sample chapters. Go to www.jmb-publishing.com