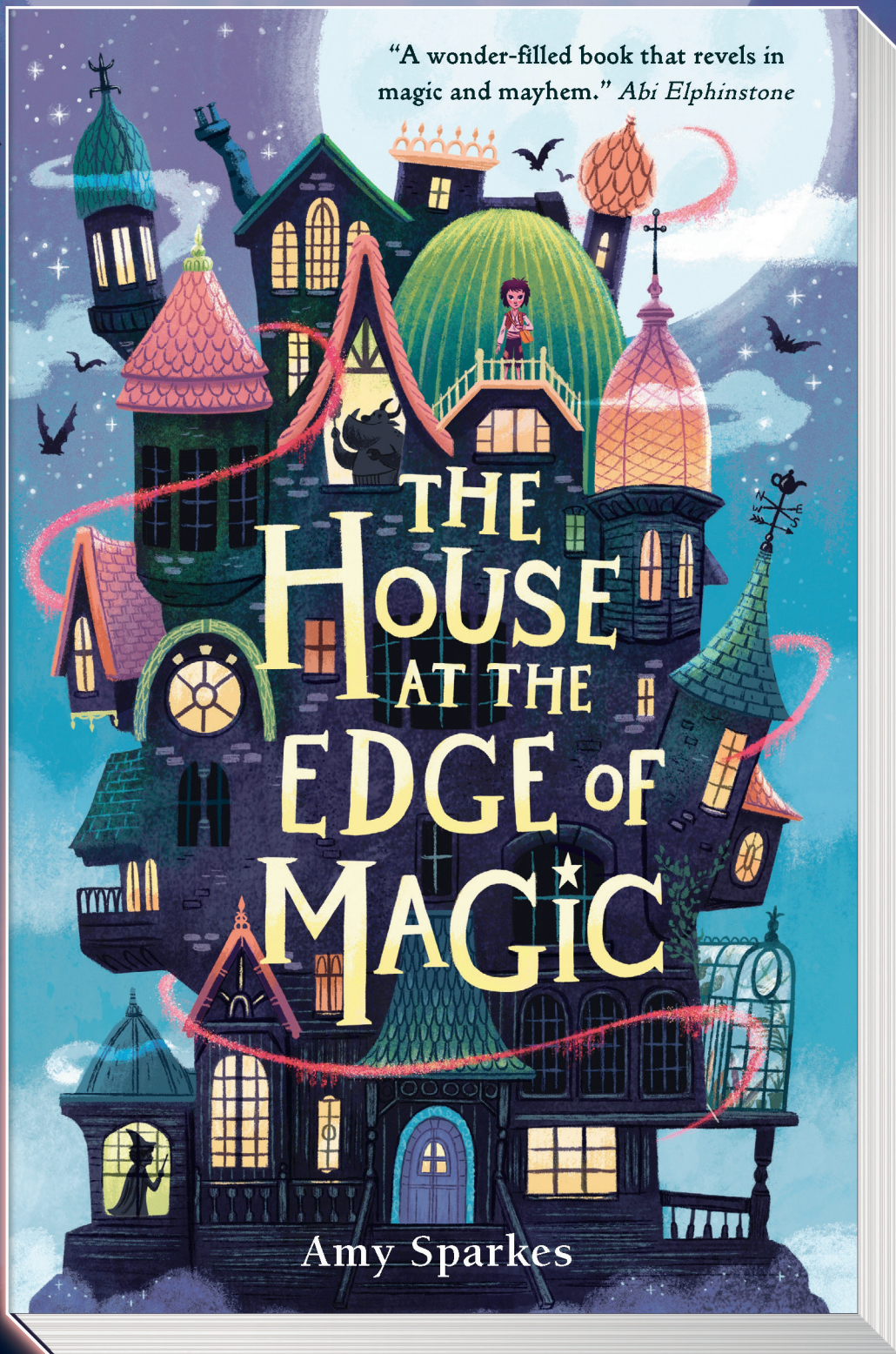


THE HOUSE AT THE EDGE OF MAGIC

DISCUSSION GUIDE



“Fizzing with imagination.”

Sinéad O’Hart



WALKER
BOOKS

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THE HOUSE AT THE EDGE OF MAGIC

Amy Sparkes

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Nine is an orphan pickpocket determined to escape her life in the Nest of a Thousand Treasures. When she steals a house-shaped ornament from a mysterious woman's purse, she knocks on its tiny door and watches it grow into a huge, higgledy-piggeldy house.

Inside she finds a host of magical and brilliantly funny characters, including Flabberghast – a young wizard who's particularly competitive at hopscotch – and a hideous troll housekeeper who's emotionally attached to his feather duster. They have been placed under an extraordinary spell, which they are desperate for Nine to break. If she can, maybe they can offer her a new life in return...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Sparkes studied English Literature and Theology at the University of Kent, and began writing after moving to Devon with her husband, six young children and an overactive imagination. Her books have appeared on CBeebies storytime and been shortlisted for several book awards, including the Roald Dahl Funny Prize and the BookTrust Best Books Awards for *Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo*. She runs author events for children, writing workshops for aspiring children's writers, produces the Writing for Children pages for bestselling Writing Magazine, and writes short stories for Aquila magazine. She co-founded the Writing Magazine Picture Book Prize for aspiring picture book authors.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

Amy Sparkes' debut middle grade novel is a classic fantasy adventure, full of mystery and intrigue, magic and emotion. While the story is fantastical, there are elements of the book that many children and young people might relate to – loneliness, hope, being in a strange place, feeling trapped, having to do something you don't want to do. Throughout the discussion, tease out some of these themes, giving group members a chance to explore and express their own feelings, reflected through the various characters.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Before you start to explore *The House at the Edge of Magic* in detail, ask what the group thought of the book. Did everybody enjoy it? If so, what were their favourite elements? Did it remind them of anything else they have seen or read? How did the book make them feel?

1. The Edge of Magic

Look at the cover of the book and consider the title. What does Sparkes mean by 'the edge of magic'? What ideas does this create in the reader's mind? Think about what it means to be at the edge of something – what does this suggest for the world Nine knows, and the world she discovers?



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2. A place called home

'Nine stroked the door wistfully. A house. A home. What would it be like to live in a house, instead of Pockets' stinking Nest?' – p.25

What does the word 'wistfully' mean? How is Nine feeling at this moment. Discuss the idea of 'home' within the book, but also amongst members of the group – what makes something a 'home' and how can home be different for different people? How do Nine's feelings change by the end?

3. Aspiration

"What does Pockets always say?"

"Life don't bring you strawberries," Nine droned along with the other thieflings.' – p.54

What does Pockets' motto mean? What do strawberries represent to Pockets? Why do you think the children have to use, 'No strawberries today,' as the password for the Nest? You might like to discuss the idea of luxury, or the meaning of the word 'aspiration'. Consider the ending of the novel and how Nine ultimately feels towards Pockets.

4. Some words are hard to say

'She hated the old man who saved her. She hated this life. And she hated that her only way out was to return to the ridiculous House...' – p.60

'She glanced ... at Eric's deep yellow eyes and wished, somehow, that she felt able to say two simple words. But "thank you" wasn't part of her vocabulary. It meant you owed someone something.' – p.139

Look at the two passages these lines come from on pages 60 and 139. Why does Nine find it so hard to say, 'thank you'? Does one passage have any relation to the other? Compare the way she is treated by Pockets and by Eric, and how she treats them in return. Discuss what it means to 'owe' someone something. Why is Nine so afraid of this?

5. Taking pride in your work

'This time she would show the old devil how good she really was.' – p.21

Pride plays an important part in the book. Discuss how different characters' pride affects what happened – Nine's pride in her ability, Flabberghast's pride in his magical powers, the witch's pride in her own. How responsible is Flabberghast's pride for the curse on the house? Why does the witch choose the magic words she does to lift the curse?

6. Treasured possessions

'The wizard shuffled and examined his chewed fingernails. "Must simply add an item of great personal and emotional significance to be sacrificed."' – p.125

Why must everyone make a personal sacrifice to break the curse? Discuss the different objects that are sacrificed and explore why each of them carries 'great personal and emotional significance' to their owner. Are these objects 'valuable'? Ask members of the group, if they are willing, to share what item they would have to sacrifice if they were in Nine's place, and why.

7. The safest place in the world

'Instead her fingers trailed the soft, dark spines of the books as she read their golden-lettered tales...' – p.108

The library, and the librarian, are important to Nine. It is the 'safest place in the world'. Talk about the importance of the library in the book. Is it significant that Nine finds the book they need in the normal library, and not the magical library in the house? If so, why? Given how important it is, why do you think the author depicts the library as 'half empty', and 'musty'?



8. Immeasurable wealth

““You receive the levitating scarlet orb which holds a jewel of immeasurable wealth, Madam.”

And freedom, Nine thought.’ – p.142

What does ‘immeasurable wealth’ mean? Discuss the idea of wealth within the novel, and how different characters see it differently. Does Nine want the jewel just because it holds ‘immeasurable wealth’ or because of what it offers her?

9. A world of magic

‘...framed by the doorway, stood a huge, ugly creature – like a cross between a walrus and a tree trunk...’ – p.27

Sparkes’ novel is full of fantastical creatures and people; talk through the different magical beings and how the group felt about them. How does Flabberghast compare to other wizards the group know of? Is Eric like other trolls? Consider the rest of the magical world in the book. What opportunities does ‘magic’ present for the writer? You might like to consider the names of the characters at the same time. What does Flabberghast mean? Why is the troll called Eric? What does Nine being called Nine suggest to the reader?

10. The curse is lifted

““Goodbye,” she murmured to the alley, “and good riddance.”” – p.228

Read the very last lines again together. What happens at the very end of *The House at the Edge of Magic*? Where do you think Nine’s adventures will lead next? Discuss how Nine might be feeling as she leaves behind everything she is used to. Do you think she will ever come back? If you were in Nine’s place, in a magic, moving house, where would you want to go?

