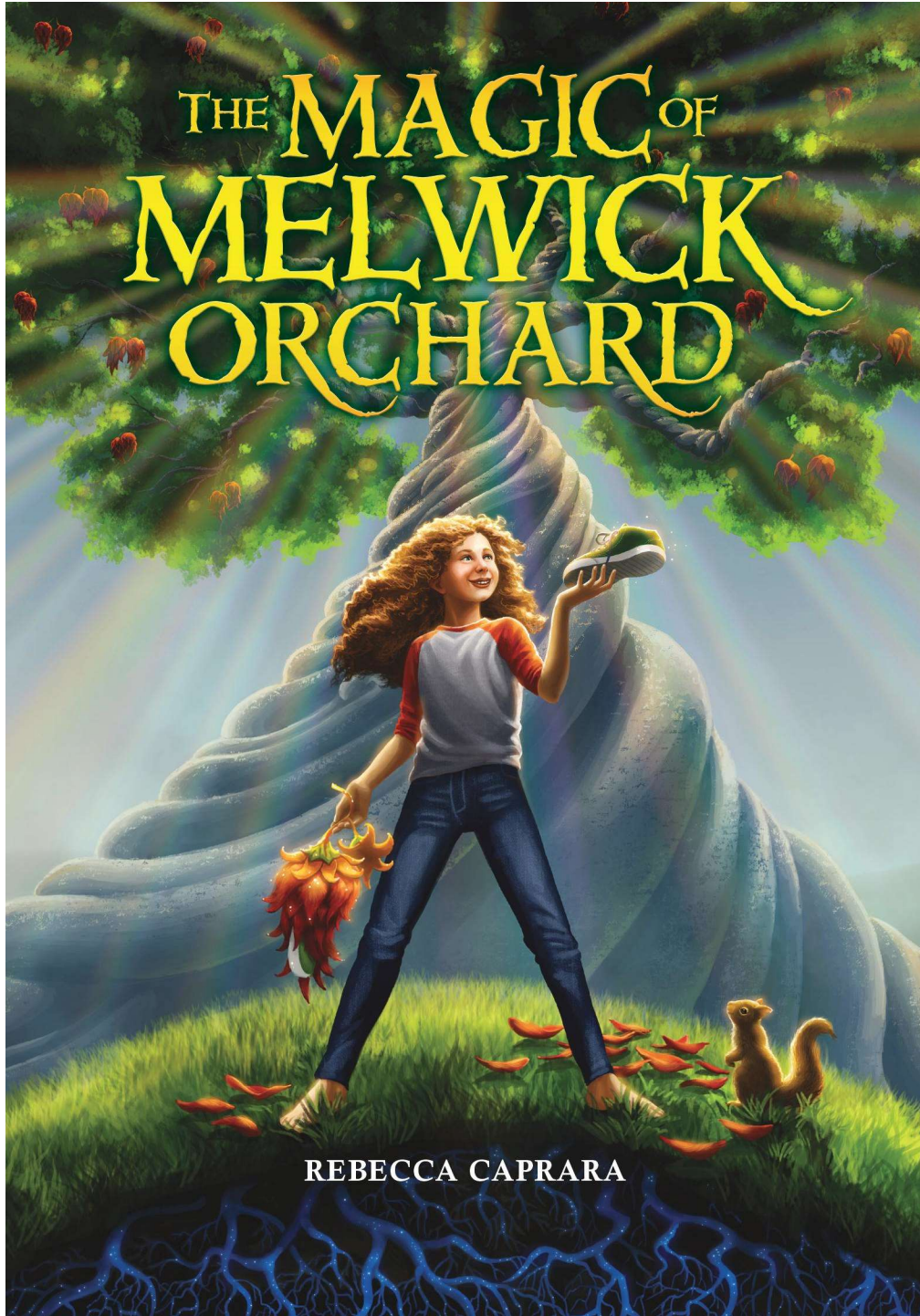


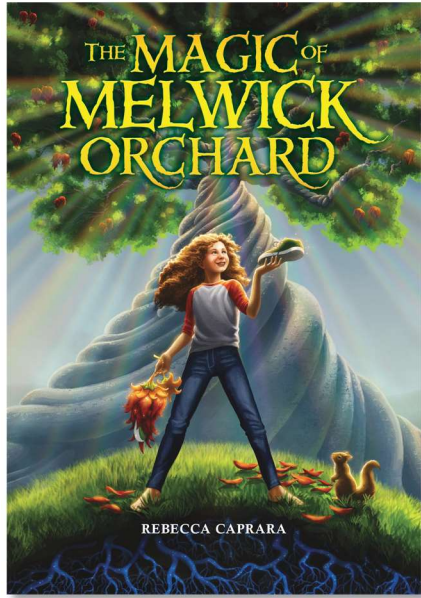
The Magic of Melwick Orchard  
Reading Guide for Classroom and Book Club Use



(Cover art by Laura Diehl)

*The Magic of Melwick Orchard* by Rebecca Caprara  
[www.rebeccacaprara.com](http://www.rebeccacaprara.com)

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**Author:** Rebecca Caprara

**Middle Grade Fiction**

**Age Range:** 8 - 14 Years

**Grade level:** 3 and up

**First Edition, Hardcover:** 376 pages

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**Language:** English

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## About the Guide

The Melwick Orchard Reading Guide is designed with librarians and educators in mind, and includes discussion questions and extension activities rooted in ELA Common Core Standards.

The guide supports **critical and analytical thinking, narrative expression, creative writing, problem solving, interpersonal relationships, empathy building, and presentation of knowledge and ideas.**

Teachers are encouraged to adapt the questions and activities to best suit their classes' specific grade-level standards and needs.

Materials and exercises created by Rebecca Caprara in collaboration with Dana Dykiel and Lerner Publishing Group.

### CCSS Alignment:

CCSS ELA - Language L4-7.1, L4-7.2, L4-7.3, L4-7.4, L4-7.5

CCSS ELA - Reading: Literature RL4-7.1, RL4-7.2, RL4-7.4, RL4-7.5, RL4-7.6, RL4-7.10

CCSS ELA - Speaking and Listening SL4-7.1, SL4-7.2, SL4-7.3, SL4-7.4, SL4-7.6

CCSS ELA - Writing W4-7.1, W4-7.2, W4-7.3, W4-7.4, W4-7.9

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*Share your ideas & artwork online using the hashtag #MelwickOrchard*

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## About the Book:

After more moves than they can count, Isabel and Junie's family finally put down roots. People in town whisper strange stories about the abandoned orchard behind their new home, but the sisters are happy to have acres of land to explore and trees to swing beneath. For the first time in a while, life feels *perfecterrific*.

But then Junie is diagnosed with cancer and everything changes. Isa's mom falls into a deep depression, and mounting medical bills force Isa's dad to work longer and longer days. As for Isa... well, she's slowly becoming invisible. No one seems to notice that her clothes are falling apart, her stomach is empty, and her heart is breaking.

In an act of frustration, Isa buries her out-grown sneakers in the orchard. The trees haven't produced fruit in decades, but the next day something magical happens: a sapling sprouts the strangest, most magnificent buds Isa has ever seen. When they bloom to reveal an entire harvest of new shoes, Isa feels inspired. Can she use the magical tree to save her family?

## About the Author

Rebecca Caprara grew up in a small town surrounded by apple orchards. She graduated from Cornell University and practiced architecture for several years, before shifting her focus from bricks to books. An avid globetrotter, she has traveled to over 50 countries, and has lived in Italy, Singapore, and Canada. She is now growing roots in Massachusetts with her family.

THE MAGIC OF MELWICK ORCHARD (Carolrhoda Books, 2018) is her debut middle grade novel. Her next two novels for young people are scheduled for publication in 2020 and 2021. Stay tuned for updates!



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*Connect with Rebecca on social media @RebeccaCaprara and visit her website [www.rebeccacaprara.com](http://www.rebeccacaprara.com) for book news, events & more!*

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# The Magic of Melwick Orchard

## Reading Guide for Classroom and Book Club Use

### Pre-Reading:

- Look at the cover of *The Magic of Melwick Orchard* and think about the title. What are your first impressions of the story? Can you make any predictions about the plot or characters? Write down your thoughts and then re-visit them after you've finished reading the book.
- The original title of the book was *Chance Seedling*. Does this title change your initial ideas about the story? Why do you think the author and publisher chose to change the title?

### Discussion Questions

- In *The Magic of Melwick Orchard*, author Rebecca Caprara explores a wide range of themes such as family, hope, home, love, loss, environmental stewardship, friendship, trust, secrets, illness, magic, science, and more. Often, these themes are intertwined. Sometimes they are presented in contrast to each other. As you read, make a list of the themes you encounter and discuss as a class. Find evidence in the text to support your ideas.
- If you discovered a magical chance seedling similar to the one in this story, what would you plant, and why? Think about the golden watch that Isa plants and its unexpected consequences. Could your "seed" have any unintended results?
- Throughout the book, the characters develop unique ways to communicate with each other. When Isa is with Junie, she says, "Sisters speak all kinds of languages. Many of them don't require words." She and her father also share a special method to say "I love you" by squeezing each other's hand three times. In addition, Isa and the tree find quiet but meaningful ways to communicate. Discuss the various ways in which you (and/or your friends, family, pets) express thoughts and emotions beyond spoken words. Are some of these methods more powerful than others? How so?
- Find examples within the text of characters taking risks. How did they overcome these challenges? Did anyone help them along the way? What did they learn in the process?

- Despite moving many times, Isa's family maintains certain traditions no matter where they live. (Examples: Feeding the birds, baking special occasion sticky buns, playing catch, etc.) Does your family have any special traditions? What are they? What makes them meaningful?
- Describe Isa's relationship with Kira. How does it develop throughout the book? Have you ever formed a first impression that changed as you got to know someone better?
- When Isa first meets Kira, Isa's head and heart disagree about how to behave. Her heart encourages her to be kind, but her head is afraid of getting attached to someone she may eventually have to leave. Can you think of a time when your head and heart were in conflict? Describe how this felt, and how you acted.
- Junie and Isa refer to amphibians as "unfittians" because they live between two worlds (water and land). Isa also uses the term to describe her sister's health, the weather, and even herself at times. What are the advantages and disadvantages of not belonging entirely to one group or one place? Do you have conflicting identities? For instance, are you different at school than you are at home? Do you try to combine these identities or keep them separate? Why or why not?
- Throughout the novel, Isa tries to offer support to her sister Junie. What does Isa do to help Junie? If you have a friend or family member going through a hard time, what can you do to show them you care? What makes you feel better when you're feeling upset or sick?
- Isa calls herself "Isabel-Invisible" because she feels unseen by her family. How do you think Isa's perception of herself influences the way she acts? Has there ever been a time when you felt invisible to your family or friends? How did that make you feel? What did you do to be seen and heard? What can you do to avoid making other people feel invisible?
- Softball practice provides a form of escape for Isa during tough times. What activities do you enjoy, and why?
- Isa often uses colors to help describe her emotions. For example, in Chapter 8 she says, "The ache in my chest. Blue... Mom's anger. My cheeks. Red. The buds on the tree. Purple. The orchard and meadow grasses. Green. The uncertainty of Junie's health. Gray." What colors do you associate with happiness, sadness, fear, excitement, etc? For an extension activity, find a work of art in the library or online and discuss how the colors help convey a mood or message. In your own creative writing, think about "painting" your story—using color words to help express an idea or feeling. Try experimenting with other sensory elements like smell, touch, taste, and sound to create richer descriptions.

- In Chapter 10, Isa says, “The fear of doing something new was worse than actually doing it. I just had to try.” Have you ever been afraid or nervous about trying something new? It could be a new activity, a new food, a trip to a new place, etc. How did you overcome your fears? What did you learn from this experience? Did it make you braver?
- Compare and contrast Isa and Junie. How are they different? How are they similar? Think about your own family members and/or friends. What traits (physical, behavioral, etc.) do you share? How are you different? Which similarities and differences complement or balance each other and why?
- What is empathy and what role does it play in the story? How do the major and minor characters display empathy? Find textual evidence to support your findings.
- While thinking about the phrase “anything is possible,” Isa realizes this applies to things that are both good and bad (Chapter 29). Discuss what she means by this. Find evidence in the text to support your ideas.
- In the story, several physical objects hold special significance. For example, Isa’s baseball glove, Junie’s wishing pin, the unusual acorn, the swing, paper dolls, etc. Chose a few items from the text and discuss what they represent to the characters. What might they symbolize? Share an object from your life that is special to you and explain why. What memories or meanings are attached to these objects?
- Consider the ups and downs of Isa’s relationship with her parents. How do Nel and Nathan react to and cope with Junie’s diagnosis? Do the grown-ups in the story (and in your own life, too) always say or do the right thing? Do you think they are just as affected by challenging situations and stress as you? Why or why not?
- In Chapter 31, Isa reads a book about apple farming that says, “Ample pruning is necessary for sunlight to reach a tree’s inner leaves. Removing limbs also helps focus a tree’s energy on fruit production. Do not be afraid to prune aggressively. Your orchard will thank you.” What do you think about getting rid of old things to encourage new growth or opportunities? Explain how this logic also applies to Kira cutting her hair. How might this idea apply to elements in your own life?
- There is a message about environmental stewardship woven throughout the story. Identify specific quotes within the text that highlight the importance of caring for the environment. Think about how your actions impact the environment and discuss ways that you can help take care of our planet.

- Author Rebecca Caprara explores the line between science and magic throughout the story. At times, things that seem magical or impossible actually have a scientific explanation, as Isa finds out during her conversations with Ms. Perdilla. Find 3 fascinating facts about nature in the text and share with the class. This could also be expanded into a STEM extension activity.
- Think about how Isa changes throughout the course of the book. How is she the same? How is she different? What mistakes does she make, and how does she grow from these experiences? Use examples from the text to support your answers.
- While speaking to Isa in Chapter 32, Ms. Perdilla quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson, saying, "The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn." Craft an essay explaining what this quote means to you.
- The book ends with the discovery of an unusual acorn in the clearing and a *What If...?* As a creative writing exercise, write an epilogue to the book imagining what might happen the next day, the next month, or the next year...

### Extension & Enrichment Activities

- *Vocabulary Journal* – As you read the book, gather Junie’s unique words and write down their definitions, as well as other vocabulary that may be new to you.
- *7 Days of Junie* – Junie invents a special calendar with Isa’s help. Make your own version and describe what fun activities should take place on each day of the week.
- *Root Woods* - Replicate the game that Isa plays in Mr. Clarke’s class. Try to decipher the meaning of words by examining their Latin and Greek roots. A few starter examples include chronological, geography, tricycle, biology, collaborate, etc. Here is a great resource for finding root words and their meanings:  
<https://www.learnthat.org/pages/view/roots.html>
- *Getting to Know You* - Make a list of some of your favorite and least favorite things under the headings **Perfecterrific** and **Worstible**. Share these with the person next to you. What can you learn about each other?
- *Chance Seedling Art* - Draw a picture of your own personal chance seeding. What would you plant at its base? What might it grow from its branches?

- *Group Art Project* - Use construction paper, newsprint and/or other recycled materials to create a large Classroom Chance Seedling. Ask students what objects or wishes they would like to plant, then have them draw or cut out images from magazines and attach them to the tree's branches.
- *Share!* Send scans or photographs (jpegs preferred) of your fabulous Melwick-inspired creations to Rebecca at [CapraraBooks@gmail.com](mailto:CapraraBooks@gmail.com). Your work may be shared on social media and featured in the Reader Gallery on Rebecca's website. Include the artists' first names and ages, if desired. Please do not send original works of art.
- *Optical Illusions* - Find examples online or in the library of surrealist paintings by Vladimir Kush (in particular his apple & butterfly painting). Ask students what they see. Then, ask them to look at the image in a different way. What do you see now? Is there a right or wrong way to view the painting? Why or why not?
  - *Follow-up discussion question.* Isa believes the wishing pin is a red butterfly, but later with Kira's help, she realizes that it is actually something very different. Have you ever misinterpreted something, or experienced something differently than someone else? Examples could include song lyrics, a meal, a book, etc.
- *Get in the Groove* - Create a playlist of songs that fit with certain chapters or scenes. Why did you choose these songs? How does the music convey the mood, energy, or setting of the selected excerpt?
- *Wordplay* - Create your own "Frankensteined" vocabulary by combining two or more words, just like Junie does. Which words work best and why? Share your favorite inventions with your classmates and see if they can figure out the definitions.
- *Acronymania* - Isa uses acronyms in creative ways. For instance, TLC stands for "Tender Loving Care" but also "Totally Lost Child." Review the definition of an acronym, and then come up with your own acronym to represent a phrase important to you. See how many new phrases you can come up with that correspond to the original set of letters.

### Just for fun

- *Name that squirrel!* Help Rebecca come up with the perfect name for that wily squirrel. Send your suggestions to [CapraraBooks@gmail.com](mailto:CapraraBooks@gmail.com). The best squirrel name will win a special Melwick prize!



## Extension Activities – Beyond the Classroom

- *Field Trip* - Organize an apple-picking field trip with your students, so you can experience the beauty of an orchard firsthand! (Pro tip: try some delicious cider donuts while you're there!)
- *Bake a "Magically Melwick" Apple Pie* – As a teen, author Rebecca Caprara worked at Old Sturbridge Village, a living history museum in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. During that time, she learned how to milk cows, knit sweaters, and bake a perfect apple pie from scratch. Visit her website to download the official recipe. Yum!
- *Give Back* - Help raise awareness & funds for childhood cancer research and care. Visit <https://www.alexslimonade.org/campaign/schools-and-universities> for ways to get involved.

## A Note from the Author

Thank you for reading *The Magic of Melwick Orchard* and sharing it with others! I hope you found this Reading Guide helpful.

I love meeting with readers and educators to chat about the book in person. To schedule an Author Visit, please contact me via email ([CapraraBooks@gmail.com](mailto:CapraraBooks@gmail.com)). Some of my favorite topics include Writing Resilient Characters, Idea Mining, Creative Wordplay, Story Architecture, The Path to Publication, and more. I'm also happy to customize workshops and talks to best suit your group's needs and interests. In addition, I offer free Skype sessions for groups that have read my books. I look forward to hearing from you!

And remember, anything is possible...

Many thanks,  
Rebecca Caprara