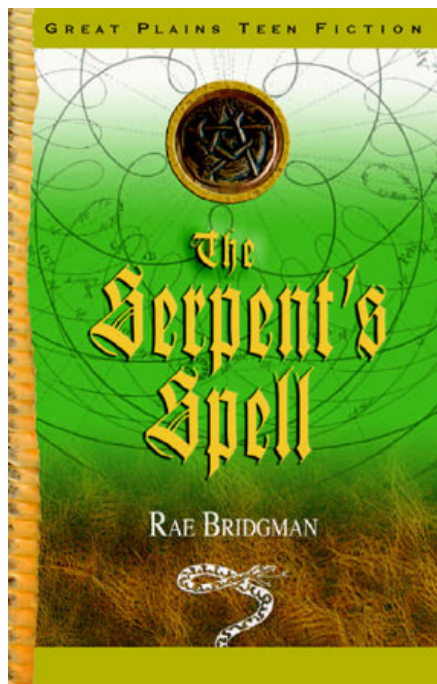




Great Plains Publications Teachers' Guide



The Serpent's Spell

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Story

The secret city of MiddleGate has been rocked by the slaughter of hundreds of snakes in nearby Narcisse. Who are the culprits?

In their quest to solve the mystery, two young sorcerers—Sophie Isidor, a girl with extraordinary powers of drawing (though she doesn't know it yet), and her cousin Wil Wychwood, a boy with a penchant for calamities—discover that Wil's medallion may have once belonged to an ancient secret society, the Serpent's Chain. Its members were once charged with being keepers of sacred knowledge, as well as training future generations. Elitism and corruption led to the Chain's downfall, but has it really disappeared?

Will Sophie and Wil be able to save their own lives, stop the destruction of the sacred snakes of Narcisse, and uncover the truth of present and past?

The Serpent's Spell is a novel about the power of friendship. Sprinkled with Latin phrases and magical adventure, and set in a secret city accessed through one of the oldest and most architecturally stunning parts of Winnipeg, Manitoba, this is the first book in a magical new series for young readers aged 9 through teen years. If you have enjoyed reading the *Harry Potter* books, you may enjoy reading this book.

The Author and Illustrator

Rae Bridgman is a writer, artist and anthropologist. She is a professor in the Department of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture, at the University of Manitoba, and is the mother of six children. She grew up in Maple, Ontario and now makes Winnipeg her home. In addition to writing and illustrating children's books, she has published several books about her research on homelessness. See her website for more information: <www.raebridgman.ca>.

Ideas and Activities Inspired by *The Serpent's Spell*

Science

If you are within hailing distance of southern Manitoba, why don't you plan a fieldtrip to visit the snake dens at Narcisse in early autumn (when the snakes are returning to the caves for the winter) or in the spring (when they are emerging to mate)

The Serpent's Spell features two species of snakes in particular (the red-sided garter snake and an egg-eating snake from Africa), both non-venomous. How many other varieties of snakes are there and what are their adaptive survival strategies?

Record the shadows cast by the sun. What do shadows of buildings and trees look like? What do shadow people look like? (Did you know the name for the fear of shadows is *sciophobia*?) How do shadows change over the course of the day (with the sun low in the morning and evening, and the sun high in the afternoon)? Where do shadows go at night? And what about a game of shadow tag?

Language Arts

There are many different wordplay games. Mage Terpsy in **The Serpent's Spell** is known for her "tipsy terpsies"—these are often referred to in English as spoonerisms. What's the history of this word? Mage Terpsy also introduces us to pangrams—sentences which use up as many letters of the alphabet as possible. What other wordplay games are there? (There are lots of online resources related to wordplay games.)

Although Latin is no longer part of the general curriculum in North American schools, students may be interested in learning some basic Latin words and in exploring how Latin lives on today in medical terminology, scientific terms, legal documents, and even in general vocabulary. Did you know that half the words in English come directly from Latin? Think of phrases like *ad nauseam* and *vice versa*. A book such as *Latin for Dummies* is a useful resource for anyone looking for a quick "dose" of Latin. Also, check out the *Cambridge School Class Project* on-line (http://www.cambridgescp.com/main_entrance.php).

Research the many stories and myths about snakes across cultures. (The ancient Greeks, for example, believed snakes represented healing, and the Incas revered snakes as symbols of knowledge.)

Ophidiophobia refers to a "fear of snakes." There are, however, many, many other phobias that people can suffer from (e.g., claustrophobia, glossophobia, scolionophobia, xenophobia...). How do people face and overcome these fears? (There are many online resources related to phobias.)

Try writing some of the scenes in *The Serpent's Spell* from the point of view of a snake (or from the specific point of view of Esme). What if we were able to see, smell and “hear” the world as a snake would?

If you were Will, what kind of letter would you write to Mr. Bertram?

Social Studies

Geography

Have you ever read the small book *Invisible Cities*, which features a series of mythical conversations between the Emperor Kublai Khan and the Explorer Marco Polo, as they play a chess game? During the game, Marco Polo regales Khan with stories about the many different cities he has seen in his travels. What other invisible or secret city exists—perhaps where you live? Is there a gateway (or portal) to this secret city? (Imagine how delighted Mage Tibor would be to hear about more portals.) The idea of a portal to another place or secret world is commonly used in fantasy books. Think of the mirror in *Alice in Wonderland*, the wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe*, and Platform 9¾ at King's Cross in the *Harry Potter* books. Can you draw a map of your secret place and how to get there?

History

The Serpent's Spell takes place in a secret city hidden within the Exchange District of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Exchange District is one of the oldest and most architecturally stunning parts of the city; the area is designated as a National Historic Site. Research the history of some of the oldest buildings where you live. What stories do they tell?

Art

Examine the work of several illustrators who work with pen-and-ink. What different techniques do they use? Drawing by exploring illustrators' methods can be a good way to learn more about those methods.

Make black and white illustrations for some of the chapters in **The Serpent's Spell** with quill pens and ink, or choose another book to illustrate. (Strongly suggested: Use non-permanent inks and ensure students wear old clothing! Fine black felt pens will do in a pinch too.)

Alternatively, bring to life some of the stories and myths about snakes cross-culturally.

Make shadow puppets (from cardboard or other materials). The Narcisse shadow play traditions in **The Serpent's Spell** resemble some traditional Balinese puppet traditions. This activity can be integrated with drama.

Caryatids (*CARRY-a-tids*) are supporting columns carved to look like female figures. They date back to ancient Greek architecture. Columns shaped like male figures are called atlantes (at-LAN-tees), named after the giant Titan Atlas, who held up the heavens with his head and hands. Nowadays, the word caryatid refers to any column with human figures. The columns work to help buildings stand structurally. Perhaps you too have seen stone caryatids— that help carry the weight of a building on their heads. If they could speak, what stories would they tell? (Portia and Portius would be thrilled to hear such stories.) Explore designing your own columns (with modelling clay or other materials).

Drama

Develop a shadow play to bring the class's favourite story to life or re-create the shadow play of *The Box* from **The Serpent's Spell**. This activity can be integrated with art and music.

Suggested Resources

Recommended reading

Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino. 1974. New York: Harcourt, Inc. [Transl. by William Weaver from the Italian, *Le città invisibili*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1972.]

Information about the snakes of Narcisse and egg-eating snakes

The snakes of Narcisse feature in *The Snake Scientist* by Sy Montgomery with photographs by Nic Bishop (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001).

See <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/catalog/titledetail.cfm?titleNumber=491720>.

See also http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/wildlife/managing/pdf/snake_brochure.pdf for more information about the snakes of Narcisse.

See <http://www.centralpets.com/animals/reptiles/snakes/snk2887.html> for information about egg-eating snakes.

Is there a local chapter of a herpetological society near you? While some people are afraid of snakes, others marvel at these creatures and promote educational awareness of their unique lifeways.

Information about the author

See Rae Bridgman's website: <www.raebridgman.ca>. And check out the quiz about **The Serpent's Spell!**

99 QUESTIONS

*Are You Sure You Know
EVERYTHING
About The Serpent's Spell?*