



Witch for a Week

Books Reviewed:

[Witch for a Week](#) [1]

Issue:

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Reviewer:

[Lucy Staines](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

A new book from Kaye Umansky is always cause for celebration. She's one of our funniest and most accomplished authors for children and **Witch for a Week** has all the hallmarks of a Umansky classic: a cast of distinctive characters; comedy of all kinds, much of it arising from the characters' close proximity to one another; lots of original ideas, and the occasional sideways dig at modern mores. Young readers will love it and adults should fight for the right to read it at bedtime or storytime.

Elsie Pickles lives with her family in the town of Smallbridge, a place where life, like its river the Dribble, 'trickled on with a calm monotony'. She spends lots of time helping in the family shop but Elsie is a girl with a sense of adventure and readers will feel she deserves something more. When the local witch Magenta Sharp arrives looking for someone to house-sit her tower for a week and offering more gold than the shop's made in years, Elsie puts herself forward. Before you can say *Three Little Spells for Beginners*, Elsie is settled in the tower keeping an eye on it and the witch's somewhat curmudgeonly talking raven, Corbett. The Pickles rules of customer service stand Elsie in good stead, particularly the ones about using a soothing tone and always being helpful. The witch's neighbours include Sylphine Greenmantle (also known as Aggie), given to barefoot dancing in the forest glades and swooning over woodcutter Hank of the beautiful hair; Joey the cheerful boy who delivers the ingredients for Magenta's potions, and letters of complaint from customers to her mail order spell business; and the peculiar, light-fingered Howler sisters; while Elsie inadvertently adopts the town's stray dog Nuisance as well. Soon, despite her vow not to try magic, Elsie is conjuring up frogs and storms in teacups, and trying to concoct the love potion Sylphine wants to use on Hank.

Readers will feel they themselves are part of the gang and Elsie's calm, practical approach is really appealing; when her spells work, we can't help feel it's as much down to her kind nature as to her growing magical powers. The relationship between the protagonists and Elsie's development too are both described with an extraordinary lightness of touch, and this is a charming mix of magic, comedy, character and adventure.

Read our [interview with Kaye Umansky](#) [4].

Links:

[1] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/witch-for-a-week>

[2] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/227>

[3] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/lucy-staines>

[4] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/226/childrens-books/articles/an-interview-with-kaye-umansky>