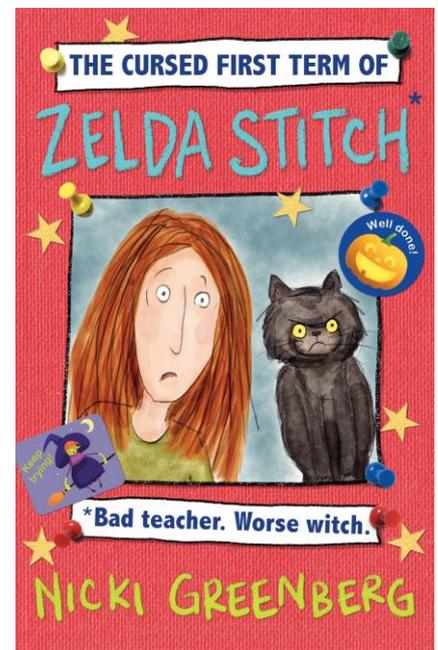


The Cursed First Term of Zelda Stitch*.



*Bad teacher. Worse witch.

By Nicki Greenberg

September 2017 ISBN 9781760294908 paperback
Recommended for 7 – 11 year olds

Summary

Imagine if you read your teacher's diary... and discovered she was a witch!

First term was never going to be easy for Zelda Stitch. Being a brand-new teacher is terrifying enough, but Zelda also has a secret that she needs to preserve at all costs.

Witches are feared, despised and misunderstood. So, while Zelda is anxious about her competence in the classroom, she is even more worried that the 'Ordinaries' might discover her true identity.

To the disgust of both her domineering mother and Barnaby, her obnoxious cat, Zelda's witchcraft abilities are feeble and unreliable. But even so, Zelda soon finds herself experiencing alarming magic leaks at school and risking exposure. What's more, Vice-Principal Melody Martin has taken an inexplicable dislike to her. But as Zelda gets to know her class – from stern, supercilious Eleanor to mischief-makers Zinnia and Zac – she makes unexpected discoveries about the children and herself. To her surprise, Zelda finds that even Ordinaries are not always what they seem.

With courage, imagination and some outrageously reckless broomstick-riding, Zelda stumbles her way to triumph as a teacher and a witch, if not entirely as a cat owner.

Newly confident readers and the diary style

It is no secret that diary-format books are very popular with newly confident readers. After all, just think Diary of a Wimpy Kid and The Dork Diaries. Telling a story via a diary breaks information into smaller chunks (i.e., by days or hours), giving young readers an opportunity to have a quick break to process information. Diaries also

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provide a handy way to include diagrams, letters and illustrations to ease comprehension and extend the narrative.

But the single greatest feature of this format is the friendly conversational style commonly used. Readers feel closer to a narrator who is 'speaking' to them and find it much easier to empathise when they have a direct window into what a character is thinking or feeling. This is particularly appealing for children reading *The Cursed First Term of Zelda Stitch* as the narrator – a teacher – is someone they might normally think of as quite distant and authoritative.

In the author's own words

'I love the idea of being able to take a peek into your teacher's diary. Kids might not give much thought to their teachers' lives outside of school... but imagine if you discovered that your teacher was a witch! And what if you learned that her life was just as bumpy, complicated and full of challenges as yours?

'Zelda feels too ordinary to be a proper witch, and too witchy to be accepted by the Ordinary world. This feeling of not quite knowing where you fit is pretty common for kids, and I wanted to explore this as something that all of us – kids and adults – have to tackle sometimes.

'Zelda isn't based on any of my teachers, who were mostly very capable (although disappointingly incapable of broomstick riding). But Zelda's cat, Barnaby, is directly modelled on our old cat, Mouse. Grouchy, greedy, suspicious and very bitey, Mouse was a rescue cat who lived with us for ten years before deciding that our neighbours offered better room service and moving in with them instead. We don't miss him very much.'

— *Nicki Greenberg*

Discussion questions and activities

Pre-reading

- What is a diary? Why do people write diaries?
- Should diaries be public or private? Would you like someone to find your diary and read it?
- Have you ever read a story written as a diary? What was it called and did you like it? What did you like about it?

Comprehension Questions

Read each diary entry and answer the following questions:

Sunday, 2 February, 11.55pm

- What type of job do you think Zelda is starting in nine hours?
- What animal might Barnaby be? What clues in this entry make you think that?
- What is Zelda scared people will find out?

Monday, 3 February, 7.30am

- What made Zelda's microwave blow up?
- What happened when she put a heat spell on Barnaby's baked beans?
- Why does Zelda call Barnaby, 'His Majesty'?



In the classroom...

Monday, 7pm

- Why is Zelda so happy about her first day in class?
- Who is the Vice Principal of Zelda's school?
- What is Barnaby's reaction to Zelda's first day?
- Which student is missing in the illustration showing Zelda's class?

Tuesday, 4 February

- Why do you think Zelda calls Zinnia 'the Troublemaker'?
- What sort of consequences do you think Barnaby wants Zelda to hand out to the class?
- What sort of rules do you think Zelda should put on her poster?

Wednesday, 5 February

- What does 'mortifying' mean?
- According to Eleanor, what does 'resect' mean?
- What word do you think Zelda meant to use on the poster?
- In your own words describe how Zelda feels when she is with other teachers.

Activities

Spot the difference:

Look at the two images of Barnaby on page 64.

- What things in the image on the left tell us Barnaby is grumpy and disagreeable?
- What things in the image on the right tell us that Barnaby is sweet natured and friendly?

Complete the following sentences:

- In the beginning of the story Zelda isn't confident about being a teacher and a witch because.....
- By the end of the story Melody Martin describes Zelda as brave because.....

Language exercise

What tense does Nicki Greenberg use in the beginning of the entry for Monday, 2.30pm?

Read on and see if you can tell how the tense changes when Zelda is remembering the school fair.

Why do you think Nicki Greenberg decided to change the tense at this point?

Whole class discussion

- Why doesn't Zelda want to read Phoebe's diary? Do you think it was ok for Zelda's mother to read it?
- Do you think people should hide things about themselves to fit in? Can you think of any examples where you might have done this?

About the author



Nicki Greenberg

Nicki Greenberg is a writer and illustrator based in Melbourne, Australia.

Nicki has been reading, writing and drawing with a passion ever since she can remember. Her first book, *Don't be Greedy for Animals are Sneaky*, written at age 7 and owing much to Roald Dahl's *The Twits*, remains happily unpublished. However, in 1990, Nicki's series of twelve children's books, *The Digits*, were published when she was fifteen years old and still at high school.

She later spent ten years disguised as a lawyer, while maintaining a not-so-secret Other Life as a comics artist and children's book author. Nicki is the creator of the award-winning 'staged-on-the-page' adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and of the graphic adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Inspired by her own young children, Nicki now dedicates most of her ink to books for younger readers. Her recent titles include *The Naughtiest Reindeer* series, *My Dog Dash* and *Teddy Took the Train*.



Books by Nicki Greenberg

The Cursed First Term of Zelda Stitch - Bad Teacher. Worse Witch. Allen & Unwin 2017

Worm Windy Hollow Books 2016

My Dog Dash Allen & Unwin 2016

The Naughtiest Reindeer Goes South Allen & Unwin 2016

Teddy Took the Train Allen & Unwin 2015

The Naughtiest Reindeer at the Zoo Allen & Unwin 2015

The Naughtiest Reindeer (HB edition) Allen & Unwin 2013

Bom! went the Bear, Allen & Unwin, 2011

Monkey Red Monkey Blue, Allen & Unwin 2010

Hamlet, Allen & Unwin 2010

The Great Gatsby, Allen & Unwin 2009 (PB edition)

The Great Gatsby, Allen & Unwin 2007 (HB edition)

Operation Weasel Ball, Starring Antonia Cutlass, Pan Macmillan 2007

Antonia Cutlass Walks the Plank, Pan Macmillan 2006

It's True! Squids Suck, Allen & Unwin 2005

The Digits series, 1990