



Educator's Guide
for
Juneberry Blue
A Novel by Candice Ransom

About *Juneberry Blue*

Taking inspiration from *Sleeping Beauty* and a rural setting, this contemporary magical realism novel includes a mistaken destiny, a dying town, and a determined ghost cat.

Eleven-year-old Andie Jennings, of Morning Glory, Virginia (population: 8), is set to inherit a matrilineal gift on Test Day, and she plans to use it to bring her dad home for good from his long-haul trucking job. Except her gift doesn't come.

Instead, Andie starts seeing and hearing unexplained things, and a phantom cat seems to be following her. Turns out, she didn't fail Test Day. Her gift just isn't what she expected or wants. But Andie's ability to communicate with the ghosts in the town's shuttered Juneberry Blue factory may be the very thing that Morning Glory—and her own family—needs.

"A sentient plant, hereditary magic, and a dilapidated town in the Blue Ridge Mountains set the stage for this folksy story steeped in fairy tales and local history and snaked through with tendrils of magic."

Kirkus Reviews



June 18, 2024

Hardcover - \$17.99

Audiobook - Listening Library

304 Pages

Ages - 8 to 12

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Candice Ransom is the author of 180 books for children and young adults, including the classic picture book, *The Big Green Pocketbook*, in print more than 30 years. Recent titles include *Bones in the White House: Thomas Jefferson's Mammoth*, *Only Margaret: A Story About Margaret Wise Brown*, *Tooth Fairy's Night*, *Grandparent's Day*, *Race for First Place*, *Monsters in a Mess*, and *Go, Go, Tractors!* Her books have been on multiple state reading lists and named Junior Library Guild Selection, Texas Bluebonnet Nominee, William Allen White Nominee, garnered starred reviews, and a *School Library Journal* Best Book 2023.



Standards of Learning Aligned with Juneberry Blue

Virginia State Standards of Learning:

- Reading:
 - R.5.4.a - context, R.5.4.f - genres
 - R.5.d - figurative language
- Science:
 - 5.8.d - Changes to Earth's Surface
 - 6.2.d - Solar System Development
 - 6.3.c - Phases of the moon
 - 4.2.b (4-M.2) - Plant parts
- Social Studies: Virginia Studies
 - VS.1 (4-D.3)

Author's Virginia History Notebook,
4th Grade, Centreville Elementary, 1963

Common Core Standards Correlations:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4 - Understanding figurative language
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4.A - Understanding chapters and scenes
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1 - Writing opinion pieces
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3 - Writing narratives real or imagined

NGSS Standards:

- MS-ESS1 Earth's Place in the Universe
- 5-LS1-1 Plant Structures and Processes

National Geography Standards:

- Essential Element 1: World in Spatial Terms, Standards 1, 2, 3
- Essential Element 5: Environment and Society, Standard 14
- Essential Element 6: Uses of Geography, Standard 17



Juneberry Blue opens with a prologue that situates readers into the story's location and some of the town's history. The prologue states that the setting is in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. It touches on the town's role in the Civil War. After the war: "Morning glory vines, blue as the Virginia sky in June, spread, and the village came to be called Morning Glory. Later, the village bloomed with houses, businesses, and even a factory."

Pre-Reading Questions and Activities: The Prologue

- Have students find the Blue Ridge Mountains on a U.S. map. Which states are they in?
- Why are they called the Blue Ridge Mountains? They appear to be blue but are covered with trees that are green in spring and summer. (Hint: the color comes mostly from oak trees that produce a hydrocarbon called isoprene.) What does isoprene do?
- How old are the Blue Ridge Mountains? Compare them to the Rocky Mountains. Which mountains are newer?

From the Author:

It took me three years to find the location of my fictional town. I looked all over central Virginia, but no place seemed right. Then one day I drove down a winding back road in Madison County. Up and up my truck went. Suddenly I was in a tiny valley between two mountains. A river splashed between the mountains. My town needed water and geography that might block signals from electronic devices. I studied how the mountains were formed and hiked the land, taking photos.



Discussion Questions and Activities: World Building

- **How important is setting in fiction?** From the prologue:

“Once, a village lounged on the morning side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, tucked into a valley in the lap of Bear Church Mountain. Then, panthers screamed from rocky outcroppings and wolves prowled. Now, the mountain shelters an ageless black bear, deer, foxes, and an ancient raven who knows more than he should.”

Ask students to pinpoint specific details about the setting as described here. Is there a time element? Are any characters introduced? If so, how are they described? How does specific language make this place seem real?

- **Is the history of the setting relevant to the story?** From the prologue:

“Yet the land clung to its memories. At night, some in their beds swore they heard the jingle of harnesses and pounding hoofbeats. Others glimpsed shifting figures in the woods—there one eye blink, gone the next. By true dawn, birds began singing and the trees kept their secrets.”

Ask students to describe what they think might have happened in this place. Is it possible that land can “store” history? **Have them look up the history of where they live**—their town, their neighborhood, even their house. Let them write a few paragraphs on what they learned.



From the Author:

I always begin a novel with place. From place my character emerges and the interaction between place and character forms the plot. When I was figuring out place, I found this fabulous website on world building: “Imagineering in a Box,” from Pixar.

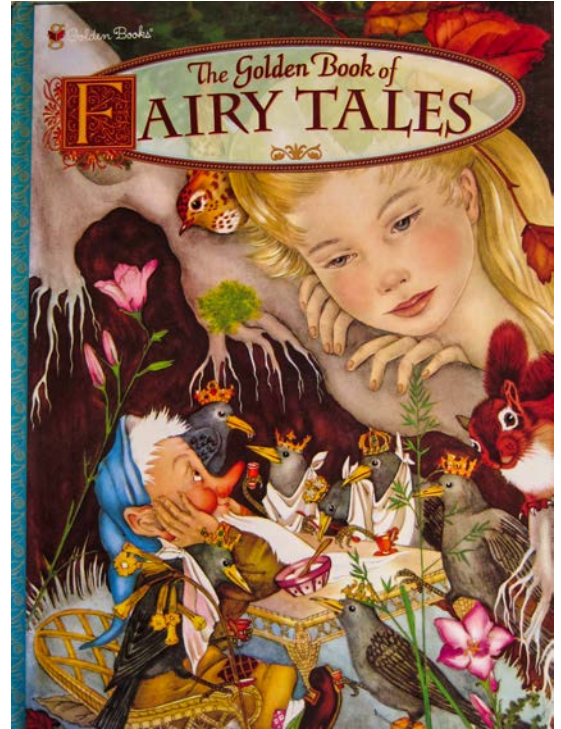
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/hass-storytelling/imagineering-in-a-box>

**Spell: story, saying, tale, narrative.
~ Old English Definition**

This quote leads the reader to the prologue. The definition of “spell” is different than what we normally think. More often, the word “spell” means magic or a form of enchantment.

The author chose this quote because it covers some of the themes in the novel: stories, the importance of storytelling, language, and the passing of narratives from one generation to the next.

In the story, Andie tells fairy tales to her little sister, Bunch, particularly “Sleeping Beauty.” The author used the version of that story from this book.



Discussion Questions and Activities:

Kirkus states in its review: “Fairy tale aficionados will delight in the parallels and references to well-known stories peppered throughout [the novel].”

- **Read a version of “Sleeping Beauty” to the students.** Ask them what parts of the story they like best. Point out that fairy tale characters are typically flat, and the stories are mainly about plot and the message. No one wants to be Sleeping Beauty and sleep through the whole story!
- **Let students view this short video** on PBS: <https://vpm.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/8dc57244-faec-46ce-88eb-d075d8ea9058/what-are-fairy-tales-young-explorers/>
- **Have students go through *Juneberry Blue* and find fairy tale references,** not just to Sleeping Beauty. Can they find “rules” from fairy tales, such as the numbers three and seven, don’t leave the path in the woods, and the importance of animal helpers.

A great source for educators: *Once Upon A Time: A Short History of the Fairy Tale*, by Marina Warner, Oxford University Press, 2014.



Activity: Art Element

Andie makes Story Boxes based on fairy tales. So can students! This is the first Story Box the author made, using a 4 by 4 wooden hinged box from a craft store, and images cut from paper “popped” with cardboard tabs. Using any type of small box, students can create a layered diorama that tells a story. They can snip images from magazines, clip art, or draw and color fairy tale figures or characters and creatures of their own imagining to make a Story Box. Andie found that the act of creating art helped her think in terms of story. Students can do the same: write their own version of the fairy tale or a new, made-up story.



Supplies and Directions:

- Craft store box or discount store pencil box
- Cut-out images, background paper
- Craft glue and scissors
- Cardboard to make pop-out tabs
- Colored pencils or markers
- Craft paint, flowers, etc. (optional)

Paint or cover box as desired. Glue paper background first. Add first layer of figures/ images. Add front layer of images. Decorate with artificial flowers or moss, ribbons.

Discussion Questions and Activities:

In “Sleeping Beauty,” twelve fairies bring gifts for the king and queen’s baby girl. The gifts bestowed are kindness, goodness, beauty, riches, etc. The forgotten thirteenth fairy gives the baby a curse that will befall the princess on her fifteenth birthday.

In *Juneberry Blue*, as the eldest daughter, Andie will inherit a gift in her eleventh summer. Andie doesn’t want the gift or a future working in the family diner. She only wants the gift long enough to bring her father home. In a fairy tale twist, her sister gets it instead. Andie receives another gift, one she’s always had, the ability to communicate with ghosts. To Andie, this gift feels more like a curse. But the gift ultimately brings her father home, saves the town, helps the factory ghosts, and gives her the gift of telling her own stories.

- **Ask students to think about receiving a gift that they didn’t want. Have them write a four-paragraph essay using the following prompts for each paragraph:**
 1. What was the gift and why didn’t they want it?
 2. How did they react?
 3. How should they have reacted?
 4. What did they learn from this incident?
- **Ask students to think about a supernatural gift or power they would like to have. What would they do with this gift? Have them write four paragraphs and draw a picture of themselves using that gift or power.**

Ordinary Gifts:

Andie’s grandmother has a gift readers might have missed: the gift of feeding people and making them feel special.

- **Discuss with students** what ordinary gifts their parents or friends have.

Have students list five people they know and their special abilities.





**If there is magic on this
planet,
it is contained in water.**

Dr. Loren Eiseley, Scientist, Author,
and Naturalist, from his book
The Immense Journey (1959)

Discussions Questions and Activities:

Andie and Tanner find a mysterious water tank inside the abandoned Juneberry Blue factory. To make soft drinks, water is a key ingredient. The location of the spring in Morning Glory was special—the soldier had died there and left behind juneberries that grew into seven trees.

- **Read Eiseley's quote to students. Ask them what they believe is the magic ingredient** in the soft drink Juneberry Blue. Is it the water or the juneberries? Discuss the importance of water on our planet. Can life exist without water?

Andie finds the beginning of the spring on Bear Church Mountain, flowing from beneath Bear Church Rock. Her father told her what would happen if a person drank from the spring. Andie did and her entire life changed. Other legends say people can communicate with animals under certain conditions.

- **Ask students to write their own legend** about ways in which water can impart special properties or gifts.





We need another and a wiser and perhaps more mystical concept of animals . . . In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete . . . moving by voices we shall never hear.

Henry Beston, *The Outermost House*
(1928)

Discussion Questions and Activities:

The above quote prefaces the main narrative of the novel. Animals figure prominently in the story, as early as the prologue. Write the above quote on the whiteboard. Tell students that Henry Beston wrote *The Outermost House*, about the year he lived alone in a tiny house on a dune on Cape Cod, overlooking the ocean. Discuss the quote with the students.

- **Divide the class into small groups.** Let some groups debate the issue that animals are not more finished and complete than humans, that humans are smarter and more creative. Let the others counter with the argument that because animals are older than humans, they shouldn't be considered as underlings, but our equals, and possibly better than we are.

Fairy tales often include animals as characters and helpers. Some are dangerous, such as wolves, others are humble, such as toads. Andie encounters many creatures, some no longer alive.

- **Ask students to list the different animals in the story.** They are all helpers but each plays a different role. How do horseshoe prints, twigs, and a ghost cat named Figment assist Andie in a quest she doesn't even know she's on? Which animal character is their favorite and why?





“Did you know—?” Tanner began.

“That morning glories only live one day? You’ve only told me about a hundred times.”

“You don’t know *this*. Darwin—*Charles Darwin*”—Andie groaned —“noted that wild morning glory vines grow the opposite direction of the sun. If you force the plant to go in the *other* direction, it will wither and die.”

“Don’t tell that to Priscilla. She grows any which way she pleases.” Andie had noticed that the potted plant mysteriously lengthened several inches overnight in the dark kitchen. So much for plants needing sunlight. *Juneberry Blue*, p. 27

Discussion Questions and Activity:

Morning glories, what most people call a weed, are everywhere in *Juneberry Blue*. They are hardy plants—all they need is something to grab onto, even another plant, and they’ll grow and grow. Everyone in town knows Priscilla, the potted morning glory in the Unlucky in Love diner. From chapter one, readers are aware that the plant is a kleptomaniac—she steals money, silverware, and especially Andie’s antique rabbit scissors.

- **Ask students what they think of Priscilla.** Is she a character? Could a wild plant live in a pot?
- **Discuss Priscilla and her peculiar habits.** What would she say if she could speak? Why does she grow at night in the dark? Does she miss being in the wild? What does she really want?
- **Have students answer one or more questions as a One Pager:** let them express their thought process by writing, doodling, experimenting with lettering, etc.

One Pager source: <https://www.readingandwritinghaven.com/using-the-one-pager-as-a-response-to-reading>

Discussion Questions:

- Andie's grandmother created a map of an imaginary world when she was a child. What was the world called? What kind of creatures lived there? How did Andie feel about NeeNee's made-up world?
- Morning Glory is in a "dead zone" where no electronic devices work. What causes this? Is it the mountains? Are there other places like Morning Glory? (Hint: Greenbank, West Virginia.) What would it be like to live without any electronics?
- Ghosts keep the factory machines working. Is it possible for ghosts to perform chores? Andie worries that the ghosts should leave their earthly work and rest in peace. What are Andie's emotions when they depart?
- The single lamppost in town remains dark throughout the story. Near the end, the light is turned on. At the very end, the light tries to hold back the darkness. What does this mean? Are all problems always solved?
- Morning Glory is mostly a ghost town. Nearly all the houses are boarded up. Tanner's uncle is a hoarder. Yards are filled with junk. Yet Andie thinks her town is beautiful. What does she see that makes the place beautiful to her?
- The old factory is off-limits to the kids. Why do the adults believe it is dangerous? What secrets are the grown-ups keeping?
- Magic is everywhere in this story. Andie's cut knee mysteriously heals. A raven leaves Andie a clue with twigs. Ghost horses leave horseshoe prints in the woods. Do these events make sense? Are they believable?
- Andie is jealous of her outgoing "fairy-princess-ballerina" little sister. What happened when Andie made Bunch use her gift that night? The moon is usually present when Bunch is in the scene. How does the moon make Andie feel at different times in the story?
- In "Sleeping Beauty" the bad fairy curses the king and queen's daughter. On her fifteenth birthday she'll touch a spindle and die. A good fairy says she will fall asleep. A prince will come to her rescue. Could Bunch be the innocent princess? Could Andie be the bad fairy when she makes Bunch drink the potion and then the good fairy when she makes Bunch's special story box? Does Andie try to be the prince and save the town? Is it possible for a character to have more than one role in a story?
- The Unlucky in Love diner is the heart of Morning Glory. Yet Andie doesn't want to be tied down to working there, even if she had gotten her gift. Is Andie right to feel she should have another future?
- In the prologue, it is revealed an "ageless bear" lives on the mountain. Later, Andie meets the bear. How does the bear affect her? Is it possible that animals know more about the world than humans?

Q & A with Candice Ransom

Candice Ransom began writing stories in second grade because she couldn't find enough books to read. She mostly wrote ghost stories, mysteries, and animal stories.

In this photo she is ten years old, in the fifth grade. By then, she had decided she would become a writer and an artist when she grew up.



Question: How did you get your idea for Juneberry Blue?

All my ideas come to me in different ways, usually with some sort of an image, something I see. I keep a journal with story ideas. This is from my journal:

Friday, May 27, 2016: I was awake around 3:00 a.m. I decided to go outside. It was civil dawn when I slipped out on the porch, still dark. There was a strange blinking green light on the porch floor. A tiny alien spacecraft? It was a firefly on its back. I put him in the grass. He continued to blink: On. Off. On. Off. The birds! Now I know what dawn chorus is. Robins, song sparrows, cardinals, wrens. All that racket and not a single bird in sight!

A black cat sat across from our house, casting a lean blacker shadow under the lamp-light. We stared at each other. Then he got up, became one with the shadows, and was gone. Overhead in the sky rode a waxing gibbous moon. No stars. I sat and listened and watched. The firefly blinked in the grass: On. Off. On. Off. I believe in signs. This morning was a gift. The cat, the firefly, the moon. They gave me my next story.

It was a long journey from that morning until 2024 when the book was in my hands. But by writing down my observations, some parts of that long-ago morning found their way into the book: a cat, the moon, the lamppost, gifts.



Question: Did you ever become an artist?

Not really. When I was in my early teens, I desperately wanted to be an animator for Walt Disney Studios. I even wrote to the Studios, asking them how I could work for them. They sent back a nice letter, saying I needed to graduate from high school (I was 14), come to California, and enroll in their special art school.

I didn't have the money and after high school, I had to go to work as a secretary. But this drawing I made of Maleficent (made with marker pens which were new then) shows I loved the story "Sleeping Beauty," which became part of my novel.

Question: You have to research your nonfiction books. Your novel has a lot of information in it. Did you do research for your novel, as well?

Yes! The materials, drafts, and research for *Juneberry Blue* filled a two-shelf cart. I did research on ghosts, morning glories, the history of Madison County where my story is actually set, geology and how the Blue Ridge Mountains were formed, Virginia wildlife such as bears, ravens, and other animals, astronomy, particularly lunar occultations of stars, the phases of the moon, superstitions and folklore, NeeNee's recipes, juneberry trees (also called serviceberry), and most of all, I researched soft drink factories

I kept a three-inch binder packed with information on the history of soft drinks, how to make soft drinks, and what old factories looked like. I even found floor plans for a soft drink factory from 1925 that became the basis of the Juneberry Blue soft drink factory.

Question: Do you have any advice for young writers?

Don't wait! If you want to be a writer, start writing now! I wrote stories and even books all through elementary school. In high school, I wrote poetry, but I still loved children's books. My English teacher told me I would probably become a writer of children's books. I was so relieved! It was an actual job! I started sending my work to publishers at age 15. They weren't published because I needed to learn my craft, which I did by writing. I did not go to college until I was 50 (don't wait that long!).

I'm an ordinary writer. I haven't traveled far or much. Since I was a kid I've kept my feet on the ground, my eyes on the sky. Much of my creative work is nurtured by what I experience in my own yard: a junco laddering down a tree trunk with nuthatch aspirations. Daylily bulbs murmuring in their sleep, dreaming of spring. Hickory shell fragments cast away by thoughtless squirrels and that crunch underfoot like chicken bones. I keep those observations folded within me, tucked away.

Even when driving to the store, I hunt for something about the day that catches in the back of my throat: the sable sheen of a turkey vulture's wings, a hard edge in the sky that might taste like nickels. Ordinary sights most of us miss in the busyness of our lives. Writing is a solitary occupation—only you can do the work. But stories keep us company!

Look around you! Whether you live in the suburbs or the city, look at what is going on around you. Take notes on your observations.

One of those observations may lead to a new idea. If you get a lot of ideas, write them down in your notebook, too. *Write every day.*

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