



Ages 8–12 • 978-0-8234-3657-6 • E-book available

Guided Reading Level: W  
Grade level Equivalent: Grade 6  
Interest Level: Grades 5 up

Instructional Standards:  
RL.6-8.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10  
SL.6-8.1, 1c, 1d, 3, 4, 6  
L.6-8.3, 4, 5, 6  
W.6-8.1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 9a, 10



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# 27

## Magic Words

Sharelle Byars Moranville

★ "Kobi's world is **vividly portrayed**, shimmering with just a soupçon of subtle magic from the opening pages. . . . Both tragic and uplifting, this winsome tale **perfectly depicts some of the many aspects of magic.**"  
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ "This **well-honed middle grade title packs a considerable emotional punch.** . . . **Highly recommended.**"  
—*School Library Journal*, starred review

## #27MagicWords

## Characterization

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1. Who are the key characters in the story? Who are the supporting characters?
2. How does Sharelle Byars Moranville build characterization in *27 Magic Words* to enhance your understanding of the character's personalities? (Choose two characters from the story.)
3. Describe the characters in the story.
4. What are their beliefs, hopes, dreams, fears, strengths and weaknesses?
5. How do they conduct themselves throughout the book? What do the characters do and say to reveal themselves?
6. Explain how they change as the plot develops and how their unique experiences cause them to grow.
7. What are your feelings about them?
8. What does Kobi learn about the other characters throughout the story? What does she learn about herself?
9. Write a brief description for each of the following characters: *Kobi, Brook, The Great Alighieri, Mom, Grandmamma, Mr. Gyver, Dante, Uncle Wim, Sally, Ms. Hanock, Norman, Ms. Lake, Ana and Lily*. What purpose does the author have for including each character in the story?
10. Which characters do you empathize with? Explain.
11. What do you think will happen to the characters next?

## Setting

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1. Where does the story take place? Explain how the location and environment of the book color the telling of the story.
2. Does the location change during the book or stay the same? If it changes, does this have any effect on the central characters?
3. How does Moranville use imagery to create a feeling as the setting changes? How does this vivid language appeal to the senses?
4. Compare and contrast the settings in the story (Paris and Des Moines).

## Theme

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1. What are the main themes and ideas of *27 Magic Words*? How do the themes of loss, coping with grief, love, art, words and family blend naturally with the story line?
2. Is one theme more dominant than others?
3. How are the themes reflected through the characters' behaviors?
4. What can these themes teach you about your own life?



5. Discuss the characters' repeated thoughts, words and actions throughout the book.
  - \* Why does Kobi put her hand to her heart? Use words? Have fantasies about her parents? Bring signed gifts in for her classmates? Lie?
  - \* Why does Brook count objects?
  - \* Why does Uncle Wim act "unfortunate"?
  - \* Why does Sally reject Wim's marriage proposal?
  - \* Why does Grandmamma dislike Sally Hanock?
  - \* Why does Norman wear stripes?

## Style

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1. Discuss how Moranville structures the story. How does she arrange her sentences as well as words to affect meaning? Was this effective?
2. How does the author incorporate Kobi's fantasies about her parents into the story?
3. In what voice or point of view is the story written?
4. How does this perspective color the story?
5. Do these different perspectives influence your perception? Is the book told from one point of view or many?
6. How would the story change if it were told from Kobi's point of view?

## Conflict

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1. Discuss the conflicts faced by the characters in the story, including
  - \* humankind vs humankind
  - \* humankind vs nature
  - \* humankind vs self
  - \* humankind vs fate
2. What decisions must the characters make? Between what things are they deciding, and what do these ideas represent?

## Symbolism

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1. What settings, names, colors and recurring objects are referred to in this story, and what do they represent?
  - \* Post-it® notes
  - \* Oryx
  - \* Vegetable garden
  - \* Paintings
  - \* Dante
  - \* Dotty
  - \* Beetle
  - \* Stories
  - \* Footlocker
  - \* Magic
  - \* Twin beds



2. Do you feel changed in any way by Kobi and Brook?
3. Did *27 Magic Words* expand your range of experience or challenge your assumptions?
4. Did it take you to a place you haven't been before or help you see a place you know in a different light?
5. Did reading it help you to understand a person better, or even yourself?
6. Have you read other, similar books on coping with loss? Compare and contrast the characters from two stories: how they deal with loss, their personal struggles and triumphs, individuals who helped them throughout the book and how they change from the beginning to the end of the story.

## About the Author

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Photo Credit: Bob Desol

**Sharelle Byars Moranville** is the author of the middle-grade novel *Over the River*, which *Booklist* called “beautifully written” in a starred review and *A Higher Geometry*, a *Booklist* Top 10 Romance for Youth. She lives in West Des Moines, Iowa.

Educator’s Guide prepared by Marla Conn, reading/literacy specialist and educational consultant

