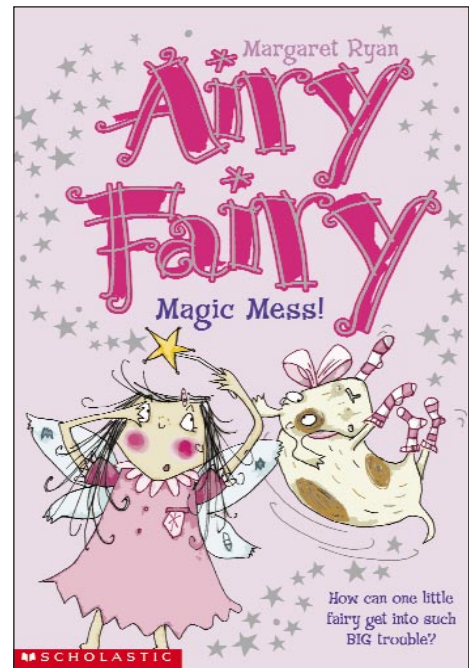


Airy Fairy: Magic Mess!

Written by Margaret Ryan



◀ The Back Story ▶ with Margaret Ryan

What prompted you to write about a caring, muddle-headed little fairy girl?

The idea for Airy Fairy came to me when I was looking up at my Christmas tree. I thought that being the fairy on the top of the tree must be a very uncomfortable job. Imagine being perched up there for the whole of the festive season with pine needles sticking in your bottom! That thought prompted me to write about a fairy. I called the fairy Airy Fairy, which suggested a character who was terribly nice, but gets a little bit muddled at times.

Is it important for you to discuss serious issues for kids such as bullying and being fair to one another in a lighthearted, humorous way, as you do in *Magic Mess!*?

It's unfortunate that when people are quiet or shy or a bit different, like Airy Fairy, they can be picked on. At school there is no mum or dad to help them. Like Airy Fairy, they have to be brave and stand up for themselves. Because Airy Fairy lives in a school for orphaned fairies, she can't even ask anyone in her family for advice. *Magic Mess!* has a serious message but it is delivered in a light-hearted, humorous way. I believe that, treated with humour, a serious theme can be made much more accessible and readable for children. The story is full of fun things like rainbow parties, planting flowers, painting pictures, kittens and, of course, fairies. Even the disasters are fun – Airy Fairy's attempts to use spells result in spilt paint, the appearance of a box of rocks instead of chocs and a deluge of smelly socks!

Scary Fairy is a bully. Do you think Scary Fairy will ever mend her ways and be able to be friends with the other fairies?

Scary Fairy bullies Airy Fairy because she is jealous of the muddled-up little fairy who can never seem to remember her spells or follow the teachers' instructions. Although Scary is clever and always gets things right, that doesn't make her popular with the other little fairies, because she isn't a very nice person. They like the friendly little fairy, even if she does sometimes get things wrong. I don't know if Scary Fairy will ever mend her ways. It would be nice to think so, but we shall have to see.

Why do you think Airy Fairy is so popular with young readers?

Although *Magic Mess!* is set in a world of fairies and magic, Airy Fairy is a character that children are able to relate to. She daydreams, gets distracted when she's been given a job to do, has to clean her bedroom and has to cope with other kids and grumpy teachers being mean to her. There are many good things in her life that children will relate to as well: being praised for good work, having fun with caring friends and wanting to win a competition.

About the author: Margaret Ryan

I grew up in the town of Paisley in Scotland. At school, I liked writing stories but wasn't very good at drawing or maths. I later studied at Glasgow University where I met my husband at a dance. We now have two grown-up children.

I became a teacher and continued to write as a hobby. After I won a competition for writing for children, some of my stories were presented on radio and television. Soon after, some were accepted for publication. I decided to give up teaching (which suited me because I didn't like doing maths) and concentrated on my writing. To date I have written over sixty books for children, as well as children's poetry.

These days my husband and I live in an old converted grain mill near St Andrews on the east coast of Scotland. I write in an untidy little room above the water wheel. The room overlooks the garden and I love watching the wildlife that come to visit, including the red squirrel that appears in *Magic Mess*! I think that writing is a lovely job. I get to meet so many people and get so many letters from children all over the world.

As well as writing, I love reading, which can take you anywhere in the universe from the comfort of your own armchair. I also like swimming, playing badminton and going for long walks to look at wildlife. Although I also like to play the piano, other members of my family usually leave the room when I do!

Teaching Ideas ✓

Before Reading ✓

- The Airy Fairy books are about fairies. Do the students know any other fairy stories? Look at the origins of fairy stories in the myths and legends of Europe. Select one short traditional story and read it aloud to the class.
- Airy Fairy is always in a muddle. Everyone gets in a muddle and messes things up at sometime or other. Encourage students to discuss ways in which they get in a muddle. For a discussion starter, perhaps they could think about all the possibilities for mix-ups in a particular situation, such as getting ready for school, tidying the bedroom or passing on an instruction to their parents that the teacher has given them.
- Everyone is bullied at some time. Discuss with students the ways in which people bully each other: verbally, physically, by getting someone else in trouble, by spoiling their fun or turning other people against them. How can someone who is being bullied put a stop to what is happening without behaving just as badly as the bully?
- Funny stories often have serious messages behind them. Have students try and think of the serious message behind some of their favourite funny stories. These stories don't have to be books; they could be from a TV show or movie.

Activity

My mistake

You will discover that Airy Fairy suffers all sorts of mishaps and gets into funny situations. But everyone makes mistakes. Write a silly short story about a mishap that has happened to you. Try and use some rhyming and alliterating words to make the story fun. Don't forget a silly illustration to go with it. Pin your story on a board. After you've read the book, compare some of the mishaps that happen to you and your classmates with those that happen to Airy Fairy in *Magic Mess*!

During reading ✓

■ As each chapter is read to the class or they read it to themselves, ask them to think about the following points:

- What are the main events in the plot?
- What does Scary say or do to show how she feels about Airy?
- How does Airy get in a muddle? How does she get out of it? What does she do when Scary is mean to her?
- What do the people other than Scary think about Airy when she gets in a muddle? Do they get cross or are they understanding and helpful?
- What is fun in each chapter? This could be what the fairies do, what happens or the language that the author uses.

Activities

Class mural

With your classmates, paint or draw a mural on a roll of paper (like Airy's painting on her bedroom wall) showing each of the fairies, the squirrel, the kitten and other things in the story. Try to add details such as the prize pen, smelly socks falling from the sky, and so on.

How do you feel?

Imagine that you are Scary Fairy. You see that in the picture Airy has painted on her bedroom wall, she has painted you smiling and holding hands with her and another of the fairies. Write a short story that shows us how you feel. Are you happy? Does it make you want to be friends with Airy? Or does it make you cross? Tell us what you plan to do next – play another nasty trick or find a way to show you want to be friends.

After reading ✓

■ Ask the students to think back to any fairy stories that they might have looked at before they read *Magic Mess!*. What do the more traditional fairy stories have in common with Airy Fairy? How are they different? Is Airy Fairy's world a bit like our world as well? In what way?

■ Discuss with students the funny things that happen in the story. Choose a scene and talk about how the writer has made what could be seen as a disaster into something funny. Look at the rhyming words and alliteration, as well as the silly things that happen and the fun activities the fairies are given.

■ Talk to students about bullying in the story, using some of the following questions as stimulus points: Why does Scary Fairy pick on Airy Fairy? How does Airy Fairy stick up for herself? Do Scary Fairy's nasty tricks work or do they backfire?

■ To help students think about the structure of *Magic Mess!* write down a list of the chapter numbers. The students can think of the major events that happen in each chapter. Help the students put the chapters into the framework of set up, carry through and resolution (see point two of 'Literature study' on next page for outline of framework components).

Activities

Four boxes

Draw four big boxes on a page. In the first box, write down an activity that the fairies are doing, such as planting bulbs for spring. Draw an arrow to the second box. In that box, write down what Scary Fairy does to ruin the activity for Airy Fairy, in this case, replacing the flower bulbs with onions. Then draw an arrow to the third box and in that box write what disaster befalls Airy Fairy as a result, in this case, her pot has no flowers in it. Then draw an arrow to the fourth box. In this box write what happens next, such as when Fairy Gropplethorpe praises Airy Fairy for growing yummy food for them to eat. Draw pictures beside each box.

BEHIND THE BOOK TEACHER'S NOTES

Silly spells

Make up some silly spells and paint them in large writing, with illustrations. Put your spells up on the wall.

Literature study

Use the following discussion starters to help students understand the ideas in *Magic Mess!* and how the author has written her story to help get those ideas across.

- What are the themes or messages that Margaret Ryan is trying to get us to think about? Talk about bullying and friendship and about not giving up and believing in yourself. From the bully's point of view, it shows that you don't have to win to be popular; that hurting others won't get you what you want and won't win you friends.

- To think about how the author has structured her story, it can be broken into three parts: the beginning or set up (we learn about the main characters and the competition and Fairy Gropplethorpe's birthday), the middle or carry through (having the competition and making the presents) and the end or resolution (Airy Fairy wins the competition and makes a present, Scary Fairy realises that her tricks haven't worked).

In the longest one of these parts, the middle of the story, the author has organised her ideas into three main events. These are the tidying of the rooms, the painting of the rooms, and making a present for the principal. Within each of these major steps in the progression of the plot: Airy tries to do her best, fails because of Scary's tricks, and then succeeds because she keeps trying. The pattern is repeated three times. This repetition reinforces the themes of the novel.

- The major characters in *Magic Mess!* are distinctive. Airy is messy, scatterbrained, creative, and friendly. Scary is tidy, good at schoolwork and likes to win. Miss Stickler is orderly and not very warm. She likes fairies who are tidy and organised. Fairy Gropplethorpe is kind. She rewards thoughtfulness and fairies who try hard.

While in real life we all possess these traits to a lesser or greater degree, each of the characters in *Magic Mess!* tends to show only some of them. This makes it easy for the reader to separate the types of actions Airy and Scary make and the reactions of Miss Stickler and Fairy Gropplethorpe. Because of this, Margaret Ryan's message is easier to understand.

- Margaret Ryan has set her story in a school for fairies. It is a lot like a real school. However, it is also an orphanage, so the fairies are there all the time and Airy has no family members to help her with her problems. The fairy school setting means the story can use elements of the real world as well as fun elements of a magical world.

- *Magic Mess!* is fun to read. The author has included lots of humorous action and fun elements in the setting. Many features of the writing such as silly verses and rhyming names make the story light and easy to laugh along with.