

Title: *The Phantom Tollbooth*

Author: Norton Juster

LIKES

- Humour, fun, whimsy, joy
- The illustrations
- Absurdist elements, the inventiveness
- Word play, cheesy puns
- Simple on the surface, but complex language and some great messages that are slightly different from much YA e.g being curious means you never have to be bored; that not engaging with life makes you an uninteresting, or even unpleasant, person to be around; the need for both 'rhyme' and 'reason'; a celebration of cleverness.
- Milo's journey – in every sense!
- Made us laugh
- Relativity and different perspectives e.g. what is small for one person is big for another, growing down instead of growing up.
- Doesn't condescend or over-explain.
- Particular scenes e.g the word market, conducting the sunset.
- Great to see pictures in a book that would work for yr 7.
- Milo as a cypher for the reader.

DISLIKES

- Not everyone liked the illustration style
- Use of idioms, archaic language and word play could make the book inaccessible for modern children or those with English as an additional language.
- Took a while to get into.
- Didn't feel an emotional connection to Milo – would have liked more context for him/his family so that we cared more.
- 'Reminds me of the trippy bits of Disney that I always fast-forwarded through'
- Too clever
- Episodic structure lead to wondering 'what's the point'? Didn't engage with the search for rhyme and reason.
- Is the ending a bit 'it's all a dream'? Did it really happen? Has he really changed? Wanted a bit more grounding in the real world at the start and at the end.
- Fiction that plays with time can leave me feeling uneasy.
- The absurdist elements
- Some slow/tedious bits that were hard to get through.
- Like to read a book in one gulp – this had too many episodes and diversions.

PUZZLES

- Milo's context
- What was the reception of this book at the time it was written? Does it hold up for children now?
- It's a whole book of puzzles!
- Would this work better as a collection of linked stories?
- Was it all a dream?

PATTERNS (Within this book and links to other books and real-life experiences)***Within the novel***

Expectations subverted

Ignorance bad, knowledge and intelligence good

Real life links

- Milo's boredom – like a modern child without their mobile phone
- Enjoyed reading about how Juster came to write the book

Links to other books / film

A child going on a journey – was it real? Alice in Wonderland, Wizard of Oz

- Episodic, different lands, inventiveness – Gullivers' Travels, Magic Faraway Tree, Roald Dahl.
- Rooftoppers – word play
- Quest narratives: Illiad, Odyssey, Pilgrim's Progress
- Candide – 'we must cultivate our garden'

HOOKS

- Good for early Y7 – good transition book.
- Reading it aloud for the word play (without too much explaining of the jokes)

OUTPUTS FOLLOWING READING (ORAL AND WRITTEN)

- Create a new place for Milo's journey
- Who is the next child to receive a Phantom Tollbooth?
- Own illustrations
- Word market. Perhaps give them a 'word budget' and some words to 'buy'. Can only use these words to write something.
- Fantasy geography – creating maps
- Cross-curricular work with maths

OTHER

Other classic children's books recommended by the group:

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle
Anne of Green Gables by Lucy Maud Montgomery
Ballet Shoes by Noel Streatfeild
Brandon Chase by B.B.
Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Patterson
Carrie's War by Nina Bawden
Coram Boy by Jamila Gavin
Five Children and It by E. Nesbit
Goodnight Mr Tom by Michelle Magorian
I Capture the Castle by Dodie Smith
Little Women by Louisa May Alcott
Lizzie Dripping by Helen Cresswell
Noughts and Crosses by Mallorie Blackman
Peter Pan by J.M Barrie
Refugee Boy by Benjamin Zephaniah
Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor
Swallows and Amazons by Arthur Ransome
Tarka the Otter by Henry Williamson
The Borrowers by Mary Norton

The Princess Bride by William Goldman
The Railway Children by E.Nesbit
The Secret Garden by Frances Hidgson Burnett
The Sword in the Stone by T.H.White
The Wizard of Earthsea (4 in series) by Usula le Guin
The Wizard of Oz by L Frank Baum
Tom's Midnight Garden by Phillipa Pearce
Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson
War Horse by Michael Morpurgo
Watership Down (content warning – misogyny) by Richard Adams
White Fang by Jack London