

## ***Babysitting Nightmares***

### **A Spooky Adventure Series by Kat Shepherd**

#### **Series Synopsis**      *The Nightmares are coming... Call the babysitters*

Rebecca, Clio, Maggie and Tanya have always loved babysitting, but the girls suddenly have their hands full when a supernatural force reawakens in the town, bringing a spooky new adventure with every babysitting job. The four girls must work together to keep their charges safe from the evil Night Queen and her supernatural minions. With the help of Clio's aunt, Kawanna, and some other friends they meet along the way, the girls learn to trust themselves and one another to become the heroes their town needs.

In Book 1, *The Shadow Hand*, a freak thunderstorm sets off a series of creepy events in the house where Rebecca babysits. A locked window opens by itself, mossy handprints streak the wall, and the baby begins acting strange. With the help of her friends, Rebecca discovers that the villainous Night Queen has taken the baby and replaced him with a changeling. The girls can save him—if they can survive a frightening journey into the Nightmare Realm!

In Book 2, *The Phantom Hour*, Clio has already had one brush with the paranormal, and she's dead set on making it her last. But her new babysitting job is in a haunted house! At first, Clio's excited to work at the historical Victorian mansion in town—until doors start closing behind her, objects move on their own, and messages appear from beyond the grave. With the help of her friends, Clio works to uncover long-buried secrets from the past. Can Clio face her fear and solve the mystery of the haunted mansion?

Book 3, *The Twilight Curse*, arrives August 20. When the town's old movie palace is converted into a theater, Maggie is thrilled to get a job helping with the first stage production. Even though she's just babysitting the star's kids, Maggie is determined to learn everything she can about acting. But a devilish ghoul seems to have other plans for the performance! It's up to Maggie and her friends to investigate. Can they vanquish the threat in time for opening night?

Book 4 is still in the revision stages, but expect to see Tanya battling possessed dolls sometime in early 2020!

#### **Theme**      *If not me, who? If not now, when?*

When trouble arises, we often find ourselves looking for someone older, wiser, and braver to come in and save the day. But what if nobody shows up? Babysitting Nightmares is about ordinary kids who step up to face their fears and become their own heroes. It invites readers to create their own definitions of a hero, exploring qualities like collaboration, compromise, and compassion.

## Where does this series fit in my classroom?

*Babysitting Nightmares* is a middle grade series for readers 8-12. The author is a former 4th and 5th grade classroom teacher, who wrote it with the goal of engaging reluctant or undiscovered readers. Short chapters, cliffhangers, and a fast-paced plot keep kids turning pages, and the rich vocabulary sprinkled throughout offers a painless way to pick up new words using context clues. School Library Journal says, “Fans of Goosebumps and the updated Baby-Sitters’ Club graphic novels will find lots to like in this delightfully monstrous mash-up.” It’s a terrific addition to a school or classroom library, but it can also serve as a mentor text for a variety of mini-lessons.

### Mini-Lesson Ideas

#### Show Don’t Tell

Educator Katie Reilley wanted to teach a lesson on showing vs. telling. She read the changeling transformation passage from pp. 132-133 of *The Shadow Hand* and invited her students to draw what the author described. Then she had students write and share their own short passages that focused on showing, not telling.

#### Metacognition and Creating Dialogue with Text

For a mini-lesson on dialoguing with text, read aloud the passage from pp. 14-16 of *The Shadow Hand*, and have students jot down questions and thoughts on post-its as you read to them. Invite students to make guesses about what might have opened the window and left the handprint. Ask if the culprit is probably supernatural, encouraging them to share clues from the story that support their answers. Post-its could be shared and sorted into type of metacognitive strategy (predictions, inferences, questions, connections, etc), which leads to a larger lesson on naming and practicing specific reading strategies. Or just keep it as a short mini-lesson that models engaged, active reading.

#### Writing Practice: Supporting an Argument

At the end of p. 171 of *The Shadow Hand*, the Night Queen offers the girls one final challenge: they can save Kyle and escape back to safety, but only if they agree to throw the changeling into the fire, destroying it. Read the end of p. 171 and all of Chapter 18 (pp. 172-181). Ask students to produce a piece of writing stating whether Rebecca should throw the changeling into the fire or not, supporting their position with evidence from the text. It could be as simple as a short opinion paragraph or something more elaborate, like a persuasive essay, friendly letter, advice columnist reply, or even a lawyer’s closing argument. Or if you’re working on speaking or debating skills, allow students to choose sides and hold a debate.

### Writing Practice: Creating Riddles

On p. 163 of *The Shadow Hand*, the Night Queen's first challenge to the girls is a riddle. Read the riddle to students and have them guess the correct answer. Invite students to share any other riddles they know, or read some from sites like riddles.com. What makes a good riddle? What makes a bad riddle? Using index cards and a recipe box, create a riddle collection. Students compose their riddle on one side of the card and write the answer on the back. Encourage students to create riddles from content areas, too! History/geography riddles, math riddles, and science riddles are all a lot of fun to create!

Use the riddle box throughout the year as an anchoring activity for students who have free time or finish work early. They can quiz themselves or each other or add riddles to the box, creating their own or collecting new ones they discover elsewhere.

### Science Connection: Black Lights and UV Light

On pp. 146-149 of *The Shadow Hand* Tanya uses a UV light (also called a black light) to track the missing changeling. She lists a few things that glow under UV light, including tomato hornworms and mold. Assemble a collection of items and present them under regular light, inviting students to work in groups to record their predictions of what will glow under the black light. Darken the room and pass out handheld black lights to each group (or drape a dark, heavy cloth over a cardboard box to create a mini darkroom) and have them test their hypotheses. Did they notice any patterns? Surprises?

Do a deeper dive if you'd like: Have students research what UV light is. Why do some things glow under it and not others? Or use black lights and UV-sensitive items to test sunscreen effectiveness.

### Social Studies Connection: Changelings

In *The Shadow Hand* the girls conduct research to learn more about changelings and the history surrounding them. Much of the research for this book came from existing history surrounding these legends. Multiple countries have changeling legends and share similar suggestions of how to deal with them. Invite students to research changeling legends and lore and mark on a map the countries that have such stories. What could be a reason that changeling stories originated? Why might there be so much similarity in the lore? How would the legends have traveled from place to place, and why did the legend spread to some places and not others? What other stories, ideas, or goods have historically spread throughout a region or throughout the world? (Cinderella stories, noodles, numeric systems, religions, animals/invasive species) What is the role of trade in all of this?

Changeling stories are a classic early example of fake news. These rumors and exaggerations with no scientific basis put small children in danger and often caused them harm. What are ways we can check to find out if a story is true or not? What steps do news agencies have to go through before they can responsibly report a story? Do internet news sites have the same vetting system? Do we need to give credence to "both sides" of an argument if one side is based on facts and the other is not? How can we be responsible about sharing news and stories?

