

READING GUIDE TO Magic Candies



Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

This reading guide was created by Agneta Edwards. Agneta is a literary educator, lecturer and author and served on the ALMA jury from 2002 to 2011.

**SWEDISH
ARTSCOUNCIL**

Astrid Lindgrens Memorial Award
Swedish Arts Council | P.O. Box 27215 | SE-102 53 Stockholm
Office: Borgvägen 1-5, Stockholm
Tel: +46 8 519 264 00 | literatureaward@alma.se | www.alma.se/en

READ! DISCUSS! CREATE!

We're excited that you want to read *Magic Candies* by Baek Heena! Here are some tips and ideas to inspire discussion, play and creative activities that you can use with your children at home or in preschool, grade school or after-school programs. Baek Heena wants her books to uplift readers and entertain them. So get ready to read and enjoy *Magic Candies* and marvel at the transforming power of the imagination!

ABOUT THE PICTURE BOOK AUTHOR BAEK HEENA

Baek Heena was born in 1971 in Seoul, South Korea. She worked in advertising and film animation before publishing her first children's picture book, *Cloud Bread* (Gu-reum-bbang), in 2004. She is now the author of over a dozen books, is popular throughout Asia and has been honored with awards both at home and abroad. She received the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award in the spring of 2020. "I was so happy. I couldn't believe it was true! It was like getting a phone call from God," she said after receiving the award.

Baek Heena is known for her innovative visual style, and she follows a time-consuming and uncompromising process to bring her picture books to life. She builds entire miniature worlds—drawing, painting, photographing, sewing, baking, snipping, gluing and assembling tiny environments, objects and figurines. These 3D collages are then lit to enhance them further before photographing each individual image/scene. This slow craft process, inspired by stop-motion animation techniques, lends her books a uniquely scenic and cinematic quality.



Foto: Bear Books.

Baek Heena's warm and humorous stories take up such themes as solitude, interpersonal encounters, cooperation and relationships. Just like children's own imaginative play, her books weave realism and magic together. A recurring motif is the way play and the imagination can bring enchantment into everyday life—which is precisely what happens in *Magic Candies*.

Baek Heena's debut book, *Cloud Bread*, was published in English in 2011. Three of her books have been published in Swedish, all by Trastén: *Cloud Bread* (*Molnbullar*, 2019); *Magic Candies* (*Magiska godiskulor*, 2020); and *The Bath Fairy* (*En fé på badhuset*, 2020). Reading guides to all three are available in Swedish and English versions at www.alma.se.



About *Magic Candies*

In *Magic Candies*, author Baek Heena tells a story, equally humorous and serious by turns, about loneliness and the interior journey we must sometimes take to escape it. When we first meet the main character, DongDong, he is playing marbles by himself. Not for the first time, we sense.

When DongDong buys a new bag of marbles, however, everything changes! The new marbles are magic candy marbles. They give DongDong the ability to talk to objects and animals. He is even able to make contact with his grandmother from beyond the grave. Strangest of all, one of the marbles lets DongDong hear the voice inside his father's head, which keeps repeating "I LOVE YOU."

With the help of the magical candy marbles, DongDong gains a sense of belonging, an awareness of his place in a network of close relationships. He is reminded that behind his father's nagging lies love. As he comes to better understand himself and those closest to him, he gains the strength to break free from his solitude and take the first steps toward other people.

Magic Candies invites discussions about loneliness, family relationships and friendships. It is especially suited for children in preschool and the early grades. But it can be read on many levels, so older and younger readers will also be able to identify and sympathize with DongDong and appreciate his story.

The original Korean title of *Magic Candies* is *Al-sa-taang* and it was first published in 2012. Fun fact: Baek Heena's latest picture book, *I Am A Dog* (Korean title: *Na-neun-ghe-dah*) features DongDong's dog as the narrator of a new story about the family's life.

Before you read

Even before you open the book, take a few minutes to study the cover. This is a great way to get the imaginative juices flowing, to help your child or school group get focused before you start reading, and to set joint expectations about the book. Don't forget to look at the endpapers—the pages just inside the cover—for more clues about the story. In *Magic Candies*, the pictures on the last endpaper and the back cover work together to create an epilogue, or conclusion, where we find out what happens after the story ends.

COVER

Ideas for discussion questions:

- What/who do you see in the picture?
- What do you think the boy is going to do with the marble?
- What kind of picture is it—a photograph, or something else?
- What is the name of the book?
- What are some ways a candy could be magical?

THREE PICTURES

The cover of *Magic Candies* whets our curiosity but does not reveal much about the story. If you would like to set more expectations about the story before you begin reading, one idea is to select three pictures: one from the beginning of the book, one from the middle, and one from the end. Look at the pictures together without reading the words. What do the pictures convey? Think about what might be happening. Questions you could ask include:

Can you tell what the character/characters are feeling, where they are and what they are doing? Do the pictures signal a particular mood? Do you detect any differences between the first and the last pictures?

In *Magic Candies*, for example, it might be interesting to compare the first two double-page spreads with the third spread from the end (where DongDong stands with trees and leaves all around him), or perhaps the back endpaper.

What is the role of the magic candy marble on the cover? A good choice for a “middle picture” might be the spread where DongDong has just swallowed his first magic candy.

As you read

Picture books are wonderfully intricate constructions where words and images work in synergy. This means that reading a picture book is (at least) as much about reading the pictures as the words. For children encountering a book for the first time, listening quietly while you read out loud may be a challenge. The primary way young children access books is through the pictures, so why not begin by focusing on them?

TAKE A PICTURE WALK

You could start by taking a picture walk—in other words, explore the story just through the pictures. Talk together about what you see, page by page. Children and grownups often notice different things. For example, children are often drawn to small details. A picture walk can help you establish a common frame of reference for the book. It can also help children to focus on the words the next time you read the book.

READING OUT LOUD

In *Magic Candies*, Baek Heena uses a narrative device known as *interior monologue*. The text is a stream of DongDong's thoughts and sensory impressions. As the magical candy marbles come into play, more voices enter whose lines are shown in "handwritten" text. This is a helpful signal for readers out loud, for whom the dialog can be challenging. Try acting out the parts. The dog says he is old and tired; the sofa has a brisker personality, to say the least. Your listeners will appreciate hearing the different characters come through in your voice! *Magic Candies* builds like a movie; the dramaturgy drives the reader forward. It makes the strongest impression when readers can take in text and pictures simultaneously, without too many interruptions. If you want to involve your listeners as you read out loud, use simple, forward-oriented questions such as "Who do you think is talking now?"

READ TOGETHER

Magic Candies offers a lot to explore. Once you've experienced the story as a whole by reading out loud, read the book once more, this time in dialog with each other. It's worthwhile to pause occasionally to share thoughts about both text and pictures. Whenever we read a book, we form automatic associations to our own experiences and things we already know, as well as to other books, movies and stories. When you read *Magic Candies*, some children might want to talk about a time they played marbles, or maybe say something about their own dog. Some children will probably identify with how it feels to have a nagging father and others might be captivated by the idea of talking to a dead person.

With each fresh reading, you will also discover new connections between events and details within the book itself. Some of the discussion questions below will point you toward these discoveries.

When we read together, everyone learns new ways of thinking about the book. We discover that each of us may see the same picture or story quite differently. Reading becomes an interactive experience and something we do together: a social activity.



After you read

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

One way to deepen our experience and understanding of a book is by talking about it. It can help to have some concrete questions to use as a starting point. Some of the questions below could be used for any book, while some are specific to *Magic Candies*. Some of the questions could also be asked as you read but to answer others you will need to have finished the book. By no means do you have to check off the whole list! On the contrary, just one question could fuel an entire discussion. And there are no right or wrong answers. Everyone can interpret the book in their own way.

I wonder...

- Is there any picture in the book that you especially like/don't like?
- How would you describe the pictures in the book?
- Choose two pictures that convey completely different emotions/moods.
- Is there anything in the book that you think is weird?
- Is there anything that happens in the book that has also happened to you?
- Is there anyone/anything in the book that you would like to know more/talk more about?

Here's a relatively advanced but intriguing question:

- Can you see any pattern in the story; i.e. something that repeats?

If that seems too difficult, consider this question first:

- Can you see any connection between the magic candies and the identity of the voice speaking to DongDong?

Clue: DongDong thinks he recognizes the pattern on the first candy.

- Whose voice or voices do we hear saying GOODBYE from the middle of the trees?
- Whose voice does DongDong hear when he eats the last candy?
- Who is DongDong talking to when he asks, “Do you want to play?”

And, of course, some questions to stretch our imaginations:

- If you had a magic candy marble (or marbles), whose voice or voices would you hear?
- If the sofa at home (or at the preschool/the library) started to talk, what would it say?

TAKE THE STORY FURTHER!

Choose a question above that feels fun and engaging (or pick a different inspiration from *Magic Candies*) and turn your response into a story. You could create an oral story, a written story, a story in pictures, a movie, a play, or any combination of the above. A good tip is to establish a framework or a basic foundation for your story. For example, you could come up with an easy-to-complete sentence, such as:

- When DongDong and I play together, we like to...
- All of a sudden, my dog started crying! Guess what he/she said?
- When I feel lonely I usually...

EXPLORE THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN *MAGIC CANDIES*

- Are the illustrations drawings? If not, how might Baek Heena have created them? What are some different ways of drawing, painting and creating pictures? Project the book on a big screen to make it easier to see the details, and loan extra copies to pass around.
- How and when does Baek use words/text within the pictures themselves? What effect do different fonts and text designs produce?

MAKE A COLLAGE

Tell a visual story with a collage. You can make a one-dimensional collage on paper, or try Baek Heena’s technique of building an entire three-dimensional environment. Instead of buying new supplies, try to repurpose leftover odds and ends: fabric scraps, ends of string, toilet paper rolls, aluminum foil and plastic wrap, cardboard boxes and packages, photographs, old newspapers and magazines, old books (ask your library for discards), etc.

Experiment with clipping out letters or fragments of text and using them as backgrounds or lines of dialog. You could also write your own texts for this purpose using different fonts on the computer. What effects can you create?

SEASONAL COLORS

What season is it in *Magic Candies*? What colors and materials could you use to show the different seasons of the year? What are some simple ways to signal spring, summer, fall and winter?



MAGIC MARBLES

Make your own marbles out of modeling clay or other material. Paint and decorate them! Maybe one large, sparkly marble is all you need? What makes the marbles magic? Do you have a spell or a special place that can charge them with magical energy?

AM I SAD, HAPPY OR SURPRISED? SHOW YOUR EMOTIONS!

Baek Heena helps bring her characters to life by precisely capturing a variety of gestures and facial expressions. Choose three pictures from *Magic Candies* that show different emotions. Discuss and experiment—look in the mirror and at one another—to see how facial expressions and body language reveal the way we feel.

Play a game of charades where you act out different emotions.

ROLE PLAY/READ OUT LOUD TOGETHER

Magic Candies has strongly theatrical qualities and is well suited to role play. Here's one idea: read the book out loud together. In groups of two or a few people, each person can read several voices. Even in larger groups, everyone can join in. Several students can play one person (or sofa) and say their lines in chorus. Read the father's nagging page as a rhythmic stream—performance poetry!

You'll need several copies of the book. Ideally, also project the pages on a large screen. Keep in mind that scanning images requires permission (contact the publisher) but it's fine to use e.g. a document camera (digital overhead).

Or go all out and show off those acting chops. Find or make props, set up a stage and put on a production of "*Magic Candies: The Play.*" Break a leg!



Foto: Bear Books.

Learn more

ALMA.SE

Find a wealth of inspirational material and in-depth reading about Baek Heena and our previous laureates as well.

CHILDREN'S AND YA CATALOG

The 2020 children's and YA book catalog from the Swedish Arts Council features a profile of Baek Heena. The catalog is also packed with reading tips for children and teens. Order a free copy at www.kulturradet.se (in Swedish).

OP SIS MAGAZINE FOR CHILDREN'S CULTURE

Issue 2/2020 of Opsis magazine includes an in-depth article about Baek Heena by ALMA jury member Maria Lassén Seger (in Swedish).

VARLDENSALMA.SE

At Hjulsta Elementary School in Stockholm, the staff make the ALMA award part of the yearly curriculum, drawing inspiration from each laureate's books and work. Their website, www.varldensalma.se, has a wealth of ideas for working with *Cloud Bread* and books by other ALMA laureates (in Swedish).

SHARE YOUR STORY

Would you like to share how you've used this book at your preschool, school, or after-school program? We'd love to hear from you. E-mail us at litteraturpris@alma.se—we can feature you on our website, alma.se. Or connect with us on social media using the hashtags #ALMA or #magiskagodiskolor (that's *Magic Candies* in Swedish). Let's build a treasury of information and inspiration together!

Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA)

The reading experiences we have as children mold us for life and shape our worldview. The young have a right to excellent literature: to books that are entertaining, innovative, challenging, or complex. One who knew this was the author Astrid Lindgren. When, in 2002, her voice fell silent, the Swedish government founded an international literature award: the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. The award money is SEK 5 million (\$513,000), making it the largest international children's and young adult literature award in the world. The prize amount is a signal to the world that Sweden takes children's reading very seriously. The laureates are chosen by a jury and each year, more than 200 candidates are nominated from around the world.

Check out our reading guides for Baek He-ena's other books *The Bath Fairy* and *Cloud Bread* (translated into Swedish)! On our website alma.se/en, reading guides for books by various ALMA laureates can be found.



Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award