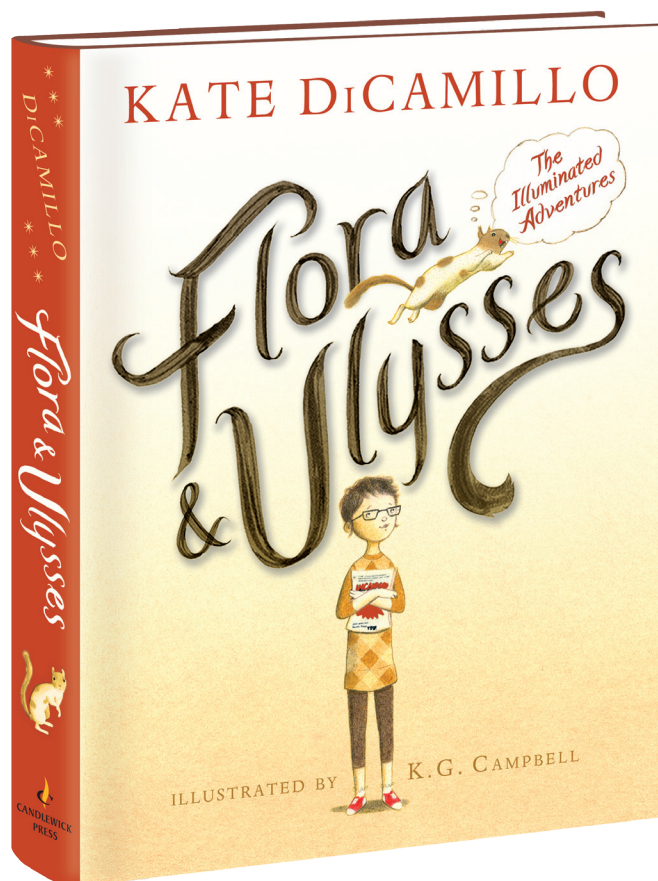


Flora & Ulysses

The Illuminated Adventures

by
**KATE
DICAMILLO**
illustrated by
K. G. CAMPBELL



About the Book

Ten-year-old Flora Belle Buckman and a superhero squirrel named Ulysses are the stars of this middle-grade adventure novel by the award-winning, best-selling author Kate DiCamillo. Incorporating her characteristic rich vocabulary, humor, and heart, the author delves into new territory by weaving comic-book elements (with the help of illustrator K. G. Campbell) into the narrative. Overarching themes of loneliness, hope, and love are key, intermixed with humor—both narrative and visual—that will have readers laughing out loud and cheering the story’s unforgettable characters.

Flora is living in a world where she doesn’t allow the possibility of hope. Her parents are divorced, and comic books are her favorite pastime. Flora feels alone and is prepared for the worst life has to offer when a random act of improbability connects her to Ulysses the squirrel, who becomes her champion. As both Flora and Ulysses begin to vanquish evil, they also help each other to believe, hope, and find love. Kate DiCamillo’s humor turns what could be a sad tale into a rip-roaring adventure, complete with lots of laughs and discoveries along the way. Here is a truly enjoyable opportunity to draw readers into a funny, superheroic, and heart-grabbing tale by a beloved author.

When used in the classroom, this guide is suitable for either large or small groups. It will help your students meet several of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, including the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL**), and the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL**). The questions in the guide can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.

In addition, a teachers’ guide with more ideas for the classroom is available at www.candlewick.com.



Discussion Questions

Before reading:

1. We are going to witness the creation of a superhero! What are superheroes? How do we identify them? Where do we find them?
2. Flora Belle Buckman is a child with divorced parents. Her mom is busy writing romance novels, and her father lives in an apartment and visits only on weekends. Flora is a worrier and is prepared for the worst life has to offer, thanks to the wisdom she has learned from her comic books. But she also observes life with a sense of humor. Unexpectedly, friendship and love come into Flora's life. Think about your own friendships. How have they changed you?
3. Impossible things happen all the time. This story is filled with unlikely events that become life changing for many of the characters. When unexpected things happen to you, what do you do?
4. Sometimes it's hard to tell what is real and what is fantasy in a story. As you read this book, there will be things that you wonder about. Keep a list of things that you think are cool and that seem real in the story but probably aren't possible in real life.
5. Do you read comic books or graphic novels? Much of this story is told through the illustrations. What are some unique features of comic books? How are they different from regular books?

During and after reading:

1. What's in a name? This book includes funny names, literary names, rhyming names, and superhero names. Which character do you think has the most fun-sounding name? Which character has a name from classic literature? Which character wants his whole name used at all times? What, if anything, can a name tell us about a character?
2. *The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incandesto!* is Flora's favorite comic book. It includes special bonus comics at the back of each issue including *Terrible Things Can Happen to You!* and *The Criminal Element Is Among Us*. Throughout the story, Flora refers to many of the life skills and themes that appear in her comics. One lesson is CPR. One theme is that "impossible things happened all the time" (page 21). What other things does Flora learn from her comics? Name some of your favorite sayings or lessons from her comic books.
3. Let's talk about superheroes. What makes Ulysses a superhero? Are there special requirements for being a superhero? Are there special things that all superheroes seem to have?
4. Flora describes herself as "a natural-born cynic" (page 6). What do you think that means? Dr. Meescham says that "Cynics are people who are afraid to believe" (page 129). Do you agree with her description? What things does Flora do that show she is a cynic? What things show that Flora is not a cynic? What, if anything, makes you feel cynical at times?
5. There is a turning point in the story when Ulysses, Flora, and her father go to the Giant Do-Nut. Describe the action that takes place at the Giant Do-Nut. How does this change things for Ulysses? For Flora? For Mr. Buckman?
6. The graphic-novel interludes show Ulysses flying at the Giant Do-Nut (pages 103–104), his vanquishing of Mr. Klaus the cat (pages 132–133), his cheering up Flora and proving his superpowers (page 153), and his escape from Flora's mother (pages 202–203). Does Ulysses believe he can fly when he first tries to? What details about his flying are captured in the pictures?

7. How does Dr. Meescham support Flora, Ulysses, and Mr. Buckman? What do Dr. Meescham's stories tell you about her?
8. What is the funniest scene in the book for you? Describe it.
9. On page 135, we hear the promise "I will always turn back toward you." It is repeated many times throughout the story. What do you think it means?
10. Describe the relationship between Flora and William Spiver. In what ways are they the same? In what ways are they different?
11. Flora and Ulysses are both lost and trying to find home. Where do they end up? How does each one figure out how to get home?
12. On page 216, a miracle is said to occur and William Spiver is able to see again. What do you think happens?
13. Imagine this story told only as a comic book. How do you think it would be different?
14. There are many quirky characters in the story. Whom do you like best and why?
15. Throughout the story, Flora and her mother are at odds. How does this change in the end? What do we learn about Flora's mother that we didn't know?
16. What would you like to see happen next for Ulysses and Flora?

About the Author

Kate DiCamillo is the author of many beloved books for young readers, including *The Tale of Despereaux*, which received a Newbery Medal; *Because of Winn-Dixie*, which received a Newbery Honor; *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, which won a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award; and the best-selling Mercy Watson series. About *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*, she says, "I set out to tell the story of a vacuum cleaner and a squirrel. I ended up writing a book about superheroes, cynics, poetry, love, giant donuts, little shepherdess lamps, and how we are all working to find our way home." Kate DiCamillo lives in Minneapolis, where she faithfully writes two pages a day, five days a week, even when she doesn't feel like it.

About the Illustrator

K. G. Campbell is the winner of an Ezra Jack Keats New Illustrator Honor for *Lester's Dreadful Sweaters*, which was also awarded the Golden Kite Picture Book Illustration Award. He was born in Kenya but raised in Scotland, where he graduated from the University of Edinburgh. Campbell's love of art originally led him to study art history and explore interior design before he began illustrating children's books. "Illuminating the adventures of Flora and Ulysses has been," he says, "a vast and hilarious experience. What wonderfully oddball and lovable characters people this story. It was a joyful challenge to bring visual life to the cast." K. G. Campbell lives in southern California.

This guide was prepared by JoAnn Jonas, MLS librarian, reviewer, writer, and youth services specialist.



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