



MADDY WEST AND THE TONGUE TAKER

By Brian Falkner

- Primary School
- Ages 8+
- Junior Fiction
- Magical Realism



Synopsis

“Maddy West and the Tongue Taker” follows the extraordinary journey of nine-year-old Maddy, who has the unique ability to speak and understand any language. This remarkable talent draws the attention of Professor Coateloch from the University of Cambridge, who enlists Maddy’s help to decode ancient scrolls held in a Bulgarian monastery. The scrolls, believed to contain powerful secrets, are written in a lost language that only Maddy can translate.

Despite her mother’s initial reluctance and her own nervousness, Maddy sets off for Bulgaria with the professor. Along the way, Maddy encounters various challenges and makes new friends, including a monkey named Mr Chester. In Bulgaria, Maddy must navigate the mysteries of the ancient scrolls while dealing with a deceitful witch who seeks to exploit her abilities.

As Maddy deciphers the scrolls, she uncovers hidden truths about magic and history. Her journey is not only a physical adventure but also a path to self-discovery and empowerment. By the end of the novel, Maddy emerges as a confident young girl who embraces her unique gift and the responsibilities that come with it. “Maddy West and the Tongue Taker” is a captivating tale of courage, friendship, and the magic of language.

About the Author



Brian wanted to be an author ever since he was a child. It only took him thirty years to realise that dream. Along the way he worked as a reporter, advertising copywriter, radio announcer and internet developer. Now an award-winning author, with twenty-one books published internationally, he is also an internationally acclaimed writing coach, running workshops and writing camps around Australia, the USA and New Zealand. He lives in Queensland.





Key Learning Areas

- **Language and Literacy**
- **History and Culture**
- **Social Skills**
- **Ethics and Values**



Themes

- **Courage and Bravery:** Maddy's journey involves overcoming her fears and taking bold steps.
- **Friendship:** The relationships Maddy forms highlight the importance of support and understanding.
- **Self-Discovery:** Maddy's adventure is also a journey of understanding her own abilities and worth.
- **Magic and Mystery:** The magical elements add intrigue and excitement to the story.
- **Cultural Diversity:** The novel explores various languages and cultures, emphasizing the richness of diversity.



Characters

Maddy West: The protagonist, a girl with the ability to speak any language.

Kazuki: Maddy's friend who supports her throughout her adventure.

Mr Chester: A trained monkey.

Dimitar the Giant: A famous Bulgarian wrestler

Tsuji: Kazuki's older brother and a bully.

Professor Coateloch/The Chocolate Witch: The antagonist, an evil witch

Pavla and Anka: The witch's daughters



Genres

- **Junior Fiction**
- **Fantasy**
- **Adventure**
- **Magic**

Writing Style

Brian Falkner's writing style in "Maddy West and the Tongue Taker" is engaging and accessible, making it suitable for middle-grade readers. He employs a straightforward narrative that combines humour, adventure, and fantasy elements to keep readers captivated. Falkner's use of dialogue is natural and helps to develop characters' personalities and relationships effectively. The descriptive language paints vivid pictures of the settings, from the bustling streets of England to the witch's house in Bulgaria. Falkner skilfully incorporates elements of mystery and suspense, keeping readers on the edge of their seats. The narrative pace is well-balanced, ensuring that the story progresses smoothly while maintaining readers' interest throughout.

Activities

Language Match-Up Puzzle:

Create a puzzle where students match phrases in different languages with their English translations.

Role-Playing:

Have students role-play scenes from the book to explore character interactions and emotions.

Cultural Research Project:

Assign students to research the cultures and languages mentioned in the book and present their findings.

Creative Writing: Ask students to write a short story about their own adventure involving a special talent..

Create Your Own Spell

Encourage students to use their creativity by designing their own spell, complete with ingredients and incantations. They can base their spell on something they wish they could do or something inspired by the book.



Exercises and Questions

The Doctor

- **Exercise:** Identify the different languages mentioned and research basic phrases in each.
- **Question:** Why do you think Maddy's mother is concerned about her language abilities?

An Invisible Friend

- **Exercise:** Write a diary entry from Kazuki's perspective about his friendship with Maddy.
- **Question:** How does Kazuki's 'invisibility' symbolize his personality?

The Man from Channel Four

- **Exercise:** Create a mock interview with Maddy as a guest.
- **Question:** What are Maddy's feelings about being on TV, and how does her mother's attitude influence her?

Tsuji

- **Exercise:** Role-play a conflict resolution between Tsuji and Kazuki.
- **Question:** What does the interaction between Maddy, Kazuki, and Tsuji reveal about their characters?

Smart Talk

- **Exercise:** Write a script for a TV show segment featuring Maddy.
- **Question:** How does Maddy handle the scepticism of Professor Sigmarsson?

The Old Man on the Train

- **Exercise:** Illustrate the train scene and the mysterious old man.
- **Question:** What do you think the old man means by "a touch of magic" in Maddy?

Professor Coatelloch

- **Exercise:** Research the history of the Glagolitic alphabet and create a poster.
- **Question:** Why is Maddy's ability to read the ancient script so significant to the professor?

Packing

- **Exercise:** Make a packing list for Maddy's trip to Bulgaria, including items for her adventure.
- **Question:** What are Maddy's emotions about traveling to Bulgaria, and how does she prepare mentally and physically?

Mr Slavinski and his Funny Monkey

- **Exercise:** Write a description of the airport scene, highlighting the diverse group of people Maddy encounters.
- **Question:** How does Maddy's interaction with Mr. Chester the monkey foreshadow future events in the story?

Two Surprise Visitors

- **Exercise:** Draw a picture of Maddy's first experience on the airplane, including Kazuki's unexpected appearance.
- **Question:** How does Kazuki manage to join Maddy on the plane, and what does this reveal about his character?

Sofia

- **Exercise:** Research and present interesting facts about Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria.
- **Question:** What challenges does Maddy face in Sofia, and how does she overcome them?

Sozopol

- **Exercise:** Create a travel brochure for Sozopol, highlighting its attractions and historical significance.
- **Question:** How does Maddy's perception of Bulgaria change upon arriving in Sozopol?

Going Home

- **Exercise:** Write a diary entry from Maddy's perspective about her thoughts and feelings regarding the sudden change in plans.
- **Question:** Why is Professor Coatelloch so insistent on visiting the island despite the police's instructions?

Tap Tap Tap

- **Exercise:** Describe the atmosphere in the cellar when Maddy and Kazuki hear the tapping noise. Use descriptive language to create a sense of suspense.
- **Question:** How does the relationship between Maddy and Pavla evolve in this chapter?

The Stroke of Midnight

- **Exercise:** Create a timeline of the events leading up to the stroke of midnight. Highlight the key moments and the actions of each character.
- **Question:** How does the atmosphere change as it nears midnight? What strategies do Maddy, Kazuki, and Dimitar use to confront the witch?



Discussion Questions

- How does Maddy’s ability to speak any language impact her life and those around her?
- What role does bravery play in Maddy’s journey?
- How do Maddy’s friendships influence her decisions and growth throughout the story?
- What are the ethical implications of using one’s unique abilities for personal gain versus helping others?



Essay Topics

- Analyse the theme of self-discovery in “Maddy West and the Tongue Taker.”
- Discuss the importance of cultural diversity as portrayed in the novel.
- Evaluate the character development of Maddy West from the beginning to the end of the book.
- Explore the role of magic in the story and how it influences the characters’ actions.
- Analyze how the themes of friendship and trust are portrayed through the relationships between Maddy, Kazuki, Mr Chester and Dimitar.



Language Matchup

Can you match these words for 'Hello' with the language they come from?

Saluton	Niuean
Hola	Swiss German
Bula	Shona (Zimbabwe)
nuqneH	Orcish
Fakaalofa atu	Spanish
Privet	Minion
Talofa	Mandarin
Sawubona	Fijian
Grüezi	Luxembourgish
Mhoro	Hindi
Ashdautas vrasublat	Polish
Sain baina uu	Mongolian
Bello	Hawaiian
Moien	Esperanto
Hi hao	Samoan
Namaste	Russian
Aloha	Zulu
Ya su	Finnish
Dzien dobry	Afrikaans
Terve	Greek
Goeie dag	Klingon

