



Babble Magic

Miguel Lopez de Leon

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A juvenile fantasy with heart, Babble Magic is ideal for anyone looking for something fresh and new in the world of witches and wizardry.

A menagerie of enchanted animals teaches a crotchety old sorcerer and his young apprentice some surprising lessons about human nature in Miguel Lopez de Leon's *Babble Magic*, a thoughtful middle grade fantasy adventure full of humor and heart.

With the prestigious wizard convention right around the corner, Palim is determined that his talking animals will be a huge success, but he might not be prepared for what they have to say. Meanwhile, Bax, his helper, is running ragged trying to keep up with the thankless task of serving a formidable spellcaster while caring for an array of woodland creatures and their unique set of demands.

A magical medieval backdrop emerges in a quaint cottage in the forest that doubles as Palim's home and workshop, complete with cauldrons bubbling on the hearth, whispered spells, and potions. Bustling about and fumbling with his own tentative magic, twelve-year-old Bax is refreshingly mature for his age, dropping thoughtful observations and showing a willingness to listen with an open mind. Surrounded by adults, he befriends a squirrel, an owl, and a chicken that have learned to speak through Babble Magic, a branch of magical study "so obscure, in fact, that Bax was pretty sure that Palim was the only wizard who was attempting it."

Themes of communication, honesty, and respect are clear throughout. Bax often engages in heartfelt discussions with his friends, whether they are human, feathered, or furred. The book's action is interspersed with many lengthy debates and the rehashing of feelings, ideas, and needs—so much so that casual conversations often seem more like counseling or therapy sessions. Bax's makeshift support group—made up of Dorris the squirrel, Brenda the owl, and Roger the rooster—is often filled with unintentional hilarity as the animals learn to express themselves and encourage Bax to do the same.

The plot is divided into two main sections, with the first revolving around personal *Wizard of Oz*-style quests for the animals as Roger searches for courage, Dorris for respect, and Brenda for love. The second section follows Palim, Bax, and the gang to the Shok Wizard Convention; there, an evil forest spirit threatens the entire wizarding world, and a battle erupts, featuring spectral wolves, a possessed sorcerer, a powerful weather mage, and an army of extraordinary squirrels.

Bax's magical skills and confidence grow as he learns to stand up for himself. The student becomes the teacher as Palim slowly begins to understand the power of angry words and negativity. Elementary or middle grade audiences will recognize Bax's need for a please or a thank-you, and adults will benefit from the reminder that respect can be as simple as a few kind words or acknowledging hard work and efforts.

Ideal for anyone looking for something fresh and new in the world of witches and wizardry, Miguel Lopez de Leon's *Babble Magic*

has a timeless message of keeping an open heart and mind while minding words and actions.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (June 14, 2018)

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