



Perfect Revenge

K.L. Denman

Interest level: ages ten to fourteen

Reading level: 2.5

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Book Summary

Lizzie Lane is used to life at the top of the food chain. Her near-perfect life is ruined when Rachel, a girl she socially destroyed, exacts her revenge by getting Lizzie in trouble for cheating on a test. Friendless and facing detention, Lizzie obsesses over finding the perfect revenge. When Stella, Lizzie's strange new neighbor, teaches her about "magick," Lizzie can't resist creating a revenge spell. But she forgets the "Law of Three": that whatever spell you cast comes back on you threefold, and her zit spell backfires with dramatic results. When she asks for help from Stella's baba, the only advice she gets is to "write the lesson of the zit on her heart." Can Lizzie find a way to teach Rachel a lesson without causing permanent disfigurement to herself?

Author Biography

K.L. (Kim) Denman was born in Calgary, Alberta, and spent her childhood in a house one street away from the open prairie. When she was eleven, her family moved to Delta, British Columbia, and she got to know life on the coast: tides, clam digging, rain gear, green grass year-round and enormous trees. It was there that Kim and her sisters got their first pony. She continued to live near Vancouver for many years while finishing school, attending college, and eventually getting married and starting a family. She always loved writing, and when her teen children and their friends provided inspiration and rekindled memories of this challenging passage, writing for teens became an irresistible venture.

Today she lives on a small farm on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast with her family of people, two dogs, three cats, two horses and an elderly mule. When she's not writing or caring for critters, she's reading, trying to grow vegetables, taking pictures or volunteering at therapeutic riding.

Connecting to the Text

Character and Novel Study Ideas

1. After Lizzie is caught with the exam key, she is an outcast. Write a paragraph answering the following:
 - Has Lizzie's past caught up with her? Give examples from the novel.
 - Does Lizzie eventually see the connection between how she excluded others and how they, in turn, excluded her? Explain, giving examples from the novel.
2. Use the quotations below to connect to Lizzie's development in the novel. Ask students to choose a quote they find meaningful and respond to the questions below.

(p. 13) *"It's easy to give people the wrong impression."*

Early in the novel, what impression does Lizzie make on others? (For example, Rachel, Haley, Kyle, Mr. Sparks)

At the end of the novel, do you think Lizzie will make a different impression on people? How do you know?

(p. 21) *"[Stella is] not the sort of person I'd normally ever talk to. I've seen her around a few times since she moved in next door, but one look at her was all I needed to know she wasn't my type."*

Why isn't Stella the kind of person Lizzie would normally talk to? What does that say about Lizzie?

At the end of the novel, do you think Lizzie will be less inclined to make negative first impressions of others?

(p. 35) *"...there's a message from someone asking to be added as a friend! That someone is Stella Flowers. I'm torn. If I add her, I can ask her about the magick. But if she shows up on my list, what will my real friends think?"*

Does Lizzie ever learn what being a real friend means?

Why is this lesson so difficult for Lizzie?

At the end of the novel, do you think Lizzie will be a real friend to Stella?

(p. 51) *"You have to be careful what you wish for...what you put out there is what will come back to you."*

Why is this lesson so important to Lizzie? When she changes the way she treats others—and exercises empathy—does it have a positive impact?

The Writer's Craft

1. A prominent theme in *Perfect Revenge* is the use of threes. In the Law of Three, any spell you cast comes back on you threefold; each spell has three lines; Lizzie gets three zits on her forehead. Make a list of the use of threes in *Perfect Revenge*. How do they lend meaning to the story?
2. The kitchen in Stella's home is "like stumbling upon a vegetable war. Not only is the floor lettuce green, the walls are radish red and the cupboards are carrot orange" (p. 57). Discuss how a particular image of the kitchen suggests a connection between the vivid colors of the vegetables and the characters of Baba and Stella. Invite students to compose their own descriptive sentences, using simile or metaphor to describe a room of their choice. Examples could be:
 - The empty gym is like...
 - The kitchen at my house is like...
 - The library is like...
 - The food court at the mall is like...
 - Our classroom on Friday afternoons just before the bell is like...

A Mock Trial for Lizzie

In *Perfect Revenge*, Lizzie is (allegedly) caught cheating. The teacher, Mr. Sparks, sees the exam key in her hand during the exam. Ask students to read chapters one through three to prepare for a mock trial: *The School vs. Lizzie for the crime of cheating on the science exam*. The roles in the mock trial are:

- Lizzie, who was caught with the exam key in her hand during the exam
 - Rachel, who gave the exam key to Lizzie
 - Mr. Sparks, the science teacher
 - The school principal
 - A judge to preside over the trial
 - A defending lawyer to represent Lizzie
 - A prosecuting lawyer to represent the school and its policies
 - A jury foreman
 - The jury
 - Key witnesses (such as other students in Lizzie's class)
1. It may be helpful to study the rules of a court of law and the roles of judge, lawyers, a jury and jury foreman beforehand. Stress to the participants that any evidence presented in the mock trial can only come from the novel. The trial should play out as follows:

- The judge begins by announcing the name of the trial and introducing the key players.
 - The prosecuting lawyer makes opening remarks, talking briefly about the case, then presenting the argument and key evidence.
 - The defense lawyer makes opening remarks, talking briefly about the case, then enters the defendant’s plea and key evidence for the defense.
 - Led by the judge, the lawyers question Lizzie and any witnesses. This goes on until the trial reaches its natural end.
 - Prosecuting and defending lawyers then make their closing statements, and the judge tells the jury to begin their deliberation.
 - The jury makes their deliberations and the jury foreman delivers the verdict at the judge’s prompt.
2. Following the trial, you may wish to debrief.
- Was there circumstantial evidence? Was it permissible?
 - Can the fact that Rachel is a model student, and Lizzie is not, contribute to the outcome of the trial?
 - If the jury decides, based on the evidence in the novel, to find Lizzie guilty, what should be her punishment?

Vocabulary Enrichment through Storytelling

1. The following words are used in *Perfect Revenge* in the context of Lizzie’s experiences with spell casting and finding her higher self. Invite students to use the words in impromptu storytelling, working in pairs or small groups:

connect	focus	interest	obvious	shiver
curiosity	higher self	magick	random	spell
experiment	incantation	natural	repeat	vibe

- We found a book in the library on spells, so we decided to try one. We never realized it would come true!
- I often think I can feel the vibe around me without even trying—sometimes it’s positive, sometimes it’s negative. One day, I decided to try an experiment...
- I think a good spell is just the power of positive thinking, so I decided to try it for one day—only thinking positive thoughts—and boy, it sure worked!
- My friends and I decided to try meditating. We created a cool mantra. It went like this...

Connecting to the Curriculum

Civics—School Policy

1. When Lizzie is sent to the principal’s office for cheating, the principal explains the consequences. These consequences are outlined on page 14. First, Lizzie’s parents will be contacted; then, her grade on the exam will be zero, and they will consider one week of detention (rather than suspension) if she apologizes. Ask students to report on the following.
 - What is your school’s cheating policy?
 - What would happen if Lizzie was caught cheating in your class?
 - Would the punishment be different if it was a first offence?
 - Read aloud Lizzie’s apology note to Mr. Sparks (p. 30). Does the letter seem sincere?

Language Arts—Writing and Creative Work

1. Use one of the following quotations from *Perfect Revenge* as the first sentence in a short story, diary entry, letter or song. **Option:** Have students choose their own “first sentence” from the novel.
 - (p. 10) *Isn’t science supposed to be about satisfying curiosity?*
 - (p. 13) *It’s easy to give people the wrong impression.*
 - (p. 15) *It’s like I’ve entered some weird alternate universe.*
 - (p. 22) *She’s so thin she looks like a collection of twigs. And her hair! It’s this wild mass of black curls that frizz around her head like an alien life-form.*
 - (p. 24) *[W]hatever you send out magickally, will come back on you threefold.*
 - (p. 26) *Magick works in its own time. You have to be patient.*
 - (p. 30) *Life isn’t fair. Never has been, never will be. End of story.*
 - (p. 37) *It’s all about appearances.*
 - (p. 38) *They think they can freeze me out? Ha. I’m the queen of freeze.*
 - (p. 51) *You have to be careful what you wish for...Like attracts like.*
 - (p. 61) *Sometimes the simplest spells are the hardest to reverse.*
2. Stella is skilled at making spells, using a series of three short rhyming sentences (“On the count of one, the spell’s begun / On the count of two, let the magick ring true / On the count of three, the magick is me,” p. 25-26). Challenge students to create their own rhyming “spells.” Ideas of sets of three, to get students started, could be:
 - For the letter A..., For the letter B..., For the letter C...*
 - To the earth..., To the sky..., To the sea...*
 - Look at the sun..., Look at the moon..., Look at the stars...*
 - First there is red..., Then there is blue..., Now there is yellow...*
 - Morning...Noon...Night*

Option: Once students have created their spells, encourage them to develop them into short stories or skits to share with the larger group.

3. At the end of the novel, Lizzie learns empathy, and she and Stella decide to “cast a spell to, you know, fix [those people who are self-centered]. Then they wouldn’t bother [Lizzie] anymore” (p. 102). Invite students to compose Lizzie’s final spell. Ask students to share their spells with the group, discussing why they chose the spell they did and how it connects to Lizzie’s journey. If Lizzie had used these new final spells, what would have happened next?

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Discussion and Exploration

1. At the beginning of the novel, Lizzie says, “I am in the group of girls who have ‘it.’ We naturally shine” (p. 2); she also refers to her new skirt, new lip gloss and amazing shiny hair (p. 1).
 - To what extent is Lizzie’s status natural?
 - Could someone without the skirt, lip gloss and shiny hair be part of “the” group?
2. Lizzie says, “If the girls in our grade were an eye-shadow palette, my group would be the main color base, the glowing center. The other groups would be the smaller pockets of color, optional extras” (p. 2–3). She refers to Mandy as a “backup” person (p. 8).
 - What do these comments tell you about Lizzie, as a person?
 - Do you think you could be a friend of Lizzie’s? Why, or why not?
3. Lizzie seems very mean-spirited and snobbish, but she also demonstrates leadership skills. She also has other skills, particularly in fashion and use of color.
 - Think of an activity where Lizzie could use her skills for good. Give examples from the novel to support your idea. For example, *Lizzie would be really good at putting together a makeover party because...*
4. Lizzie shuns Rachel from the group, which is an example of social bullying. She refers to Rachel as a “pathetic wannabe” who “so wishes she could be part of *us*, like she once was” (p. 2–3). Lizzie treats Rachel badly because Rachel “had the nerve to move in on Kyle” (p. 3). In retaliation, Rachel sets up Lizzie by giving her the answer key to the science test.
 - Why do you think Rachel wanted to retaliate? What was she feeling?
 - Was Rachel right in retaliating against Lizzie? Why, or why not?
 - What could Rachel have done instead?

5. Lizzie and Stella are opposite in many ways. Lizzie obsesses about her looks and how she is perceived by others, where Stella is not at all concerned about either. When they leave the school washroom together, Lizzie says, “Uh, we can’t be seen leaving together, can we?” (p. 45).
 - If you were meeting Lizzie and Stella for the first time, what do you think would be your first impressions?
 - Who would you rather be friends with, Lizzie or Stella? Why?
7. When teaching Lizzie about magick, Stella says, “You have to be careful what you wish for...what you put out there is what will come back to you” (p. 51).
 - Can you think of examples in your own life of something you “put out there” that “came back to you”? For example, if you have a positive attitude, are you more likely to have positive experiences?
8. Stella teaches Lizzie to meditate as a way to focus on high thoughts. Invite students to research and try meditation, creating their own mantras. As a group, hold a meditation session. Afterwards, ask students to share their experiences. Was it relaxing? Did it allow you to focus? Did you find, like Lizzie, that your mind wandered?