

# The Monkey's Paw

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,784

## Connections

### Writing

Write a friendly letter to Damien encouraging him not to use the monkey's paw. Offer Damien a different solution to his problem.

### Social Studies

Research the objects people in different cultures associate with wishing. Choose one and use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast it with the monkey's paw.

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**Multi  
level  
V·Y·Z<sup>0</sup>**

Written by Rus Buyok and  
Keith and Sarah Kortemartin  
Illustrated by Mariano Epelbaum

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## Focus Question

Do you think the monkey's paw really has power? Why or why not?

## Words to Know

curio	rhythmic
desiccated	shriveled
disheveled	sodden
imperceptibly	transfixed
legitimate	twitches
reverie	unadulterated

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Level Z1 Leveled Book  
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## Correlation

### LEVEL Z1

Fountas & Pinnell	W-X
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	60





The campfire crackles, and Miguel lazily digs his roasting stick into the glowing embers. Kara and Damien stare **transfixed** at the dancing flames as they all bask in the **unadulterated** languor that only comes at the beginning of summer vacation. They survived their first year of middle school—they deserve a break.

Shelly shuffles out of the darkness on the other side of the fire, looking haggard and exhausted, even in the warm glow. The trio barely look up from their **reverie**. With a determined movement, Shelly flings something into the flames that bounces off a burning log and lands between Miguel’s sneakers.

He leans forward and sees that it’s a severed hand, the fingers curled into a clawlike fist.

“What the—!” Miguel squeaks as he bolts upright. The scent of singed hair hits his nostrils, and he cringes.

“If you know what’s good for you, you’ll toss that back in the fire,” Shelly says, her voice shaking, almost frantic.



“What . . . why do you have a *hand*?” Damien stutters. Kara pokes at it with a stick, and the three shudder as the fingers open on their own.

“It’s not a hand—it’s a monkey’s paw, and you need to torch it,” Shelly snaps. “It’s supposed to grant wishes, but everything you ask for turns out horrible.” She darts around the fire, but Kara snatches the paw off the ground and clutches it behind her back.

Shelly steps away, her terrified expression melting into something icy and distant in the firelight. She shakes her head. "I'm warning you: burn that thing before it ruins your life, too." With that, she turns and sprints away as if something were chasing her.



"She's so weird," Miguel says.

Kara holds the paw up to the flickering light and gingerly brushes away some soot. It looks ancient—maybe even mummified. "Weird or not, this is pretty astonishing."

"You don't *actually* believe that story about wishes," Damien challenges. "Let me see it."

Kara hands the paw to Damien, who grasps it between his thumb and forefinger with a frown of distaste.

"Of course I don't believe in a paw granting wishes," she says, "but it's just cool to have, like a **curio**." Miguel and Damien stare at her blankly. "That's a **legitimate** word—look it up."

"It's getting late, and I told my mom I'd be home before ten," Miguel says. "Help me with the fire."

"That means I have to go home and pooper-scoop the backyard before Dad comes home tomorrow," Damien whines, fidgeting with the monkey's paw. "Do you guys have any idea how much a mastiff poops? It's like an adult human male squats in our yard four times a day. I wish I didn't have to clean up after Bruiser anymore."

The paw **twitches** in Damien's hand, and he chucks it on the ground with a shriek. Kara and Miguel start laughing as Damien repeatedly screeches, "It moved!"

"Don't be ridiculous," Kara says, picking up the paw. "It's just a dried-up old husk of a hand. There's nothing to be afraid of."





Three days later, Damien's mastiff, Bruiser, is hit by a truck and killed. When Miguel and Kara hear about the news from other friends, they try texting, emailing, and calling Damien, but he doesn't respond. Finally, after days of silence, they ride their bikes to his house, and as the evening shadows stretch toward a summer storm beginning to roil, they knock on the door.

Damien answers, looking **disheveled** with red-rimmed eyes.

"I'm so sorry," Kara says and jerks him into a tight hug.

"Thanks," Damien mumbles into Kara's shoulder. Eventually, Kara releases him, and the three go inside to sit in the living room in uncomfortable silence.

Finally, Miguel breaks the tension by asking, "How are you doing?"

"Not great, man," Damien replies and clears his throat. "Bruiser used to sleep on the bed with me, and now I can't sleep without him there. My parents don't seem concerned; they went out to some work party tonight and left me here like there's nothing wrong."

"That's harsh," Miguel says.

"The worst part is that his death is my fault." Damien's voice catches in his throat, and he wipes his eyes. "Shelly warned us to burn the paw."

"I know you're in a lot of pain right now," Kara says, "but do you really think a **shriveled** knickknack could cause something like this?"

"It's the only logical explanation," Damien retorts.

"It's the most *illogical* explanation possible," Kara says.

"Do you have it with you?" Damien asks.

"It's in my backpack, but what difference does that make?"

Miguel sits up taller. "You're not thinking about—"

"If it worked once, it could work again," Damien snaps.



"Except for the 'everything you ask for turns out horrible' part, or have you forgotten that?" Miguel asks. Rain patters gently on the roof, filling the large room with a noise similar to faint static on an old television.

"I have a chance to get my friend back, and I'm going to take it," Damien states as he seizes Kara's backpack off the couch and rummages through it. Miguel makes a move to stop him, but Damien yanks out the paw in a flash and holds it up.

One **desiccated** finger is curled down.

"This is an awful idea," Miguel says.

"Just let him try," Kara says. "When nothing happens, he'll see he's done everything he possibly can, and maybe that'll help him feel a little better."

Miguel and Kara observe as Damien whispers something. They wait and listen to the rain gradually increasing in intensity, none of them sure exactly what they're waiting for.



After what seems like forever, Kara says, "See, it's just a creepy, gross old monkey's paw—nothing more, nothing less." She grabs the hand, returns it to her backpack, and zips the backpack shut.

"Now, my friend, you need to take a shower, so scuttle on upstairs while Miguel and I find some food and a movie that won't depress us any more than we already are."

Damien nods and reluctantly climbs the stairs, dragging his feet. A few minutes later, they hear the shower running. Kara points for Miguel to start going through the collection of movies on the shelf while she searches through the kitchen.

Thunder rumbles in the distance, and night descends. Soon, the three friends are covered in blankets on the couch, eating microwave popcorn, watching Damien's favorite comedy, and laughing as if nothing terrible could ever happen.



They see the flash of light out front a split second before the crack of thunder shakes the windows like a cannon blast and the house plunges into blackness. Kara throws the blanket over her head, Miguel nearly leaps out of his skin, and Damien yelps like a frightened puppy.

A moment later, they all start to laugh at each other's reactions—until Miguel shushes them.

"Did you hear that?" he asks and whips out his cell phone to turn on the flashlight, almost blinding Kara and Damien.

"Hear what?" Kara asks, shielding her eyes from the sudden brightness.

Miguel puts his finger to his lips. They listen. From somewhere at the back of the house, they hear a faint scratching over the rain.

"What is that?" Miguel asks. Kara shakes her head, but Damien's eyes grow wide.

They clamber off the couch, cautious, Miguel in the lead with the light, followed by Kara enveloped in her blanket, and then Damien. The scraping sound grows louder as they approach the door leading to the backyard, but when they're near enough to grasp the handle, the noise halts.

They can hear their own anxious breathing as Miguel peers through the blinds covering the window in the upper part of the door. "It's like a black hole back there," he says.

"Must be a branch or something caught in the thunderstorm," Kara suggests, trying to sound confident, but her voice is scarcely above a whisper.

The scraping sound starts again, clearly this time on the outside of the house: a **rhythmic** pulse that moves sluggishly, as if something is using the exterior wall to drag itself along.

Miguel tracks the sound with his cell phone light as it haltingly works its way across one wall and then another. It stops.

Kara clutches the blanket around herself like a protective shield. Miguel focuses the light on the point where the noise ceased.

Lightning flashes, and Kara emits a squealing sound. "Let's go back to the living room," she pleads to Miguel and Damien, who both nod enthusiastically.



They enter the living room, Kara diving onto the couch and covering herself with the boys' blankets, hunkered into the corner.

Miguel and Damien move toward the couch but freeze when something strikes the front door.

*Thump.*

It doesn't sound like rapping with hard knuckles on wood—more like tossing something **sodden** and heavy against it.

*Thump.*

Miguel shines his light on the front door. Kara tries to bury herself in the corner of the couch, and Damien covers his mouth, stifling a scream.

*Thump.*

Slowly, Miguel and Damien cross the living room, moving toward the large curtained window next to the front door.

"Stay away from—" Kara starts.

*Thump.*



As they near the window, Miguel and Damien cautiously push the fabric aside and lean forward to peer through the rain-streaked glass, using the cell phone light to pierce the darkness beyond.

"I can't see anything," Miguel says, his breath fogging the window.

*THUMP!*

Something smashes into the door, rattling the hinges, and the boys bound back.



The thing outside scratches slowly down the door, beginning at the top and raking all the way to the base. Damien's eyes widen, fixed on the door, as the scratching comes again, long and slow. Damien steps forward.

"No, don't," Miguel begs, grabbing Damien's arm, but Damien shakes him off.

"Damien, don't open the door!" Kara screams as he reaches for the dead bolt. Miguel is frozen in horror.



The scratching combines with a low, gurgling growl. Behind Damien, Kara's shaking hands fumble with her backpack's zipper. Damien unlocks the dead bolt as a prolonged scratch finally trails off.

*THUD!*

The door shakes. The low growl turns into a horrific snarl. Kara manages to open her backpack and plunges her hand inside. She feels the leathery skin and coarse hair and pulls out the monkey's paw. Two fingers are curled down.

With trembling hands, Damien anxiously unlocks the doorknob and whispers, "Bruiser..."

Kara squeezes her eyes shut and wishes. The paw twitches almost **imperceptibly** in her hand.

Damien swings the door open to see the rain falling gently in the deserted darkness beyond.



## Glossary

<b>curio</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a rare or unusual object that is considered interesting or special (p. 5)
<b>desiccated</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	dried up, preserved, or dehydrated (p. 9)
<b>disheveled</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	messy or disordered (p. 7)
<b>imperceptibly</b> ( <i>adv.</i> )	in a slow and gradual way that is almost unnoticeable (p. 15)
<b>legitimate</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	real or accepted as true (p. 5)
<b>reverie</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a state of being lost in pleasant thoughts or a daydream (p. 3)
<b>rhythmic</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having a regular beat or sound pattern (p. 12)
<b>shriveled</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	dried up and wrinkled (p. 8)
<b>sodden</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	soaking wet and heavy (p. 13)
<b>transfixed</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	unable to move because of shock, fear, or wonder (p. 3)
<b>twitches</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	makes a small, sudden movement that is not planned or controlled (p. 6)
<b>unadulterated</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	complete and pure; not mixed or combined with other things (p. 3)