

# The Monkey's Paw

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,648

## 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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LEVELED BOOK • Y

# The Monkey's Paw



**Multi  
level  
V•Y•Z<sup>o</sup>**

Written by Rus Buyok and  
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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

anxious	rhythmic
desiccated	shriveled
disheveled	sodden
ghastly	transfixed
imperceptibly	twitches
reverie	unadulterated

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Level Y Leveled Book  
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## Correlation

### LEVEL Y

Fountas & Pinnell	T
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40





The campfire crackles, and Miguel lazily digs his roasting stick into the glowing embers. Kara and Damien stare **transfixed** at the 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.

The trio barely look up from their **reverie** as Shelly shuffles out of the darkness, looking haggard and exhausted. With a determined movement, she 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.

"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 and clutches it behind her back.



Shelly steps away, her terrified expression melting into something icy and distant. 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 brushes away some soot. It looks ancient—mummified, even. “Weird or not, this is pretty astonishing.”

“You don’t *actually* believe that story about wishes,” Damien challenges. “Let me see it.”

She hands the paw to Damien, who grasps it with a frown of distaste.

“Of course I don’t believe in a paw granting wishes, but it’s just cool to have.”

“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 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, Bruiser is hit by a truck and killed. When Miguel and Kara hear about it 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 to some work party tonight and left me here."

"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?"

"You're not thinking about—" Miguel starts.





"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 begins to gently patter on the roof above.

"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 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 coming down, harder now, none of them sure exactly what they're waiting for.

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

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

Damien nods and reluctantly climbs the stairs. A few minutes later, they hear the shower running.

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 and the house plunges into blackness. Kara throws the blanket over her head, Miguel nearly jumps off the couch, and Damien yelps in surprise.

A moment later, they are all laughing 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.

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

Miguel puts his finger to his lips, and 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 back door, 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 completely black out there," he says.

"Must be a branch or something caught in the thunderstorm," Kara suggests, trying to sound confident.

The scraping sound starts again, clearly this time on the outside of the house: a **rhythmic** pulse that moves sluggishly, like something dragging 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.

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.

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—but 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 in alarm.

*Thump.*

Slowly, Miguel and Damien cross the living room, inching 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. A **ghastly** snorting noise and an unsettling, gurgling rumble that could be mistaken for a deep growl follow the impact.

The thing outside scratches at the door, beginning at the top and raking down 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 and the gurgling growl persist. 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>anxious</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	worried or nervous (p. 12)
<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>ghastly</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	very frightening, horrible, or shocking (p. 14)
<b>imperceptibly</b> ( <i>adv.</i> )	in a slow and gradual way that is almost unnoticeable (p. 15)
<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)