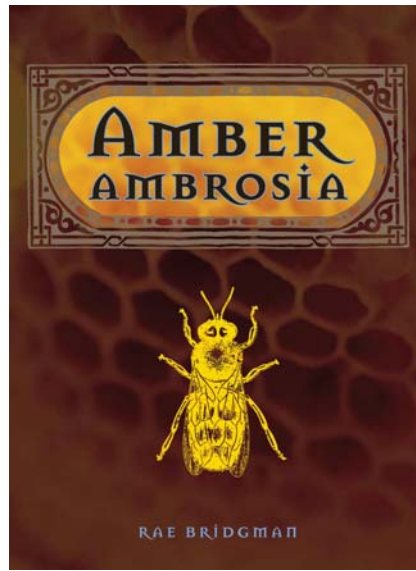




Great Plains Publications Teachers' Guide



Amber Ambrosia

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5½" x 8½"

Trade Paper, 176 pp.

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Story

In the first of the *MiddleGate Series*, **The Serpent's Spell**, the secret city of MiddleGate is rocked by the slaughter of hundreds of snakes in nearby Narcisse. In their quest to solve the mystery, two young sorcerers—Sophie Isidor and her cousin Wil Wychwood—discover that Wil's medallion may once have belonged to an ancient secret society, the Serpent's Chain.

The second book, **Amber Ambrosia**, picks up where **The Serpent's Spell** leaves off...

Tawari, kamahi, manuka, pohutukawa—

With these words, Wil and Sophie are cast into the secret world of the magical honey bees of MiddleGate (*apis mellifera magykalis*). A world where magykalis honey portends a future when the Serpent's Chain—a secret magical society—returns to power from Realms Unearthly, Realms of Myth.

Sprinkled with humorous Latin sayings at chapters' beginning and Rae Bridgman's pen-and-ink drawings, this rollicking adventure is set in a secret city accessed through one of the oldest and most architecturally stunning parts of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The *MiddleGate Series* is a magical new series for *young* readers aged 9 through teen years, and for the young-at-heart! If you have enjoyed reading the *Harry Potter* books, you may enjoy reading this book.

The Author and Illustrator

Rae Bridgman is an author, artist/illustrator and anthropologist. She is a Professor in the Department of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture, at the University of Manitoba, and the mother of six children. She grew up in Maple, Ontario and now makes Winnipeg her home. In addition to writing and illustrating fantasy novels for young people, she has published several books about her research on homelessness.

She has undergraduate degrees in musicology and classics, a Master's in interdisciplinary studies and a PhD in cultural anthropology, and is a member of the Canadian Society of Children's Authors, Illustrators and Performers (CANSCAIP), the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), the Children's Book Centre, the Writers' Union of Canada and the Manitoba Writers' Guild. See her website for more information: <www.raebridgman.ca>.

Ideas and Activities Inspired by *Amber Ambrosia*

Science

If you are within hailing distance of southern Manitoba, why don't you plan a fieldtrip to visit the snake dens at Narcisse in early autumn (when the snakes are returning to the caves for the winter) or in the spring (when they are emerging to mate).

Both **The Serpent's Spell** and **Amber Ambrosia** feature two species of snakes in particular (the red-sided garter snake and an egg-eating snake from Africa), both non-venomous. How many other varieties of snakes are there and what are their adaptive survival strategies?

Did you know there are 20,000 species of bees in the world? The life cycle of honey bees and their indispensable roles in pollination and honey production are fascinating topics.

Language Arts

Although Latin is no longer part of the general curriculum in North American schools, students may be interested in learning some basic Latin words and in exploring how Latin lives on today in medical terminology, scientific terms, legal documents, and even in general vocabulary. Did you know that half the words in English come directly from Latin? Think of phrases like *ad nauseam* and *vice versa*. A book such as *Latin for Dummies* is a useful resource for anyone looking for a quick "dose" of Latin. Also, check out the *Cambridge School Class Project* on-line (http://www.cambridgescp.com/main_entrance.php) and *Latin Lessons A to Z* (<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/explore/latin.htm>).

Research the many stories and myths about snakes, bees and dragonflies across cultures. (The ancient Greeks, for example, believed snakes represented healing, and the Incas revered snakes as symbols of knowledge. The Egyptians believed bees were born from the tears of the Sun God Ra, as his tears fell onto soil.)

"A Day in the Life of..." Try writing some of the scenes in **Amber Ambrosia** from the point of view of a honey bee. Explore how honey bees "see" the world.

Social Studies

Geography

Have you read the small book *Invisible Cities*, which features a series of mythical conversations between the Emperor Kublai Khan and the Explorer Marco Polo, as they play a chess game? During the game, Marco Polo regales Khan with stories about the many different cities he

has seen in his travels. What other invisible or secret city exists—perhaps where you live? Is there a gateway (or portal) to this secret city. The idea of a portal to another place or secret world is commonly used in fantasy books. Think of the mirror in *Alice in Wonderland*, the wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe*, and Platform 9¾ at King's Cross in the *Harry Potter* books. Can you draw a map of your secret place and how to get there?

The secret “limestone cities” of the red-sided garter snakes of Narcisse, Manitoba and honey bee “cities of wax” both represent fascinating non-human settlements. As beekeeper Jack Lee puts it: “The honey bee is a secretive animal that is essentially wild—they can just get up and go even if you do things right” (Red River Apiarist Association newsletter *The Bee Cause*, vol. 4, issue 1, p. 4, 2007).

History

The Serpent's Spell and **Amber Ambrosia** take place in a secret city hidden within the Exchange District of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Exchange District is one of the oldest and most architecturally stunning parts of the city; the area is designated as a National Historic Site. Research the history of some of the oldest buildings where you live. What stories do they tell?

Art

Examine the work of several illustrators who work with pen-and-ink. What different techniques do they use? Drawing by exploring illustrators' methods can be a good way to learn more about those methods.

Execute illustrations for some of the chapters in **Amber Ambrosia**. Alternatively, bring to life some of the stories and myths about snakes or bees cross-culturally.

Suggested Resources

Recommended reading

Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino. 1974. New York: Harcourt, Inc. [Transl. by William Weaver from the Italian, *Le città invisibili*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1972.]

Information about the red-sided garter snakes of Narcisse, Manitoba

The snakes of Narcisse feature in the children's book *The Snake Scientist*, by Sy Montgomery with photographs by Nic Bishop (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001).

See <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/catalog/titledetail.cfm?titleNumber=491720>.

See also http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/wildlife/managing/pdf/snake_brochure.pdf for more information about the snakes of Narcisse.

See <http://www.centralpets.com/animals/reptiles/snakes/snk2887.html> for information about egg-eating snakes, such as the snake Esme Wil takes care of.

Is there a local chapter of a herpetological society near you? While some people are afraid of snakes, others marvel at these creatures and promote educational awareness of their unique lifeways.

Information about honey bees and dragonflies

Is there a local apiarist society near you? Many beekeepers are interested in promoting educational awareness of their work and the virtues of local, sustainable and ethical honey production—distinct from many global sugar production processes. Locally, the Red River Apiarists' Association represents the beekeepers of the Red River Valley and environs in southern Manitoba.

<http://www.geocities.com/ve4tg/>

Locally produced honey has less impact on the environment than any other sweetener, according to a recent Swedish study. Did you know that the energy required to make a pound of chocolate is equivalent to the energy embodied in the equal weight of gasoline? Read *Honey as Canada's sustainable and ethical sweetener* by Andony Melathopoulos, posted on the Canadian Honey Council website (and originally published in *Hivelights* May 2006 19(2):14-17).

<http://www.honeycouncil.ca/users/folder.asp?FolderID=5507>

You'll enjoy learning about the work of acclaimed artist Aganetha Dyck, who collaborates with bees, professional beekeepers and researchers to produce her sculptures and artefacts.

<http://members.shaw.ca/ahtenaga/>

<http://www.albertabeekeepers.org/Articles/2003%20-%20A%20Collaboration.html>

<http://umanitoba.ca/schools/art/galleryoneoneone/dyck.html>

Honeyland Canada in British Columbia offers a comprehensive and graduated set of tours from preschool to grade 12 for students to learn about the different kinds of honey bees, their life stages, how honey bees communicate, their roles in pollination, the chemical composition of honey, history of hive products and their uses, the life of a beekeeper and career development.

http://www.honeylandcanada.com/eng/e_tour_school.php

The *Bee Lab* at the University of Minnesota has links to many resources.

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/honeybees/>

WEB Links to the World: A Thousand Great Places to Bee on the Web!! offers links to many, many interesting sites: *kid's stuff, honey bee trivia and facts, the historical bee, weird and neat bee stuff, honey and honey recipes.*

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Beekeeping/weblinks.htm#kids>

This odonatology website about dragonflies shares stories from around the world

http://casswww.ucsd.edu/personal/ron/CVNC/odonata/cultural_odonatology.html

And if you want to learn more about the almost 100 kinds of dragonflies living in Manitoba, check out NatureNorth.com and the Manitoba Dragonfly Survey. The NatureNorth site features superb photographs (see especially <http://www.naturenorth.com/dragonfly/photos.html>) and contains excellent, detailed information about the basic biology of dragonflies, their life cycle, overwintering/migration, food, sight and flight, cultural significance and conservation. (<http://www.naturenorth.com/dragonfly/DOM/opening.html>)

Information about the author and other resources

See Rae Bridgman's website: <www.raebridgman.ca> for additional resources (e.g., films about the snakes of Narcisse and a French language teachers' guide published by Manitoba's Bureau de l'éducation française).