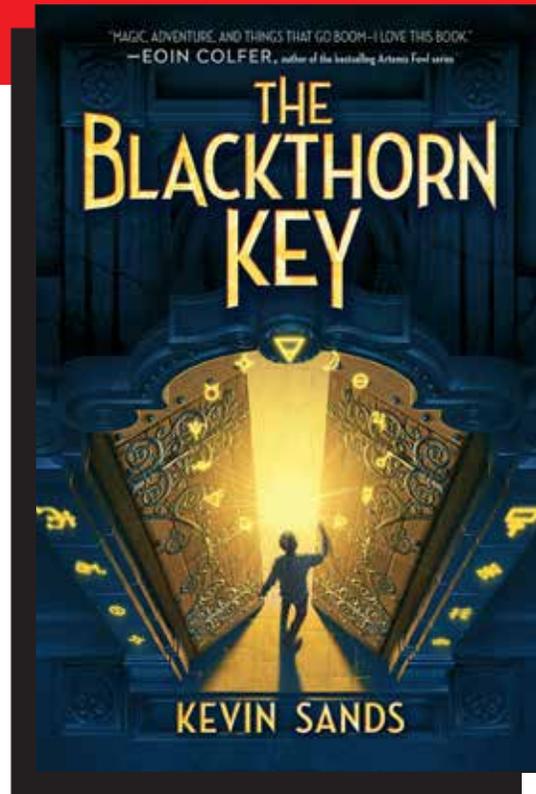


Booktalk!

The Blackthorn Key Script

For this Book Talk you will need:

- 2 actors (Christopher, Master Benedict)
- Christopher (Chris): grey or black pants, white long-sleeved shirt, black boots
- Benedict (Master): blue or grey pants & long blue or grey jacket torn at the shoulder, grey hair, black smeared across right cheek & on neck
- Additional props: long table covered with blankets (simulating a sleeping space beneath), brown blanket (simulating straw bed), large chair covered in dark blanket, small table, lidded ceramic jar, lantern, battery-operated candle, large metal bucket, plain ceramic mug, metal pot, small package wrapped in cloth, small aluminum-wrapped box the size of Chris's palm containing 2 beans/pieces of uncooked pasta, copy of *The Blackthorn Key*



(stage should be dimly lit; Chris is lying on brown blanket underneath blanket-covered table; Master Benedict walks onstage looking bedraggled/beaten up; moving the ceramic jar that's resting on top of the table)

Chris: *(sitting up on bed when he hears noise; peering over edge of table; standing up when he realizes who is there)* Master?

Master: *(leaning against table)* Yes, yes. Go to sleep. *(trying to get something out of jar)*

Chris: Are you alright?

Master: Yes, Christopher. I'm fine. Go back to sleep.

Chris: *(getting up, crossing stage & retrieving lantern with battery-operated candle inside; returning to take closer look at Master; sounding concerned)* Did someone attack you? Was it Stubb? Was it the killers?

Master: *(trying to turn away; moving awkwardly, as if in pain)* No.

continued on next page...

Booktalk!

Chris: *(moving towards Master & taking him by the arm)* Let me help you.

Master: *(insistently)* Christopher – I'm fine.

Chris: *(pleading)* Please, Master.

(Master hesitating then nodding; lifting his right arm over Chris's shoulder & crying out in pain; Chris leading him over to chair; crossing stage to pick up lantern & bringing it to chair; setting it on small table next to chair; Master sitting down in chair)

Chris: *(sounding concerned)* You are burned! Who did this to you? *(Master shaking his head; Christopher patting Master's shoulder gently)* Rest a moment, Master. *(retrieving bucket, pot, mug & ceramic jar from table; pouring imaginary water from pot into mug & giving mug to Master; tending to burn on exposed arm & wrapping it in cloth)*

Master: *(speaking quietly while sipping from mug)* You've learned so much... You're a good apprentice and a good boy.

Chris: *(taking mug from Master & turning to go)* Thank you. Are you comfortable now? Please try and rest, Master.

Master: *(weakly)* Wait... *(pausing; Christopher turning back around)* It's Oak Apple Day tomorrow — the King's birthday...and your own. No one ever gave you a choice. The orphanage made you study. The Guild gave you the test. I brought you here... No one ever gave you the choice. If I sent you away, to walk a different path — somewhere you'd be safe, somewhere you couldn't be hurt — would you choose it?

Chris: *(thinking momentarily then replying with certainty)* No, Master. I'm grateful for the life you have given me. Whatever happens, I want to stay with you.

Master: *(pausing then pointing to a small package wrapped in cloth sitting on small table, resting on top of a book)* I have something for you.

Chris: *(picking up package)* What is it?

Master: *(smiling weakly)* A present.

Chris: *(incredulously)* Can I...can I open it?

Master: *(nodding)* Yes. Please do.

Chris: *(pulling cloth away and revealing silvery cube)* It's beautiful.

continued on next page...

Booktalk!

- Master:** Do you recognize the metal?
- Chris:** *(bouncing box in his hand)* Antimony?
- Master:** Good. Otherwise known as?
- Chris:** The Black Dragon. Some say it has mystical properties. But it makes you throw up if you eat it.
- Master:** Excellent.
- Chris:** *(hugging cube to his chest with 2 hands)* Thank you so much.
- Master:** Don't get too excited. That's only half your present... You get the rest if you can open it.
- Chris:** How do I...?
- Master:** *(closing eyes the opening them & smiling)* I told you. You get the rest...IF you can open it.
- Chris:** *(shaking box and hearing rattle)* What's in it?
- Master:** *(speaking slower & more sleepily)* That would spoil the surprise, wouldn't it? But I do think you might need a little help on this one. I'll tell you this. The key is downstairs, somewhere in the shop. And that *(pointing to the book the cube had been resting on)* will help you find it. *(falling asleep)*
- Chris:** *(giving box a shake then setting it down; picking up book, staring at the cover of it, then looking up at audience)* What surprise awaits me? Why did Master talk to me about choosing a path other than this one, as an apothecary's apprentice? *(glancing over at the sleeping Master & gesturing to his bandages)* And who harmed Master in this way? As Master Benedict said *(picking up book)*, THIS is going to help find the answers to these – and so many more – questions. *(holding up book for audience to see)* *The Blackthorn Key* – search for it at your Scholastic Book Fair.