

Smudge Episode 6

Grades 4-7 Teacher Guide

*Integrating SEL, ELA, and Creative
Expression*



Overview

Episode 6 turns the search for the Storyteller into a series of choices about trust, identity, and control. Outside the Weaver's lair, Hocus offers to shorten the Inkompletes' journey. His past behavior gives them reasons for doubt, and he doesn't clearly explain his terms or hidden agenda. Nevertheless, their concern for Iggy makes the offer difficult to refuse.

The episode cuts to Calumbra's tower, where Calumbra takes Iggy's ink after finding that Bob has none left to give. Calumbra explains that the Storyteller will serve a purpose other than writing his ending. As he restores the pages, contradictory versions of himself emerge and then merge back into him. The sequence complicates the idea that restoring a story will produce a single, settled self.



Overview (continued)

Meanwhile, Hocus's shortcut leads through a herd of Barnivores and ends in a crash in Neverwood. The group reaches a carnival of unfinished characters and separates. In a tent of self-proclaimed heroes, Fleck tries to establish her credibility. Their ridicule prompts her to reveal the Weaver's map, turning a private mission into a public pursuit.

Smudge's internal conflict unfolds in the **House of Mirrors**. After rejecting several possible selves, they enter a cracked mirror and encounter versions of Edgar and Clarissa discussing The Happy Baker, the story Edgar has given Smudge. Smudge insists on being an author, but cannot make themselves heard. Spinks pulls them out, and the group escapes with Hocus in a balloon bound for the Whispering Dunes. The episode ends with the rescue unfinished and the reliability of their guide unresolved.



Key themes



Identity and agency: Smudge's mirror experience asks who gets to define a character and what makes an ending happy for the person living it.



Trust under pressure: The urgency of helping Iggy makes an unclear bargain attractive. Students can examine the decision without assuming that Hocus is either entirely helpful or entirely malicious.



Recognition and judgment: Fleck's need to be believed influences what she reveals. The scene connects social pressure with decisions made in the moment.



Heroism through conduct: The adventurers' boasts contrast with their treatment of Fleck; Spinks's practical help offers another way to evaluate heroism.



Completion and competing selves: Calumbra's contradictory echoes and Smudge's unwanted ending invite questions about whether completion necessarily brings freedom or stability.



Learning paths

Teachers can use three paths to connect Episode 6 with classroom learning. Select goals that fit your students' readiness and the time available.

SEL

- Analyze how urgency, embarrassment, curiosity, and the desire for acceptance influence choices.
- Evaluate trust through observable behavior, clear agreements, and willingness to answer questions.
- Discuss respectful self-advocacy, support for a distressed friend, and alternatives to reacting under pressure.

ELA

- Support claims about motivation and theme with specific dialogue or actions.
- Examine parallel plotlines, the story within the mirror, and the effect of an unresolved ending.
- Distinguish observation, inference, and prediction; explore symbolism in the map, mirrors, and restored pages.
- Use context to explore terms such as caveat, quid pro quo, leverage, and echoes, including literal and figurative meanings.

Creative expression

- Develop a missing conversation or alternate choice that remains consistent with established characters.
- Imagine a carnival attraction that reveals a character's hopes, fears, or assumptions.

Grade adjustment: For grades 4-5, begin with one clear claim and one relevant detail. For grades 6-7, compare details across scenes and consider a plausible alternative interpretation. Oral responses can precede writing at either level.

Pre watch discussion



Use two or three prompts for brief partner talk or a quick-write. Keep personal sharing optional.

- Someone offers a fast solution but will explain the cost later. What would you need to know before agreeing? How might time pressure change your decision?
- What separates a reputation for heroism from heroic behavior? What evidence would you use to judge each?
- Can an ending seem happy to an observer but feel wrong to the person living it? Give an imagined example.
- The Weaver has warned that Calumbra wants to restore his story. What do you predict restoration will change? As you watch, distinguish what you expected from what the episode actually shows.



During watch discussion

Choose two or three pauses. Invite students to separate what the scene shows from what they infer about it.

After Hocus postpones explaining his terms: What does the group gain by accepting his help? What remains unknown? How does Dot's concern for Iggy affect the decision?



After Calumbra draws the echoes back into himself: What do the conflicting voices reveal about his story? What changes can we observe, and what consequences are still uncertain?



During watch discussion continued



When Fleck reveals the map: Trace the connection between the heroes' ridicule, Fleck's feelings, and her action. At which moment could she have chosen another response?

After Spinks rescues Smudge: The tent promises "CHOOSE YOUR HAPPY ENDING." How does the experience challenge that promise? Who controls Smudge's future inside the mirror?



Teacher guidance: Treat the mirror sequence as an embedded experience whose reliability is unconfirmed. The scene reveals Smudge's response to an imposed future; it does not establish that the real Edgar has written this story.

Post watch discussion

Use small groups, a seminar, or short written responses. Ask students to connect interpretations to specific scenes rather than judge a character from a single label.

- Is the group's decision to travel with Hocus understandable, well considered, or both? Defend a position and identify one question that could have improved their decision.
- How does the heroes' tent challenge the relationship between reputation and character? Compare the adventurers' behavior with one of Spinks's actions.
- What is Fleck trying to protect or prove when she reveals the map? How can we understand her reaction while still examining its consequences?



Post watch discussion continued

- Smudge says, "You can't just decide who I am." How does this line develop the conflict between a creator's authority and a character's agency? Why is the problem larger than the choice of a job?
- Compare Calumbra's restored pages with Smudge's mirror ending. What do the scenes suggest about the difference between having an ending and having a future one can accept? Where does the comparison stop being useful?
- Which unanswered question creates the most tension: Hocus's intentions, Dot's card, Calumbra's purpose for the Storyteller, or the meaning of the mirror? Explain your choice and make a prediction supported by a detail.



Discussion emphasis: Being a baker is not presented here as an inferior ambition. The conflict concerns Smudge's voice and choice. Likewise, the comparison with Calumbra does not make their conduct morally equivalent.

Character profiles



Stitch: Fleck's living scarf and partner. Stitch identifies the Lantern of Lament through gesture and offers comfort when Fleck is frustrated. These moments provide evidence of communication and support beyond spoken dialogue.

Smudge: Curious and increasingly clear about their identity as an author. The mirror offers familiar roles before confronting them with a future designed by someone else. Their protest turns a magical danger into a conflict about agency. Their certainty about who they are does not prevent them from feeling frightened or needing help.

Fleck: A protective, practical leader who questions Hocus's motives and checks on the group after the crash. In the heroes' tent, ridicule unsettles her judgment. She reveals the map to establish credibility, creating a new danger. The episode makes room for both her competence and her vulnerability to social pressure.

Character profiles continued

Dot: Knowledgeable and curious, but also driven by concern for Iggy. She identifies the nest stone on the map and urges the group to accept Hocus's help despite the risk. Her later exit from a fortune-teller's tent, dazed and holding a card, establishes a mystery without revealing the prediction itself.



Hocus: An entertaining but unreliable guide. He uses warnings, flattery, and promises of speed while leaving his terms vague. He provides an escape, yet implies that the balloon was taken without permission. His final doubt about the destination adds uncertainty; the episode does not establish his allegiance or full intentions.

Spinks: Skeptical of Hocus and often guided by humor or appetite. His decision to wander off complicates the group's plan, but his later actions show attentiveness and care: he pulls Smudge from the mirror, softens when he sees their distress, and helps Fleck escape.

Character profiles

Calumbra Iggy and Bob

Calumbra: A coercive antagonist who treats others' ink as a resource for his own restoration. The conflicting echoes expose the many versions written into him. He regains control of his form, but the full effect of restoration remains unknown. He wants the Storyteller for a purpose he does not explain.

Iggy and Bob: Captives whose exhaustion makes the cost of Calumbra's plan visible. Bob has no ink left to give and is dragged away. Iggy is drained but still challenges Calumbra about the Storyteller. Neither character is shown being rescued leaving their fates undecided.



Authors and heroes

Edgar and Clarissa in the mirror: Versions of the authors who discuss The Happy Baker while remaining unable to hear Smudge. Their conversation dramatizes a gap between the future an author imagines and the future a character wants. Claims about the real authors require evidence beyond this mirror sequence.

The self-proclaimed heroes: Boastful adventurers who ridicule Fleck and then become intensely interested in her map. They create a setting in which reputation matters more than listening. Their individual motives for pursuing the map are not explained.



Plot breakdown Introduction and rising action

Introduction

The episode resumes outside the Weaver's lair. Hocus warns the Inkompletes that Calumbra's pursuers are following them. The map points toward a distant destination, and concern for Iggy creates urgency. Hocus offers a shortcut to the Whispering Dunes while deferring the terms of his bargain. The group reluctantly agrees.

Rising action

The narrative shifts to Calumbra's tower. Unable to obtain more ink from Bob, Calumbra drains Iggy and restores his pages. He tells Iggy that the Storyteller will serve a purpose other than writing his ending. When the pages reach the wall, a shockwave accompanies the emergence of contradictory versions of Calumbra. He draws them back into himself; the sequence ends without explaining the full result.



Plot breakdown Rising action continued



Back on the journey, a herd of Barnivores obstructs the mountain pass. A crash strands the group in Neverwood. Spinks follows the smell of funnel cakes to a carnival, where Hocus leaves to arrange transportation and the others disperse.

Fleck enters the heroes' tent. Her account of facing Calumbra is met with disbelief, and the adventurers mock her intention to rescue Iggy and find the Storyteller. She reveals the map to prove her claim. The crowd advances. In a parallel thread, Smudge enters the House of Mirrors and rejects several offered identities before approaching a cracked mirror.

Plot breakdown Climax and cliffhanger

Climax

The cracked mirror pulls Smudge into an author's lair where Edgar and Clarissa discuss The Happy Baker. Smudge objects to the imposed identity, but the authors cannot hear them. Edgar places the story in the World Book, and Smudge is drawn into a bakery. This is the emotional climax of Smudge's plotline: the promise of choosing an ending becomes an experience of losing control over one's story.

Falling action

Spinks reaches into the mirror and pulls Smudge out. He recognizes their distress and leads them toward the escape. Dot emerges from the fortune-teller's tent with an unexplained card. Hocus holds a balloon whose ownership is questionable, while Fleck approaches with the heroes chasing her.

Resolution and cliffhanger

The plotlines reconnect as the group boards and escapes. Hocus names the Whispering Dunes as their next destination, then mutters that he doubts they will find what they seek. The escape resolves the immediate pursuit, while Iggy's captivity, Calumbra's transformation, Hocus's intentions, and Smudge's experience remain unresolved. The episode closes with forward motion rather than a completed rescue.

