

SONG OF THE FAR ISLES

Teaching Resources

Devised by NICHOLAS BOWLING

Creative writing activities

- On pages 93-4 Granny gives a brief version of how Chorus 'sang the world into being'. Write a full account of this myth, describing how Oran's world was created.
- Add an instrument to the 'zodiac' at the beginning of the book, describing the instrument itself and the characteristics of people who play it. Or create a whole new zodiac, with new instruments!
- Imagine you are Oran, returning to Tusk at the end of the book. You discover Bard's diary, tattered and sea-stained. What does it say?
- Write the story of Oran and Dugald's meeting in the dungeons (chapters 19 and 20), but from Dugald's perspective.
- Write a codex of ten rules for membership of the Opera. Who is allowed to join? What are their duties? What are they allowed, and not allowed, to do? Make it look good enough to be hammered to the ship's mast!
- On pages 22 and 123 we are told a little bit about the Opera's "performances". Write a story about the Opera's visit to another island community, and its consequences ...
- Create your own song to add to the Opera's repertoire! It could be about music, or the sea, or life aboard the ship, or any adventure they might have had. (You don't need to set it to music.)
- Write a different ending to the confrontation between Bard and the Duchess (chapter 25).
- Imagine you are Oran in ten years' time. You have practised and perfected the Old Music, and the natural world listens to your every note (see the final chapter of the book). What other amazing things can you do with your cithara? What powers do you have?



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Cross-curricular activities

Music

- Pick a song from the book and create a melody for it.
- At the end of the book, Oran calls a warm easterly breeze with her cithara. What do you think that piece of music might have sounded like? Can you create it?
- Music Pictionary. Divide into pairs. Between you write a list of emotions – happiness, fear, anger etc. Take it in turns to express these emotions just using music (you can just clap, or use a tambourine, or use another instrument if you can play it). Your partner gets a point if they guess the correct emotion!

Art & design

- Based on Oran and the Opera's descriptions, create an *extended* version of the map at the beginning of the book. You could include the Green Sea, the Boiling Straits and the rest of the Headland, and you can add some more islands of your own!
- Draw a tenth instrument to add to the nine instruments of the Chorus.
- Create your own 'skein'! In the book, a 'skein' is a woven pattern that represents a person's family – it's a bit like a tartan, but not limited to just horizontal and vertical lines. What design would you choose to represent you and your family?
- Make your own cithara – or a musical instrument of your own design!

History

- Research and make a presentation on the earliest known instruments.



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Discussion questions

About the book

- In the opening chapter, we see Oran talking to her instrument. Why do you think this is? Do you think it can understand her?
- Why is music so important to people of Little Drum?
- What do you think matters most to Oran: music or family?
- Do you think that Oran's behaviour is irresponsible, or that her mother is too strict and controlling? Or both? Or neither?
- Why are the people of Little Drum so worried about the fate of the ghaists? Why are the ghaists so important to the island?
- Why do you think Magmalley is such a nasty piece of work? What do you think might have made him like this?
- How would you describe Alick's character? Why do you think he's like this?
- Do you think Oran was right to take Alick with her on the journey?
- Do you think Alick is right to criticize Oran for being too egotistical?
- The Captain of the Opera makes the statement: "a soloist is only as good as the musicians she's playing with." What do you think she means by this?
- We are told in the book that the islanders' opinion of the Opera is divided: some love them, some hate them. Do you think they are heroes or villains? Is it possible to be both?
- What is the relationship between the Headland and the Far Isles? Can you think of relationship like this in the real world, either from the present day or from history?
- Dugald doesn't seem very happy being the Duke. In what ways might life be difficult for royalty, in spite of their wealth and their power?

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- When Oran escapes her hanging, why do you think everyone joins in with the sea-shanty so readily?
- Why do sailors and pirates sing sea-shanties at all?
- How does Oran's relationship with Bard change over the course of the book, and why does it change?
- By the end of the book, how do you feel about the Duchess? Do you sympathize with her?
- What about Bard? Do you sympathize with her?
- Do you think the Duchess will keep her promise and allow the islanders to keep making their music?

General questions

- Do you think – as the Duchess does – that music really can be dangerous?
- Throughout the book music is presented as a kind of magic. In what ways are the two similar?
- What do you think our world would be like if every child was given a musical instrument at a young age?
- What is your favourite piece of music, and why do you love it?



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