Teachers' Guide

The Novels of Rosemary Sutcliff



The historical novels — including the award-winning trilogy set in Roman Britain as well as *Outcast*, *The Shining Company*, *Sword Song*, *Tristan & Iseult*, and *Warrior Scarlet* — of Rosemary Sutcliff are based on extensive research, a love of storytelling, and a keen desire to relate the important themes of love and loyalty, honor and duty, courage and faith to children. Her training as a painter and her gifted way with words combine to create vivid descriptions of times past and lands unknown. "To know where we started from and by what road we came to be where we are now — and to know this not only in an academic way, but also with other emotions, not only with our heads but with our hearts, must surely be helping us in coping with the world in which we are today," she once said.

Taking a blank page like a white canvas, Sutcliff paints the smells and sounds of a battlefield, the colors of an emerald signet ring, the melody of harp strings, the emotions between two lovers, the conflict between father and son, and the bond between master and servant. She re-creates all the customs, rites, and ceremonies of the Bronze Age and Roman Britain clans and the tribes of the Dark Ages and medieval England. She does this with eloquent language, fast action, and well-developed characters. She writes with honesty and authenticity, never jeopardizing the truth, nor tempering the violence in early British history. She respects her readers and tells them things they need to know, but at the same time gives them a good story

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The questions that follow can be used as writing prompts or for engaging readers in group discussions, or for the solitary reader who wants to explore themes and concepts more fully on his or her own.

About The Eagle of the Ninth

First book in the Roman Britain Trilogy

In the early second-century A.D., Marcus Flavius Aquila is born and reared in Rome, but at age eighteen applies for a Centurion's commission and leaves his native land for Britain, where he hopes to find his father, who disappeared with the Ninth Legion — the Hispana — eight years earlier. In a battle between the Romans and Celtic tribesmen, Marcus is wounded and declared unfit for military service. Disappointed that his military life is cut short, he retreats to the home of his father's elder brother, where he begins to recover from his wounds. He is only partially healed when he accepts the chance to search for the lost eagle standard of the Ninth Hispana. Along with his Celtic friend Esca, Marcus sets out on a quest to reclaim the eagle and restore his father's honor.

Discussion Questions for The Eagle of the Ninth

What is the difference between loyalty and duty? Marcus Flavius Aquila embarks on a quest to reclaim the lost eagle standard of the Ninth. How is his need to accept this opportunity connected to his personal loyalty to his missing father? Why does he feel it his duty to restore his family's honor?

Why does Hilarion warn Marcus about the wandering Druids? Though Marcus attempts to dismiss the warning, there are times in battle and on his journey to reclaim the eagle standard of the Ninth that the warning haunts him. What is it about the girl Guinhumara that makes Marcus heed Hilarion's warning? Cite other times that Marcus feels threatened by the Druids.

Explain the occurrences of dark magic in the story. How do these accurrences help define the time and place of the novel?

Why is the Capricorn bracelet so important to Marcus? What is the significance of the emerald signet ring?

After Marcus is wounded, he goes to Uncle Aquila's house on the extreme edge of Calleva, where he is given a sleeping cell and allowed time to heal. How might Marcus describe his uncle upon meeting him for the first time? Why is Marcus so surprised when Uncle Aquila talks of the woman he once loved? What is Uncle Aquila's reaction when he learns that Marcus plans a quest in search of the lost eagle?

Discuss the relationship that develops between Marcus and Cottia. The chapter where they first meet is titled "Two Worlds Meeting." Compare and contrast Marcus's and Cottia's worlds. At what point do their worlds become one?

Esca, a slave, accompanies Marcus on his journey. Why does Marcus grant Esca his freedom? Marcus says to Esca, "You don't like being a freed-man, do you? Well, I don't like being lame. That makes two of us, and the only thing we can do about it, you and I, is to learn to carry the scars lightly." [p. 272] At what point does Esca begin to be comfortable with his freedom? How does Marcus finally come to terms with being lame?

Marcus and Esca return to Uncle Aquila's house with the eagle. Discuss why the Legate wants to bury the eagle. Cottia wants Marcus to tell her the story of the Ninth Legion. Why isn't he ready to share the story? Tell the story as he might relate it to Cottia.

About The Silver Branch

Second book in the Roman Britain Trilogy

Political turmoil plagues Britain during the latter part of the third-century, when two young descendants of Marcus Flavius Aquila uncover a plot against the British emperor Carausius. Tiberius Lucius Justinianus (Justin), a junior army surgeon, and Marcelus Flavius Aquila (Flavius), a red-headed Centurion, learn from Evicatos of the Spear that Allectus has joined with the Painted People to overthrow Carausius. When the Emperor is killed, Justin and Flavius go into exile before joining an underground organization of secret agents in the service of Rome.

Discussion Questions for The Silver Branch

Explain what Flavius means when he says to Justin, "But you know how it is with us; the old Service is in all our blood; look at you, you're a surgeon, but you couldn't break away from the Eagles, even so." [p. 27] How does this statement foreshadow the adventures ahead for the two cousins?

How does Justin know that he has been a disappointment to his father? When things look grim for the two boys, Justin writes his father a final letter. Discuss why he feels the need to communicate with his father.

What is Justin's first impression of the emperor Carausius? Why does Flavius feel that Carausius is "not the blindly trusting kind"? Discuss why Carausius dismisses his escorts and invites Justin and Flavius to ride with him.

How do Justin and Flavius demonstrate loyalty and heroism throughout the novel? Compare

and contrast their heroic deeds to those of Marcus Flavius Aquila in *The Eagle of the Ninth*.

Evicatos of the Spear tells Justin and Flavius that, "the Painted People fear us because we are different from them." [p. 78] Discuss how fear breeds hate. How is Allectus using the Painted People to overthrow Carausius? Evicatos asks Justin and Flavius to warn Carausius. Why does he think that the Emperor will listen to Justin and Flavius?

Discuss the role of Paulinus in the novel. Explain what Flavius means when he tells Paulinus, "We haven't the right kind of makeup for this business of yours. We haven't the right kind of courage, if you like that better." [p. 126] What kind of courage does the job require? Why do Justin and Flavius make the decision to accept Paulinus's offer to stay in Britain?

Despite the blood and gore of battle scenes, the evil plot of Allectus and the Painted People, and the murder of Paulinus, there are funny scenes in the novel. Discuss how Sutcliff uses humor to temper the violence in the story.

Explain the title of the novel.

About The Lantern Bearers

Third book in the Roman Britain Trilogy

In fifth-century Britain, the last of the Roman troops are returning from Britain to Italy. Aquila, a young legionnaire and descendant of Marcus Flavius Aquila, deserts his army to fight for his native land. This time, the enemy is the Saxons, who raid Aquila's home, kill his father, and kidnap his sister, Flavia. Several years later, Aquila finds his sister and learns that she is married to a Saxon and has his

child. Though Flavia helps Aquila escape the barbarians, she elects to stay behind. He heads north, where he enters the service of Ambrosius, Prince of Britain, and takes part in a battle to overthrow the Saxons. Though Aquila experiences much darkness in his life, he finds joy in his son, Flavian, and hope for Britain when Ambrosius is finally crowned High King.

Discussion Questions for The Lantern Bearers

Aquila deserts the Roman army when the last troops are recalled to Italy. Why does he feel that he is fighting a personal battle of divided loyalties? His father tells him, "Rome has done too much of thinking what is comfortable." [p. 10] How does this statement suggest his father's loyalties? At what point does Aquila know that his battle of loyalty must be fought alone?

Aquila prepares his Roman troops for embarkation, and briefly considers asking Callistus, his Commandant, to dismiss him. Why does he think that Callistus will understand his need to stay in Britain? And how does he know that the Commandant will refuse? Discuss his decision to desert the Roman army. He isn't sure that he has made the right decision, but he feels that he has made the only decision for him. How does he get to this point? Why does his decision bring him to tears?

How does his confusion about his loyalty later interfere with his relationship with his sister? Early in the novel, Aquila's father is killed by the Saxons. Aquila's greatest nightmare is of how Flavia must be suffering in the hands of the barbarians. Discuss Aquila's reaction when he later finds his sister in a Saxon camp and learns that she is married to a Saxon and has a child by him.

Aquila wants Flavia and the child to go with him, and escape the Saxon camp. Flavia responds, "Aquila, part of me would lie down and die tomorrow and not think it a heavy price to pay, if I might come with you tonight. But there's another part of me that can never come." [p. 101] Discuss her divided loyalties.

Discuss why Aquila's father believed that the hope of Britain was with Ambrosius of the House of Constantine. Aquila offers his service to Ambrosius in an effort to satisfy the "emptiness" that he feels inside. Debate whether the emptiness is for his father, Flavia, Britain, or everything that he has lost.

What is Aquila's attitude toward women? Ambrosius thinks that Aquila should marry. Why does Aquila choose Ness, the brown sister, over the golden sister? Discuss whether his attitude toward women changes by the end of the novel.

A son, Flavian, is born to Aquila and Ness. Trace the relationship that develops between father and son. How does Flavian possess the same sense of duty as his father, and his ancestors?

Explain the conflict between light and dark. Who are the Lantern Bearers?

About Outcast

A Roman ship is wrecked in a brutal storm off the coast of Britain, and the men in the Spear Brethren of the Clan comb the seacoast for remains of the ship. Cunori, whose wife, Guinear, has recently birthed a boy child who died, finds a baby alive in the arms of his dead parents, and decides to take the babe to his wife to help her overcome the sadness at the loss of her own child. An old Druid warns them that the babe will bring sorrow to the clan, but Cunori and Guinear name the baby Beric and raise him as their own. When

pestilence descends on the Clan, the leaders believe that it is Beric that has caused it, and they cast him out to find his own place in the world.

Discussion Questions for Outcast

Discuss Guinear's attitude toward the infant boy when Cunori first brings him home. How do her feelings for the baby change? Guinear and Cunori are honest with Beric about his birth parents and tell him how he came to be their son. Discuss what Guinear and Cunori do to make Beric feel that he belongs in their family.

Merddyn, the Druid, tells Cunori, "It is unlucky to rob the sea. If you bring it [the baby] among us, it will bring sorrow on us all." [p. 10] How does the Druid's message foreshadow the future problems that Beric experiences with the Clan?

At age nine, the boys of the clan begin warrior training. At first it appears that Beric will not be accepted because he doesn't hold birthright in the Clan. How does Rhiada, the blind harper, help the men see that Beric should be given a chance? Beric is happy with his training, but the other boys resent him. How do their fathers and the leaders of the Clan shape the prejudices of the young boys? How are the prejudices expressed against Beric similar to prejudices against ethnic groups in society today?

Discuss how prejudice and superstition eventually drive Beric out of the Clan. Rhiada once again rises to Beric's defense: "We call ourselves a free people; shall he not at least have freedom to speak for himself in this matter?" [p. 33] How does the organization of the Spear Brethren contradict the concept of a free society?

Beric leaves the Clan in search of his own people's land. Along the way, he is sold into slavery. How does his life in bondage make him further lose faith in man? Glaucus, his owner, decides to change Beric's name to Hyacinthus. [p. 88] Discuss how losing his name is the breaking point for Beric.

Draw a parallel between Beric's escape and the escape of slaves on the Underground Railroad in nineteenth-century America. There were metaphorical stations and conductors on the Underground Railroad. Identify Beric's underground stations. Who are the conductors that help him?

Discuss why Rhiada leaves the Clan after Beric is cast out. What is the significance of his reappearance in Beric's life? Beric tells Rhiada about Justinius, and about the events of his life since he left the Clan. Explain why he doesn't tell Rhiada "how or why Justinius had taken him as a son." [p. 204]

Throughout the novel, Beric is searching for a sense of belonging. How does he find his "belonging-place"? [p. 228] The sea gave him a beginning. How does it also give him an end?

About The Shining Company

In post-Roman Britain, around A.D. 600, Prosper, second son to Gerontius, lord of three cantrefs, lives in the shadow of his older brother, Owain. He is only twelve when his father gives him Conn, a body servant. Prosper isn't sure what to do with a servant, so the boys become companions on various adventures. The two part company when Prosper joins Prince Gorthyn as a shieldbearer in the Shining Company, a military force formed by Mynyddog, King of the Gododdin, to unite the British kingdoms against the Anglo-Saxon threat. When the Shining Company is defeated, Prosper and Conn are reunited long

enough for Prosper to bid his friend farewell. Prosper, restless and unable to deal with defeat, heads for Constantinople to take on a new battle.

Discussion Questions for The Shining Company

Discuss the relationship between Prosper and his father. Explain what Prosper means when he says, "I have said that my father had little love for me, and that is true, but it is true also that I always had justice from him." [p. 42]

For his twelfth birthday, Prosper's father gives him a body servant. Explain the role of a body servant in Prosper's culture. What is Prosper's attitude toward the servant? How does his attitude indicate that he is not quite ready to deal with a servant?

Prosper learns that Prince Gorthyn plans to hunt the white hart. Discuss what happens on the hunt. How does Prosper change as a result of the hunt? What is the purpose of the "song" written after a hunt? Explain what Prosper means when he says, "Gwyn will just have to change the end of the song." [p. 59]

What is the role of a shieldbearer? Compare and contrast how the training for shieldbearer is similar to the training for manhood in Prosper's culture. Discuss how the shieldbearer training leads to cavalry training. At the end of the training the men begin "to knit together into something whole and complete." [p. 98] What is the difference between being "whole" and being "complete"? Locate and discuss scenes in the novel where the men appear to be both.

Explain Ceredig Fosterling's words, "To be a bard is a greater thing than to be a warrior." [p. 224]

Discuss the circumstances that cause Prosper and Conn to part ways. How does Conn come back into Prosper's life? What is the greatest gift that Prosper gives to Conn at the end of the novel?

Cynan tells King Mynyddog that he has three reasons for wanting to leave Dyn Eidin. Discuss each of his reasons. Why is his third reason the one that really sends him away? What are Prosper's reasons for joining Cynan?

The Shining Company deals with the themes of man vs. man, man vs. self, and man vs. nature. Discuss how Sutcliff develops each of these themes. Which is the most central theme of the novel?

Shud vs. be in italic????

About Sword Song

Sixteen-year-old Bjarni Sigurdson has just arrived in Rafnglas when he holds a holy man under in a horse-pond for kicking his dog. The man drowns, and Bjarni is charged with manslaying. When the Chief banishes him from Rafnglas for five years, Bjarni travels to Dublin and becomes a mercenary swordsman. He teams up with Ornund Treefoot aboard the Sea Witch, where he is involved with bitter feuds among clan chiefs on the west coast of Scotland. Bjarni's adventures and near-fatal sea fights make him a man, and he returns to Rafnglas after five years, with a bride, ready for his land-take.

Discussion Questions for Sword Song

In *Sword Song*, as in all of Sutcliff's novels, there is a strong sense of place. Cite specific scenes in the novel that define the setting.

Discuss what is going on in Norway to cause Bjarni's grandfather to send him to join his brother, Gram, in Rafnglas. How does Gram feel responsible for Bjarni?

Bjarni holds the holy man under in the horsepond for kicking his dog. The man drowns, and Bjarni is summoned to appear before Rafn the Chief. The Chief says to him, "Time enough to learn that in this land-take the men of the White Christ walk safe." [p. 2] Who are the men of the White Christ? Contrast this religion to the Viking gods that Bjarni worships.

Explain how Bjarni makes Rafn the Chief an "oath-breaker." [p. 3] How does Bjarni learn the meaning of an oath?

Bjarni is banished from Rafnglas for five years. He goes to Dublin, where he is robbed of the silver that his brother gave him for his journey. How does Bjarni wind up on the Sea Witch with Onund Treefoot? Discuss the sea battle that Bjarni is involved with on board the Sea Witch. Explain the concept of the "share-out." [p. 67]

Bjarni is involved in a fight to save his dog, Hugin. Onund says to him, "There is a time for battle and a time for peace and Sea Witch has no place among her crew for a man who cannot tell the one from the other." [p. 82] Discuss how Bjarni should have handled the incident. Why does Bjarni say that Onund is the person that made Hugin "unfit for sacrifice"? [p. 82]

Why does the Lady Aud choose Bjarni as a rower on the Fionoula for the Easter faring? Explain why Bjarni feels it necessary to tell the Lady Aud that he doesn't intend to follow her god. Describe the strangeness that Bjarni experiences on board the Fionoula.

Bjarni returns to Rafnglas after five years. Much has happened to him, and much has happened in Rafnglas. Discuss the changes to both. The Chief asks Bjarni to tell them the tale of his five years. What will Bjarni tell? What will he leave out from his story?

About Tristan and Iseult

Tristan is only sixteen years old when he leaves Lothian to seek adventure in faraway countries. He travels first to his mother's country of Cornwall, where he meets his uncle, King Marc. The two form a close bond, and Tristan is chosen to sail the seas in search of a Queen for his uncle. He slays a dragon in Ireland, and for his deeds wins the hand of the beautiful young Princess Iseult for King Marc. When Tristan and Iseult fall in love, King Marc is insanely jealous and demands that Tristan leave the country. Tristan eventually meets another Iseult, but his love for her is never the same. Finally, in a dramatic ending to one of the greatest love stories of all time, Tristan and Queen Iseult, the ill-fated lovers, are united in death.

Discussion Questions for Tristan and Iseult

Tristan's name means "sorrow." [p. 2] How is his name prophetic? When Tristan wants to travel to his mother's land of Cornwall, his father tells him, "Cornwall brought me much of joy and much of sorrow." [p. 5] How does Cornwall bring Tristan both joy and sorrow? Discuss what Tristan means when he says, "I will count the sorrow as fair payment for the joy, my father." [p. 5]

Tristan wants to become a hero, but makes it clear to his father that he doesn't expect "easy glory." [p.4] Why is it so important to Tristan to achieve the status of hero without the aid of his father, King of Lothian, or his uncle, King of Cornwall? Gorvenal teaches Tristan to ride a horse and to handle a sword and a spear. What other skills deemed necessary for a hero does Tristan learn? How does Tristan become a hero when he goes to Ireland to fight on his uncle's behalf?

Discuss why Tristan is considered the champion of the ordinary folks of Cornwall. How is he their hope?

When Tristan first sees King Marc, he thinks, "Here is one with a gift for loving and a gift for hating, and when he hates, God help the man who earns his hatred." [p. 7] Discuss Tristan's relationship with King Marc. How does he earn his uncle's love and his hatred?

How does Tristan win the hand of Princess Iseult for King Marc? At what point do Tristan and Iseult fall in love? King Marc is bitterly angry when he discovers that his nephew and Iseult are lovers. They are brought before the Council of the Chiefs and found guilty of betraying the King. Discuss why Dynas the High Steward appeals to the King for their mercy. How do Tristan and Iseult escape their punishment? Discuss how the lepers help them.

King Marc finds Tristan and Iseult asleep in a hut. Explain why he leaves his sword for Tristan and his glove for Iseult.

Discuss the parallel between the ways Iseult White-hands and Iseult of Cornwall enter Tristan's life. At what point does Iseult Whitehands realize that she has not won Tristan's heart? How does she deal with her jealousy of Iseult of Cornwall?

King Marc sees that Tristan and Queen Iseult of Cornwall are buried together. Discuss the meaning of this final gesture.

About Warrior Scarlet

Drem, a boy of Bronze Age Britain, is very young when he overhears his grandfather casting doubt on his abilities to ever do what it takes to become a man in the eyes of his Tribe. Born with a withered arm, Drem is determined to prove his grandfather wrong and move into the Boys' House to begin warrior training. According to the tradition of his clan, the final test of manhood is to slay a wolf singlehanded. Any boy that fails will leave the Tribe in disgrace and be sent to live with the Half People. His manhood is tested more than once, but on the journey Drem finds both friendship and love.

Discussion Questions for Warrior Scarlet

Rosemary Sutcliff describes the Bronze Age in the Historical Note at the beginning of the novel. Find examples in the novel that support Sutcliff's description of this period in history.

Drem is only nine when he overhears a conversation between Sabra, his mother, and Cathlan, his grandfather. Cathlan asks, "It likely, think you, that the young one will ever win his way into the Men's side, with a speararm that he cannot use?" [p. 10] How does this conversation alter Drem's world? Discuss how Drem deals with the dismay and terror that he may never become a warrior. How does Talore help Drem realize that, even with his handicap, he can go to the Boys' House and take part in the initiation of his Tribe like other twelve-year-olds?

Describe the arrogance of the young boys when they first arrive at the Boys' House. What is Luga's role in turning the boys against Drem? How might Luga be described as a bully? Discuss how Drem deals with the situation. Why does he feel that he is fighting for his place in the Clan?

Discuss the relationship that develops between Drem and Vortrix, the Chieftain's son. The boys don't always discuss things, but they usually know what the other one is thinking. How does this make them true soul mates? Why is Drem "dead to the Tribe" [p. 128] when he fails in his Wolf Slaying? Explain why he must now go and live with the Half People. He finally has his Wolf Slaying. Discuss the reaction of the Tribe.

When the King dies, there is a Death Feast and the crowning of a new King. Describe other rites, ceremonies, and customs of the Tribe. How are these rituals similar to ones in other cultures today?

Religion plays a significant role in the novel. How is the religion of the Dark People different from the religion of Drem's Tribe? Why does he fear losing his faith?

How does Blai come back into Drem's life? Drem knows that he and Blai belong together, because "she knew the things that he knew." [p. 206] What knowledge do the two young lovers share?

Internet Research to Extend the Enjoyment of Rosemary Sutcliff's Books

King Arthur Tristan and Iseult

www.legends.dm.net/kingarthur/tristan.html

Roman Britain

www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/ www.brims.co.uk/romans/

The Vikings

www.smr.herefordshire.gov.uk/saxon_viking/ vikings.htm

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/vikings/invasion/vi2.s html

About the Author

Rosemary Sutcliff was born in Surrey, England, on December 14, 1920. Her father, a naval officer, instilled in her a sense of service, duty, and loyalty, and her mother introduced her to the love of reading and storytelling. After she was diagnosed with Still's disease (a form of juvenile arthritis) at the age of two and a half, Rosemary spent much of her childhood in hospitals or at home, confined to a spinal carriage. Her handicap prevented her from pursuing a formal education, and at the age of fourteen she enrolled in Bideford Art School, where she studied alongside students who were much older than she and who, although nice to her, did not include her in their activities. Instead, she focused on her work. She became a successful painter of miniatures, some of which were exhibited at the Royal Academy.

By her twentieth birthday, Sutcliff had become somewhat impatient with her art. "I could not cope with harsh realities in paint and I think my first urge to break out into writing was the result of this. One can write as big as one needs: no canvas is too large to be unmanageable." Memories of King Arthur, Robin Hood, and other legendary characters in the stories of her childhood greatly influenced her interest in history, adventure, and action. Her first book for children, The Queen Elizabeth Story, was published in 1950. She became known for her historical fiction and wrote more than fifty novels and anthologies in her career. Her books have been translated into fifteen languages, and Sutcliff fan clubs have formed throughout the world. She received the Carnegie Medal for The Lantern Bearers in 1960, and was runner-up for the same honor in 1972 for Tristan & Iseult.

Rosemary Sutcliff died at seventy-one years old in Surrey, England, on July 22, 1992. She was writing until the last day of her life.

For more on Rosemary Sutcliff:

Articles in reference books:

Contemporary Authors Online. Thomson Gale. Gale Group. 2003.

Contemporary Popular Writers. St. James Press. Gale Group. 1996.

Something about the Author. Volume 44. Thomson Gale. Gale Group. 1986.

Twentieth-Century Young Adult Writers. St. James Press. Gale Group. 1993.

Web sites:

www.fsgkidsbooks.com

www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/intrvws/ sutcliff.htm

www.historicalnovelsociety.org/solander% 20files/rosemary_sutcliff.htm

THE NOVELS OF ROSEMARY SUTCLIFF

THE ROMAN BRITAN TRILOGY

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This guide was prepared by Pat Scales, Director of Library Services, South Carolina's Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, Greenville, South Carolina.