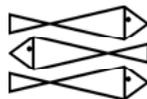
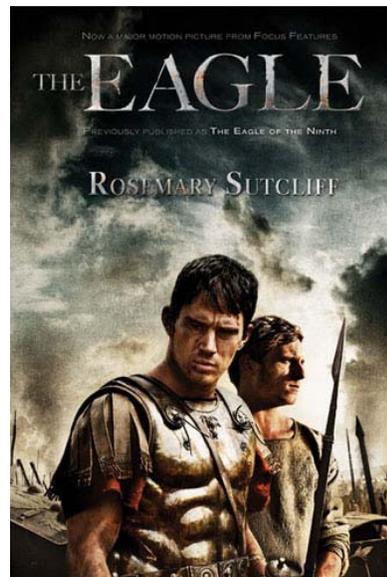
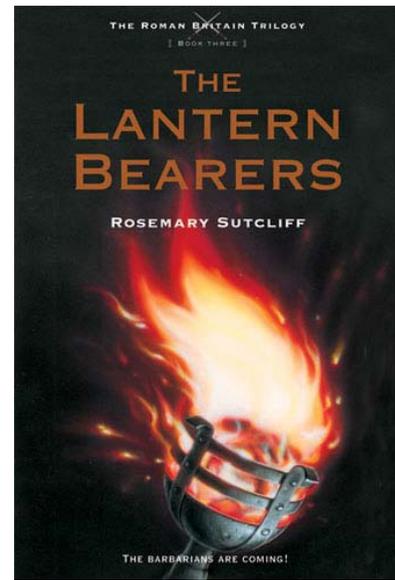
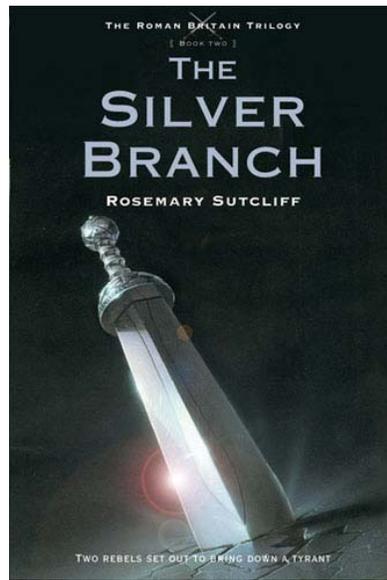
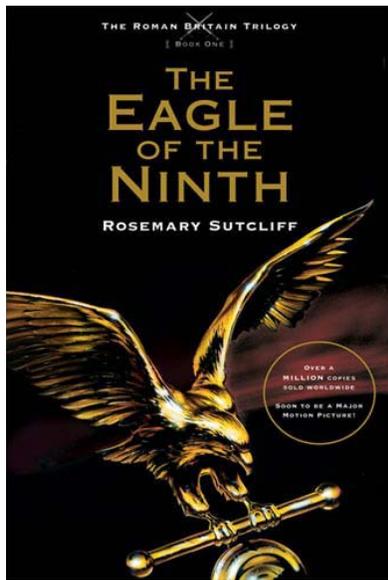


THE ROMAN BRITAIN TRILOGY

By Rosemary Sutcliff

Teachers' Guide



The Roman Britain Trilogy by Rosemary Sutcliff is 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. Sutcliff's 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. 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 occurrences 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?

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.

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. 196] At what point does Esca begin to be comfortable with his freedom? How does Marcus finally come to terms with being lame?

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 Marcus 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. 17] 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. 56] 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 make-up for this business of yours. We haven't the right kind of courage, if you like that better."

[p. 93] 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 Sutcliffe 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. 78] 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 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 age seventy-one 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.

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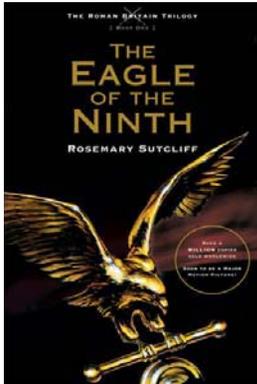
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The Eagle of the Ninth

First Book in the Roman Britain Trilogy

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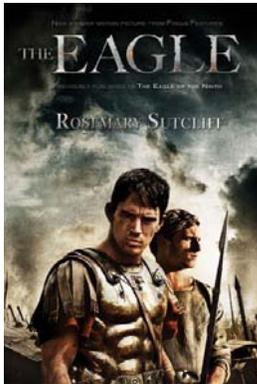
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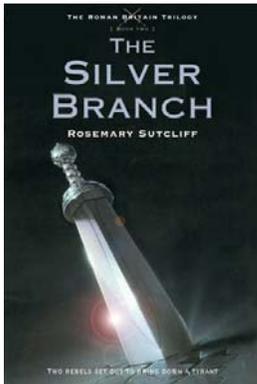
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The Silver Branch

Second Book in the Roman Britain Trilogy

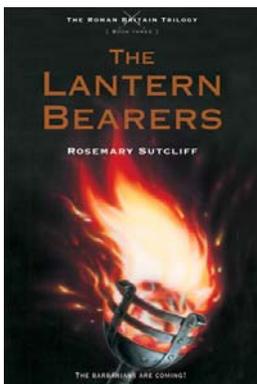
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