

Argenta

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Synopsis

Anquin is disillusioned with his life on Argenta. His parents are away on a Mission and he has no friends to keep him entertained. Anquin is the only birdchild on Argenta and as such the responsibility for passing on the knowledge when the eggs hatch and the future hatchlings are born falls to him.

Anquin's Grandmother Cormar is concerned that her time on Argenta is coming to an end. The time has come to explain to Anquin about his past. He was born on Earth and smuggled back to Argenta by his parents. He was hatched to save the clan. His birth was unregistered and as such he will never be allowed to go on a Mission like everyone else. Anquin refuses to accept this and decides to go on a Mission of his own. He flies away from the Settlement and heads towards the Forbidden Zone.

Meanwhile in Ratanunui Martin is bored. It is the summer holidays and all his friends have gone away. Martin lives with his mother Anne, a woman who is well-known in the community for being a champion of causes. Things seem grim until something unusual happens. A leather-clad biker comes into town and takes him for a ride, starting a chain of events that guarantee that Martin's holidays will be anything but boring.

In the Forbidden Zone Anquin is surprised to find a settlement that is inhabited by middle generation bird people. Among them is his father's brother Kandor. Anquin soon finds out that life in the settlement is far from idyllic. All of the bird people are under the control of the Masters and forced to work continuously in the mine. During his first night in the settlement Anquin's father Krismon arrives in a spaceship and informs the Masters that his Mission has been successful. He produces a device he calls the Replicator, which he has hidden inside a black helmet. When attached to the Extrapolator the device allows the Masters to read the thoughts of a human - in this case a typical New Zealand boy called Martin. It is their plan to learn how humans think and feel and use this information against them to take over Earth. The Masters decide to send Krismon back to Earth to gather further samples.

Determined to see his father, despite Krismon's order that he return home, Anquin sneaks onto the spaceship just as it is going to return to Earth. Not realising that

the hideous human creature on board is his father, Anquin pushes him off the ship, and heads to Earth alone. Trying on the helmet Anquin is suddenly confronted with all of Martin's thoughts, feelings and memories. Astounded he decides that he has to find the boy and learn more.

Once on Earth Anquin meets Martin and the pair learn how to communicate using the Replicator. So begins an amazing adventure for both of them that sees them trying to save the clan from slavery and rescue Earth from the evil clutches of the Masters.

Text Type

Argenta is an original and fast-paced science fiction novel that will appeal to teenagers of both genders. Set in New Zealand and in outer space, the author ingeniously plots a story that allows readers to make the leap of imagination required to become engrossed in a world full of birdpeople and other strange creatures. With short chapters and exciting action *Argenta* will keep even reluctant readers engaged.

The two main protagonists are Anquin, a birdchild, and Martin, a typical teenage boy. These characters are credible and sympathetic. Their stories run parallel throughout the novel in alternating chapters until they eventually meet.

Anquin feels cheated out of his rite of passage (his Mission) and decides to take matters into his own hands by leaving the settlement and flying into the Forbidden Zone. In doing so he learns that all is not what it seems with his clan. Martin feels bored and lonely because his friends are away for the holidays. He feels embarrassed by his mother, who he thinks is always trying to ruin his fun. Together these two must overcome many obstacles and challenges in their quest to save the Earth. They, along with Martin's friend Wendy, display courage and determination in their endeavours.

Themes include courage, rebelliousness, friendship, the survival of a species, good versus evil, heroism, conservation and family relationships.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-16), Chapters 3-15 (pp. 17-92), Chapters 16-35 (pp. 93-182) and Chapters 36-52 (pp. 183-253).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Many ideas and concepts such as the Replicator and the Extrapolator will require further explanation and discussion.

Have students describe the setting of the story. Make sure they understand the world of the birdpeople and the difficulties that they face in both settlements on Argenta and identify elements that help categorise the novel as Science Fiction. Encourage students to study the main characters and track their development throughout the story. Students should make predictions about the story and be able to identify important themes and conflicts.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel:

- Describe the illustration on the front cover of the novel. What do you think *Argenta* is? Why do you think that the picture is in blue tones? Make a prediction about what the story might be about.
- Read the blurb of the novel. Who is the main character in the novel? Where does he live? What does he have to do to ensure the survival of the clan? Why does he fly into the Forbidden Zone? How do you think he gets transported to Earth?
- Who is Martin? What Mission do he and Anquin have to complete?

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-16) aloud to the students. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-16)

- Describe Anquin's life on Argenta. How does he feel about his life?
- Who is Cormar? What information does she give Anquin about the circumstances of his birth? Why is Anquin so upset when he learns what his future holds?
- Where does Martin live? Why is he so dissatisfied with his life? Who is Martin's mum? How does Martin feel about her?
- What unexpected event occurs while Martin is wandering through town?

Discussion

- Describe Argenta. How does life there differ from life on Earth?
- Why does Anquin decide to fly away from the settlement? What does this suggest about his character?
- What do we find out about Martin in these Chapters? What is the significance of the man on the motorbike?
- Make a prediction about what happens next in the story.

Students read Chapters 3-15 (pp. 17-92) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3-15 (pp. 17-92)

- Why does Anquin think that he is different from other birdpeople?
- Describe Anquin's journey into the Forbidden Zone. When he starts to panic what stops him from returning to the settlement?
- What does Martin's mother ask Martin to carry home? Why does he take his mother's cardigan as well? What does he spy in his mother's bag?
- Describe what Anquin sees when he arrives at the settlement. Why does he assume that the birdpeople there are middle generation? How do the birdpeople react when they see Anquin? Why do they react like this? What do they tell Anquin about his parents? Who is Kandor? Who demands that the birdpeople get back to work?
- Who is Martin's favourite hero? Who does he fight against?
- How does the Master treat Anquin? Why doesn't Anquin stand up to him? What job is he assigned? Why does he decide to leave?
- What does Kandor explain to Anquin about the Masters? Why do the birdpeople simply go along with the Masters' orders? What do Kandor and Anquin see arrive at the spaceport?
- Where do Kandor and Anquin hide so that they can hear what is going on in the Meeting Room? What has Krismon brought back from Earth with him? Why don't the Masters want to use it in front of the birdman? How did Krismon choose the Earthling to use the Replicator on? Who do you think this Earthling was? Why do the Masters decide to send Krismon back to Earth?
- Why are the Masters so disturbed by Anquin's sudden appearance? What do they decide to do about it?
- Why are the clan so dependent on the Masters? Why does Krismon make himself useful to the Masters?
- How do Anquin and Kandor communicate with Krismon?

- What motivates Martin to complain to his mother about how she treats him? How does Anne react to Martin's accusations? What newspaper article does she read that inspires her into action? How does she decide to protest?
- What does Anquin's father's message say? How does Anquin feel when he receives it?
- How does Anquin manage to get inside the spaceport? Why does Anquin enter the spacecraft? Describe the creature that he sees on board. What does Anquin hit him with? What is he horrified to discover when the creature speaks?
- Why is Krismon both thrilled and dismayed to see Anquin?
- Why does Anquin decide to complete Krismon's Mission? How does the Replicator work? Why is Anquin so excited when he sees Martin's thoughts? Why does he feel such a strong connection to the Earthling?
- What has Martin's mother painted on the protest placards? Why does Martin decide to go for a walk? How does he know that there is something strange going on? What does he see through the bushes? How does he react when he sees Anquin?

Discussion

- Describe Anquin. What qualities and attributes does he possess?
- Describe Martin's relationship with his mother. Why is he so embarrassed by her? What aspects of his life is Martin dissatisfied with?
- Who is your favourite superhero? What qualities do you admire about him or her?
- Anne Wilson has a strong social conscience and is not afraid to stand up for what she believes in. What problems in the world today concern you? What are some actions that you could take to draw attention to these issues? Why is it important that people take a stand when things are not right?
- In what ways are Martin and Anquin similar?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 16-35 (pp. 93-182) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 16-35 (pp. 93-182)

- Why does Cormar feel ashamed when she realises that Anquin has flown away? Why is Anquin's disappearance a crisis for the clan?

- Why is Mevak so shocked by what Cormar has to say? Why are the birdpeople reluctant to speak about disobedience?
- Why does Anquin leave the helmet for Martin to find? How does Martin feel when he puts the helmet on? What does he learn about Anquin? Who does he recognise from Anquin's thoughts?
- How do Anquin and Martin communicate with each other?
- Who is in the car park with Martin's mother when he returns? What does he think is strange about her?
- What happens when Anquin moves the helmet near the Extrapolator?
- What does Anquin share with Martin when they meet in the morning? Why does Martin have so much trouble returning to the spaceship? What does he do to ensure that he can find his way back?
- What does Martin see when he returns to the spaceship? How does he react to this vision? What does Anquin do when Martin shares his experience with him?
- What secrets are revealed during the meeting in the Great Cave? Why does the clan feel resentment towards the Masters? What admission does Semibel make during the meeting? How do the other birdpeople react to this?
- Krismon was aware that the Masters had made a mistake when they handed him the helmet with the Extrapolator inside. What do you think he planned to do with it? Why is he too ashamed to let Kandor see him?
- Why doesn't Anquin's "what if" hologram turn out like he expected it to?
- What scene does Martin ask the machine to show him? How does he feel while he is experiencing his adventure? What qualities does Martin display during the scene? Why is Martin so pleased with the outcome?
- Who does Martin decide should be the first person whose thoughts he records? How does he convince her to put the helmet on? What realisation does Martin come to as he leaves the girl's house?
- Why does Anquin begin to feel annoyed with Martin as he sits alone in the spaceship? How does his idea of saving the world differ from Martin's?
- What moral dilemma does Martin face as he carries the helmet to the spaceship? What would you do in his situation?
- Describe what happens when Martin asks the machine his "what if" question. Why is he so impressed with Wendy? Why does Anquin find the scene so funny? What does he call Martin that upsets him?
- Why does Anquin call Martin ordinary? How does he feel about it afterwards? How does he apologise? How does Anquin make Martin understand his position?
- Why do the birdpeople decide to make the Crossing? Why do they feel excited about this journey? What dangers do they face?

- Why is Semibel so thankful to Cormor?
- What realisation does Martin come to about his mother?
- Why does Anquin feel like such a failure? Who does he decide to try and find? Why does he need Martin's help?
- How does Martin react when he sees the reality of Anquin's life? Why does he decide to call the Masters the *Dorgazoids*? What understanding does Martin reach about the purpose of the "what if" machine?
- Who is in the car across from Martin's house? What news does she give Anquin? How do the Masters send messages to Earth?
- Why is Bartonya so upset when Anquin tells her what has happened? What does she order Anquin to do? Why is Martin so concerned that Anquin doesn't listen to his last message?
- Why does Martin need to get the "what if" machine off the spaceship? Why does he decide to go to Wendy for help? What does he decide to take with him to the spaceship?
- How does Wendy initially react when Martin tells her what is going on? How does her reaction change when she sees the spaceship? How does Martin convince her to help?
- Why is Bartonya convinced that she has to return the helmet to the spaceship? Why does Anquin defy his mother?
- What does Anquin see when he arrives at the spaceship? Why doesn't he warn Martin that his mother is on her way?
- Who is Bartonya to Martin and Wendy?
- Why is Martin convinced that he and Wendy need to get the helmet off the spaceship? How does Anquin help them?
- Who turns up unexpectedly at the spaceship?
- What does Martin's mum think that Janet Barton is doing to her son? What happens to the four human figures on the spaceship?

Discussion

- What would be the advantages and disadvantages of being able to read someone's mind? If you had a "what if" machine, what questions would you ask it?
- What are the Masters planning to do with the "what if" machine? How would this machine be helpful to them?
- Do you agree with Cormar when she says "obedience has been our ruin"? Explain your answer.
- When is it good to be obedient? When is it better not to obey?
- Is Cormar a hero? Explain your answer.
- Compare and contrast Martin's and Anquin's planets and lives.

- Anquin tells Martin "it takes a true hero to give up a lifetime". Do you agree with him? Why/why not?

Students read Chapters 36-52 (pp. 183-253) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 36-52 (pp. 183-253)

- Describe the Old Ones reunion with the other birdpeople. What orders do the Old Ones give the birdpeople? How do the Masters react to the unexpected arrival?
- Why is Bartonya so angry? What message does she send back to the Masters? Why is she so worried about what the Masters will do to them?
- Why do Wendy and Martin have so much trouble explaining evil to Anquin? [What does Anquin think the problem with the birdpeople is? - I don't like this question as I don't think Anquin thinks there's anything necessarily wrong with the birdpeople. I would substitute the following two questions.] Why are the Masters mean to the birdpeople? Why don't the birdpeople fight back? Why is it important for Wendy, Martin and Anquin to figure out how the Masters think?
- What interesting information does Krismon overhear in the space station? Why does the High Commander decide to come to Argenta with an army and weapons? Who does Krismon believe that the Masters think is on board the spaceship?
- Describe the plan that Anquin and the others devise. What could potentially go wrong with this plan?
- Why does Bartonya decide to leave the spaceship first? Who appears when the Dorgazoid asks about her Mission partner? Why does he return to the spaceship? What does Martin hand to him instead of the Extrapolator?
- Why is Martin so amazed when Anne asks him for advice? What two plans does he explain to her? What aspects of these plans rely on there only being six Dorgazoids on the base?
- How does Anquin feel when he thinks that Martin has given up the "what if" machine? Why do Martin and the others give themselves up?
- What memories are discussed during the Clan-gathering? How does how the birdpeople live now contrast with how they used to live? What news is delivered to the birdpeople that makes them fall silent?
- How does Martin feel when he sees all of the Dorgazoids with their weapons?

- What does Anquin do to ensure that he is able to get back into the building? Who meets him on the tower? Why does Kandor tell the birdpeople to follow the Masters' command? What message does Kandor pass on to Anquin from Krismon?
- What is Anquin's new plan? Who draws the picture? What role does Wendy play in the plan? Why does Martin feel so obliged to get his part of the plan right?
- How do the group identify the leader of the Dorgazoids? Why is he so keen to talk to the humans?
- How do Martin, Wendy and Anquin execute their plan? What question does Wendy ask the "what if" machine? What changes does the High Commander announce will occur at the base? What does the High Commander intend to do with the humans?
- How many birdpeople died in the battles?
- How will Krismon and Bartonya return to their birdfolk bodies?
- What is Kandor's new role in the clan?
- What do the clan discover when they arrive back at the settlement? What has Semibel done for the eggs in his care?
- What does Martin tell his friends he has been doing in the holidays? What has happened to Miss Barton? What news does Martin give Wendy about his father and about Anquin?

Discussion

- Who do you include in your clan? What would it be like if you included everybody in the world as a member of your clan?
- What does Mantoc mean when he says "when one ventures into the unknown, one never knows if things will be better or worse than before. Only that things will never be the same again"? Why is it important to take risks in life?
- Do you think it is important to fight back sometimes? Do you think things would have been more peaceful on Argenta if the birdpeople had had weapons?
- Martin, Wendy and Anquin's plan involved changing the High Commander's mind, Why was this more effective than fighting with him?
- What lessons do you think Martin has learned from his adventure? How will his life be different from now on?
- Identify the climax of the novel and explain why this event is important.
- What do you think the author's message is?

Activities

Storyboard - Choose 10 important events that occur in *Argenta*. Design a storyboard that illustrates each of these events in the order that they occur. Under each picture write a brief description about what is happening.

Static Image - Design a poster advertising *Argenta* that is suitable for displaying in your school library. Combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

Plot - Choose an important section of the story and retell it in your own words.

Review - Write a book review for *Argenta*. Include a brief plot summary. Explain the setting and the themes of the story. Include information about the main characters and explain whether you believe the characters are credible. Remember to include your personal opinion about the novel.

Theme - Choose an important idea or theme developed in the novel. Design a collage that uses images, words and symbols to portray this theme.

Issues - Did anything in the story make you change your mind about something? If you did, what was it in the story that caused it and why?

Character - Complete a character description for Martin Wilson. Include information about his qualities and characteristics and any difficulties that he had to overcome. Back up your ideas with quotes from the story.

Play - Choose an exciting event that occurs in the story and write a script for it. Include a list of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Letter - Write a letter to the author explaining why you enjoyed reading her book and what it taught you.

Setting - Design a poster of the two settings in the novel: Earth and Argenta.

Notes written by Vicki Williams