Denzil's Dilemma

Author: Sherryl Jordan

Synopsis

Denzil is Valvasor's apprentice wizard. He is so talented that some believe that his power is almost as great as that of his master. The only problem is that Denzil is lazy, sneaky and has a penchant for stealing things. He also uses his magic in ways that are forbidden by his master – to do his chores for example. Denzil is returning home after one such disasterous spell when he is confronted by one of the village children. Rowl accuses Denzil of being a liar. He overheard Mother Wyse telling Valvasor about Denzil's adventures with Sam in the future. Mother was the only person who Denzil trusted to tell his amazing story about Sam's strange modern world with its cars and motorbikes, computers and videos, and the terrible black dragon called a train. Now Mother Wyse has betrayed him. Valvasor knows about the sacred charm he stole and the forbidden, powerful magic that he used. Denzil is terrified of the punishment that his master will mete out to him. There is only one thing for it he decides. He must bring Sam to his time so that she can convince Valvasor that he only borrowed that charm and that he isn't really wicked.

So Denzil devises a spell that enables Sam to travel through time. She arrives at his cottage dressed in costume as an angel and this is how the confusion starts. It turns out that Valvasor isn't really angry with Denzil after all, but he will be if he finds out that Denzil has been dabbling in powerful magic again. Denzil must keep Sam's presence a secret. Meanwhile Sam proves to be an effective angel by helping the villagers with their many problems. Denzil tries hard to devise a spell to send Sam back to her own time but then discovers something shocking. He can't send Sam back. Sam has to learn enough magic to send herself! But who will teach Sam and how long will it take? Surely her family will be wondering what has happened to her?

Text Type

Denzil's Dilemma is the second novel in a series written by New Zealand author Sherryl Jordan. The novel is highly readable with enough action and humour to keep even the most reluctant reader engaged. Set in modern New Zealand and in England during the 1200's, *Denzil's Dilemma* is full of magic, spells, wizards and enchantment. Delightful illustrations mark the start of each chapter in the book.

Even though *Denzil's Dilemma* is the second book in the series it stands alone. All pertinent information from *The Wednesday Wizard* is presented in the first chapter so that readers understand the premise for the story.

In this novel the reader is reacquainted with Denzil and Sam, the main protagonists. Denzil is a likeable rogue. He has a hugely dramatic personality

and constantly becomes entangled in silly antics, which invariably have hilarious outcomes. Sam is more than a match for Denzil. Clever and headstrong she refuses to be pushed around by Denzil, but is thrilled to be in his world and more than happy to go along with some of his hair brained schemes if she believes that they are for the greater good.

In *Denzil's Dilemma* Valvasor tries to teach his young apprentice that he must respect magic and use it wisely. Although Denzil is talented he lacks self-control and common sense. Unfortunately, it is a lesson that Denzil seems unwilling to learn.

Themes include time travel, friendship, magic, the importance of having faith and belief and loyalty.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 9-22), Chapters 2-7 (pp. 23-103) and Chapters 8-13 (pp. 104-173).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas. Have them make predictions about what is going to happen in the story. Students should read closely and make inferences.

Students need to be able to identify the elements of the novel that make it a fantasy. Encourage them to make the leap of imagination necessary to become engrossed in Denzil's world of wizards and magic. Have them compare Denzil's own time with the modern world.

Readers should examine the main characters Denzil and Sam and compare and contrast them. They should discuss the negative and positive characteristics that each has and how each develops or changes as the story progresses. Encourage students to look at the relationship between the pair and discuss why they are such good friends despite being so vastly different. The minor characters Valvasor and Mother Wyse are also interesting.

Encourage students to identify and discuss the main themes and issues raised in the text.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What kind of novel is this? What do you expect from a novel of this genre?
- What is a dilemma? What do you think Denzil's Dilemma might be?
- What do we find out about the main character from the blurb?

- Make some predictions about is going to happen in the story.

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 9-22) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 9-22)

- How does Denzil get the donkey to cross the bridge? Why does Denzil immediately regret what he has done? How does Denzil get out of the icy pond?
- How do the village children react when Rowl begins to taunt Denzil? Why do they react like this? What does Rowl tell Denzil he overheard Mother Wyse telling Valvasor? Why is Denzil so upset when he learns that Valvasor knows about his journey into the future? Why doesn't Denzil run away?
- Why is Denzil so hurt by Mother Wyse's betrayal?
- What costume is Sam's mum making for her? Who is Murgatroyd?
- What does Sam remember about her friend Denzil?
- Why do you think Sam thinks about snow on such a hot day?

Discussion

- What do we learn about Denzil from this first chapter? Who does he live with? What sort of person is he? How does he know Sam?
- Have you ever been betrayed by someone? If so, what happened and how did it make you feel?
- If Valvasor already knows that Denzil stole his sacred charm and travelled into the future why do you think he hasn't punished Denzil?
- What do you think is going to happen in the story next? Will Denzil and Sam meet up again? If so, how?

Students read Chapters 2-7 (pp. 23-103) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2-7 (pp. 23-103)

- Why does Denzil believe that he has to bring Sam to his world? How does the spell that Denzil chooses work? What does the charm that Denzil takes from Valvasor symbolise?
- What does Sam think of while she is posing for the photo? What happens to her when she repeats the words?
- Why is Denzil so alarmed when he initially sees Sam? Why does the pair argue?
- Who else is outside when Sam arrives in Denzil's world? How does she react when she sees Sam?
- Where does Denzil get a dress for Sam? How does Sam feel when Denzil leaves her alone in the cottage? Why is Sam so confused when she tries to get dressed?

- Where does Sam hide while Denzil waits for Valvasor to get home? Why doesn't Denzil want her to touch anything up there?
- What have the people in the village been saying about Denzil and Sam?
- What explanation does Denzil give Valvasor for his time travelling? How does Valvasor know that he is lying? How does Denzil know that he is forgiven for his indiscretion? Why does he decide that Sam should remain a secret for now?
- How does Sam feel when she realises that she has lost her watch? Why is the watch so special to her?
- What flies towards Sam in the darkness and scares her? How does Denzil cover up her scream?
- Why doesn't Denzil get up in the night to work on the spell to send Sam home like he planned?
- Who is waiting to see Denzil in the morning? Why do they consider Denzil to be the most honoured son in the village? What gifts does Mother Goodhart present to him? Why are the villagers so adamant that they need to see the angel? What does Denzil agree to do to try and get the angel to return?
- Where does Valvasor go for the day?
- Why is Sam reluctant to show herself to the villagers? What deal does Denzil strike with her?
- What is Black Death?
- What does Sam discover in the straw when she gets changed into her angel costume? Why isn't Denzil very surprised to see Sam's discovery?
- What is a changeling? What startling revelation does Denzil make to Sam about his own childhood?
- Who comes into the stable and discovers Sam and Denzil? How do they react when they see Sam? Why are the villagers so excited when they notice the baby? Why do they think that they are blessed?
- Why does Sam suddenly realise that she can't go home yet? What does Denzil promise to do for her after he has finished the spell?
- Describe Mother Wyse. Why is Sam enchanted with her? Why isn't Denzil pleased to see her?
- Why does Mother Wyse transport her cottage into Valvasor's house? How does Denzil deal with this little problem? Why does Mother Wyse think that Denzil's magic is coming along nicely?
- Why doesn't Valvasor notice Denzil's guilty expression when he storms into the cottage? Why are the villagers organising a rat hunt? How does Valvasor plan to help?
- What horrible thought does Denzil have about Murgatroyd? How does Sam allay his fears?
- Why does Denzil accuse Sam of causing all the trouble? Do you agree that everything is Sam's fault? Why/why not?
- What does Denzil decide to turn all the rats into? What is the purpose of his plan? Why isn't the spell exactly what Denzil is after?
- What makes Sam think that Denzil has turned people into stones?

- Who attacks Denzil with a broom? What does she think he is doing? How does she react when she sees Sam?
- Why does Sam feel sad as she looks around the village? How does she feel poking around in people's possessions? How do her feelings contrast with Denzil's?
- Who does Sam meet in the last home that she visits? What is the girl doing? What is special about the girl? What does she give Sam as a gift? Why does Sam bend over the girl before she leaves?
- Who do Sam and Denzil meet as they continue their search? What is he swinging?

Discussion

- Do you think Valvasor knows that Sam is hiding in the cottage? Why/why not? If he does know that she is there why do you think he pretends that he doesn't?
- Describe Denzil's relationship with Valvasor. Does Denzil respect his master? Why/why not? Why does Valvasor have such a soft spot for his young apprentice? What does Denzil do that annoys him?
- Describe Sam and Denzil's relationship. What does each like about the other? Why is Sam a good match for Denzil? Is Denzil a good friend? Why/why not?
- How is Denzil's world different to Sam's? In what ways is life harder in the 1200's? What modern conveniences do people have to do without?
- Why is it so important for people to have hope and something to believe in?
- What do you think will happen to Sam if Denzil can't work out a spell to send her home?
- Make a prediction about what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 8-13 (pp. 104-173) independently before the next shared session

Comprehension Chapters 8-13 (pp. 104-173)

- What does Rowl tease Denzil about? Why doesn't Denzil retaliate? What does Sam do to Rowl? Why is she so astounded when she sees what rolls out of his sack?
- What does Rowl tell Sam and Denzil when he learns what they are searching for? Why do Sam and Denzil get into a fight with Rowl? How does Denzil rescue them from the fray?
- How does Sam feel after her first flying experience?
- Why does Sam refuse to return home? How does she know that the spell has worn off? Why does she decide to put her angel costume back on?
- How do the villagers react when they see the "angel"? What message does Sam give them? Why does it feel "all wrong" to her? What exciting discovery does Sam make about Milda's illness? Why does she decide to let Milda keep her watch?

- How does Sam get Murgatroyd back? Why do the villagers see this as a sign?
- What does Valvasor tell Denzil about the spell that he used to bring Sam back in time? Why does Sam have trouble thinking of someone to send the spell to? Who do you think would be the best person?
- Who does Valvasor decide should teach Sam magic? How does Denzil react when Valvasor mentions her name?
- What interesting admission does Valvasor make to Denzil when he hears him badmouthing Mother Wyse? Why explanation does he give Denzil for why he didn't punish him? Why does Valvasor admire his young apprentice?
- Why are the people of the village waiting outside the cottage? What miracles do they want the Christ Child to perform for them? Why doesn't Valvasor think that Denzil should tell them the truth? How does he want Denzil to solve the problem?
- Where does Valvasor take Sam while Denzil is trying to work out his spell? What does he want the strange woman to teach Sam?
- What does mother Wyse call Sam? Why does Sam find it frustrating talking to the old woman? Which picture does Sam choose out of the book? Why does Sam have trouble focussing on her task? How do you send a connecting word?
- How does Sam know that Mother Wyse really did come and visit her world?
- Why are pictures so much easier to send than words?
- Why does Denzel have so much trouble creating a spell to help all of the villagers? Why does Emmeline create a particular problem for him? Who turns up while Denzil is reciting the spell? Why does his presence create such a problem for Denzil?
- What wondrous sight greets Sam as she enters the village? What does she notice about Emmeline when Milda hands her the watch?
- Why is she so surprised when Denzil agrees to go flying with Rowl?
- Where does Valvasor take the baby? What does he tell the people in the village about where the baby is going?
- What does Valvasor tell Sam when she reveals that she feels bad for deceiving the villagers?
- Who does Sam think of when she wants to return home?
- Why isn't Mrs MacAllister more worried about Sam's disappearance? How does her attitude contrast with Mr MacAllister's? What is Mr MacAllister's explanation for Denzil's abilities?
- What image comes into Travis's head when he goes outside to think about Sam? Why does he feel unsettled and on edge? What happens when he looks at the can of beer that he is drinking?
- Where does Denzil go on Christmas day? Why is he looking forward to having some company so much? Who does he meet on his journey? What startling discovery does he make about her?
- What shocking news does Mother Wyse give Denzil about the Christ Child?
- What happens to Denzil at Christmas? How does he feel about this?

Discussion

- Is Denzel an exceptionally good wizard who excels at organising things, or an incurably bad wizard who has incredibly good luck? Explain your answer.
- Do you believe that Valvasor is right when he tells Denzil that sometimes it's best not to destroy people's dreams? Explain your answer.
- How do you think Emmeline got her eyesight back? What is Mother Wyse's suggestion for how the feat was achieved? Do you believe in miracles? Explain your answer.
- Do you think Sam returned home safely? Why/why not?
- What lessons do you think Denzil and Sam have learnt from their experiences?

Activities

Items – Imagine that Sam knows that Denzil is going to transport her back in time to his world. Choose 5 items that she would pack to take with her and explain why she would choose them.

Plot – Complete a plot graph for *Denzil's Dilemma*. Label the vertical axis "Level of Excitement". Label the horizontal axis "Events" and list 10 important events from the novel in the order that they occur. Plot each event on the graph according to its level of excitement.

Plot – Complete a storyboard for *Denzil's Dilemma.* Choose 15 important events from the story and illustrate them in the order that they occur. Under each illustration write a brief explanation about what is happening.

Character – Complete a character profile for one of the main characters in the novel. Use quotes from the novel to back up your ideas.

Newspaper Front Page – Create a newspaper for Denzil's village. Choose a name for your paper and include a banner headline. Your front page should contain a feature article, a news article and an advertisement.

Writing – Write an epilogue for the novel that explains what happens when Sam returns home.

Theme – Choose an important theme from the novel and explain how the author develops the idea.

Research – Conduct a research assignment about the Black Death. Formulate focussing questions to guide your research. Use a range of oral, written and visual resources to gather your information. Present your information on a poster, as an essay or as an oral presentation.

Static Image – Design a new book cover and write a new blurb for *Denzil's Dilemma*. Write a paragraph explaining why your design will encourage people to read the novel.

Writing – Imagine that you are a wizard and want to cast a spell. Write your spell using interesting and lively language and present it attractively.