

The Great Bear Burglary

Author: Sherryl Jordan

Synopsis

Denzil is used to trouble. He has been in his fair share of scrapes but usually finds a way of talking his way out of them, or using magic to solve his problem. But this time is different. This time he has made such a monumental mistake that he is in grave danger of being terminated as a wizard's apprentice by his master Valvasor. Firstly, Denzil delivers charms for Valentine's Day to the wrong women, causing the wrong men to fall in love with them. Then Denzil makes pigs fly. Literally. Denzil should be old enough to remember and respect the great laws of magic that say you should never touch a human being, or an animal, with magic against its will. As punishment Valvasor forbids Denzil from going to the fair. Instead he must stay home and complete his chores and think about what he has done.

However, the lure of the fair proves too much for Denzil. He casts a spell to complete his chores, including one to exercise the donkey, and heads to the fair. Here Denzil has a marvellous time, until he discovers that the dancing bear is being severely mistreated by its owners. They force it to stand on a hot plate and it dances because it is trying to avoid burning its feet. Unable to leave the miserable animal to its fate Denzil steals him from his owners and plans to take him home to Valvasor's cottage. When he arrives home, however, his master is furious with him. Denzil has disobeyed him one time too often. If he puts another spell on a helpless beast Valvasor will terminate their partnership. Denzil begins to panic. He can't possibly show his master the bear now. There is only one thing for it. Denzil must travel through time with the bear and go and visit his friend Sam. Hopefully she will know what to do.

But harbouring a bear in the future proves to be just as difficult as hiding one in Denzil's time. Sam's grandmother is staying with the family and between trying to keep the bear a secret from her and the MacAllister's cantankerous neighbour Mr Gump, the family becomes adept at telling lies. Mr MacAllister's refusal to believe that Denzil is a wizard from the future and his insistence that he meet Valvasor adds to Denzil's problems. Are the MacAllister's ready for more of Denzil's high jinx? And what will happen if he can't return to being an apprentice in his own time?

Text Type

The Great Bear Burglary is the third novel in New Zealand Author Sherryl Jordan's series about Denzil, the wizard's apprentice. The novel is fast-paced, action-packed and often hilarious. It has broad appeal for readers of both genders. The story is set in London in the 1200's and in modern day New Zealand. The reader is given a unique look at what life was like in medieval times. Although this novel is the third in the series, it is not necessary for

students to have read the previous novels. The book stands alone and all pertinent information is provided so that students understand the premise for the story.

In this story the reader is reacquainted with Denzil and Sam, the main protagonists. Denzil is a loveable rogue who can't seem to keep out of trouble. Hugely dramatic, talented and sly, Denzil is a likeable character despite his at times selfish behaviour. Sam is headstrong and adventurous and refuses to be bossed around by her sexist friend.

Although Denzil's heart is in the right place he tends to go about things the wrong way and causes no end of trouble. In *The Great Bear Burglary* he learns that he must value and honour the gifts that he possesses by being a responsible and trustworthy wizard. Denzil's relationship with Sam is also put to the test in this novel when the pair has a terrible argument. Each learns the importance of apologising and the value of admitting when you are wrong.

Themes include cruelty to animals, vivisection, time travel, friendship, magic and being responsible and listening to and learning from your elders.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 7-23), Chapters 2-5 (pp. 24-83), Chapters 6-10 (pp. 84-169) and Chapters 11-14 (pp. 170-233).

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.

Encourage students to identify and discuss the main themes and issues raised in the text. The treatment of animals in the 1200's compared with today and the issue of animal testing are particularly interesting.

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?
- Who is the main character in the novel? What is special about him?
- Why is the novel called *The Great Bear Burglary*?
- Make some predictions about what will happen in the story.

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 7-23) aloud. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 7-23)

- Why does Denzil want to borrow Valvasor's ceremonial robes? What does Valvasor say to his request?
- What does Valvasor want Denzil to deliver to the three ladies from the village? Why doesn't Denzil take his request very seriously? How does he choose which chocolate to give to which woman?
- Who is Sam? Where does she live? What does Denzil miss the most about her world?
- What does Denzil notice as he passes Mother Gurtler's courtyard? What revelation does he have as he studies the animals?
- How did Denzil come to live with Valvasor?
- How does Denzil feel when he successfully casts the spell on the pigs? How does Valvasor react when he sees what Denzil has done?
- What are the Great Laws of magic? What does Denzil think magic is for? What does Valvasor tell Denzil about magic?
- How does Valvasor punish Denzil for his careless use of magic? Where does Valvasor go for the day? What does Denzil do to ensure that he won't miss the fair?

Discussion

- What do we learn about Denzil in this chapter? Why does Denzil prefer the term burglar to thief? Why do you think he is always getting into trouble? What do you think it is about his personality that usually enables him to weasel his way out of trouble?
- How does Valvasor feel about his young charge? What sort of values is he trying to teach him?
- Do you believe in magic? Why/why not? If you had magical powers what is the one thing you would most like to do?
- How do you think Valvasor is going to react when he realises that Denzil disobeyed him and went to the fair? Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2-5 (pp. 24-83) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2-5 (pp. 24-83)

- What brilliant idea occurs to Denzil when he is on his way to the fair? How do the people at the fair react when he arrives?
- What makes Denzil think about Sam while he is at the fair? When did Sam visit his village? Who taught her some magic?
- Why doesn't the fair seem as wonderful to Denzil as usual? What does he miss about Sam's world?
- Describe the bear that Denzil sees. Why is it so amusing to watch? Why does Denzil find the bear so enthralling? What does Denzil discover about the bear when he sneaks into the tent? Why does he call the bear Wimpy? How does the bear react when Denzil unbolts his cage? Why does he react like this? How does Denzil remove Wimpy from his cage? Why is he so sure that Valvasor will disapprove of his actions?
- Why is Denzil so shocked when he arrives home? How does Valvasor know that Denzil laid his magic on an animal again? What does Valvasor threaten to do if Denzil puts any more spells on animals? How does his threat make Denzil feel?
- What does Valvasor notice lying beside Denzil as he sleeps in the stable? How does he know that Denzil has been up to mischief? What does he do to try and minimise the impact of Denzil's spell?
- Why are the three women who come over to the cottage in the morning so furious with Valvasor? How does Valvasor deal with this situation? What decision does their sudden appearance prompt Denzil to make? Who else unexpectedly turns up at the door? Why are they so angry with Denzil? What do they threaten to do to him? What does Denzil do to solve his problem?
- How old is Sam? Who are Theresa and Adam?
- Why is Theresa so unimpressed with her Valentine's Day present? Why does Sam hope that Theresa and Adam won't split up?
- Why is Sam's grandmother staying with the family? Why is Sam's mum so worried about her?
- What does Sam see when she goes to close the sliding glass doors? What does Denzil do when he comes inside? Why does Sam admire her mother so much at that moment?
- How does Sam's mum react when she sees the bear? Why does she tell Denzil that both he and the bear will need to go back? Why does Denzil tell her that he is not just visiting?
- What happens to scare the bear? Where does he run off to? Why does the bear look so pitiful when he returns? Why does Mrs MacAllister believe that her neighbour must be out?
- Where does Mrs MacAllister instruct Sam and Theresa to take the bear?
- Why does Mrs MacAllister think that Denzil's surprise visit is not very well-timed?
- Where does Mr MacAllister work? Why does he find his new job so stressful?

- How does Mr McAllister react when he learns that Denzil will be staying with them for a little while? Why is he so surprised when he first sees his house guest in Sam's room? What is Denzil wearing around his waist? Why does he refuse to change his outfit?
- What happens to Mr MacAllister when he prods the bear? What is Denzil's explanation for what happened to Mr MacAllister? Why is everyone so adamant that Mr MacAllister needs to see a doctor?
- Describe Mr Gump. Why is he so angry when he comes over to see the MacAllister's? Who comes out and confronts the old man? Why does Mr Gump present the family with a bill? What does Denzil do to exact revenge Mr Gump?

Discussion

- What lessons do you think Denzil needs to learn about how to use his magic? What do you think would happen to him if he didn't have Valvasor to guide him?
- How is the bear at the fair treated? How does the treatment of the bear make you feel? How does the treatment of animal in the 1200's differ from how they are treated today? What do you think has brought about these changes?
- Does Denzil do the right thing by stealing the bear from the fair? Explain your answer. What does the fact that he does this suggest about his character? How do you think Valvasor would have reacted if Denzil told him what he had done and why he did it? Why doesn't Valvasor confront Denzil when he discovers the stone bear in the stable?
- Why do you think everyone believes that Denzil has travelled through time except Mr MacAllister? What explanation does he come up with for Denzil's special abilities?
- Describe Denzil. What is it about him that is so endearing? Why does Valvasor find it hard to stay angry with him? Why are the MacAllister's so pleased to see him despite the fact that they know he will cause no end of trouble? What positive and negative characteristics does he possess?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 6-10 (pp. 84-169) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 6-10 (pp. 84-169)

- Why does the bear badly need to be seen by a vet? Why can't Denzil cure him?
- Who arrives home from work? How does he react when he sees Denzil? What does he say that makes the whole family suddenly leave the house?

- Why is Travis's grandmother pleased that he didn't inherit his father's temperament? What else does the pair discuss while the rest of the family is out?
- Why is the family so angry with Travis when they arrive home?
- What do Travis and Denzil discover about the bear when they go and check on him in the garage? Why does Travis warn Denzil not to tell Mr MacAllister what has happened?
- Why has Denzil's visit cost Mr MacAllister so much money?
- What happens when Mrs MacAllister calls the family vet? Why does Mr MacAllister call the vet back? What does he learn during this conversation? What problems does having the bear cause the MacAllister family? Can you think of a solution to these problems?
- Why is Denzil so upset when he learns that Mr MacAllister wants to talk to Valvasor? Why does he suddenly realise that Mr MacAllister can't go and visit Valvasor? Why does he make a big mistake by showing Mr MacAllister the charm? What does Mr MacAllister plan to do with it?
- What idea does Denzil come up with for earning money? What does Sam suggest that he call his business?
- Why does Sam begin to worry about Joplin? Why does Adam try and help her find him? How does Theresa react to Adam's concern?
- Why does Denzil refuse to turn Wimpy into another animal so that he can take him to the vet? What does this suggest that Denzil has learnt from his recent experiences?
- Why do Sam and Denzil argue? Is Sam being fair to Denzil? Why/why not? What spell does Denzil cast on Sam? Is Denzil really being selfish? Explain your answer.
- Who does Sam discuss her woes with? How does she react to Sam's story? What advice does she offer Sam? What clever idea does Sam have for contacting Valvasor?
- Describe how Sam tries to make contact with Mother Wyse.
- Why does Gran wake suddenly from her sleep? What does she think she is seeing? What does the strange visitor give Gran?
- Where does Mother Wyse finally catch up with Sam? Who do her parents think that she is in the bathroom with? What does Sam ask mother Wyse to do?
- Why does Theresa go storming into Sam's room? What does Sam say that embarrasses her?
- What did Sam's mum talk to Mr MacAllister about while they were out walking? What has he been so worried about lately?
- Who brings Joplin into Sam's room? Where did her father find Murgatroyd?
- What else does Adam give Theresa as a Valentine's Day present? How does she react to his gift? Why do you think she acts like this?
- Why is everyone so worried about Denzil?
- Why is everyone so astonished when Gran walks into the kitchen in the morning?

- What is Denzil holding when he rushes into the kitchen in the morning? Where did Denzil get it from? Why does Mr MacAllister think that Denzil is lying?
- What does Denzil turn Mr MacAllister in to? Why does he do this? How does the rest of the family react to what happens?
- Why is Sam worried that Mr MacAllister won't come back?
- Why is Sam astonished when she sees inside Mr Gump's house? Why is she so fascinated by the pictures on the walls? How does the Mr Gump in the photos contrast with the Mr Gump that Sam knows? What excuse does Sam come up with for being in Mr Gump's house? What amazing discovery does Sam make about her cantankerous neighbour during her visit to his home?
- How does Mr Gump react when Sam tells him about the bear?

Discussion

- Why is the charm so important to Denzil? Is Mr MacAllister being fair when he takes it off him? Why/why not? What do you think will happen if Denzil doesn't get the charm back?
- What do you think about Denzil's idea for a business? Can you think of other ways that Denzil could use his talents to earn a living?
- Who do you think is responsible for the disappearing pets?
- Describe Sam's relationship with Denzil. Why are they such good friends? What does each like about the other?
- How does Sam's Grandmother react when Sam tells her the fantastic tale about Denzil and the bear? What does this suggest about her character? Why do you think old people are often wise?
- What do you think Mr Gump will do when he sees that his neighbours have a bear living in their garage?

Students read Chapters 11-14 (pp. 170-233) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 11-14 (pp. 170-233)

- What does Theresa tell Adam that hurts him? How does Adam react to her news? What does this suggest about him as a person?
- Why does Mr Gump's treatment of Wimpy surprise everyone so much? What is wrong with Wimpy? Who does Mr Gump threaten to tell about the bear? How does Travis persuade him that this is not a good idea?
- What does Mrs MacAllister order Denzil to do immediately? Why does this command make Denzil so nervous? What happens to Mr MacAllister when he eventually returns home?
- What does Gran mean when she says to Mr Gump "We could have a lot of regrets, if we don't make the most of this life"? Why is Mr Gump so impressed with Gran?
- What is Mr Gump's assessment of Mr MacAllister's injuries? How does everyone react when Mr Gump releases the "bird"? Why is Mrs MacAllister so worried that her husband won't come back? How does

she react when he becomes himself again? How does Mr MacAllister feel after his adventure? What positive after-effect does his escapade have?

- What do the MacAllister's learn about the missing animals from the television report?
- How do Mr and Mrs MacAllister react when they learn that Gran has stopped taking her pills? What happens to stop Mr MacAllister from calling her doctor?
- Who drops in unexpectedly while everyone is sitting in the lounge? Describe each family member's reaction to the surprise visitor.
- What message does Mother Wyse deliver to Denzil from Valvasor? Why has Valvasor gone to his cottage in the Great Wood? How does Denzil feel after Mother Wyse delivers her news?
- What chaos does Wimpy cause when Denzil and Sam bring him into the house?
- What does Denzil ask Mr MacAllister for when he is preparing to return home? Why doesn't Mr MacAllister give it to him? What does Denzil try to do to punish Mr MacAllister? Who stops him?
- What does Denzil do to disturb Theresa's date with Charles? Why doesn't Sam want Theresa going out with him?
- What does Sam find when she goes to pick some parsley? What does Sam tell Denzil he has to do before he returns home? Describe what happens when Denzil casts his spell.
- Where does Denzil stop before he goes home?
- Describe Denzil's reunion with Valvasor. What has he brought back home with him? Why isn't Valvasor angry with him?

Discussion

- Describe Mr Gump. Why do you think he is so grumpy? How does his behaviour around animals differ from his behaviour around humans? Why is this? What lessons do you think he learns from being around Gran?
- What is your opinion about doing experiments on animals? Formulate arguments both for and against this practise.
- Why is having a positive attitude important for people who are ill? Do you believe that the power of the mind can cure diseases? Are natural remedies as effective as prescription medications?
- What lessons do you think Denzil has learnt from his experiences?

Activities

Debate – Conduct a classroom debate about the topic “Testing on animals is essential”.

Research – Conduct a research assignment on an aspect of life in the 1200's. Formulate 3 focussing questions to guide your research. Use a range of written, visual and oral sources to gather your information. Present your findings as an essay, on a poster or as an oral presentation.

Plot – Create a flow diagram that shows 15 important events from the novel in the order that they occur.

Diary Entry – Imagine that you are Sam. Write a diary entry for the night after you have your argument with Denzil explaining the events of the day and your thoughts and feelings about them.

News Report – Write a television news story about the mysterious disappearance of the animals from the university. Video your presentation and present it to the class.

Theme – Choose an important theme from the novel and write several paragraphs explaining how this idea is developed in the story. Use quotes from the story to reinforce your ideas.

Conflict – Identify an important conflict in the novel. Explain why it occurs and how it is resolved.

Static Image – Design a poster advertising *The Great Bear Burglary* that would be suitable for displaying in your school library. Remember to combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

Drama – Choose an exciting scene from the book and write a script for it. Remember to include a cast of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Character – Imagine that Sam takes Denzil to school to give a talk about himself to the class. Write Denzil's speech and then present it in role.