

The Silver Dragon

Author: Sherryl Jordan

Synopsis

It seems like a typical night in Northwood when Denzil and Valvasor are interrupted by a mysterious visitor. The midnight caller is Friar Gregory. He has come to ask for Valvasor's help. Friar Gregory has a dream that one day every boy and girl will be able to read. For this to happen the world needs more books. At the moment books are copied out by hand in the scriptorium by the monks. It is a painstakingly slow process, one that Friar Gregory plans to speed up with Valvasor's help. He wants the wizard to create a thousand quills so that the books may be produced faster. This must remain secret however, because the monks have a deep distrust of magic.

When Denzil learns of Gregory's dream he becomes extremely excited. He has seen thousands of books in one room – at his friend Sam's house. Sam lives in the future and the books there are created using a magnificent invention called the printing press. Denzil tries to tell Gregory about this invention but he is cautioned by Valvasor, who tells Denzil that "life will unfold, wonders will be invented, discoveries made, all in good time". If new ideas are brought from the future before their time history could be altered in disastrous ways. But Denzil doesn't heed Valvasor's warning. He is a headstrong wizard's apprentice and once he gets an idea in his head it is almost impossible to change his mind. The only problem is that Denzil has no idea how to build a printing press. However, he knows someone who might. Adam, a clever young man who he met in the future just might be able to help.

All Denzil has to do is transport Adam back in time over 700 years. He has transported Sam before so it shouldn't be that hard. Unfortunately Denzil gets it wrong this time and although Adam is transported, so are Mr and Mrs MacAllister, Sam and Sam's older sister Theresa. They arrive in Northwood in Mr MacAllister's brand new car; a strange machine that the villagers believe must be a silver dragon. Chaos ensues and the family gets caught up in the hunt for the mysterious dragon.

While everyone enjoys their medieval experience (even Mr MacAllister, who is convinced that he is on an elaborate movie set), they are eager to return home. This proves difficult when Sam, Theresa, Mrs MacAllister and Adam are kidnapped by Avaldamon, a master illusionist who also happens to be Valvasor's evil brother. Denzil goes to Avaldamon's castle to try and rescue his friends, a feat which proves difficult because his powers don't work inside Avaldamon's stronghold. Will Denzil be able to save his friends using just his courage and cunning, or will he fail to rise to the occasion now that he can't rely on his magic?

Text Type

The Silver Dragon is the fourth novel in New Zealand author Sherryl Jordan's series about Denzil, a talented and mischievous young wizard. While the novel is part of a series it stands alone, and all pertinent information is provided to readers at the start of the novel so that they understand the premise of the story.

The Silver Dragon is a fast-paced adventure fantasy. It has broad appeal for both boys and girls. Set primarily in England in the 1200's the novel deals with time travel and the idea that time and history must take their proper courses.

In *The Silver Dragon* the reader is reunited with the main protagonists Sam and Denzil. Both are hugely likeable characters. Denzil is dramatic, headstrong, cunning and talented as a wizard, but he lacks common sense and wisdom. His impulsiveness often leads him into trouble and hilarious adventures often ensue. Sam is more than a match for the vain and wilful Denzil. She is strong-willed, compassionate, brave and whimsical- a quality that allows her to embrace Denzil, his powers and her own experiences in 13th century London.

The Silver Dragon also sees other members of Sam's family trying to cope with the strange and sometimes dangerous world of medieval London. Readers, like Adam, will be fascinated by the insight provided into what life was really like back then.

Themes include time travel, adapting to a new and foreign way of life, trying to change the course of history, friendship and bravery. Most importantly in this novel Denzil is faced with the challenge of defeating an adversary without his special powers. He can call only on his own skills and cunning to solve his crisis.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 5-23), Chapters 2-5 (pp. 24-82), Chapters 6-10 (pp. 83-166) and Chapters 11-14 (pp. 167-237).

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 idea that ideas brought from the future and changes made before they are due will change history in disastrous ways, is particularly worth discussing.

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?
- Have you read any other books from this series? If so, write down what the novels are about and what you enjoyed the most about them.
- Who are the main characters in this novel? What do we learn about them from the blurb?
- Make some predictions about what is going to happen in the story.

Teacher reads Chapter 1 aloud. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 5-23)

- Describe the setting of the story.
- Who is the mysterious midnight visitor? What does he want? Why is he taking such a risk visiting Valvasor's cottage?
- What does Denzil tell Friar Gregory about the books that he has seen in Sam's world? Why doesn't Valvasor want Denzil talking to people about his adventures into the future?
- How does Valvasor explain the creation of the quills to Friar Gregory? Why does this make the monk feel better?
- Why does Gregory want to speak to Denzil alone before he leaves? How does he convince Denzil to disobey his master?

Discussion

- Describe the setting of the story.
- What do we learn about Denzil in this chapter? What kind of person is he? What sort of powers does he have? Why is he so eager to share his knowledge with Friar Gregory? What is Denzil's relationship to Valvasor?
- Is Valvasor right when he tells Denzil that "time and history must have their proper courses"? Explain your answer.
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2-5 (pp. 24-82) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2-5 (pp. 24-82)

- What does Denzil tell Friar Gregory about the machines that he learnt about in the future? How does Friar Gregory convince Denzil to try and create such a machine for him? Why does Friar Gregory believe that Denzil has been placed in his life for a wondrous purpose?
- Why can't Denzil simply build a printing press? What solution does he come up with for his problem?
- Why do both Friar Gregory and Denzil have to keep their plans a secret?
- What is a Connecting Word?
- Why do Sam and her family decide to go for a drive? Who turns up just before they leave? What has he brought for Sam?
- Describe Adam. What does Sam love about him?
- Why doesn't Mr MacAllister believe that Denzil is really a wizard?
- Why isn't Theresa very keen on Adam joining the family for their drive?
- What explanation does Mr MacAllister come up with for the sudden darkness that occurs while the family and Adam are out driving? Why is Adam sceptical about this explanation? What happens to the car's instruments? What feeling overcomes Sam as she sits in the back seat?
- Who arrives to greet the MacAllister's? Why is Friar Gregory so frightened of the car? How does each passenger in the car react to the situation that they find themselves in?
- Who does Adam mistake Friar Gregory for? Why does Adam get so excited when he learns that Valvasor knows the medieval monk he is reading about in his book?
- Why does Denzil decide to take his visitors back to Mother Wyse's cottage?
- Why does Mr MacAllister think that he has run into a movie set?
- What season is it in England? What does Mr MacAllister put the unusual change of temperature down to?
- Describe Mother Wyse's cottage. What realisation does Mrs MacAllister come to when she sees the cottage? Why does she ask if there is a first aid kit in the car?
- Describe Mother Wyse. How does she greet her guests? What does she initially think Mr MacAllister's car is?
- Why does Mr MacAllister think that they are going to be extras in a film? Why is he so excited about this?
- How does Adam react when he sees the inside of Mother Wyse's cottage?
- What do Mrs MacAllister and Theresa eat that makes them sick?
- Why does Adam believe that Denzil has made a mistake by transporting them through time? How does he react to Denzil's request?
- Why does Mrs MacAllister decide that they will all have to stay the night? Why is Theresa less than thrilled about this idea? Where does

Mr MacAllister wonder off to? Why doesn't Adam think that he will get far?

Discussion

- What does Denzil miss about Sam's world? If you travelled back in time what modern convenience would you miss the most and why?
- Adam is fascinated by Denzil's village and the people who live there. He is excited at the possibility of meeting Roger Bacon, one of the greatest thinkers who ever lived. If you could travel back in time and meet a famous person who has passed away, who would you meet and why?
- If Sam and her family had had warning that they were going to be transported through time, what 5 items do you think they would have taken with them and why?
- What do you think has happened to Mr MacAllister?

Students read Chapters 6-10 (pp. 83-166) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 6-10 (pp. 83-166)

- Why is it so important to hide the car? What does Sam take out of the car before they hide it?
- Why is Mrs MacAllister so worried about her husband's whereabouts?
- What does Sam take photographs of? Why does Adam warn her not to let anyone see her with the camera?
- What explanation does Adam come up with for why he and the others can read and understand Middle English?
- What news do Denzil and Friar Gregory bring when they return to Mother Wyse's cottage? Why has Mr MacAllister been taken to Sir Godric's?
- Why does Adam maintain that the invention of the printing press was the single biggest invention in History? What social and political changes did it bring about? What was the Reformation?
- Why is it important for Sam, Adam, Theresa and Mrs MacAllister to change clothes before they go to Sir Godric's manor house?
- Why are the villagers in such an uproar when they arrive at Mother Wyse's cottage? How do they describe Mr MacAllister? Who does Mother Wyse tell the villagers are the best dragon slayers?
- Where does Denzil decide to hide the car? How does he get the car there without anyone noticing? What difficulty does he run into when he gets the car to the hiding place?
- What news does the young lad the group meets on the way to Sir Godric's give them about Valvasor?
- What do Denzil and the others see when they arrive at Sir Godric's manor? What does Adam tell Theresa about the manor house? Describe the mood of the people who are present there.

- What kind of mood is Mr MacAllister in when he greets his wife? What explanation does he give her for what he is doing there?
- Who is Sir Everard? Why does his arrival cause such a stir? What does Adam tell him about the “dragon”? Where does Sir Everard think that the dragon has gone to? Who offers to ride there with him?
- Describe the armour that Mr MacAllister and the other men wear. Why does Mr MacAllister have so much difficulty mounting his horse? Why is Mr MacAllister so keen to participate in the dragon hunt?
- Why is Denzil a little relieved that Valvasor is sick?
- Who does Denzil initially believe is responsible for the wood that the group comes across? Why does he soon change his mind? Describe the wood and the way the group feel while they are within it. Who does Denzil believe is responsible for the enchantment? What two spells cover the group while they are in the wood? What does Denzil do when the six men approach them? What happens to the others?
- Where does Denzil find himself when he materialises? How does he get back to Valvasor’s? What does he discover about his master when he arrives home? How does he know that Valvasor’s predicament is connected with what has happened at the wood? Who does Denzil call for help?
- Who put the spell on Valvasor? Where does he tell Denzil to go?
- What symbols illustrate the seventh book that Valvasor instructs Denzil to look at? What happens when Denzil tries to open the book? Who helps him with the password? Why do you think the book hasn’t been looked at for years?
- What important information about Avaldamon’s castle does Mother Wyse give Denzil as he sets off to rescue his friends?
- How does Sam feel when she wakes up in the strange fortress? Describe what she sees when the sack is removed from her head. Why does Sam find her captor’s eyes so amazing?
- How does Avaldamon react when Adam mentions Valvasor’s name? Why do you think he reacts like this? Why has Avaldamon brought Adam to his fortress? Where does he take him while the others enjoy the banquet?
- Why is Adam so delighted when he sees Avaldamon’s Hall of Knowledge?
- How does Avaldamon know what has been happening in the village of Northwood? What is Avaldamon’s opinion of Valvasor?
- What does Avaldamon threaten to do if Adam defies him?
- What does Sam notice when she looks out the window of her confinement? What is inside the room? What happens to Sam, Mrs MacAllister and Theresa the longer they are away from Avaldamon? Why is Theresa excited when she learns where they are being kept captive? What suggestion does Sam come up with for how to make contact with her father? What images of her father come into her mind when she makes the connection?

- What does Sir Everard decide to do when Mr MacAllister tells him what the voice in his head says? Why does he tell Mr MacAllister that he may need to knock him out for his own safety?
- Why does Denzil feel so disorientated when he lands in the mountains by Avaldamon's stronghold? What happens when he speaks the Spell of Supreme Discernment?
- Why is it important for Denzil to hold the Spell of Supreme Discernment in his mind as he approaches Avaldamon's stronghold?

Discussion

- Describe Adam. What attributes does he possess? What aspects of his trip into medieval times does he enjoy the most?
- Explain how the character of Mr MacAllister adds humour to the story. Why do you think he has such a hard time accepting that he has travelled back in time? In what ways would he behave differently if he knew what was really going on?
- Name another invention that you think had a major impact on history. Justify your answer.
- What qualities does Mrs MacAllister exhibit when she is held captive with her daughters?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 11-14 (pp. 167-237) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 11-14 (pp. 167-237)

- Who is forced into the room where Sam and the others are being held? What does he tell them about what Avaldamon is doing to them all?
- How does Mrs MacAllister help the captives escape from their room? Why do they have to be careful as they try and make their escape? Why is it important for the escapees not to believe everything that they see? What do the group notice as they leave the room? Why is their escape plan thwarted?
- Why does Mr MacAllister become disenchanted with the situation? Why do his companions still suspect that he is mad?
- How does the weather inside Avaldamon's courtyard differ from the weather outside the gates? What approaches the men as they enter the courtyard? What does the creature do to Sir Everard? What does Mr MacAllister do to try and help his comrade?
- What two things happen when Mr MacAllister attacks the dragon?
- Why isn't Denzil happier when he realises that his friends have escaped their room? What spell does he recite to try and alleviate his fear? When does Denzil realise that his magic doesn't work inside Avaldamon's stronghold? What does Denzil think he has to do if he is to beat Avaldamon?
- Why does Denzil suspect that Avaldamon is trying to trap him?

- Describe the room where Denzil finds his friends. Why doesn't Avaldamon notice Denzil when he first enters the room? Why does Denzil show so much courage when he faces Avaldamon?
- Where are Sam and the others being held? What stops Denzil from releasing his friends?
- How does Avaldamon react when Denzil mentions Valvasor's name? Why does he despise the old wizard so much?
- How does Denzil feel when he looks into Avaldamon's eyes? Who warns him to look away?
- Why does Denzil think that he can use Avaldamon's hatred of Valvasor to his advantage? Why doesn't he reveal that he knows the Spell of Supreme Discernment?
- What happens when Denzil challenges Avaldamon to fight him outside the walls of the fortress? How does Denzil deal with Avaldamon's spell that creates the terrifying creatures?
- How does Denzil provoke Avaldamon into displaying his abilities as a wizard? Describe the trap that Denzil leads him into. What happens to Avaldamon when he turns himself into a stag?
- Who do the captives run into as they flee from the cave? What chases them as they look for an escape route? What does the group realise as they find themselves outside?
- What goes through Sam's mind as she falls? How does Denzil save the group?
- What message does Adam give Valvasor for Roger Bacon?
- What dreadful news does Friar Gregory give Mr MacAllister? What is the only thing that he manages to save from the car?
- What does Valvasor think Mr MacAllister is talking about when he is lamenting the loss of his car? What does he promise to have for him when he returns home?
- What does Adam believe that true courage is? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?
- Why is Travis so surprised when he sees what has been transported back in time with his family? How does Mr MacAllister react when he sees the animal? How does Valvasor's gift work out advantageously for the family?
- How has Denzil's experience with Avaldamon taught him humility?
- What shocking information does Valvasor give Denzil about his relationship to Avaldamon? Why did Valvasor's father have to teach Avaldamon magic? What kind of magic did he teach him? What safeguards did he put in place to try and contain the extent of Avaldamon's power? Why does Valvasor believe that it is his fault that Avaldamon was able to extend his powers?
- What is strange about the film that Mrs MacAllister has developed?
- What arrives for Sam in the mail? Why does she decide that it is not a good time for a Connecting Word with Denzil?

Discussion

- How does Denzil feel when he realises that his magic doesn't work inside Avaldamon's stronghold? In what ways have Denzil's extraordinary abilities helped him in the past? What attributes does he display when he challenges his adversary using only his wits? What lessons do you think Denzil learns from his experiences inside Avaldamon's fortress?
- Are things only real if you believe in them? Explain your answer.
- Discuss the statement "We live in the greatest time in human history, and we don't even know it".
- Identify the climax of the story. Explain why this event is important.

Activities

Story Board – Design a storyboard for *The Silver Dragon*. Choose 15 important events that occur in the novel and illustrate them in the order that they occur in the story. Under each picture write a brief explanation about what is happening.

Diary Entry – Imagine that you are Adam. Write a diary entry about your experiences in medieval England. Remember to include your thoughts and feelings.

Board Game – Design a board game based on *The Silver Dragon*. For each positive event that occurs reward the player. For each negative event that occurs penalise the player. Illustrate your game with images and symbols from the story.

Research – Complete a research assignment on Roger Bacon. Formulate focusing questions to guide your research. Use a range of written, oral and visual sources to gather your information. Present your findings in role as Roger Bacon.

Soundtrack – Imagine that *The Silver Dragon* is being made into a movie. Choose 5 songs for the soundtrack. Explain when you would use them in the film and why you chose them.

Review – Write a book review for *The Silver Dragon*. Include a brief summary about the plot, explain the characters, describe the setting and discuss the author's themes. Explain your favourite part of the book and why you liked it. Remember to include your personal opinion about the novel. Don't give too much away though, or people won't want to read it themselves!

Web Page – Design a web page advertising *The Silver Dragon*. Include a brief plot summary and explain the book's main themes. Include illustrations that help convey the events and ideas presented in the novel. You may wish

to include links such as “About the author” and “Historical information about Roger Bacon”.

Static Image – Design an alternative book cover for *The Silver Dragon* and write a different blurb. Explain why your book cover is an effective advertisement for the novel.

Writing – Imagine that Mr MacAllister knew that he and his family had travelled back in time and that what was happening was real. Choose 3 incidents that occur in the book and explain how they would have happened differently.

Writing – Write the first chapter for the next book in the Denzil series.