

Finnigan and the Pirates

Author: Sherryl Jordan

Synopsis

Captain Wildbloode the Wicked really lives up to her name. She is a fearsome pirate who isn't afraid of anything or anyone. If any of her crew misbehaves he is made to walk the plank and take his chances in the sea with the sharks. The only person on her ship who isn't afraid of her is her young nephew Finnigan. Finnigan's mother died when he was four and he has lived with his aunt ever since. Finnigan doesn't approve of his aunt's lifestyle; he can't stand all of the murder and mayhem that takes place when the crew plunders and pillages other ships. When he tries to talk to his aunt about his concerns she fobs him off, telling him that she is addicted to the wildness of her life and that she craves fame and fortune. Finnigan isn't wild in the slightest. Despite Wildbloode's insistence on calling him Finnigan the Fierce, Finnigan never fails to disappoint his aunt. He isn't fierce at all; in fact, he is a dancer.

When Finnigan decides that he has had enough of his aunt's marauding ways he devises a plan to try and force her to live on land so that he can attend ballet school. At first his attempts fail and his aunt and the crew are easily able to fix the damage caused to the ship. But one night, during a massive storm, Finnigan is able to fulfil his dream. He throws a lantern up into the rigging and a huge fire engulfs the ship, forcing the crew to leap overboard. The surviving pirates swim to shore and Finnigan is feeling pretty happy with himself until a horde of wild savages descend upon them. The pirates are all placed in a large pot and as the water begins to boil, it appears that their fate is sealed. That is, until Finnigan comes up with another plan. Can he save the pirates or are they destined to become soup?

Text Type

Finnigan and the Pirates is a delightful tale written and illustrated by New Zealand author Sherryl Jordan. The story is fast-paced and the short chapters will keep even the most reluctant readers engaged. The story is brightly illustrated and the pictures enhance the story and add interest. Finnigan and the Pirates will appeal to both boys and girls.

The story revolves around Finnigan and his aunt, Captain Wildbloode the Wicked. Jordan has reversed usual gender roles in this story because the evil pirate is a woman and the sensitive young dancer is a boy. This adds a point of difference to this humorous tale. The reader sympathises with Finnigan and his dissatisfaction with his aunt's lifestyle. His aunt doesn't value his abilities as a dancer and would like Finnigan better if he was more like her. It is ironic that it is Finnigan who eventually saves Wildbloode's life, using the talent that his aunt has never appreciated. The moral of the story is to accept people for who they are and not judge them.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 3- 10), Chapters 2- 5 (pp. 11- 41) and Chapters 6- 10 (pp. 42- 76).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them study the characters presented in the novel and discuss their positive and negative characteristics. Wherever possible have students relate Finnigan's antics to their own experiences and prior knowledge. A central idea raised in the story is the importance of staying true to yourself and not judging others based on your own values and opinions. Most importantly, make sure students enjoy the story and look at the pictures

Introducing the Novel

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

- Who is the character on the front cover? What does he enjoy doing?
- What is "piratical pillaging"?
- Who is Wildbloode the Wicked? How is she related to Finnigan?
- What sort of activities do you associate with pirates?
- Why might Wildbloode not approve of Finnigan's dancing?

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 3- 10) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 3- 10)

- How does the author describe Captain Wildbloode the Wicked?
- What does Wildbloode do to any member of her crew who misbehaves?



- How long has Finnigan been living with Wildbloode? Why isn't he afraid of her?
- What hopes does Wildbloode have for Finnigan's future? What does Finnigan want to do?
- Why does Finnigan hate life aboard the ship so much?
- How does Wildbloode feel about Finnigan's dancing? Why do you think she feels this way?
- Why is Finnigan so convinced that Wildbloode won't harm him?

Discussion

- Use a dictionary to find the meanings of 3 words that you are unfamiliar with.
- What would be some of the good things about living on a pirate ship? What would be the bad things?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2- 5 (pp. 11- 41) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2- 5 (pp. 11- 41)

- What are Finnigan's jobs? Which job does he hate the most?
- Why does Finnigan want to live on land so badly?
- Why does Wildbloode tell Finnigan that he will have to find somewhere else to hang her washing?
- How does Finnigan feel about being made to become a wicked pirate?
- Describe Finnigan's first Wonderful Idea. What happens to the ship? How does Wildbloode free it? What is Wildbloode's explanation for the incident? How does Wildbloode propose to repair the ship? What job is Finnigan expected to complete?
- How long does it take to repair the ship?
- How does Wildbloode react when she sees the Spanish treasure ship?
- Why is being small an advantage to the pirate ship?
- What do the pirates manage to remove from the treasure ship? What happens during their celebrations?
- Why does Wildbloode introduce a pirate tax? How do her crew react to this? What does Wildbloode threaten to do to the pirates who complain?
- How does Finnigan know that it is time to put his plan into action? How does he start the fire?

- Why is Wildbloode grateful when the storm arrives? Why isn't the storm the help that she thought it would be?

Discussion

- Do you think that if Wildbloode lived on land her personality would change and she would no longer be evil? Why/why not?
- What is a landlubber?
- What do you think might have happened to Finnigan if his aunt realised that he was responsible for the damage to the ship?
- Why do you think fire is the biggest enemy on any sailing ship?
- What is a mutiny?
- Is Finnigan justified in trying to sabotage his aunt's ship? Why/why not?
- What do you think is going to happen next in the story?

Students read Chapters 6- 10 (pp. 42- 76) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 6- 10 (pp. 42- 76)

- Why does Finnigan have mixed feelings as he looks towards the shore?
- Why does Wildbloode decide to abandon ship?
- Why does Wildbloode accuse one of the pirates of being a "mutinous mackerel"?
- What stops the pirates from beginning the work on their ship?
- What are cannibals? How does the chief particularly like his pirates? Why aren't the pirates able to fight off the savages?
- What do the savages do to the pirates when they catch them?
- How does the chief respond to Wildbloode's demands to be released? How do you think Wildbloode felt when her demands were ignored?
- What does Finnigan notice about the savages?
- Why is the chief so pleased when Finnigan compliments the dancers?
- Why does Wildbloode back Finnigan up when he is talking to the chief? How does Finnigan convince the chief to put out the fire under the pot?
- Who does Finnigan choose as the crew's best dancer? What excuse for Wildbloode make for his poor performance?
- When does the chief lose patience with Finnigan and his dancers? What does Finnigan come up with as a final offer for the chief? Why do you think the chief agrees to this bargain?

- Describe Finnigan's dance. How does Wildbloode feel as she watches her nephew's performance? Why does the chief keep up his side of the bargain?
- How long does it take the pirates to build a new ship?
- What tasty alternative do the savages find for pirate meat?
- What do the savages give the pirates as a farewell present?
- Why do you think Wildbloode drops Finnigan off at a port?
- How is Wildbloode greeted when she arrives at the wharf? Why is she convinced that Finnigan needs to travel? Why does she decide to give up pirating?
- Why are Finnigan and Wildbloode both content with their new lives?
- What does Wildbloode change Finnigan's name to? What does she become known as?
- Why do you think Wildbloode's attitude towards her nephew changes so much?

Discussion

- How do you think Wildbloode would have felt, having to leave her beloved ship? What do you think might have happened if she'd found out that Finnigan was responsible for the fire?
- Why is it important to accept people for who they are?

Activities

Writing - Rewrite the ending of the story.

Poetry - Write a poem about being a pirate.

Storyboard - Design a storyboard for Finnigan and the Pirates. Choose ten important events from the story. Under each illustration write a brief explanation about what is happening.

Static Image - Design a poster advertising Finnigan and the Pirates that would be suitable to display in the school library.

Diary Entry - Imagine that you are Finnigan at the start of the story. Write a diary entry about how you feel living with your aunt on the ship and your dreams of becoming a dancer. Remember to include your thoughts and feelings.

Writing - Write a letter to the author explaining what you liked about the book.

Drama - Choose an exciting scene from the story and write a script for it. Remember to include a cast list and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Oral Book Report - Write a book report that can be presented orally to the class. Include information about the storyline, characters, your favourite scene and the author's message. Include an extract from the novel in your presentation.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd