

The Singing Cave

Author: Margaret Beames

Synopsis

Tom's parents are marine biologists and are spending a year living on a small island, studying the reef surrounding it. Tom is living with them on the island and is taking his lessons by correspondence. The thing Tom likes best about living on the island is hanging out with his friend Pero, a local boy the same age as him. Tom and his parents are renting their cottage from Pero's mum Ani. Tom and Pero spend their day's together swimming, fishing, rock climbing and collecting shells. That is until Pero disappears.

The villagers believe that Pero has been taken by a shark, but Tom knows better. He fears that his friend has gone to the Singing Cave, a mysterious cave where people have heard eerie noises. Pero has been there before and when he refuses to take Tom there he accuses him of being a coward. Tom knows that some people have disappeared from the cave and feels responsible for finding his friend, so he sets off to the Singing Cave to find a way to the top of the cliff where he has seen unusual lights at night. He tells only Jojo, Pero's younger sister, where he is going.

After an arduous journey Tom manages to reach the camp where Pero is being held hostage by some strange, alien beings. He manages to befriend a young girl called Eleni who endeavours to help him with the rescue. Meanwhile, back home, no one believes Jojo when she tells them where Tom and Pero have gone. The help that Tom is counting on never arrives. Does he have the courage to rescue his friend when it means risking his own life, or is the pair doomed to spend the rest of their lives as slaves?

Text Type

The Singing Cave is a fast-paced, action-packed adventure story with broad appeal. Written by New Zealand author Margaret Beames, the story is set on a remote island in the Pacific. The story is told from the point of view of Tom, a twelve year-old boy who has moved to the island for a year while his parents are on sabbatical. Through Tom's eyes we view events that unfold when Pero, his best friend disappears, and his thoughts and feelings about them. Tom feels responsible for Pero's disappearance and shows great courage and fortitude when he goes to rescue his friend. When it becomes apparent that no help is on the way Tom can only rely on himself, and some help from Eleni and her mother. Tom

is amazingly determined and brave when faced with making decisions that could mean the difference between life and death.

Themes include friendship, alien life forms, self-reliance, courage, determination and the triumph of good over evil.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 7- 14), Chapters 2- 10 (pp. 15- 75) and Chapters 11- 16 (77- 135).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Students should make inferences and predictions about what will happen next as they read.

Encourage students to study the character of Tom and examine his qualities and characteristics as well as his motivations. Wherever possible, have students compare their own lives to Tom's experiences. Have students discuss their own views about aliens, different cultures and societies, and freedom. Encourage them to form opinions and values of their own.

Introducing the Novel

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

- Describe the front cover of the novel. What does this illustration suggest about the book?
- Why is the extract at the top of the blurb written in italics?
- Who disappears? What does everyone think has happened to him? What does Tom think has happened to him?
- Why is the novel called The Singing Cave?
- Come up with 3 different scenarios of what Tom might find at the top of the cliff above the Singing Cave.

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

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 7- 14)

- Where is the Singing Cave situated? What do we learn about the island from Tom? Who still lives there?
- Who owns the house that Tom and his parents are living in? What do Tom's parents do? Why are they living on the island?
- Why does Tom's dad warn him not to go swimming?
- Who is Pero and why does Tom like him so much?
- Why is Tom so fascinated by the cliffs?

Discussion

- Imagine that your parents decide to move to an island for a year. How would you feel about having to leave your school and friends? What would some of the positive and negative aspects of the move be?
- Why do you think Ani is so late getting to Tom's?

Students read Chapters 2- 10 (pp. 15- 75) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2- 10 (pp. 15- 75)

- What do Pero and Tom argue about?
- Why doesn't Pero want to show Tom the Singing Cave? What does he believe happens to people who go right into the cave?
- Why does Tom call Pero a chicken? How does he feel about what he has said to Pero after he runs off?
- How do Tom's parents react when he tells them about the legend of the cave?
- Why does Tom run down to the beach? What does he see there? Why is Tom so sure that Pero wouldn't have taken his boat out?
- Why do the men organise boats to go after the shark?
- How do the women at the house react when Tom tells them that he wants to speak to Ani? What does Jojo tell Tom about her brother?
- What does Tom pack to take with him into the cave? How does he find it?
- Where do Tom's parents go?
- Why does Tom have so much difficulty getting into the cave?
- What does Jojo give Tom for good luck?
- Describe the cave that Tom walks into. How does he know that there must be a way to climb to the top? What does Tom see in the cave that indicates he is on the right track? What noises does he hear as he begins to climb?

- What does Tom see when he exits the cave? Why does he decide to look for Pero at the river?
- Why doesn't Jojo's mother or aunt listen to her explanation about where Pero and Tom have gone?
- What does Tom see when he answers the cries for help? What does he notice lying around the base of the plant? What does "carnivorous" mean? How does Tom rescue the girl? Why does the girl drag him into the river?
- What does Eleni tell Tom about Pero? Why is it important that remain hidden?
- What does Tom see when he follows Eleni back to the village? What does he notice about two of the men who have Pero? Why does Pero take the men back to the cave? What do they do to the entrance? What difficulties could this present for Tom and Pero later on?
- How do the island men learn that Pero didn't take his boat out?
- Why does Jojo's aunt finally listen to her? What do the men discover when they investigate the caves?
- Why isn't anyone able to get hold of Tom's parents?
- What do the Star-callers in the village do when they hear the signal? What do the villagers do?
- How do we know that the Star-callers are in charge of the village?
- What dangers does Tom face as he hides in the bush by the village?
- What does Tom see in the Star-callers' cave when the door opens?
- How does Eleni save Tom from being detected?
- Why can't Tom rescue Pero at night? What plan does Eleni come up with to save him?
- Why do the villagers call their captors "Star-callers"? Who are the "in-comers"?

Discussion

- What is a superstition? Do you believe in them? Why/why not?
- Is Pero's disappearance Tom's fault? Why/why not?
- What possible complications could the fact that Tom's parents have gone away for the night and don't know where Tom has gone cause in the story?
- Who do you think the Star-callers are? What special powers do they have? How did they get onto the mountain?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 11- 16 (pp. 77- 138) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 11- 16 (pp. 77- 138)

- Describe Eleni's mother. What does Tom learn about how she arrived on the island? Why wasn't Eleni made to work like the rest of the captors? How long has she been in the village? Why does she think that the Star-callers aren't human?
- Who are the three classes of people in the village? What are their roles?
- Where did the villagers come from? Why do you think that they aren't allowed to return to their families? What will Pero be expected to do?
- How do Eleni and Tom plan to rescue Pero? What does Tom give Eleni to give to Pero so that he trusts her?
- Why does Laura want Tom to take Eleni with him? What does she give Tom to take with him?
- Why is Eleni so reluctant to leave her mother?
- Why does Tom become convinced that something has gone wrong with the plan? What does he see when he crawls to the edge of the quarry?
- How does Eleni manage to get Pero away from the work party? Why can't she and the others escape down the path? What is the only other way out of the valley? What suggestion does Pero come up with? How do they know that the alarm has been raised at the village?
- What do Tom and the others see on the Watching Hill?
- Why does Eleni refuse to go back with Tom and Pero? How does Tom alert their pursuers to their position? Why do you think he does this?
- What unusual object does Tom discover in the undergrowth? How does Pero think the object got there? Where does the group escape to when one of the Star-callers spots them?
- How does Pero stop Eleni from becoming mesmerised by the music?
- What weapons do the Star-callers use to try and stop the group from escaping? How do Tom and Pero elude them? How does Pero save Tom's life?
- What do Tom's parents and Ani assume has happened to them? Why don't they believe the boys when they try to say what really happened?
- Who convinces Tom's parents that they should investigate the boys' story? What does Tom have in his backpack that he has forgotten about? How does Tom's dad convince the helicopters to go and search for Laura and Eleni?
- Why does Tom feel sorry for the Star-callers?
- What strange thing occurs while Tom and the others are waiting to hear news about Eleni?

- When does Tom see Eleni again? Who is she living with? What aspects of life does she find strange and different? What happened to Eleni when the Star-callers caught up with her? Why wasn't she punished?
- What happened when the helicopters landed in the village? Why didn't they find any evidence of aliens living there? What did the scientists find when they studied the area?
- Why does Tom return to the village with Eleni?

Discussion

- How does life in the village contrast with Tom's life on the island?
- Do you believe that life exists on other planets and that there are aliens? Why/why not? Are the actions of the Star-callers justified? Why/why not?
- Why do you think that there are no old people in the village?
- Describe Tom's character. What qualities and characteristics does he possess?
- When Tom asks Eleni if she is happy living in the village she gives a sigh. Is it possible to miss something that you have never had? Explain your answer.
- Eleni sacrifices herself to give Pero and Tom precious time to escape. What does this suggest about her character?

Activities

Monologue - Create a monologue for Tom in an important part of the novel. What is he thinking and feeling in that moment? Why?

Movie Pitch - Write a one page "pitch" to a producer explaining why the story would make a great movie.

Questions - Write 10 discussion questions for the novel.

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

Soundtrack - Imagine that this novel is being made into a film. Choose 5 songs for the soundtrack. Explain why you chose the songs and where in the film they will go.

Writing - Explain how the novel would have been different if a certain event occurred.

Plot - Draw a flow diagram that shows 10 important events from the story in the order that they occur.

Review - Write a review of *The Singing Cave* suitable for publication in a school magazine. Include information about characters, the style of the book, setting and themes. Discuss the issues raised in the novel. Remember to include your own opinion about the book.

Character - Imagine that you are Tom. Write an account of his experiences that you can present to the class in role.