

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Dragonflight

by
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Book Information

Anne McCaffrey, Dragonflight
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After coming out of hiding to reclaim her birthright, Lessa finds she must save the planet of Pern from the deadly Threads.

Award: Margaret A. Edwards Award; Misc./Other

Topics: Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other;
Recommended Reading, California
Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Science
Fiction, Other Worlds; Series, Dragonriders
of Pern

Main Characters

F'lar the disciplined son of a former Weyrleader, who becomes Weyrleader at Benden Weyr and leads the people of Pern in the battle against the Threads

F'nor F'lar's half-brother and wingsecond, who is unflinchingly loyal to him

Fax the "Lord of the High Reaches," who has gone against tradition by invading other Holds and is ultimately killed as a result of Lessa's need for revenge

Lessa the sole survivor of the Ruathan bloodline, who becomes Weyrwoman of Benden Weyr and ultimately saves Pern with her daring plan

Mnementh the bronze dragon, ridden by F'lar, that mates with Queen Ramoth

R'gul the incompetent Weyrleader, whose time as leader comes to an end when F'lar comes to power

Ramoth the Dragon Queen that is "impressed" by Lessa

Vocabulary

between an area of nothingness between times or places

fire-stone a phosphine-bearing mineral chewed by dragons to produce flame

Hold a place where the common people of Pern live

Impression the joining of minds of a dragon and its rider at the moment of the dragon's hatching

Threads spores from the Red Star, which fall on Pern and destroy vegetation

Turn a Pernese year

watch-wher a nocturnal reptile, often used by people to warn of nighttime intruders

Weyr a home of dragons and their riders

Synopsis

Dragonflight is one in a series of science fiction fantasies depicting the history and culture of Pern. Pern is a planet inhabited by descendants of space immigrants from Earth and a separate, highly intelligent species of dragon. The dragons have evolved to battle regular attacks of menacing "Threads," toxic to all vegetation. The Threads are emitted from a red planet that has an elliptical orbit, which brings it close to Pern at approximately two-hundred-Turn (year) intervals.

Politically, Pern is divided into Holds, similar to feudal estates, ruled by Lord Holders and populated by highly skilled Craftspeople, as well as servants and farmers. Dispersed among the populated areas of Pern are six Weyrs, or homes of dragons and their riders. The dragonriders are charged with protecting the Holds and maintaining the Laws and history of Pern. For these services, the Holders are obligated to provide tithes from the annual production of Hold lands. At the time of this adventure, only one of the six Weyrs is occupied.

In this context, the story opens with Lessa, the only survivor of consequence of a brutal invasion of the Hold of Ruath, plotting to overthrow the invader, Fax, and reclaim her birthright. Although she successfully contributes to the death of her enemy, she is asked to serve Pern by being the rider of the soon-to-be-hatched Dragon Queen, Ramoth, thereby contributing to the possible rescue of the planet from the dreaded Threads and restoring

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order in all the Holds. F'lar, a student of Pernese history and mythology, successfully installs Lessa as the rider of the Queen and subsequently becomes Weyrleader when his bronze dragon becomes the Queen's mate.

Faced with the predictable onslaught of Threads, insurrection among the skeptical Lord Holders, and a sadly neglected force of dragons and riders, F'lar and Lessa attempt, by both conventional and non-conventional means, to prepare for the battles. In Lessa's impatience to fly and experience travel "between" places, she accidentally discovers the dragons' power to travel "between" times. Using this knowledge, she and F'lar contrive to build dragon numbers by raising them in another time and bringing them back when needed. This experiment is driven by the first battle against the Threads, which results in several casualties.

While a moderately successful attempt to raise dragons in another time is attempted, Lessa understands that it will not be enough. With help from ballads, sagas, and the return of a crucial historical tapestry, she determines that their salvation relies upon traveling between times four hundred Turns back to recruit help from ancient dragonriders by teaching them to travel between times. Though the risk is great and is opposed by F'lar, she makes the journey and successfully retrieves several thousand dragons and dragonriders, simultaneously rescuing the planet and solving the mystery of the five abandoned Weyrs.

By the end of this adventure, F'lar and Lessa have established a strong, loving, and cooperative relationship. Respect for their unique leadership talents and dedication to the principles of Law suggest a return to the glory days of Dragonkind and Pern.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Sequence becomes very important when traveling between times. Describe problems F'lar faced as he returned from the Southern Continent to give F'lar reports.

He had to leave the Weyr, stay several Turns, and then return in less than three days. Once he came back before he left and became ill and disoriented.

Literary Analysis

Both F'lar and R'gul were well versed in the ballads, sagas, and Laws that were written to guide the behavior of the Holds and Weyrs. Why was their interpretation so dramatically different? Describe the differences in your answer.

F'lar understood the meaning and context of the mythology because he studied the Records. R'gul knew the words and knew they were important, but was unable to grasp the lessons within the literature.

Inferential Comprehension

Taking risks or not taking risks both can lead to positive or negative results. Identify examples of both positive and negative outcomes from the risk-taking behaviors of both F'lar and Lessa.

- a) Lessa encouraged some of the dragonmen to raid the Holds, which resulted in an uprising of the Lords.
- b) Lessa tried to go between to Ruatha before she was ready, but learned accidentally to go between times.
- c) F'lar did not act against R'gul, thus making the power transfer less disruptive.
- d) F'lar willingly confronted the rebellious Lords and reminded them of their duties to the Weyr.
- e) F'lar risked all the dragons to go between times to confront the Threads at Nerat. The outcome was positive.
- f) Lessa went 400 Turns back to bring the Dragonriders. Initially she was very sick, but the risk saved Pern in the long run.

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Constructing Meaning

As a child, Lessa rebels against the oppression of Fax. As a Weyrwoman, she helps F'lar suppress a rebellion of Hold Lords, yet she continues to "rebel" against F'lar's instructions. What is the message the author is trying to share about rebellion or responding to authority? Cite examples to support your answer.

Each of us is responsible for examining the reasons for authoritative rules. Under most circumstances, there is justification for compliance, as in the case of Lessa encouraging raids when she was unaware that others were handling the situation more quietly. Under extraordinary circumstances, disobedience is a matter of conscience and obligation, as in Lessa's decision to attempt going between times four hundred Turns.

five Weyrs are empty because their past inhabitants were brought into the future. Have the students develop a timeline, chart, or diagram of the "between times" excursions of the characters in this story. Then have them discuss problems for history if such disruptions of sequence could really occur.

Responding to Literature All of the solutions in this story are derived in part by those who fully understand the history and mythology of Pern. F'lar derives his timetable from the Records. Lessa finds references for going between times on the old tapestry. Have the students choose a historical event, or events, and discuss how knowledge of those events might influence their response in the future. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of history to the present and future.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization Lessa is a character in the story who has natural skills and talents that influence the course of events in her life. As the story progresses, she learns to use her unique talents and strengths not only for her own benefit, but also for the good of all of Pern. Ask the students to discuss what they have been taught about how unique talents should be applied and for whose benefit. Do some of them have special talents they would be willing to share with the class?

Comparing and Contrasting Fax, R'gul, F'lar, and Lessa were each given power by the author. Each used this power in different ways. Have the students discuss the different kinds of power each had and the pros and cons of how they applied it. Have students identify one or two people from their own experience (historical characters, characters from books, personal acquaintances) whose use of power has been memorable to them. Did the people use their power in positive or negative ways?

Understanding Sequence By going between times, the natural progression of events was disrupted. For example, we are led to believe that