



Story Summary

Leira is about to start her initiation as a priestess in Bronze-Age Crete when her world is turned upside down. A violent earthquake leaves her home—and her family—in pieces. And the earth goddess hasn't finished with the island yet.

With her family, Leira flees across the sea to Crete, expecting sanctuary. But a volcanic eruption throws the entire world into darkness. After the resulting tsunami, society descends into chaos; the status and privilege of being noble-born are reduced to nothing. With her injured mother and elderly nurse, Leira must find the strength and resourcefulness within herself to find safety.

Swallow's Dance is a thrilling new Bronze Age survival story from the award-winning author of *Dragonfly Song* and *Nim's Island*.

Wendy Orr was born in Edmonton, Alberta, but moved a lot growing up following her father's Air Force piloting career. Wendy has lived across Canada, and in Colorado, France, and England for several years. After graduation, Wendy settled in Australia. Wendy has published over 40 books for children, including the international bestseller *Nim's Island*. Her books have been published in 27 countries and have won awards around the world.

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Keywords:

Bronze Age, Minoan Civilization, Fantasy, Mythology, Mutism

BISAC Codes

JUV022020 JUVENILE FICTION / Legends, Myths, Fables / Greek & Roman
JUV016020 JUVENILE FICTION / Historical / Ancient Civilizations
JUV001010 JUVENILE FICTION / Action & Adventure / Survival Stories
JUV029030 JUVENILE FICTION / Nature & the Natural World / Disasters
JUV037000 JUVENILE FICTION / Fantasy & Magic

Reading Level

Fountas & Pinnell : X | Lexile measure : 980L

BOOK CLUBS

This guide has been developed for use in classroom book clubs/literature circles. Book clubs support and develop the love of reading as well as help students build comprehension and support the development of collaborative learning and critical thinking.

In book clubs, students:

- meet in small groups (4–8) to discuss a book they are reading
- take turns assuming a leadership role within the group
- meet regularly and set the pace for their reading
- take ownership for their learning by:
 - selecting the book they will read (usually from a predetermined list provided by the teacher)
 - determine the pace of the reading
 - prepare for and run their discussions

Prior to beginning with book clubs, teachers:

- take time to develop and nurture whole-class discussions about books while modeling the skills and behaviors needed to collaborate and work together as a book club
- provide guidance, modeling, and support
- become familiar with all texts prior to making them available to students

During book club discussions, teachers:

- develop a schedule for book clubs ensuring they provide time for reading and discussion
- provide mini-lessons for any needs that may arise
- monitor through observation and conferring as well as supporting student self-assessment

Key elements:

- Groups meet on a regular basis, with time provided in class to read and discuss their book
- Students use a “reader’s notebook” to write notes, comments, insights, and questions while they read
- Students bring their reader’s notebook to each meeting to support their discussion
- Discussion topics may emerge from the students as they read; however, the teacher provides discussion topics and provocations to help students engage in rich discussions (suggestions are provided in this guide)
- Group meetings are collaborative, with each group developing a set of norms for their group
- The teacher serves as facilitator
- Assessment is grounded in teacher observation, student conversations, and student self-assessment
- Book clubs promote a love of reading

Thinking about Assessment...

This Discussion Guide offers a range of prompts, tasks, and provocations to support Book Club discussions. While using this guide in the classroom, teachers have a number of opportunities to use observation, conversation, and products to assess student thinking and learning. The tasks and prompts offered in this guide are designed to support discussion, sharing, and student thinking while providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate comprehension, extension of thinking, and critical literacy. Assessment can include self-assessment, peer assessment, conversations with students through teacher/student conferences, group discussions, and products created by the students.

For the teacher and student to have a clear, common understanding of the expectations and criteria to achieve success while reading the novels, educators develop learning goals based on curriculum expectations and share them with the students in language they can understand. Then together, the educator and students co-create criteria to make the path to success visible and clear.

These success criteria are posted in the classroom, are visible to all students, and may be revised and edited based on the learning and understanding of the students.

As the Book Club meetings are collaborative and begin with the groups developing a set of norms for their group, it is suggested that all groups open each meeting with a reflection of the previous discussion. These reflections can highlight what went well during the discussions, what needs to improve in these discussions, and considerations for the current discussion.

Discussion Guide:

This discussion guide will offer a variety of tasks, discussion prompts, and questions to provoke thinking and deepen comprehension before, during, and after reading of the novel. These are suggestions only and it is certainly not necessary to complete the entire list of suggested activities/questions. Educators are encouraged to make choices based on the strengths, needs, and interests of the students.

Highlighted Curriculum Expectations

Ontario Ministry of Education Language Arts Curriculum K–8

Oral Communication

- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding

Reading for Meaning

- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences / Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding
- 1.7 Analyzing Texts
- 1.8 Responding and Evaluating Texts

Reading: Understanding Form and Style

- 2.3 Text Features
- 2.4 Elements of Style

Before Reading

1. This story takes place during the Bronze Age in what is now known as the island of Crete. Conduct research in your school library and using online resources (recommended by your teacher) to learn all you can about the Bronze Age. Each member of the group is encouraged to explore and learn about one area of interest and then share their learning with the entire group. Some possible topics to consider are family structures, religion, travel/transportation, the arts, business/commerce, education, gender roles, and community/social structures. Refer to the author's note at the beginning of the novel to help you begin your research. Summarize your learning in your reader's notebook. You may summarize in point form, in a short paragraph or using a graphic organizer or graphic text. Share your learning with your group. As everyone shares, you will all develop an understanding of this time in history.
2. Learn about the island of Thera and the volcanic eruption that occurred in 1625 B.C. Share your learning with your group.
3. In this book, you will read about both a volcanic eruption and a tsunami. Using both classroom and library resources, learn about both. Record your learning in your reader's notebook.
4. Review the maps for the Isle of Swallows and the Great Isle, as well as Gournia that are included in the front of the book. What do you notice? What do you wonder? Record your thinking in your reader's notebook and share with a partner.
5. Have a close look at the front cover illustration. What might you predict about this book given the details in the illustration and what you have learned about the Bronze Age? Share your predictions with your group.



During Reading

Chapters 1–9

1. You will notice as you read these first few chapters that the author has chosen to write this book using both prose and poetry. Do you think this enhances your experience as a reader? Explain your thinking. Why do you think the author chose this specific style? Discuss with your group.
2. In these early chapters, we learn a great deal about gender roles in this society. What are the roles of the females and the males in this society? What do you notice about how girls and women live in this society? How does it compare to our modern society? Discuss with your group.
3. In these early chapters, you learn about Leira and her friends and family. Create a web or other graphic organizer that shows the connection between Leira and all the other characters introduced in these first few chapters of the book. Include everyone's name and their relationship to Leira. Share your graphic representation with a partner.
4. In the early chapters, we begin to develop an understanding of Leira's character. What are some of Leira's character traits? List them in your reader's notebook and provide evidence from the text for each trait. Share your thinking with your group.
5. By chapter 8, we have learned about some important traditions in this community. What have you learned about burial rights, rights of passage into adulthood for boys and girls, social structure and hierarchy, and faith/beliefs and religion? Record your thinking and share with your group.
6. The author describes Leira's initiation into womanhood in these chapters. In your reader's notebook, use the "retell, relate, reflect" framework to summarize and reflect on her initiation. You may use the following link to help you use the 3Rs framework. <http://www.edugains.ca/resources/DI/TeachingLearningExamples/COOP/CooperativeEducationExperientialLearning3RsAppendix.pdf>



7. There is a violent earthquake in this first part of the book. The author depicts the earthquake in vivid language creating strong images of the experience. Select one passage that you find to be particularly vivid and share it with your group.
8. Leira has strong bonds with her friends and family. How would you describe her relationship to the following characters in the story: her mother, her father, Nunu and Pellie? Discuss with your group.

Chapters 9–13

1. On page 107, Leira questions her father's decision to leave the island. She says, "There is more going on than I've been told. Dada says that Mama and I are leaving because it's Mama's only chance to be healed, but I'm sure it's not the only reason." Why do you think Leira feels this way? Do you agree or disagree with her? Explain your thinking. Share with your group.
2. What are some of the things Leira has learned between chapters 8 and 12? Consider both the practical skills she has learned and the life lessons she has absorbed as she tries to survive with her Mama and Nunu. What has she learned about herself? Record your thinking and then share with your group.
3. Leira is emerging as a strong person and as a leader. How is Leira demonstrating strength and leadership during this dangerous time in her journey? Discuss with a partner and then share with your group.
4. Throughout her adventures, Leira encounters kindness and generosity, as well as cruelty and aggression. How do you think Leira handles her encounters with both those who are kind and generous and those who are cruel or aggressive? Discuss with a partner. In your group, consider how these encounters are impacting Leira. What effect are they having on her?
5. Read the final paragraph on page 194. In it, Leira thinks, "It still takes me by surprise when people don't try to please me. In Tarmara I thought it was because of Mama's wailing, but she's not shrieking now. This is just because of who we are." Leira has come to a real-

ization here. Do you agree with her? Why/why not? What does this thinking show us about the way in which Leira is changing and developing? Discuss with a partner and then share with your group.

6. Read pages 213–216 again. This prose captures Leira's current situation, her hopes and fears. Considering Leira's situation, describe your thoughts and reaction after reading this part of the novel. Record your thinking in your reader's notebook and then share with your group.

Chapters 13–19

1. Throughout the book, the author depicts Leira as being of noble birth. She is privileged in many ways. Discuss the ways in which the author portrays Leira as both noble and privileged. Consider those who are privileged in our current community/society. How is their situation similar to Leira's?
2. What do you think about Leira's attention to her appearance, her clothes and jewelry? How does her attitude change over the course of the novel? Discuss with your group.
3. On page 224, Leira is adamant that she is not a slave. How do you think Leira has handled the change in her social standing? Discuss with your group.
4. While Leira is in the "purple works," she has many strong reactions to the sites, smells, and sounds, as well as to the work itself and the people she encounters. To help you understand her reaction and the work she is doing, conduct some research to learn about how purple dye was made during the Bronze Age. While exploring the manufacturing of purple dye, you will also learn about the value of the dye for making purple clothing. Share what you have learned with a partner. How does this research help you to understand Leira's reaction to the "purple works"? Discuss with your group.
5. Consider Leira's escape from the purple works. Discuss the steps taken to escape with your group. Why do you think Leira was able to escape? Do you feel she will do well as a potter? Why or why not? Discuss with your group.

6. We are learning more and more about Leira's character. Some might say she is resourceful, determined and spiritual. What are some of the ways she demonstrates these qualities? Summarize your thinking in your reader's notebook. Does she remind you of others who show these similar qualities? If so, describe how.
7. As a group, reread pages 232-233. Discuss how:
 - a. the relationship between Nunu and Leira has changed/evolved over the course of the novel.
 - b. Leira's relationship with her mother has changed/evolved over the course of the novel.
8. While guided by Pellie's voice, Leira climbs to the goddess mountain shrine. As she climbs and reaches the shrine, she thinks about how her life has changed in the last year. Re-read pages 244-250. In this verse, Leira reflects on what she has learned and how she has transformed. What are some of the things Leira realizes?
5. This book touches on several big ideas, including perseverance, resourcefulness, resilience, and the ability to push through when all seems hopeless. Which "big idea" stands out for you? Explain why in your reader's notebook. Share your ideas with your group.
6. Leira, her mother, and Nunu are refugees seeking asylum and a new life. In Canada, we have had the opportunity to welcome refugees throughout our history. Discuss this with your group. Conduct some research to deepen your understanding if needed. How has this novel deepened your understanding of the experience and feelings of refugees? Discuss with your group.
7. Leira's experience after the volcano and tsunami shape her into the young woman she will become. In a way, they provide a different initiation rite into adulthood than the one she expected. Describe the evolution of Leira's character over the course of the novel. How has she grown and changed by the end of the book? Record your thinking in your reader's notebook. Share with your group.

After Reading

1. How do you feel about the ending/conclusion of the book? What questions remain unanswered for you? Discuss with your group.
2. What message do you think the author is trying to convey about girls and women in this book? Explain your thinking.
3. This story is told in the first person—by Leira herself. Do you think this was effective? Explain your thinking.
4. There is a great deal of loss, death and devastation in this book. Discuss one part of the novel where the loss and devastation left a strong impact on you. Have you ever experienced this type of loss and hardship? If so, and if you are comfortable, connect your experience of loss and hardship with Leira's.



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