

Text Title: *Circle of Dreams, Runeweaver*

Author: Linda McNabb

Synopsis

Twelve year-old Zaine lives with his Aunt and Uncle on a farm, although it's clear to him that he is not related to his "family" because they don't look anything alike. Zaine's Aunt Tilly is particularly cruel and works him tirelessly so that he can repay the jar of silver she feels he owes her for his upkeep (although funnily enough the jar never gets any fuller!). Zaine's only pleasure is going to visit Davyn, an old herbbmaster who lives in a cottage nearby. Zaine aspires to be a herbbmaster when he grows up, but there is another, more important reason why he is drawn to the old man's cottage. There is a strange book there that Zaine can't seem to leave alone. At first he couldn't even open it but in the last five years he has worked his way to page 100 – even though he has no idea of the meanings behind the strange patterns and designs contained within it.

Zaine's life changes dramatically when a man named Calard discovers his ability and buys Zaine from his aunt. Calard plans to train Zaine as a runeweaver and use him to help Prince Theodane win the crown to the kingdom. Davyn rescues Zaine from Calard and takes him to the castle himself. Here Zaine learns about his mysterious past. Davyn is actually Zaine's father and Trianna, the King's personal runeweaver is his mother. Zaine was sent away as a child in an attempt to stop him learning the runes and hopefully stop the terrible prophecy given about Zaine when he was born from coming true. But Zaine has already learnt the runes, and his mother, fearful of what will happen to the kingdom should her son be allowed to become a runeweaver, banishes him to the Circle of Dreams. Zaine is resigned to his fate but is determined to help Princess Maata gain the crown before he goes. Zaine soon becomes involved in a contest that could cost him his life and ends in an outcome that no one could have predicted...

Text Type

Circle of Dreams, Runeweaver is a fast-paced adventure fantasy novel. It is the first in a series and it introduces us to the character of Zaine, a young boy who has powers as a runeweaver. The story has broad appeal and features strong male and female protagonists in Zaine and Maata. It contains elements of the supernatural which the reader learns as Zaine discovers who he really is and begins to develop his knowledge and weave the runes, which he memorised, to create magic spells. The story allows the reader to escape into a fantasy world where rivals vie for the crown to the kingdom in the Circle of Dreams, a powerful place that has the ability to hold people within its boundaries forever. The story leaves the reader wondering what further adventures Zaine will have now that he is discovering the true extent of his powers.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 5-18), Chapters 2-7 (pp. 19-103), Chapters 8-11 (pp. 104-163) and Chapters 12-15 (pp. 164-216).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them describe the setting of the story and identify elements that help categorise the novel as a fantasy. Encourage students to study the main characters and track their development throughout the story. Students should make predictions about the story and be able to identify important themes and conflicts.

Introducing the Novel

Study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Based on the front cover what kind of story do you think this will be?
- What do you think a runeweaver is?
- Who is the main character in the story?
- How do you know the first part of the blurb is an extract from the novel?



- What is going to happen if Zaine touches the book?
- Why are runeweavers important in the search for a new King or Queen?
- What does “perilous” mean? What is a prophecy?

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 5-18) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 5-18)

- Why is Zaine so excited when he wakes up?
- Who does Zaine live with? How does he describe his living situation?
- How old is Zaine?
- How does Zaine know that he is not really related to his Aunt and Uncle?
- Why does Aunt Tilly believe that Zaine owes them a jar of silver?
- Why aren't the sheep on the farm fetching much money?
- Who is Davyn? How does Zaine know him? Why does Zaine like spending time with him?
- What does Zaine look at when Davyn leaves the cottage?
- How long ago did Zaine find the book? Describe what the book looks like. What is contained in the book?

Discussion

- When do you think the story is set? Quote evidence from the first chapter to back up your ideas.
- What magical elements have been introduced in the story?
- Why do you think Davyn kept the book hidden from Zaine? How is the book going to be important in the story?
- Predict what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2-7 (pp. 19-103) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2-7 (pp. 19-103)

- How does Davyn react when he sees Zaine with the book? Why does Zaine lie to Davyn about how much of the book he has looked at? What does Davyn tell Zaine about the power of the book?
- Who turns up to wish Zaine a happy birthday? Why is Zaine so surprised to see him?
- Why does Zaine decide to go to the inn? What does he find there? Why does he decide to try and open the book? How does the man react when Zaine is successful? Who does Zaine see in the crowd?
- Describe Master Calard. Where does he want to take Zaine?
- What does Aunt Tilly want as payment for Zaine?
- Why does Zaine want to go and see Davyn before he leaves? What does he plan to do after he visits the old man?
- Who finds Zaine at the cottage? Why does he seem surprised when he learns Davyn's name?
- Who is Tercel? How does he feel about the offer that Zaine has been made? What information does Zaine learn from Tercel?
- What does Calard give Zaine to study in the carriage? Why does Tercel want to be involved in the contest?
- Why is Zaine shocked when he learns how many pages Calard can do?
- How does Calard fix the broken wheel?
- Why are Calard, Tercel and Zaine forced to walk to town?
- Why does Calard set up a table in the street?
- What happens to distract Calard and allow Zaine to escape? Who caused the distraction?
- What is different about Davyn's appearance?
- What is Zaine's first rune circle?

- Why is Davyn so astounded when he learns how many pages of the book Zaine can do?
- What amazing information does Davyn give Zaine about his age?
- Why does Davyn feel as though he has failed his oath?
- Why does Davyn decide to take Zaine to Willow Castle?
- Who is Zaine's mother?
- Who does Calard want to become King?
- Who is Princess Maata?
- Who are the novices? Why does Davyn decide to put Zaine with them for a few days?
- Describe what happens when Zaine goes down to the river with Master Pavil and the novices.
- Why does Davyn decide that Zaine should stay with him at the Castle?
- What does Zaine find outside the door to his room? Who does he meet outside?

Discussion

- Why do you think Davyn was supposed to watch over Zaine and make sure that he didn't learn any runes? Why do you think his parents gave him to another family when he was young?
- Why won't Trianna be pleased to see her son?
- What have we learnt about Zaine so far? What qualities and characteristics does he have? How has he dealt with the news that Trianna is his mother? How would you feel if you were in his position?
- What is a runeweaver?
- Predict what is going to happen in the story next.

Students read Chapters 8-11 (pp.104-163) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 8-11 (pp. 104-163)

- Describe Zaine's first meeting with the Princess. What sort of person is the Princess?
- How does the Princess know who Zaine is?
- Why does Maata want Zaine to hide her?
- Where does Davyn take Zaine so that he can see his mother? What does Zaine wear to avoid being recognised?
- What does Trianna say to Davyn when she approaches him in the hall?
- Why does Trianna demand a meeting of the Council of Seven? Who will make up the seventh member of the council?
- What shocking news does Davyn give Zaine after he leaves the hall? What information does Davyn give him about his background? Why is Trianna scared of Zaine? What does the prophecy say?
- What kind of training exercise does Maata take part in? Why is she training? How does Maata deal with the exercise?
- Who is Prince Varan? Why is he helping Maata train?
- Why are runeweavers involved in the battle for the crown? What does Davyn show Zaine behind the castle? How is the new ruler of the castle decided? Why do runeweavers stay out of the circle? What happens to Maata if she is not the first to reach the crown?
- Describe what happens at the council meeting. Who decides Zaine's fate? How does Trianna defend her decision? How does Maata convince Trianna to hold off giving Zaine his punishment?
- How does Zaine react to the news of his fate?
- What does Davyn give Zaine to take into the Circle of Dreams? How will the books help him?
- What does Zaine overhear when Maata and Varan sit on the bench in front of his hiding place?
- Who formally becomes a contender for the crown? Who else decides to vie for the crown? How does Maata react when she learns about the surprise contender?

Discussion

- Why do you think Prince Varan has decided to vie for the crown? What could this mean for Maata? What kind of powers do the king or queen have? What problems can it create for the people in the kingdom if the monarch is corrupt or incompetent?
- Explain what we have learnt so far about the Circle of Dreams. Do you believe Zaine is equipped to survive there? Why/why not?
- Describe Davyn. Why do you think his attitude towards his son is different to Trianna's? In what ways does he try to help Zaine?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 12-15 (pp. 164-216) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 12-15 (pp. 164-216)

- Describe the confrontation that occurs between Davyn and Calard. Why is Zaine no longer afraid of Calard?
- What announcement does Maata make regarding the contest that surprises everyone? How do you know she is nervous about the outcome of the contest?
- Why isn't Zaine allowed to attend the contest? What does Davyn want Zaine to do while the contest is taking place? Why won't Zaine take his advice? What does this suggest about his character?
- What does Zaine do that enables him to attend the contest? How does he trick the guard?
- What does Davyn learn from Varan at the contest? Why do you think Varan wants to enter the Circle of Dreams?
- What does the man do with the crown once the contest starts? How does the ground change once the crown has been put into the circle of dreams?
- Why does the Princess enter the Circle of Dreams so carefully? What problems does she run into almost immediately? Why is it so important that she trust the magic of the runeweavers?
- What does Zaine learn about the runeweavers' powers as Maata moves deeper into the Circle?
- What happens to a runeweaver if they enter the Circle?
- How does Varan help Maata in her quest to reach the crown? What do you think is his motivation for helping Maata succeed? What does he stand to lose?
- What incident helps Zaine decide to enter the Circle of Dreams? How does Trianna react when she sees what he means to do? Why is Zaine disgusted with his mother? Are his feelings justified? Why/why not?
- Describe what happens when Zaine enters the Circle of Dreams. In what ways does he help Maata?
- Who else does Zaine see in the Circle? How did the pair get there?
- Why does Calard refuse to help Theodane with his quest? What does this action suggest about his character?
- How do Varan and Zaine work together to stop Theodane from reaching the crown?
- Describe what happens when Maata and Theodane both reach the crown. Who finally puts the crown on their head?
- Why is Maata worried that the crown has lost its power?
- What happens to Calard?
- What astonishing realisation does Zaine come to about the runebooks?
- What does the Circle of Dreams do to the contenders?
- How does Zaine feel when he finds himself alone in the Circle of Dreams? How does he escape? What does he find when he leaves the Circle?
- How does Maata convince the others that Zaine is no longer a threat?
- How does Zaine free Davyn from the book?
- How does Davyn convince the others that Maata reached the crown first?

Discussion

- Identify the climax of the story. Why is this event important?
- How does Zaine's character develop and change throughout the course of the story?
- Identify an important theme in the story and explain how the theme is developed throughout the story.
- Choose an important conflict that occurs in the novel and explain how it is resolved.

Activities

Board game – Design a board game that features important events that occur in the novel. For every positive event reward the player, for every negative event penalise them. Illustrate your game with important settings from the story.

Book cover – Design an alternate book cover for *Circle of Dreams*, *Runeweaver* and write a new blurb. Give reasons for the elements and choices in your book cover design. Who do you think your cover will appeal to? Who do you think the original cover appeals to? Which cover do you think is more appropriate? Why? What did you try to capture or emphasise in your blurb? Why?

Webpage – Design a webpage advertising the novel. Include a brief plot summary, illustrations and information about the characters and themes. Remember to combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

Character – Complete a character profile for Zaine. Include his name, age, family, personal qualities and characteristics, motivations, important actions and quotes that illustrate interesting aspects of his character.

News Article – You are a reporter writing a news article about the outcome of the contest. Use the inverted pyramid style of writing – this means all of the important information (the 5 w's and h) should be in the first 2 paragraphs. Your article should be objective and contain quotes from people involved.

Drama – Choose an important event from the story. Write a script that depicts the event. Remember to include a cast of characters and stage directions in your script. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Writing – Write the first chapter for the second book in the series.