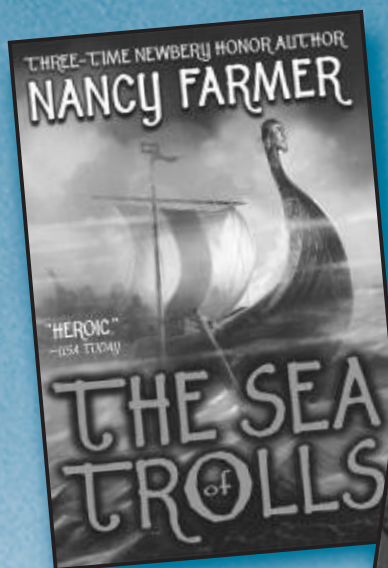


A GUIDE FOR READING GROUPS



The Sea of Trolls

The Land of the Silver Apples



The Islands of the Blessed

By Three-Time Newbery Honor Author
Nancy Farmer

Pre-reading Activity

Ask students to research the unique elements in Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology and share their findings in class. What are the significant differences? List the most common figures and distinctive characteristics of the Norse myths. Tell students to keep these in mind as they read the three novels.

A GUIDE FOR READING GROUPS TO *The Sea of Trolls*

Discussion

- » Good vs. evil is a common theme in fantasy novels. Discuss the good and evil forces in *The Sea of Trolls*.
- » Describe Jack's family. Contrast Jack's relationship with his mother to his relationship with his father. Lucy, Jack's younger sister, appears to be very spoiled. Why does Jack's father allow her to live in a fantasy world? How does her fantasy world protect her when she encounters Queen Frith?
- » Giles Crookleg is very religious. How does he convey his religion to his children? Discuss how his religion is in conflict with his wife's practice of magic. Jack learns from his mother how to talk to bees and how to soothe frightened animals with song. What type of magic does he learn from the Bard? What does the Bard mean when he tells Jack, "Real magic is dangerous"?
- » The Bard, a druid from Ireland, is also known as Dragon Tongue. How does he acquire this name? What is the role of the Bard to the village people? Describe Jack's relationship with the Bard. Why does the Bard choose Jack to be his apprentice? Why doesn't Giles Crookleg want his son to go with the Bard? What is Jack's mother's opinion of the Bard? Discuss what Jack learns during his apprenticeship.
- » The Bard advises Jack, "You should look intelligent even when you aren't." How does this advice serve Jack as he travels on his quest?
- » Explain the Bard's nightmares. How do his nightmares foreshadow Jack's journey and encounter with the evil forces?
- » How does the Bard protect the village people from the Jotuns? The Bard tells Jack, "Only a very special kind of warrior can overcome them." Describe the qualities of this kind of warrior. How does listening to the Bard's stories about the Jotuns help Jack see his father differently?
- » Why does the Bard give Jack the rune of protection? How does the Bard's gift leave him vulnerable to the evil forces? At one point, Jack almost gives the rune to Lucy. Explain why he changes his mind. Why does Jack give the rune to Thorgil?
- » The Bard tells Jack, "You see, lad, most people live like birds in a cage. It makes them feel safe. The world's a frightening place, full of glory and wonder and danger." Describe the "glory, wonder, and danger" that Jack and Lucy face. What do they learn about the

world by the end of the novel? How does the Bard's statement to Jack apply to the world we live in, and the way we live our lives?

» The Bard teaches Jack about fear, pain, power, magic, and anger. How does the Bard's warning of Ivar the Boneless and Queen Frith leave Jack "dizzy with fear"? At what point does Jack experience the most pain and anger? How does his magic make him feel powerful? What important lesson does he learn about power?

» Discuss the significance of Mimir's Well.

Research & Activities

» Giles Crookleg can't read, but he has memorized stories from the monks of the Holy Isle. Write and illustrate a story that Giles might have told his children.

» When Olaf relates Thorgil's story, Jack thinks that it would make a good poem. Write the poem, and give it a happier ending to please Jack.

» Jack's mother fears that Lucy can't tell the difference between fact and fantasy. Research the Vikings and write a factual and a fanciful story about them. Share the stories in class. Which type of story creates the most interest?

» There are good physical descriptions of the characters, both human and animal. Make an illustrated chart of the novel's characters.

» Identify the most humorous scenes in the book. In small groups, select a scene to perform as a one-act play. Create appropriate costumes.

» Four of the days of the week (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday) are named for Scandinavian gods. Research these days of the week and find out which gods the names represent. Pick one of these days and write or retell the myth that explains the name.

» The birth of Norse mythology was pre-Christianity. Research the story of the Norse creation and write a short paper that draws a parallel between this story and the creation story taught in your religion.

A GUIDE FOR READING GROUPS TO *The Land of the Silver Apples* Discussion

» Describe the power of the Bard over the people in Jack's village. Contrast the beliefs of the Bard with those of Brother Aiden. Describe the strength of their relationship, in spite of their religious differences. Discuss Brother Aiden's efforts to rid the village of its "old" beliefs. How might Jack interpret Brother Aiden's success and/or failure after they have returned from their journey to *The Land of the Silver Apples*?

» Lucy, Jack's little sister, is first introduced in *The Sea of Trolls* and appears very spoiled. How does the discovery of Lucy's true identity help explain her behavior? Discuss whether she is spoiled or "possessed." What does Jack's mother mean when she says to Lucy, "You need a lesson in humility"? Do others learn humility in *The Land of the Silver Apples*? Thorgil? Pega?

» Giles Crookleg confesses that he didn't tell anyone that the hobgoblins had switched Lucy and Hazel as infants. Why does he call his action a "sin of pride"? Explain Jack's mother's reaction when she finds out that the little girl in her house isn't her child. How does the Bard blame Giles for the evils in the village? How does the Bard suspect trouble with the family during the Need-Fire Ceremony?

» Almost all fantasy has an element of magic. Identify the objects of magic in the novel and explain their power. How do these items contribute to the outcome of the group's quest to find Jack's real sister?

» Among Northmen, thirteen-year-olds are considered adults. How does the Bard expect Jack to act like an adult? At what point does the Bard tell Jack that he is grown up enough? How does this contribute to Jack's confusion about his place in the world?

» Why is it necessary for Jack to buy Pega in order to free her? Pega promises to serve Jack in exchange for her freedom. How does Jack see this promise as a contradiction of his intent? Discuss the relationship that develops between Jack and Pega. Explain Jack's jealousy of her.

» Farseeing is a form of magic that Jack really wants to possess. What are the risks of farseeing? Discuss Jack's first experience with farseeing. How does he almost take the wrong turn? What saves him? Why is his mother the first person he wants to reach by means of farseeing? How does this explain their special bond?

» How is Jack burdened with guilt throughout the novel? Who is responsible for helping him deal with guilt? How are his feelings of guilt sometimes healthy?

» Discuss how pagan beliefs and Christian beliefs collide in the novel.

» There are many betrayals in the novel. Which character feels the most betrayed? How is this betrayal resolved?

» Jack remembers Olaf One-Brow's advice: "Never give up, even if you're falling off a cliff. You never know what might happen on the way down." Explain the figurative use of the word "cliff." How often does Jack come face-to-face with a cliff? What things happen on the way down from these cliffs that affect his ultimate quest?

» Which character grows the most in the novel—Jack, Thorgil, or Pega?

Research & Activities

» Consider various ways to dramatize the Need-Fire Ceremony. For example, it could be as a one-act horror play, as a fantasy, and as an historical epic. Make an appropriate playbill and use masks to interpret the characters of the Bard, Lucy, Jack, Pega, and Giles Crookleg.

» On their journey to *The Land of the Silver Apples*, Giles sings hymns and the Bard sings a ballad. A ballad is a song with a story. Write a ballad that Jack might sing at the end of the novel, when their journey is complete.

» Hobgoblins and elves play an important role in the novel. They are different in appearances and live in different habitats. Consider

Nancy Farmer's descriptions of these creatures and illustrate them in their natural habitat. Where in the novel might each illustration be placed?

- » Take a look at the Pictish symbol stones at aberdeenshire.gov.uk/archaeology/sites/pictish. Locate a small, smooth stone and carve or paint a Pictish symbol on it. Write a brief description of the symbol and its meaning on an index card. Place the stones on exhibit and invite your friends to visit this "archaeological exhibit."
- » Time stands still in the *The Land of the Silver Apples*. Why does Jack say that this is "a curse rather than a blessing?" Write a brief paper called "How My Life Would Change if Time Stood Still."

A GUIDE FOR READING GROUPS TO *The Islands of the Blessed*

Discussion

- » The Northmen are known for nasty behavior. Has does Thorgil's memory of her earlier life define her temperament? Why does the Bard defend her? Thorgil is prone to depression. Why does her crying worry Jack more than her cursing and bad behavior? Why is it easier for Thorgil to deal with anger over sorrow? What is her greatest sorrow?
- » Thorgil is also described as "brave, loyal and utterly trustworthy." What is her bravest act? Describe her loyalty to Jack and the Bard. Why does Jack think that Thorgil is inflexible? How does he know that he can trust her? Explain Thorgil's special touch with animals. How does her ability to communicate with animals help in the quests leading to the Islands of the Blessed?
- » Describe Jack from Thorgil's point of view. What are Jack's weakest qualities?
- » The Bard says, to Jack, "Ever since I took you as my apprentice, I've been training you to see things as they are. Until you do that, you haven't a hope of looking farther." Why does the Bard want Jack to spend a night in The Hazel Wood? Cite specific scenes where it appears that the Bard is testing Jack. At what point does Jack begin to "see things as they are?" What is Jack's greatest test for entrance into Bard School?
- » The Bard advises, "Sacrifice, done rightly, is stronger than magic." What does Jack sacrifice? What is the Bard's greatest sacrifice? Debate whether Jack ever makes a wrong sacrifice. Discuss other characters in the novel that sacrifice something of importance to them. There are times when Jack wishes that the Bard had taught him useful magic. At what times might such magic have helped Jack?
- » Discuss the symbolism of the fish-shaped clapper of Fair Lamenting. How does the Bard's explanation conflict with that of Father Severus? Explain the significance of the silver flute, the new clapper, for Fair Lamenting. How does Fair Lamenting contribute to Jack's coming of age?
- » Discuss how religious and pagan beliefs collide in the novel. Father Severus claims to be a Christian. Debate whether his godly

persona is really a disguise. Brother Aiden claims that Father Severus is unselfish and performs many acts of kindness. Explain what the Bard means when he tells Brother Aiden, "Let's not forget that your hero has a few blind spots." Why does Jack think that Severus has courage? How does power corrupt Severus? Debate whether Father Severus is a hero or a saint after the Flying Venom plague threatens the monastery.

- » What does Jack learn about power and responsibility in his quest to rescue the Bard's daughter? How does he deal with fear?
- » Explain the wisdom in Olaf One-Brow's advice, "You must never give up, even if you're falling off a cliff. You never know what you might find going down." Discuss the many "figurative" cliffs that Jack and Thorgil encounter. What do they discover on their descents?
- » The Bard says, "There is always a choice between good and evil." Why does Jack feel that the Tanners get rewarded for their evil behavior? Which other characters in the novel are forced to choose between good and evil? Discuss the character that best represents "good." Who are the most evil characters?
- » Explain the significance of the Rune of Protection. Why does Jack give it to Thorgil? Explain why Thorgil gives it to Ethne.
- » The Bard encourages Jack to ask questions when he wants answers. He says that "self-imposed" ignorance doesn't do anyone any good. Debate whether there are times in the novel when Jack should have asked questions? What lessons does he learn from his "self-imposed" ignorance?
- » How does Thorgil earn the privilege of attending Bard School? Discuss Jack's reaction when he learns that she will be joining him.

Research & Activities

- » Have students read the story of Samson. Write a feature article for a fantasy magazine that draws a comparison between Samson and Father Severus.
- » Ask students to create a comic strip about one of the following characters: Mrs. Tanner, Gog and Magog, Father Severus, Einar Adder-Tooth, Big Half and Little Half, the Bugaboo, or Mr. Blewit.
- » Thorgil wanted to be a warrior and had a "fondness for bloody death scenes." Divide the class into small groups and ask them to select a scene from the novel and turn it into a "bloody death scene" fit for a warrior. Suppose that Jack has to complete an application to continue his Bard education. Write a personal essay that he might write called "Why I'm qualified for Bard School." The Bard also thinks that Thorgil has earned the right to become a Bard. Write her personal essay.
- » There is a betrothal ceremony for Mrs. Tanner and Schlaup. Rune tells the love story of Balder and Nanna, the god and goddess of spring, and Jack gives the tale of the Irish god Aengus. Ask students to locate one of these stories and illustrate it as a picture book as a wedding gift to the couple.

About the Books

Eleven-year-old Jack's mythological adventure first began in A.D. 793 when he left his family's farm and became an apprentice to the Bard to learn the magic of the life-force. No one but the Bard himself could have possibly predicted that Jack would embark upon a dangerous adventure-quest in *The Sea of Trolls*, in which Jack and his little sister Lucy are captured by berserkers and enslaved by their captain, Olaf One-Brow. Thus begins Lucy and Jack's introduction to Thorgil, Olaf's fierce, young, shipmate, and the start of their supernatural journey alongside Northmen, beasts, trolls and half-trolls. But surviving one adventure is hardly what fate has in store for Jack—in *The Land of the Silver Apples*, now thirteen-year-old Jack, Lucy, and Thorgil meet Pega, a slave girl, on an unforgettable journey through the glamour-veiled kingdom of the elves, facing moral and magical struggles along the way. The two books encompass Norse mythology, Saxon history, and the reality of growing up in a conflicted world. In *The Islands of the Blessed*, Jack's final adventure, Jack is fourteen and in some ways his education has just begun. He gives up the Rune of Protection to Thorgil, and together they embark on a dangerous quest to rescue the Bard's daughter. There are detours to Draugr's Tomb, Grim's Island, and St. Columba's Cave where they come face to face with creatures, both good and evil, like the Fin Folk, Shoney, Father Severus, Brother Aiden, King Brutus, Skakki, the Bugaboo, and Pangur Ban. In the end, it is wisdom learned from the Bard that leads them to their ultimate fate—final acceptance into the School for Bards.

About the Author

NANCY FARMER has written three Newbery Honor Books: *The Ear the Eye and the Arm*; *A Girl Named Disaster*; and *The House of the Scorpion*, which, in 2002, also won the National Book Award and was a Printz Honor book. Her other books include *Do You Know Me*, *The Warm Place*, and three picture books for young children. *The Land of the Silver Apples* is the sequel to the highly acclaimed *The Sea of Trolls*, which received five starred reviews and was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults as well as an ALA Notable Children's Book. *The Islands of the Blessed* is the final book in the trilogy. Ms. Farmer grew up on the Arizona-Mexico border, and now lives with her family in Menlo Park, California.



The Sea of Trolls

A Richard Jackson Book
Atheneum Books for Young Readers
ISBN: 978-0-689-86744-6 (HC)
ISBN: 978-0-689-86746-0 (PB)
Ages 10-14 • Grades 5-9

AN ALA BEST BOOK FOR YOUNG ADULTS
AN ALA NOTABLE CHILDREN'S BOOK



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The Islands of the Blessed

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Simon & Schuster Children's Audio
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Also by Nancy Farmer: *The House of the Scorpion*

A National Book Award Winner • An ALA Newbery Honor Book
An ALA Michael L. Printz Award Honor Book • An ALA Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults

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Ages 11 up • Grades 6 up

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