

Resource kit

for use in schools

Contains:

- Comprehension Questions
- Research Skills
- Creative Writing
- Visual Media/Technology
- Vocabulary Challenge
- Discussion Topics
- Debate Topics
- Creative & Critical Responses

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owl



a novel by

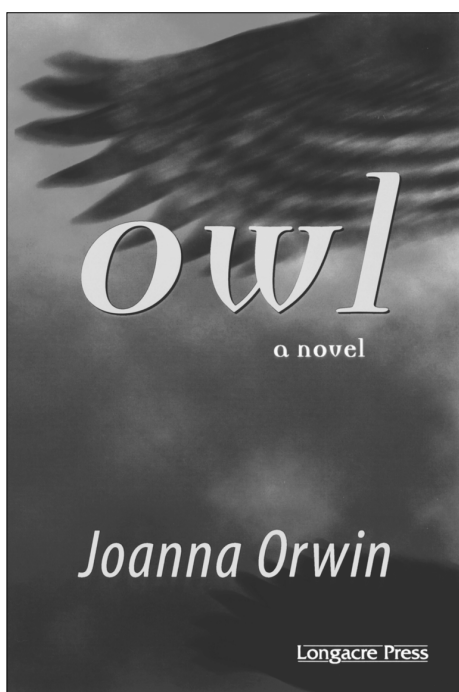
Joanna Orwin

A dark shape hurtled out of the fog... The bird turned in a curving steep dive, aiming for Tama... The boy was being dragged beneath it, his feet barely brushing the tops of tussocks...

Owl and Tama could hardly be more different – Owl a farm kid carrying the burden of his father's death, Tama, disgruntled and alienated, sent from the city for a bit of 'time out'. The boys are set for a stand-off when a greater threat suddenly appears.

Somehow, Owl's discovery of Maori cave art on the family farm, and Tama's arrival have combined to unleash a disturbing malevolence from the past. They have set free the forces of the ancient myth of the Pouākai, a brutal man-eating bird, bent on destruction. Together they must decode the stories of the rock drawings in order to defeat the creature: to save themselves, Owl's family, and the local farmers.

***Owl* is Joanna Orwin's fifth novel, after a long break from fiction writing. She won the 1986 Children's Book of the Year for *The Guardian of the Land*, and is recognised for her accurate portrayal of Maori culture and history.**



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comprehension questions

Answer in complete sentences, using your own words after re-reading material from the selection of chapters below:

chapter one

Character interaction: summarise all the clues we are given in the first chapter about how the absence of Hamish's Dad has affected the family.

p. 13

Look at the first paragraph after the section break. What descriptive technique is the author using to create an impression of the area surrounding the farm? What sort of mood does it help to convey?

p. 15

Why is the family's reaction to Tama so surprised?

p. 17

What is Hamish's nickname based on?

p. 17

What makes Hamish think Tama is chauvinistic?

chapter two

pp 19–20

Why is Hamish disappointed when he sees the rock drawings again?

p. 21

What makes Hamish think that perhaps his find is worthy of publicity?

pp 22–25

What makes Hamish change from thinking Tama is useless to thinking he is a greaser? What reasons does Hamish have for resenting Tama so quickly?

p. 23

How does Hamish plan to get successful photos?

Can you find a turning point in the dynamics between Tama and Hamish in this chapter? If so, describe what brings on the change.

pp 26–27

What is it that makes Hamish think that Tama doesn't feel as casual as he pretends to be about his father walking out on the family?

p. 28

How do the MacIntyre kids' and Tama's attitudes to their fathers differ?

pp 29–30

Summarise the reasons Jane gives for not keeping the farm in the family.

p. 31

Why doesn't Kirsten like the idea of selling the farm to an Asian consortium?

p. 33

What else besides his excitement over the freshness of his discovery makes Hamish want to get the photos as soon as possible?

pp 43–44

What is so unusual about Hamish's find? What sort of archaeological questions might such a discovery help to answer?

p. 45

At this early stage, do you believe Hamish thinks the stone described here is just a stone? Why – or why not?

pp 46–59

Give an account of all the ways we're gradually led to understand what Hamish feels about taking the stone away from the rock art site as time passes.

pp 46–59

What new personal qualities does Tama reveal during the lambing run?

pp 55–56

What aspects of photography does Hamish seem to enjoy the most here? What sorts of things does this tell us about his personality?

p. 56

What are Kirsten's plans for the farm at this stage of the novel?

pp 58–59

Why does Kirsten first of all think that the damage to the flock has been done by keas?

pp 62–63

Why does Hamish worry about his mother at this point?

pp 65–57

Re-reading the narrative and dialogue between

Tama and Hamish, summarise all the arguments they cover for and against the existence of a giant bird-like creature in southern New Zealand.

p. 79

What do you think of Hamish's response in the final two paragraphs before the section break here? Do you feel he is too harsh on himself? Explain your answer.

pp 97–99

Why is it so important to Kirsten and Hamish that Tama offers his support at this stage?

What finally convinces Tama that his support is crucial?

chapter eight

What are some of the contrasts between Tama and Uncle Manny?

Why does Hamish feel unnerved by Uncle Manny and Taua Gray?

How does Taua Gray know that Hamish has taken the stone of protection, or kaitiaki, from the site of the Seven Sentinels?

According to Taua Gray, what are all the factors that seem to have contributed to the unleashing of the ancient forces of the myth of the human-eating eagle? (You may have to re-read the whole chapter to get a complete answer to this question.)

Why was Tama in particular attacked by Pouākai?

According to the legend, why did Pouākai reappear 500 years ago?

What were all the precautions that the ancestral Ruru took to keep the power of Pouākai at bay?

On page 115, we learn something about Tama that explains why he was reluctant to take part in tracking down a Maori elder to help the MacIntyres understand their crisis. What is this new piece of information?

chapter twelve

p. 159

Look at the way the sentence style has changed on this page. How does it affect or convey the mood of the narrative?

p. 166

Why do Hamish, Tod and Kirsten all show grief at this point in the story?

pp 170–171

Why is Hamish surprised and disappointed the morning after they have vanquished the Pouākai?

chapter fourteen

What persuades Mr Xiang from the business consortium that the MacIntyre land is not for him?

chapter fifteen

What connection does Hamish see between Taua Gray and the Pouākai?

How does the ritual at the scene of the killing of the Pouākai seem to help Hamish?

What do you think about the author's decision to place the scene with the Pouākai offspring near the end of the novel? How does it affect the suspense?



Research skills

I.

At the start of the novel, a note from the author says that the novel is based on the Waitaha legend of the Pouākai. Using the library (and access to the internet if you have it, and if it seems useful) try to track down as much as you can both about Waitaha, and the myth of the Pouākai. How do the versions of the myth that you have found differ from the retelling in the novel?

2.

(a) Find out about historical rock art sites in New Zealand. Write up your research as a talk to present to the class. If you wish, you could also research and draw comparisons to one or two other rock art finds around the world.

(b) Or, after your research, imagine that you are Hamish MacIntyre. Present a talk to the New Zealand Archaeological Society (as he considers

creative writing

doing on page 8), about the rock art find at the Seven Sentinels, and its relationship to the Pouākai legend.

3.

Using sources like oral story-tellers in your family, or published versions of myths and legends, research into a Maori myth that you find particularly powerful or have a strong personal response to in some way. Retell this myth in written form, and explain why it has produced a powerful response from you.

4.

Jane MacIntyre works as a graphic designer. Find out as much as you can about what this work involves. Write a newspaper ad for a graphic design company that is searching for a new member of their team. What sort of skills and personal qualities would a graphic designer need?

5. pp 79–81

Summarise all the facts you can find in the novel about Haast's eagle, then compare what you find here to your own research on the subject. Find at least three good sources of information. You could hunt through bird field guides, encyclopedia entries, zoology books on New Zealand birds ("ornithology" is the study of birds), or perhaps books on dinosaurs. Along with this research, give a brief 2–3 sentence explanation of what a "flight feather" is.

6.

Each of the main characters begins to discuss plans for after school, and for further training. What career paths are you interested in? Research some of your options, then prepare a short oral presentation to give to the class on what aspects of one of your possible choices appeal most to you.



Have you ever been caving or rock-climbing? If so, write about your most exhilarating – or most frightening – day.

Imagine Hamish is applying for a job as a research assistant on the archaeological investigation of a set of caves in the South Island. He has to write a letter persuading the research team that he is the right person for the job, despite his age. Using your own assessment of his strengths and abilities as a character, and knowing what he has been through in the narrative of *Owl*, try to write the most accurate and persuasive letter you can.

Find a landscape description in the novel that you find particularly vivid. Recreate your own impression either of this landscape, or of any other landscape you have strong personal responses or connections to, in another art form: e.g. photography, print, painting, drawing, sculpture, poem, song, dance. If you choose a non-literary form, write up a small press release item explaining the ideas behind your work, which you would send out to the media to publicise the launch of your new work of art.



visual media/ technology

Re-read the descriptions of the rock art on pp 20–21, and elsewhere in the novel. Recreate the images using the artistic medium you think would suit it best: paint, chalk, pencils, pastels?

If your school has video equipment, imagine that a news team has been sent out to the farmland in the novel, and that you have to prepare a report on the rumours of dogs killing sheep. Get whoever plays the role of TV journalist to describe the setting, and interview some of the locals – including some of the main teenage characters in the novel – about their losses and their fears.

Write a simple time line or scene break-down of all the major events and scene changes in the novel, as if you were producing an outline for a TV series or movie script based on *Owl*.

Design a pendant like one of those described in Chapter Fifteen. You will probably also need to re-read the descriptions of the rock art and of Tama's tattoo to follow Joanna Orwin's images closely.



vocabulary challenge

Either

1. Divide the class into teams. Each team tries to be first either to give the correct spelling, or to offer a correct definition, and scores points for success.

Or

2. Ask the students to design a crossword, where at least 20 of the words below are the answers to the clues they design. Encourage the students to make the clues as inventive, challenging, cryptic or comic as possible.

chauvinistic	runnel	concentric
sundry	posterity	provisos
concede	nonchalant	consortium
intonation	tor	balaclava
polypropylene	superstitious	belaying
jettisoned	scaffolding	abseil
bulbous	granular	alluvial
fickle	perfunctory	knoll
balaclava	periphery	matagouri
posse	impeded	rancour
saunter	malignant	scimitar
assailed	calibre	marauder
surreptitiously	constrained	incongruous
adze	circuitous	maelstrom
pyre	swathe	consortium
sussuration		



discussion topics

Have any of the class had farming experience? If so, get them to discuss or write about their experiences, and how successful they feel the author's depiction of this work and lifestyle is.

Should historical sites like the rock art area discovered by Hamish be protected by the government? Why, or why not?

Throughout history, there have been sightings either of fabulous – or of presumably extinct – creatures like the Yeti or Abominable Snowman, the moa, the Loch Ness Monster, or large wild cats (like the Beast of Exmoor). In small groups, or as a class, either discuss – or formally debate – whether such phenomena exist.

NB: Points to consider along the way might be the fact that science is always discovering new facts and disproving old ideas; that there is still much in our world that is inexplicable; that perhaps people have a deep need to believe in magical or fabulous events, regardless of proof; that some of these creatures have been investigated again and again, with all sorts of new technological tools, and yet no proof has been found. Note, also, the response of the farmers to the slaughter of the sheep, in *Owl*, pp 85–87, and what this seems to be saying about the nature of belief.

What does the novel as a whole seem to be saying about the power of story, history, and tradition?

Hamish works out that the rock drawings represent what he calls “parallel patterns”: i.e. sequences of events that have been acted out in the past, and that are being acted out again in the present of the novel. Discuss whether “parallel patterns” exist in our own world.

pp 137–138: Do you agree with Tama's opinion that rich overseas business groups have little right to own New Zealand territory?

Get the class to discuss how affected they have been by land rights issues in New Zealand – or elsewhere, if they come from overseas.

In the final chapter of the novel, before the epilogue, Kirsten, Hamish and Tod talk about the fact

creative and critical Responses combined

that their father's dreams for them and the farm no longer concern them as much as they once did. How easy do you find it to separate your own dreams for your future from the dreams your parents have for you? Is it fair for parents to have ambitions for their children?



debate topics

Divide the class into debating teams of convenient size, and explore the following statements:

Rational thought and emotional instinct are always in conflict.

(Re-read pp 126–128:) Our fates have already been decided, so there's no point in trying to change the current situation.

Magic is the concoction of small minds and primitive fears.

Science is another word for human arrogance.

Town and country are more foreign to one another than nations at war.

The misunderstandings between Maori and Pakeha are to blame for everything wrong in New Zealand.

Fear is a useless instinct.



In small groups, discuss the importance of the cover design in creating an impression of a novel. Following the discussion, design your own version of the cover of *Owl*, thinking about the mood of the novel, the most visual aspects of the narrative, and what would make it as eye-catching as possible for people browsing casually in a bookshop. You might want to think about elements in the narrative such as climbing, rock art, landscape, farming, Pouākai, the individual characters, the woven flax, charred wood and coloured pebbles that Hamish finds.

Write character studies of the four main characters: Tama, Owl, Tod, Kirsten. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? Think about how they all cope with stress, curiosity, social situations, solitude, family, grief, responsibility (or being trusted or distrusted by others), what their ambitions are, how they cope in unfamiliar situations.

Either

Set these out as character references for job applications they might be making once they leave work on the farm;

Or

Write these up as psychological profiles done by the police, who have decided to investigate accusations that the kids have set up a “cave art and monster eagle” hoax.

Write a 1–2 page monologue from Tama's point of view, retelling his whole work and boarding experience with the MacIntyre family. Think about things like the kind of vocabulary he would use, and how his opinion of some of the events might differ from Hamish's. In particular, think about how Hamish might have first appeared to Tama, and how that opinion might have changed during the course of the novel.

You might wish to do the same exercise from the point of view of Tod, Kirsten, or Jane MacIntyre instead. Would they all give similar – or different – versions of the same story?

