

taur

Jack Lasenby

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RESOURCE KIT for use in schools

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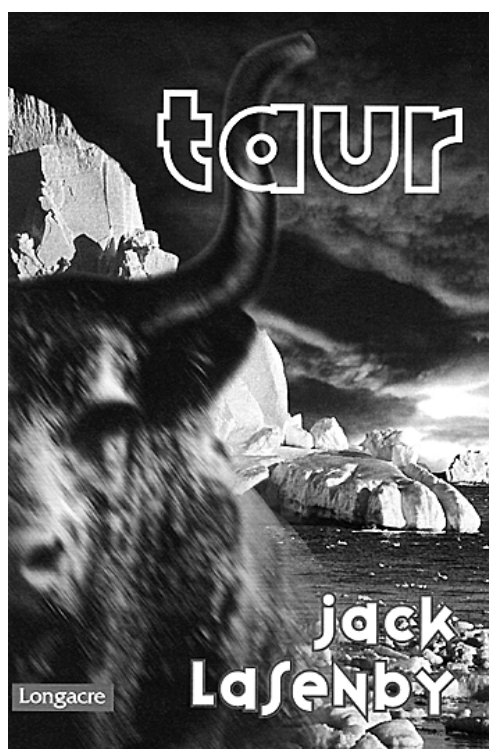
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Includes:

- chapter-by-chapter approach for classroom study
- comprehension questions
- issues for discussion
- classroom activities
- extension ideas and projects
- linked to the English curriculum

Pursued by the hateful Salt Men, Ish flees south with his friend Taur, the mute Bull Man. But nowhere is there refuge from the brutal Squint-face, who wants his greenstone god back, and wants Ish's life. Across the ice loom the mountains of the South Land – can Ish and Taur find peace there?

Here is the riveting sequel to the best-seller *Because We Were the Travellers* (Honour Award 1998 NZ Post Children's Book Awards). A third novel is in process.



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reading the book

Get the students to start Ish's journal. At the end of each day's reading, give them 10 minutes to write up a piece beginning "I'm Ish and I feel..."

Chapters 1-3 (pp. 9-27)

Comprehension

- What has happened to the Metal People?
- Why was Ish going to the Metal People's village?
- Why does Squint-face want to capture Ish?
- What is the Shaker?

Discussion

- What do you know of Ish's story so far?
- This is a violent beginning to a book. Does it grip you, make you want to read on, or turn you off? Why?
- How many placenames can you decipher – Lake Top, Tayamoot, Tungaro River, Towmranoo, the Wunger, Whykatto, Orklun...?

Chapters 4-6 (pp. 28-50)

Comprehension

- Why does Ish decide to follow the monster that bellows in the night instead of run away?
- What does Ish think Taur is at first sight?
- What does Taur do with all the surplus food he grows and makes?
- What does Taur tell Ish about the significance of the greenstone pendant?

Discussion

- What new skills does Ish learn from Taur? What can he teach Taur?
- Why doesn't Taur want to go south with Ish at first? What does Ish mean when he says 'I saw slavery took other forms as well'?
- How much do you know about the Salt People already?

Chapters 7-10 (pp. 51-72)

Comprehension

- What is Elltun?
- How do Taur and Ish get to Marn Island?
- Who told Ish the Crone's Story?

Discussion

- Discuss Ish and Taur's friendship. Why is humour so new to Ish?
- 'I realised stories are messages that greet generations separated by death. That stories are our future as well as our present and past.' What does Ish mean?

Chapters 11-13 (pp. 73-94)

Comprehension

- How do Ish and Taur escape from the besieged fort?
- How do Ish and Taur escape Marn Island?
- What do they eat when they run out of supplies on the ice floe?
- When Taur returns to health, what has changed about him?

Discussion

- Taur was right to build the fort – and the flax ropes – and the latrine. What else has Taur been right about while Ish has scoffed?
- Taur has retreated into a type of sleepworld, with little memory of the battle at Marn Island. Why do you think he has reacted this way?
- When Ish kills the seal on the ice they can't cook the meat. Could you eat raw flesh and blubber, if it was to keep you alive?

Chapters 14-16 (pp. 95-115)

Comprehension

- How do Ish and Taur try to outwit the pursuing Salt Men?
- What is the black rock that catches alight when Ish lights a fire against it?
- It looks like a post upright in the sand, something flapping against it –but what is it really?
- What is it, 'worse than murder', that Ish and Taur witness at the Salt Men's camp in the Green Stone Valley?

Discussion

- Why does Ish keep the greenstone, despite Taur's insistence that he throw it away? What do you think he should do?
- Ish can't get the slaves to understand he is on their side. In fact, the slaves want to treat him brutally themselves. Why do you think they behave like this?
- Is cannibalism wrong in a primitive society? Why/why not? Does Ish have any right to be morally outraged? –he has, after all, just murdered two Salt Men.

Chapters 17-19 (pp.116-144)

Comprehension

- How do Ish and Taur manage to cross the desert?
- What does Ish do with the greenstone pendant?
- Who is Sodomah?
- What did Taur see at the Garden of Dene?

Discussion

- Read the class 'The Lotos-Eaters' by Tennyson. Discuss the themes with reference to the Garden of Dene.
- The Garden of Dene sequence has allusions to a number of old stories, myths and folk tales. How many can you identify?
- Taur says to Ish 'You saw what you wanted to see.' Ish wonders 'How can truth be different?' Discuss.

Chapters 20-22 (pp. 145-160)

Comprehension

- What is the strange music Ish keeps hearing during the final stage of the pursuit?
- What happens to Jess?
- Who kills Squint-face, and how?
- What does Ish do with the greenstone dolphin?

Discussion

- Why did Taur sacrifice himself for Ish? Should he have?
- Should Ish have got rid of the greenstone pendant earlier? Why/why not?
- What do you think happens next?



The Great Scary Stories – violence in children's books.

Here's what Jack Lasenby said in an interview in 1995:

I don't think the imagination will grow unless you hear the great scary stories early enough in childhood. If the imagination doesn't grow, the intelligence doesn't grow. All the great ideas occur first of all in the imagination and the weight of that is through those great stories. Rather than just scary, they are deeply moving, either to laughter or tears and I think [we] need that.

These stories release the catharsis in us because evil is punished and good is rewarded. That is immensely satisfying.

I believe all the great nightmares and all the great stories, the plots and the terrors, are imprinted genetically. We have to have those stories or experiences of art that work it out for us so we can control them and they don't control us.

Choose one of the following and write an essay of 500 words:

- a) Do you agree with the above? Are violent or distressing tales, whether from the Bible or Grimm or Poe or Dahl suitable for young people to read, and if so, why? If not, why not? If possible, give examples from your own experience and that of others you know, including people from older generations. Have things changed?
- b) How much does Lasenby draw on the 'great scary stories'; on folk tales, myths and legends, in *Taur*? Give as many examples as you can. What is the effect of this on the book?

Or, stage a debate on the assertion:

'Being scared by stories helps us to not be scared by life.'

2. The Bull Man ...

... a man as far up as the waist, with a slabbed bull's chest, shoulders, and horned head above... Beside him lay a huge curved trumpet made from a horn.

Read the class the Cretan legend of the Minotaur.

- Divide into groups and devise and make a mask or simple costume that could be worn by a person in a primitive society.
- Present it to the class and explain the story of the mask. What does it represent, how would it be used?

WRITING EXTENSION:

Write up the story of your character, and/or describe a ritual or time when they wear the mask.

READING EXTENSION: *The King Must Die* by Mary Renault

3. New Zealand folklore

- a) Look up *New Zealand Explorers* by Philip Temple (Whitcoulls, 1985) and read the account of Thomas Brunner's great journey, accompanied by Kehu and others, down the Buller Gorge to the sea and along the West Coast.
- Go through *Taur* and on one side of a page list references in the story to distinctive landmarks. Then, using the map at the front of *Taur* and a New Zealand atlas, see how many places you can identify. Put the modern names opposite the text references.
 - Copy a modern map and trace onto it what you think was the path of Ish and Taur's journey.

VISUAL EXTENSION:

Make a collage with the map as the focal point, and add images and text that relate to the geography of the journey.

b) Read Denis Glover's 'Arawata Bill'.

- Write a narrative poem or ballad about the journey of Ish and Taur.

4. Environment

The judges of the NZ Post Children's Book Awards gave *Because We Were the Travellers*, the prequel to *Taur*, an Honour Award. Here's what they said:

Will there ever come a time when this land has been stripped of its trees and baked constantly by the fierce sun, when the walled city of Orklun is deserted, when a few nomadic tribes eke out a bare existence in the harsh, dry conditions as they travel their never-ending route around the Whykatto plains?

Divide the class into groups. Each group discuss the following:

1. How far in the future is this?
2. What do you think has happened to the New Zealand environment?
3. What do you think happened to the people?
4. How do you think the Travellers, the Salt People and other tribes evolved?

Each group then presents their theory to the class. Field questions from the floor.

5. TV Interview Game

Set up chairs at the front of the class as a television studio.

- Select one interviewer and one guest, and conduct an interview in front of the class. Each round select a new interviewer and guest.
- Imagine the characters from *Taur* have walked into a TV studio in the South Land and they are the first people to have ever arrived from the North.

Choose one of the following interviews:

- a) Interview Squint-face about the North Land, the Salt People, their beliefs, customs, way of life, and his role in the tribe. Why has he come south? What is his ultimate aim?
- b) Interview a slave who was captured when his or her tribe was massacred. Ask them about their original people, the attack and massacre, and what their life is like now, with the Salt People. Why don't they try to escape?
- c) You are the host of *Real Life Heroes*, a prime-time TV programme. Interview Ish, the first man to make the remarkable journey from the North to the South Lands. How did he manage it? What about his adventures on the way? What part did this guy Taur play in the journey? Be imaginative!

JOURNALISM EXTENSION FOR THE CLASS:
The rest of the class take notes (no tape recorders!) on the interviews and write up their account for one of the following:

Woman's Weekly
Ironman Magazine
Time Magazine
Truth
The Herald
National Geographic

NB: keep your readership and the style of the paper in mind...

further ideas for activities and assignments

1. Deliver a three minute book review on *Taur*.
2. Read the account of Ish and Taur on Marn Island, chapter 9. Then write about a happy time you and a friend or relative spent together. Try to give the flavour of your friendship through your description.
3. In three minutes tell the class why you think Ish should have thrown away the greenstone dolphin.
4. In three minutes tell the class why you think Ish should have held onto the greenstone dolphin.
5. You are Taur. Before you die write a letter to Ish.
6. From Taur's point of view, write up the story of Ish's capture by the Salt Men, through to the scene where Taur helps him escape.
7. Find an authentic old legend that reminds you of the stories Ish says Hagar told. Learn it and tell it to the class – orally, without reading!
8. Design your own book cover for *Taur*.
9. Read *Because We Were the Travellers*. Which book is better? Why?
10. Write one more chapter at the end of *Taur*. What happens?

Reading on Jack Lasenby:

Beneath Southern Skies, NZ Children's Book Authors and Illustrators, Fitzgibbon & Spiers, Ashton Scholastic 1993.

Otago Daily Times: Feature July 5 1995, 'Violent Old Tales...'

New Zealand Books: 'Tall tales and truths from an underrated writer' Vol.4, No.4, December 1994

Further reading:

The Dreamtime Henry Treece

A Song in the Forest (trilogy) Peter Hooper

Man Alone John Mulgan