



Story Summary

The girl has had many selves in her short life. The first she remembers is Aissa, the daughter of Mama and Dada, sister to Zufi who watched the goats. Then the Bull King's raiders came, and Mama said, "Don't make a sound till I come back." And when the villagers found her she was silent as stone, because Mama never came back again.

So the villagers cursed her as back luck and made her No-Name, lowest of the servants to the Lady, the island's priestess. But there were whispers, as she grew, of another self: of the Lady's rejected first daughter, born imperfect with two extra thumbs. The silent girl looks at the scars on her wrists and wonders, but she has more pressing concerns. The villagers blame her bad luck for the tribute the Bull King now demands of them: two youths given each spring to dance with his bulls and die for his god's glory. And the servants hate and fear the unnatural way the animals all come to her. For Aissa, though, this bond with creatures of fur and scale is the first clue in finding the true self that no one else can give to her, or take away.

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

JUV037000 JUVENILE FICTION / Fantasy & Magic
JUV001010 JUVENILE FICTION / Action & Adventure / Survival Stories
JUV016020 JUVENILE FICTION / Historical / Ancient Civilizations
JUV022020 JUVENILE FICTION / Legends, Myths, Fables / Greek & Roman
JUV002000 JUVENILE FICTION / Animals / General

Reading Level

Fountas & Pinnell : Z | Lexile measure : 1020L

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 product 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 and 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

- 1.2 Active listening strategies
- 1.3 Comprehension strategies
- 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

- 2.1 Text Forms
- 2.2 Text Patterns
- 2.3 Text Features

Reading: Reflecting on Reading Skills and Strategies

- 4.2 Interconnected Skills

Before Reading

1. As a group, research and learn more about:
 - life during the Bronze Age
 - life during the Minoan Civilization
 - the island of Crete
 - the legend of the Minotaur
 - other Greek myths.

Each member of the group should select one of the above topics and then share their learning with the entire group.

2. After each group member has shared their research, anticipate what you might read about in this novel. Use your Reader's Notebook to record your ideas.
3. Research and explore the symbol of the dragonfly. Given your research, what predictions might you make about this text?
4. Explore the map of Aissa's island included in the front of the book, as well as the author's note. What questions do you have? Record them in your Reader's Notebook and share them with your book club members.

During Reading

Section 1

Book 1

5. Read the chapter titled "The Firstborn Daughter". In this chapter you meet several important characters. What words would you use to describe:
 - The Lady (Aissa's mother)
 - The chief (Aissa's father)
 - Kelya (the wise woman)
6. Several important locations are introduced in this chapter. Find these locations on the map: the Source, the Hall, Mama's farm, the western cliffs. What have you learned about each place?
7. Why do you think Kelya took the baby to a new family? Do you believe she did the right thing? Why/Why not? Discuss in your group.
8. There are clues in the prologue "The Firstborn Daughter" that this is a matriarchal society. What is a matriarchal society? What clues are provided in the prologue?

Section 2

1. Read chapters 1 and 2, "Another Spring" and "Four Years Later." During these early years Aissa experiences kindness, love, violence, courage, fear, and rejection. How do you think these early experiences will influence her?
2. What have you learned about Aissa's personality in these early chapters? What characteristics does she display? List them in your Reader's Notebook. Share with your group.
3. What have you learned about this community and the town Aissa lives in? How does this compare/contrast to your research on this ancient civilization prior to reading?

Section 3

1. Read chapters 3, 4, and 5. Each of these chapters includes the word firefly or dragonfly. What is the significance of this?
2. Why do you think the servants feel such animosity toward Aissa?
3. What do you think about Aissa's reaction to their hatred and rejection?
4. What does this reveal about Aissa's character?
5. You will notice that this text is structured in a very specific way. The author uses both free verse and prose. Why do you think the author structured the book in this way? Explore what the writer has to say about this structure by conducting some research about her writing.
6. Revisit the bath scene beginning on page 50. How is this a turning point for Aissa?

Section 4

1. Read chapters 6, 7, and 8. These chapters focus on three key locations: the sanctuary cave, the hills, and the sea.
2. The physical settings in the book can be seen as a metaphor for Aissa's inner life. How do these three locations serve as a metaphor for Aissa's life and how do they reflect her feelings?

3. Return to your list of Aissa's character traits. What would you now add to this list? Would you remove anything from your list? Revise your list and share with the group.
4. What are you learning about this community's beliefs and their social structure? How does this compare to your pre-reading research about this society? Record in your Reader's Notebook and share.
5. Aissa has three mother figures in her early years. What are the qualities/characteristics of each?

Section 5

1. The next four chapters, 9, 10, 11, and 12, help us understand two very different groups of people: the shepherds and the bull dancers. What do you think Aissa is feeling and learning while observing and interacting with each group?
2. In these chapters various animals (the cat, the snake, the wolf, and the bees) play an important role in the story. How do these creatures contribute to Aissa's life?
3. As you read about Aissa's survival, what more do you learn about her personality? What qualities does she possess that help her survive? Return to your list and continue to add to it or revise it to reflect your new thinking. Discuss with your group. How do you feel about Aissa at this point in the book?
4. We are continuing to learn about this community's faith and social structure. What are you learning? Add to your list in your Reader's Notebook.

Section 6

1. Read chapters 13, 14, and 15.
2. Aissa is learning about herself throughout this book but there are significant moments of self awareness in these chapters. What does Aissa learn about herself? What are the events/circumstances that help Aissa learn about herself?
3. Throughout this part of the book Aissa is bullied, especially by the servants. How do you think the servants feel while they bully Aissa? How do you know?

How do you think you might react to this type of bullying both as a bystander and as a victim?

Section 7

1. Read chapters 16 and 17
2. Aissa's life changes again during these chapters. What are the words and images used by the author to convey this change? Record in your Reader's Notebook and share with your group.
3. Discuss the Lady's reaction to finding out Aissa is her daughter.
4. Why do you think Aissa decides to replace Nasta and become a tribute/bull dancer? What do you think about her decision?
5. Before beginning Book 2, predict what you think will happen next. Record your ideas in your Reader's Notebook.

Section 8

Book 2

1. Read chapters 19–27
2. During these chapters Aissa experiences several significant changes to her life. How does her life change initially and then again in chapter 22? What qualities does Aissa possess that help her adjust to these changes?
3. As you reflect on Aissa's life to this point, at what point do you feel she was the happiest? Why?
4. In these chapters we learn a great deal about the Bull King's island and community. How does it compare/contrast to Aissa's island/community? Consider the landscape/physical setting, the people, the culture, and their faith/belief systems. Record your thinking in your Reader's Notebook. You may find a Venn diagram helpful in organizing your thinking.
5. How do you think these societies view girls and women? How is it the same/different than our own current society?

Section 9

1. Read chapters 28 and 29
 2. Do you think Aissa makes the right choice in these chapters?
 3. What surprised you the most in these final chapters?
 4. Revisit the book's structure of including both prose and free verse. How do you feel about this structure? Why do you think the author chose this structure? How was the free verse used?
 5. If you were going to create a time capsule of Aissa's life, what would you include and why? Record in your Reader's Notebook and share with your group.
9. Aissa is unable to speak throughout most of this book. There does not seem to be any reason provided except for Mama's warning to "Stay quiet, still as a stone till I come back." There were several moments in the book when it seemed Aissa might regain her speech: after singing the snake with Luki, and when her friends faced death in the bull ring. Do you think that meeting Mama again was the only reason she regained her speech?

After Reading

1. Aissa learns a great deal throughout this book. What is her greatest lesson? Explain your thinking.
2. What was your favorite moment in the book? Why?
3. Where do you see connections to your research prior to reading?
4. *Dragonfly Song* has been described as a fantasy, an epic tale. What makes this book both a fantasy and an epic tale?
5. This book includes many themes, including: belonging, identity, friendship, family, courage, kindness, and many more. Choose the theme that is the most important to you. Explain how the book helps you to understand more about this theme. What did you learn?
6. We see evidence of gender equality in this book. Where in this text did it stand out for you? Explain your thinking.
7. Characters throughout this text make significant decisions with far-reaching consequences. Discuss one of these decisions. Why did you select this one? What were the consequences of this decision? Do you feel it was the right or best decision? Why or why not?
8. Why do you think the author chose the title *Dragonfly Song*? Explain your thinking.
10. The author has written about how she uses music to inspire her when writing. What might you select as background music for different parts of the book:
 - Aissa's life in the cave
 - her wandering by the sea
 - her survival during the winter
 - her life with the wise women
 - her time as a bull dancer
 - her time as a priestess
11. Share your music selections for three parts of the book with your friends. Explain why you selected each piece of music.



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