

These notes are for:

- Primary
- Middle Years
- Years 5-7

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- History

Example of:

- Historical fantasy
- Fiction/novel
- Series fiction

National Curriculum Focus*:

- Cross-Curricular Priority: Asia & Australia's Relationship with Asia
- History content description:
Year 7 Depth Study 3 – The Asian World (India or China)
- English content descriptions include:

Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
ACELT1608	ACELT1613	ACELT1619
ACELT1611	ACELT1615	ACELT1620
ACELT1612	ACELT1618	ACELT1621
ACELY1700	ACELT1800	ACELT1622
ACELY1701	ACELY1709	ACELT1625
ACELY1704	ACELY1710	ACELY1720
ACELY1705	ACELY1714	ACELY1725

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.

Themes:

- Destiny/fate
- Friendship
- Courage
- Chinese history and culture
- Buddhism
- Quests/journeys

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Blood Brothers

Dragonkeeper 4: Blood Brothers

Author: Carole Wilkinson
 ISBN: 9781742031897
 Hardback
 ARRP: \$24.95
 NZRRP: \$27.99
 Imprint: Black Dog Books
 May 2012



Synopsis

The next instalment in the internationally bestselling and award-winning Dragonkeeper series.

The year is 325. The powerful Han Dynasty is a distant memory and tribes of barbarian soldiers fight over what was once the Empire. It is a dangerous time.

Kai is 465 years old – a teenager in dragon years. He is searching for the person predestined to be his dragonkeeper. Kai's search has led him to a Buddhist novice named Tao. But Tao is certain he is not the one; he has no interest in caring for a difficult dragon. He believes his path lies in another direction.

But Tao must learn to listen to the voice within himself. He must learn that no journey ever reveals its true purpose until it is over.

Author Information

Carole Wilkinson is an award-winning and much-loved author of books for children. She has a long-standing fascination with dragons and is interested in the history of everything. Though Carole has written over 30 books, she did not write her first book until she was nearly 40. Before that she had worked as a laboratory assistant and as a film and television writer and editor.

Carole has written four other books in the Dragonkeeper series: *Dragonkeeper* (Book 1), *Garden of the Purple Dragon* (Book 2), *Dragon Moon* (Book 3) and *Dragon Dawn* (prequel). There is also a companion to the series, *The Dragon Companion*. Carole's other titles include the Ramose series, *Sugar Sugar*, *The Night We Made the Flag* and a number of books in the nonfiction series, *The Drum*.

How To Use These Notes

These notes provide a variety of discussion questions and activities that can be used with *Dragonkeeper 4: Blood Brothers*. Please select according to the level, learning style and targeted outcomes of your students.

Carole Wilkinson on writing *Dragonkeeper 4: Blood Brothers*

I always said there wouldn't be another book in the Dragonkeeper series. Ping's story was finished, and I thought she deserved a nice quiet life. But after a while, the urge to get back into the world of dragons overtook me. I realised that as dragons live for up to 3000 years, I had scope for taking up Kai's story later in his life. I decided I wanted him still to be a young dragon – about four hundred years old. I reached for my Chinese history books to see what dynasty that would put me in, only to discover that there was no dynasty at that time. I had landed myself in the period of Chinese history called the Sixteen Kingdoms, which was a period of chaos and division, a sort of Chinese Dark Ages. This period lasted for over a hundred years. China was divided and redivided into kingdoms of brief duration, often ruled by the so-called barbarian races that had invaded China.

It was a challenging era to research. I have discovered what I can in the limited resources available, and imagined the rest.



Classroom Activities

History

- Research the different periods of Chinese history up to the present day. As a class, construct a large-scale timeline around the walls of the classroom. Illustrate each period with a representative image or symbol, such as a calligraphy pen to represent the Qing Dynasty when art and culture blossomed. You may like to work in pairs, with each pair allocated one period of history to represent. Discuss as a class what image would be most appropriate to represent the Sixteen Kingdoms period when the novel is set.
- *Blood Brothers* is set during the Sixteen Kingdoms period of Chinese history (304 – 439 A.D.). As a class, discuss how this period came to be known by this name. Who were the Five Tribes and what role did they play at this time? After finishing the novel, write five questions you have about this period, then use the internet to try and find answers to these questions.
- Working in small groups, choose another part of the world and research what life was like there in 325 A.D. For instance, Greece, Egypt or Australia. Some topics to consider include:
 - social structure (Who had power? What different social classes or groups were there? Was there a formal government or ruler?)
 - relationships with other countries or groups (Were there wars? Did they trade? Did they travel much to other areas?)
 - diet/food
 - dress and hairstyles
 - transportation (How did people move about?)
 - work (How did people survive? What jobs did they do?)
 - houses/living arrangements
 - the roles of women
 - health.
 Prepare a PowerPoint presentation on your findings for the class.
- A number of the characters in the novel are based upon real historical figures: the monk Fo Tu Deng (often spelt Fo T'u-teng), Shi Le and Ji Long (more commonly known as Shi Hu). Choose one of these figures and research them on the internet. Construct a Venn diagram showing the differences and similarities between the real-life figures and Carole Wilkinson's depictions of them. What are the main changes the author has made? (For example, Fo Tu Deng is portrayed as a thief and a charlatan, although in most historical sources, he is presented as a capable diplomat and respected holy man. He is also reported to have had the ability to see visions and prognosticate (make predictions), while in the novel it is Tao who is given this ability.) Why do you think Wilkinson has made these changes? Think particularly about how it makes the story more interesting for the reader and helps emphasise key themes and ideas.
- Have you read any other books or seen any movies where the characters were based on real people? Tell the class about them. Do you think these characters were realistically represented or might they also have been transformed in some way?
- Discuss the following questions as a class:
 - How is learning about history from a novel different to learning about it from a nonfiction text such as an encyclopaedia or reference book? Which do you prefer to read? Which do you think would be more reliable as a source of information? Explain your answer.
 - In your opinion, is it more important for an author to observe strict historical accuracy or to tell gripping stories that will captivate readers?
 - What is meant by the term "artistic license"? To what extent do you think authors have the right to use artistic license when writing about real people or events? If a person or event is represented differently to how they are presented in historical sources, can this be considered as misleading the reader – or even lying?
 - Is it possible to ever present history accurately? Or when we write about it are we always transforming it by putting our own biased interpretation on it?



Geography

- Compare the map at the start of the book with a modern-day map of China. Can you locate the Luoyang region? How far is it from the current capital, Beijing? What are the modern-day names for Tianzhu and Huaxia? Which mountains do you think the dragons may have come from? (NB: Remember that English spellings of Chinese names may vary.)
- Has anyone in your class ever lived in or visited China? If so, have them share their experiences with the class. Discuss the way China today is different from the period Wilkinson describes in the novel.
- In your workbook, draw your own detailed map showing all the places Tao and Kai visit in the novel. (For example, the monastery, Pema's hideout, Tao's family home, Sha's cave, etc.) Mark the route of their journey on the map.
- Do an internet search on Luoyang. What does the name mean in English? What is it famous for today? Find recent photographs of it and then draw a picture of how you think it might have looked in 325 A.D. (It may be useful to re-read the description at the start of Chapter 5.) Find three interesting facts about Luoyang and share them with the class.
- Find a Chinese penfriend on the "Students of the World" website: <http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/> Write them an email telling them about your life and asking about their life in China. You may like to also share things you have learnt about Chinese history and culture from *Blood Brothers*.
- 2012 is the Chinese Year of the Dragon. Research the Chinese Zodiac. What attributes are dragons supposed to have? What other animals are represented in the Zodiac? What are the five elements and how do these relate to people born in the Year of the Dragon? Work out what Chinese animal sign you were born under. The following websites may be useful starting points:
 - National Geographic Kids: <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/stories/peopleplaces/chinese-horoscopes/>
 - A China Family Adventure: <http://www.china-family-adventure.com/chinese-zodiac.html>

English

Plot

- "A dragon was not part of his plan. He couldn't be diverted from his task of accumulating karma. He wished Kai would just go back to wherever he had come from ..." (40-41). The appearance of Kai is the main complication in the plot, with Tao's ambition at the start of the novel being to lead a quiet monastic life transcribing the sutras. How does meeting Kai change Tao's life and his destiny?
- Identify what you believe are the 10 most important events in the novel. Arrange these chronologically in your workbook. Compare your list with a classmate's. Have they identified the same events as you? Discuss any differences and similarities.
- What do you think might happen in the next book in the series? Write the blurb for this book.

Character

- "Tao had been alive for fifteen years. Kai had lived for centuries." (43) Despite the great difference in their ages, relative to their life span, both Tao and Kai are teenagers. What typical adolescent characteristics do they display? Does one seem more mature than the other, in your opinion? In what ways do both display a maturity beyond their years? Think particularly about their attitudes, responsibilities and the experiences they have endured.
- Pema is motivated by the desire to take revenge on the man who killed her family when she was five. How has this experience affected her? Compare Pema with Tao's sister, Meiling, who is the same age as her. Could Meiling offer a picture of what Pema's life might have been like if Pema had not gone through her ordeal as a child?
- "Tao gasped. "I only met you a few minutes ago and in that time you've broken three of the Five Precepts." ... "Those are your rules, Holy Boy, not mine. I have my own 'precepts'. Just three of them – to survive, to find the barbarian who murdered my family, and to kill him." (89) How does Pema represent a challenge to Tao and his beliefs? How does his attitude towards her change from when he first encounters her to the end of the novel? Represent these changes as a graph or diagram.
- In small groups, create a character map for a person from the book. Each group should look at a different character – make sure you include Tao, Kai, Pema, Sha, Wei, Tao's mother, Fo Tu Deng, Shi Le and Ji Long. Draw a picture of the character in the centre of a large sheet of butcher's paper and then around it include:
 - adjectives that describe their personality
 - information about their skills, fears, ambitions, etc.
 - their actions in the novel
 - how/if they change throughout the novel
 - their relationships with other characters
 - three quotes from the book which give insight into their character (make sure you use quotation marks).

Re-form into new groups made up of one member from each of the original groups. Each group member should present their character while the other members of the group take notes. At the end, students should have notes on all of the characters in the book.

- Draw symbols to represent each of the main characters in the book. Present these to the class, explaining how each symbol reflects your understanding of the characters.
- Choose a key episode in the novel and retell it from the perspective of another character. For instance, Tao's rescue of Pema, Sha's fight with Kai or Fo Tu Deng's hoodwinking of Shi Le. Rather than simply recounting events, try to focus on the character's thoughts and feelings.



Language

- Choose a key episode from the book and analyse the way the author uses language and structural techniques to help draw in the reader. Make sure you identify examples of specific language techniques and discuss their effects in the passage. Some techniques to consider include:
 - **Varied sentence structure**, with long rhythmical sentences interspersed with shorter sentences, e.g. “Men came running. Horses were saddled.” (185) The short brisk sentences create an air of briskness and activity as the Nomads prepare to ride out.
 - **Dialogue**, e.g. “Kai, we will be burned to death! Hurry!” (77) Creates energy and a sense of immediacy.
 - **Aural imagery** (description that relates to sound), e.g. “Kai made a sound like someone banging copper bowls together” (77) Evokes Kai’s panic and helps bring his character to life for the reader.
 - **Visual imagery**, e.g. “His big nose was squashed against his face. He had a patchy beard and hair that fell in untidy straggles about his shoulders. Saggy pouches of skin hung beneath his squinting eyes.” (166) Helps the reader to visualise Shi Le and makes them feel hostile towards him.
 - **Olfactory imagery** (relating to smell), e.g. “It smelled like rotten eggs and dead fish.” Evokes the stench of dragon urine, emphasising the bestial side of their nature. (272)
 - **Metaphorical language**, e.g. “His hopes had been crushed.” (114) Emphasises Tao’s disappointment when he discovers that Wei is not the dragonkeeper as he expected.
 - **Similes**, e.g. “He picked up the scrolls, handling it as if it were delicate as dragonfly wings.” (82) Expresses Tao’s reverence for the sutras.
 - **Alliteration**, e.g. “like a leaf carried by a fast-flowing river” (195) Stresses Tao’s feelings of powerlessness and lack of control over his life.
 - **Assonance**, e.g. “hollow and without hope”. (77) Conveys the despair Kai feels in the burning city.
 - **Repetition**, e.g. “the force circled through them like a strengthening wind, like a stream swelling with rain.” (129) Highlights the powerful connection between Tao and Wei.
 - **Symbolism**, e.g. “Tao felt the hope and joy inside him die, the petals of the lotus wither.” (69) Emphasises Tao’s feelings of disillusionment and hopelessness, with the symbol of the lotus linking to Fo Tu Deng’s fraudulent magic tricks.
- Read the glossary at the back of the book. What is its purpose? Are there any other terms you would have included in it? What sort of words are usually found in a glossary? Choose a book of your own and create a glossary for it.
- Kai enjoys devising riddles for Tao to solve. Using Kai’s riddles as a model, write your own riddle and challenge a classmate to guess the answer!
- Write a short story set during another period of history. (You may like to focus on a period you have studied in class.) Choose a protagonist and then think of one complication or problem that you could base your story around. When it comes to writing your first draft, remember to use conventional plot structure with an introduction, a sequence of events where the reader is drawn into the story, a climax towards the end of the story, then a conclusion.

After you have finished your first draft, edit your work. As well as checking grammar, punctuation and spelling, try to add some sensual imagery (description which appeals to the senses), vary your sentence length for dramatic effect and replace any weak words with stronger ones.

- Read another book in the Dragonkeeper series. In what ways was it similar and different to *Blood Brothers*? Which did you prefer?

Themes

- The novel is set during a time of turbulence and danger, where the power structure was continually changing and there was little stability or security. Can you think of any parts of the world today which might be like this? What would it be like to live in such a time? How did Tao’s family and the other families around them manage to stay safe and avoid persecution?
- “My brother and I were born at the same time. ... My mother says we should have been one, but something happened before we were born and we became two. ... I can’t imagine my life without him.” (105 –106) Draw the Ying – Yang symbol on the whiteboard or in your workbook. How can this symbol be used to represent the relationship between Tao and Wei? In what other ways could this symbol reflect themes or ideas in the novel?
- In small groups, discuss the role of each of the following devices in the novel. Consider how they help develop the plot, characters and themes, and what they might symbolise.
 - The purple gem stone
 - The sutra scrolls
 - The Five Precepts
 - The jade butterfly hair comb
 - Visions/predictions.
- In your workbook, draw a picture to represent each device and around it write bullet points about its significance.
- In groups, discuss how the following values are demonstrated in the novel:
 - courage
 - compassion
 - persistence
 - selflessness
 - resourcefulness/ingenuity
 - loyalty.
 Are there any other values you would add to this list?
- Create a brochure entitled “Caring for Your Dragon” aimed at novice dragonkeepers. Structure your work with headings, subheadings, bullet points and diagrams, graphs or charts to make it easier to understand. Also consider how you can use design features such as font, colour, borders and composition to add to its visual appeal.
- As a class, create a display of books about dragons in the school library.



- Write a reflection statement explaining what you feel the main messages of the book are. Read these out in class. Did everyone interpret the book in the same way? What might this tell us?

Religious Education

- “By spreading the Buddha knowledge in this way, he would accumulate good karma. By accumulating karma, a human could eventually escape the cycle of birth, death and rebirth and attain the perfect peace of nirvana.” (18) From the novel, what is your understanding of karma? How does it work?
- Discuss the ending of Chapter 32 in relation to Buddhist beliefs about reincarnation. What has happened to Wei? How might the idea of reincarnation help people find comfort when they are grieving?
- What are the Five Precepts which Tao follows in the book? Why do you think it is important for Buddhists to observe each of these? How does Tao break these commands in the book? Do you think his actions were justified in each instance?
- Compare the Five Precepts of Buddhism with the precepts or tenets of another faith. For instance, the Ten Commandments of Christianity and Judaism or the Niyama and Yama of Hinduism. (If you follow a particular religion, you may like to look at this.)
- Research Buddhism on the internet or in the library and then create a poster explaining its central beliefs and practices. You may like to use an online poster design site such as Glogster (www.glogster.com/), Artskills (<http://www.artskills.com/>) or Notaland (<http://notaland.com/>).
- If you were a Buddhist monk, what do you think you would find most challenging? Write a series of diary entries as a monk either in Tao’s day or today.
- Find a Buddhist sutra that you like on the internet or in a book and write out a section of it in calligraphic script. (Remember, Tao is a keen calligrapher.) You may like to make your page look like an ancient scroll by singeing or tearing the edges and lightly staining it with a used teabag.

Performing Arts

- In small groups, prepare a list of questions you would like to ask each of the main characters. The questions should focus on their motivations (why they did certain things) and how they felt at different parts of the story, as well as their actions. Brainstorm possible answers to these questions.
- Individually, choose one of the main characters and in this role, answer questions from the rest of the class. Try to use your voice, posture and gestures to make your performance more convincing.

- Compose a soundscape to represent Tao’s emotional and physical journey. Work in pairs, with each pair taking responsibility for one chapter of the text.
 - Decide what are the main emotions or feelings Tao experiences in that chapter, e.g. fear, anticipation, courage, love.
 - Brainstorm the different noises/vocal sounds/instruments/body percussion sounds that could be used to show this emotion. (Try to be creative and use everyday objects around you, as well as proper instruments).
 - Work out what volume and pace would be appropriate for this emotion.
 - Record your section of the soundscape. (It should be approximately 20 seconds long.)
 - After each group has recorded their piece, play all the sections of the soundscape in order.
 - Write a reflection on the soundscape. Did it sound as you imagined it would? What sounds or instruments worked well or didn’t work well? Did the different parts fit together smoothly? Did you feel it captured the overall feel of Tao’s journey?

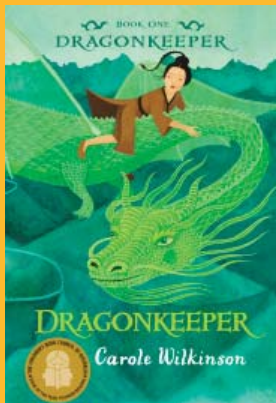
Visual Literacy

- Design your ideal dragon. What special skills would it have? What colour and size would it be? Would it have wings? Would there be anything else unique about its appearance? Draw and label a diagram of your dragon.
- Invite a member of the Chinese community to do a calligraphy demonstration for the class.
- Transform a section of the novel into a comic strip or graphic novel.
- A mandala is a geometrical design representing the universe in Buddhist and Hindu belief. Design your own mandala to display on the classroom wall. You may like to look at the following websites for inspiration: <http://www.mandalaproject.org/Index.html> (You can also submit your mandala to an online gallery on this site.)
- Discuss the title of the book. Do you think this is a good title? Why or why not? If you were asked to choose an alternative title for the book, what would it be? Remember, a good title should capture the audience’s attention and give them some idea of what the book is about.
- Analyse the visual techniques the designer has used on the cover of the book. For example, colour, font, images, symbolism, composition (where things have been placed). Design an alternative cover for the book featuring your new title. Present it to the class, explaining how you have used visual techniques to emphasise the themes, subject or mood of the book.

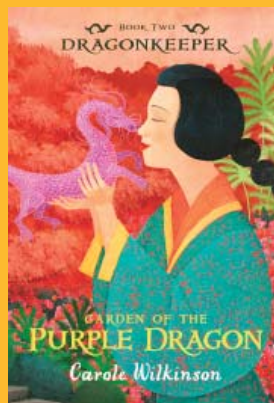
Science

- *Blood Brothers* provides many insights into healing and medicine in fourth century China. Make a list of remedies and treatments used in the book. What would we do today instead?
- In pairs, research traditional medicine and healing techniques used by Indigenous Australians in the past. Alternatively, invite a National Parks ranger or Aboriginal Elder to speak to your class about native plants in your area which have healing properties. Afterwards, create a wall chart identifying medicinal plants and explaining what they can be used for.
- Tao's brother Wei suffers from broken bone disease, or what is known today as cerebral palsy. What do you know about cerebral palsy? How does Wei show resilience in the face of his condition? Read the real-life stories of Australians with cerebral palsy at <http://www.cpaustralia.com.au/index.php/site/shareyourstory>

Other Titles in the Dragonkeeper Series



Dragonkeeper Book 1:
Dragonkeeper
9781742032450
Au\$19.95/\$21.99



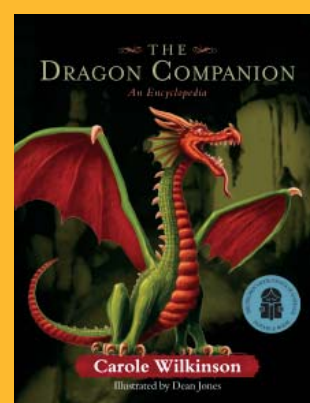
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