

THE SOWER OF TALES: Teachers' Guide

SUMMARY:

This is a fantasy novel about the importance and power of tales. Thirteen-year-old Calantha, stubborn, awkward and dreamy, lives in the Plains, in the village of Grenlea. More than anything, she longs to be a Gatherer of story pods, the person in each village who selects a story pod for the daily gathering of Talemeet. Story pods grow freely in Calantha's world, the seeds scattered nightly by the legendary and mysterious Sower of Tales. Story pods ripen in fourteen days, and, if correctly harvested to avoid tearing, then carefully opened, unfurl their five petals, releasing their seeds, which then circle the heads of all gathered, enabling them to hear the tale.

But Calantha's mother has more grandiose plans for her, and wants her daughter to engage in a trade that will allow more of the comforts of life. Moreover, she is preoccupied and distracted, because King Ulric's men are seen riding through the Plains. King Ulric, who, with his new sorcerer, Odhran, threatens the Plains. Rumors and fears abound. Something is definitely not right and Calantha isn't the only one to feel it – the village Seer too, insists that the Essences are twisted, hard to read. But why?

Trying to shut out the discord, Calantha loses herself in the tales of the story pods. But then, the unthinkable happens. There are story pods in the fields as always, but there are no new ones springing through the soil. Where are the seeds? What will happen to the Plainsfolk without the Tales to bring them together? Has the Sower of Tales abandoned them?

Devastated, Calantha sets off on a harrowing journey to find the Sower of Tales, while someone powerful and hidden tries to stop her. Calantha is soon burdened with a terrifying task. Her dearest dreams – and her worst nightmares – will guide her, if Calantha can face them. But face them she must.

For the fate of the Plainsfolk, the fate of the Sower of Tales herself lies in Calantha's hands. And her one passion, the Tales, makes her more vulnerable – and more powerful – than anyone could have known.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS:

NOTE: With all my other books, I have designed Teachers' Guides that outline General themes as well as classroom activities. With this book, however, to be true to the theme and heart of the story, I feel it is best for the classroom activities to focus on creative writing. All the activities below, are designed to honour the creative spirit of this book by encouraging, supporting and developing a love of story.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

- 1) This book is about the power of stories, as well as the need for all of us to tell our own stories. What parallels do you find in our own society concerning these themes?**

2) **Discuss the kinds of stories that may be found in the story pods. Are they mostly fables? What are fables? How do they differ from other forms of fiction? Does character development have anything to do with it?**

3) **Discuss:**

*If the Sower of Tales you seek to find
Unravel the knots that tangle your mind
Let the song of the story pods ring in your heart
Let go of all else, let the tales do their part.*
(The Key to the Sower of Tales)

How do you think this might apply to the writing of stories today in our society?

4) **Discuss:**

*Does the Sower feed the tale
Or the tale feed the Sower?*
(Traditional Plains Saying)

What does it mean? How would it apply to the writing of stories in our world?

5) **Discuss:**

If you snatch their stories you snatch their souls?
(The Sorcerer Odhran)

How does this relate to the creation and distortion of stories in our world? To the changing of history? What power do stories have in shaping our world view and perspectives on life? Discuss.

CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES

1) **Create a cluster of five word – any five words – that may be heard from a torn story pod. Write a story around it.**

Here are some examples:

fox frost terror duckling blood
seashell voices liar danger giant
toads seeds fight stones shining
horses sandal story pod mud flower
pitcher ghost stink trees laughter

2) **Write a sentence or a sentence fragment that you might hear from a torn story pod and make up a story around it. eg:**

* *He grabbed and grabbed for it, but it drifted away...*

* *She knew it was up to her. She seized the goose and...*

* *He hid behind the door, heart racing. What if that creature...*

* *It was a sunny day, and yet, alarmingly, he saw the sky was turning...*

- * *Who would have thought that a plain cup of water could be...*
- * *She hesitated before putting it in her mouth. What if it...*
- * *He stared at her. Could the witch be trusted?*

- 3) **Make up and write your own story, one that you might hear from a story pod.**
- 4) **There are many examples in this novel of story pods opened, with short summaries of the tales within. Using one of these, write the whole story.**
- 5) **Take any traditional fairy story, and develop the main character so they have specific personalities, with strengths and weaknesses. Use the Character Development Handout below, if needed. Re-write the story, changing it if needed, so that it is true to your created character. eg: Little Red Riding Hood. Develop Little Red so she has the characteristics of a real girl, (is she intrepid, sneaky, nasty, feeble...?) with real strengths and flaws, and rewrite the story, changing events if needed, so the story fits your made-up character.**
- 6) **Take any traditional fairy story and write it from the point of view of one of the minor characters eg: re-write Little Red Riding Hood from the point of view of the wolf. Or Cinderella from the point of view of one of the Ugly Stepsisters. Re-write with the character as portrayed in the traditional tale, or develop the character and change the story to fit that character's perspective.**
- 7) **Write out any favourite story you remember. Make it your own and change it any way you like.**
- 8) **Re-write one of the traditional fairy tales, such as Cinderella, but with modern characters and modern voices, dialogue, technology, issues.**
- 9) **Gather a collection of pictures of a variety of people, cut from newspapers and magazines. Have students select one jot down the following:**
 - a. a description of the character in 2 or 3 sentences
 - b. what is his/her greatest fear?
 - c. what is her/his greatest desire?
 - d. what is his/her darkest secret?
- 10) **From a collection of pictures of people from newspapers and magazines, pick one and answer the following questions: who, what, why, when, where and how?**
- 11) **Gather two collections of pictures of people from newspapers and magazines, with adults in one box, and children in another. Have students pick at least one from each box and write about the selected people as though they are a family. What kind of family are they? Where might they live? What kind of jobs do they have/schools do they go to? What kind of relationships do they have? Do they get along? What is the most fun thing this family has done together? What is the greatest source of stress in this family? These are just some questions to ask – students may come up with many, many more. Create a family portrait and give it a title that sums up this family.**

12) Create a fantasy world. Over a period of a month, allow students about 15 minutes each day to work on the creation of the fantasy world. Have them jot notes on:

- * geography and landscape
- * climate
- * flora (plants and vegetation)
- * fauna (animals)
- * make a map of your world if you wish
- * people
- * their history
- * their stories
- * culture
- * is their history accurately remembered?
- * clothing
- * food
- * housing
- * language/names
- * political systems, if any
- * biggest concerns, worries, challenges
- * superstitions if any
- * unquestioned beliefs
- * any specific turns of phrase, or exclamations
- * any specific sayings or proverbs
- * most valuable, or valued possessions or attributes
- * create a specific character who lives in this world
- * do you have a story you can develop?
- * is there a villain, antagonist, who is after something big?
- * create other characters, ones that would be of importance to your main character.
- * using the Character Development Handout (below), develop your main character.
- * develop all characters.
- * Remember, to have a story, your characters must have clear motivations

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT:

1) Jot down the following about your character:

- * date and place of birth
- * parents (who they are, what they're like etc)
- * brothers and sisters, if any, and relations with them
- * friends
- * nicknames
- * appearance (use as many of the five senses as possible)
- * habits
- * interests
- * favourite foods
- * likes and dislikes (what she/he loves and hates)
- * what is she/he most enthusiastic about?
- * hobbies (what does she/he love to do in spare time?)
- * description of neighbourhood, his/her house and yard
- * description of bedroom (colours, furniture, condition)
- * what his/her handshake feels like
- * what position she/he sleeps in
- * patterns of speech (any repeated phrases, favourite swear words? Jot down scraps of dialogue)
- * sound of voice
- * personality (eg: shy, out-going, loud, cheerful, helpful, sly...)
- * mannerisms (both physical and of speech)
- * the kinds of moods she/he has
- * favourite clothes, movies, books, toys, subjects in school
- * **HISTORY:** any past events that trouble her/him
- * anything else relevant to the story (eg: history and relations with the other characters in story) – superstitions
- * what does he/she excel at; what does he/she do dismally
- * what makes your character really, really happy
- * the happiest memory your character has
- * in what environment, and around which people is your character most at home and happiest?
- * nicest, or kindest, or most generous thing he/she has done
- * the meanest thing he/she has done

- * his/her deepest darkest secret!
- * what the parents of your character think is his/her biggest problem
- * what friends and other characters in story think and feel about your character
- * what your character thinks friends and parent think about him/her
- * AMBITIONS, WANTS, NEEDS (what she/he wants more than anything else, IN THE GUT)
- * what is preventing her/him getting it
- * how she/he FEELS at the time of the story (emotions)
- * where in the body she/he registers various emotions
- * what she/he wants to be when she/he grows up
- * what you think she/he will actually be when grown up

2) Write a journal entry as written by your main character on the day of your story, or any day. Write it in the first person, present tense.

3) Write a letter your character might write to a distant friend or confidant. What would he/she include? Omit?

4) To really get to know the essence of your character, describe your character in the following terms:

- * a flower (ie: what flower does she/he remind you of? Or, if she/he were a flower, what flower would she/he be?)
- * smell
- * sound
- * music
- * texture
- * taste
- * what kind of cake would they be?
- * flavour of ice-cream
- * place (city)
- * landscape (ie: desert, prairie, tropical jungle, lush farm,ocean, etc)
- * colour
- * fabric

5) In as much detail as possible, describe your character's room. Include details that cover the five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch.