

## A Curriculum Guide for

### ***Storm***

By Donna Jo Napoli

#### **About the Book**

Sebah is sixteen years old. She is the bean counter for her family. Her three brothers rely on her to work quickly and accurately while keeping the beans clean and dry, then wrapping them in cloth packets to sell at the market. Sebah is busily attending to her work when she feels the first and early drops of dangerous rain. The rain season is necessary to bring life-giving water to their desert existence, but it is one month early. This early rain sends Sebah home. Once there, she is sent out again to find her three brothers. When she does find them, they become caught in a flash flood. Sebah watches as her brothers are washed away, and her village is immersed in water. She stays above the waters by climbing to a rock ledge with two cedar trees, living on mushrooms and birds as she watches her world perish. She encounters Aban, a boy from her village. The two build a crude raft hoping to float to safety, but when Aban perishes in the flood, Sebah must go on alone, her only companion a cat that has been clinging to her since the rains began.

The crude raft bumps into a large floating structure, and they are rescued by two bonobos. The structure is an ark containing every species of animal imaginable. It has a caretaker family responsible for making sure that the same number of animals and humans that entered the ark, leave the ark—no less and certainly no more. Naked, cold, hungry, and alone, Sebah must survive as a stowaway on the ark and rely on the relationship she develops with the animals for safety. Hidden from the caretaker family, she watches and listens as frustrations and tensions develop among the passengers, led by the patriarch Noah. Sebah's intelligence, wit, cunning and limited knowledge of plants and animals help her survive. As the storm rages on and the waters continue to rise, Sebah learns how to navigate her own feelings, emotions, and faith.

#### **Prereading Activity**

The activity below correlates to the following Common Core State Standards (W.11 – 12.4, 5) (RL.11 – 12.1, 3, 5, 7)

Read the story of Noah's Ark from the Book of Genesis (Genesis 6:5–9:17) and the Deucalion flood account in Greek mythology. Ask students to write a one-page paper that draws upon the similarities and differences in the two accounts. Have them share their writing as part of an initial discussion before reading the book.

#### **Discussion Questions**

The discussion questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.9 - 10.1, 2, 3, 4, 6) (L.9 - 10.1, 4, 5, 6) (SL.9 - 10.1, 2, 3, 4, 6) (RL.11 - 12. 1, 3, 4, 6,

7) (L.11 - 12. 4, 5, 6) (SL.11 - 12.1, 3, 4)

1. *Storm* is told from the point of view of a girl and in the first person. Why is this an important element for the story? Would it have been easier and more believable had the author used a male narrator?
2. Contrast the role of women in Sebah's time with the role of women in the modern day Middle East. Compare the roles that they had then and the roles they have now.
3. The ability or inability to communicate is a theme throughout *Storm*. Discuss how Sebah finds her voice and becomes able to make herself known to those around her, both human and animal. Why does verbal and nonverbal communication become central to *Storm*? Compare this with the ways we communicate.
4. Symbolism plays an important role in the myths and legends of creation narrative. Are there symbols in *Storm*? What role do they play? How has the author incorporated ancient symbolism into this modern creation narrative?
5. Fear is an emotion that motivates Sebah throughout the novel. Discuss the ways in which fear empowers Sebah to teach and communicate with the animals and people on the ark. How does Sebah overcome her fear? How do Shem, Ham, Japheth, Nela, Mother Emzara, and Noah overcome their fears? Does Bash have any fears?
6. How does the author create and use tension throughout the book? Why is this literary device essential to the story?
7. Shem and Ham are mortified at the sexual behavior, which appears to be intentional and deliberate, of Queen and The Male, while their wives are less shocked. Why? The women accept and understand the frustrations of the ark more so than the men. Why does the author create contrast emotionally, spiritually, and sexually between the men and the women in the book?
8. Desperation and hope play opposite each other throughout the book. How does the author use these two emotions to drive the story? How do despair and hope motivate Noah and Sebah? What is the role of despair and hope in the faith life of Noah and Sebah?
9. A *motif* can occur within a single text or across multiple texts. Discuss the term *motif*. How do writers employ this literary device? Which motifs have writers employed in their telling of creation narratives? How has the author employed a motif in *Storm*? What might the author's purpose be in employing a motif in her story?
10. Discuss the differing and at times opposing beliefs about morality between the characters. Who appear to be the moral gatekeepers in *Storm* and why? Discuss the relationships between Nela, Leba, and Ada; Noah and Mother Emzara; and Shem, Ham, and Japheth. What are the tensions and harmonies among the characters and why?

11. Who does Bash represent? Why is he presented in such a physical contrast to the other characters on the ark?

12. Discuss the conversation Japheth and Ada have on night 85 (Chapter 21). How is this conversation a reflection of emotional honesty? Has the imposed celibacy brought the passengers on the ark closer or driven them further apart? How will the passengers rebuild their world once free from the confines of the ark?

13. Discuss this thought of Sebah's: "Suddenly I am grateful to all of them. Noah and Mother Emzara, Shem and Ham and Nela and Leba, Japheth and Ada. They didn't choose this, it was imposed upon them. And they are doing the best they can. There's honor in that." Is Noah's family honorable? How does the author portray them as compared to the traditional portrayal of Noah and his family?

14. Compare the conversations between Nela and Sebah on night 192 (Chapter 26) and between Mother Emzara and Nela on night 355 (Chapter 35). Why are these pivotal moments in the relationships between the women on the ark? Why does the Mighty Creator's plan seem to be essential to the conversations? Who is more accurate in their interpretation of the plan and why? Discuss Mother Emzara's statement: "Do not misunderstand, you who doesn't exist. My husband's name will not be sullied. His hands will not be sullied. He is a hero." How does this set the stage for time after the ark? Is Noah truly a hero?

15. Discuss the imagery in Chapter 37, Days 357–370. How are these familiar images of a regenerating or recreating world? What does Sebah's garden represent? What does Pishon represent? How will the Mighty Creator's plan be put into effect and why are Sebah, Pishon, Bash, and Noah's family essential to the plan? Why do they all need to learn how to be free and know joy again?

### **Activities**

The activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (W.9 - 10.1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) (RL.9 - 10.2, 3) (SL.9 - 10.1, 3, 4, 6) (L.9 - 10.1, 2, 5) (W.11 - 12.1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9) (RL.11 - 12.1, 2, 3, 4, 7) (SL.11 - 12.1, 3, 4, 6) (L.11 - 12.1, 5)

1. Noah's Ark is among the most beloved creation myths. It is also among the most debated. Sponsor two student panels: one panel will research proof supporting the existence of the ark and flood narrative, and the other will research proof disclaiming the existence of the ark and flood narrative. Students will research such sites as: [www.cbn.com](http://www.cbn.com), [www.viewzone.com/noahx](http://www.viewzone.com/noahx), [www.andrews.edu/archeology](http://www.andrews.edu/archeology), [www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/07/060705-noahs-ark.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/07/060705-noahs-ark.html). Students not on the panel will generate questions and provide them to a moderator who will ask the panel members to respond to the questions. Students will then decide which side had the more convincing argument.

2. The novel is a retelling of the deluge myth. Many ancient civilizations have their versions of flood myths, including China and the Native Americans. Read four different accounts of flood mythology, and write a one-page paper comparing and contrasting the different flood accounts.

3. Creationism vs. Evolution is a debate carried on in many states today. Many school districts support one set of beliefs over the other while some teach the two belief systems side by side. Have students read the creation story in the book of Genesis. Then have them read any of the creation narratives from a western European or Middle Eastern culture. Students will then write a one-page paper defending the teaching of one position over the other. Students will need to cite specific examples from the text to support their positions.

4. Read about the basic beliefs of the people of the ancient Near East, including the monotheistic and polytheistic belief systems. Have the students write a brief paper explaining how the passengers on the ark uphold their belief systems. Do any of these belief systems allow for free will and choice? Encourage peer editing for clarity and grammar.

5. The novel is divided into days and nights. We meet the passengers during different parts of the day and in different situations. Find a statement of each passenger from the novel that best exemplifies each person's character.

6. "Not a single one of these creatures can die. Exactly the same number of creatures we led on board must be led off board at the end." This was the direct order from the Mighty Creator to Noah. Nela sees Sebah after this is made known in the novel. Have students assume the roles of Nela, Noah, Sebah, Mother Emzara, Shem, Ham, Japheth, Ada, and Leba. Based on the setting, plot, and action in the novel, students will write and perform a reader's theatre that will determine Sebah's fate after she is caught. Students should work in small groups, performing for the whole group while displaying their group outcomes. They need to use evidence from the text to support their outcome.

7. The flood occurred to remove evil from the world. When the novel ends, the passengers must learn how to be free again and how to know joy again. Freedom and joy are not what we think of when we think of evil. The passengers who leave, the family who has survived, are good. How does evil reenter the world and the human experience? Have students write a narrative answering this question.

8. The author relies heavily on the story of Noah and the Ark to tell her story. Sebah is also a farmer from the area of Canaan and her life and spirituality is tied to the land and nature. Because the novel is based in a story of faith the author uses some of the symbols of faith to tell Sebah's story. Have the students write a short paper identifying the symbols throughout the novel, their meanings and implications for the story. Have them share their writings with the class.

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