

The Mapmaker Chronicles (Series)
Race to the End of the World

by A.L. Tait

Teachers' Notes

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INTRODUCTION

‘Don’t you want to see the world?’

Not really,’ Quinn said again. ‘I like the part of the world I know.’ (p 13)

Quinn, at fourteen, is the youngest of six brothers and considered something of a ‘runt’ because of his size. At 21, Jed is the eldest and he and the others – Simon, Heath, Berrick and Allyn – work long and hard at their father Beyard Freeman’s farm. Quinn is the only one to have learned to read from his mother, and he also has a photographic memory (p xii). When his talents attract the attention of someone in high power, though, his life is about to change irrevocably.

Quinn’s family live in the village of Markham in the country of Verdania. King Orel has ‘decided that Verdania will create the first map of the world’ (p x) since his rival Rey Bernadino of Gelyn has a rudimentary map and Orel wants to ‘go one better’ (p 25). He has decided to select ten boys to train as mapmakers, and has thus scoured the kingdom for boys who could become mapmakers. Consequently, he has sent Master Blau and a Deslonder slave named Zain to collect Quinn. But when Quinn is chosen for the King’s training school, he’s amazed but not really interested in leaving his life as his mother’s helper. For while his older brothers long for adventure, Quinn is content with a quiet life on their farm. Fate has intervened in his life, though, and has other plans for him.

So Quinn heads off to scribe school and after training, is shocked when he is selected as one of the three mapmakers and finds himself on board a ship, competing for the big prize. Of the three explorers embarking on the race to create the map, Dolan wants gold, Odilon of Blenheim wants power, and Zain wants freedom (pp 27– 29). Dolan chooses Ira the bully (p 34); Odilon chooses Ajax (p 35); and Zain chooses Quinn (p 36).

‘You have all that you need to succeed.’ The slave continued. ‘And you have something I need.’(p 37)

So reluctantly, Quinn begins a journey deep into the unknown, on a ship captained by a slave, with a stowaway girl on board. A mysterious sea monster seems to be following them and as they venture further north they encounter unexpected enemies, and discover strange new lands. Quinn tries to conceal two very big secrets from his crewmates. And hot on their trail are the other competitors for the King’s prize, who will stop at nothing to win.

The Mapmaker Chronicles: Race to the End of the World is the first in a trilogy of junior novels for 9-13 year olds, which is packed with action, adventure and intrigue. It is also a moving story of a boy’s journey, not only into new and challenging realms by ship, but also into a world which encourages him to embrace new experiences and to recognise his own distinctive skills.

BEFORE READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the **cover** of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel’s themes?
- Read about the history of maps and mapping, and how the early explorers came to map the world.
- Study mapping techniques and experiment with making a map of an area yourself.

THEMES

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics might be identified in this novel:

- **Maps and Mapping**

Discussion Point: It is hard to believe now that people believed the world would simply end, and that one would fall off the edge if one travelled too far. When and how did this belief change?

Question: Quinn’s doubts about the expedition are based on the maps he has studied (p 9). What does he discover there?

Discussion Point: Quinn and Ajax find a tapestry map (p 159) that seems to offer clues to their journey. When Ajax takes it with him when he’s returned to Dolan’s employ, it may have left the crew of the *Libertas* without a valuable tool to assist them in their race. How do you imagine the map might play a role in the sequels to this novel?

- **Myths and Legends**

Question: In this society the people have been brought up on a range of myths, one of which was that 'Besides everyone knew that if you went too far in either direction you'd fall off the end of the earth. They also knew that below that drop lay Genesi, dragon of death, waiting.' (p x) In earlier times people in our own world actually believed in myths like this too. Why?

Question: Several old wives' tales appear in this novel e.g. red hair was considered a good luck charm (p 35); 'Everyone knows that girls are bad luck on a boat.' (p 48) What is the origin of these two beliefs?

Question: Jericho sees the monster (p 58) and later a great white beast appears again to Quinn (p 126). Then his ship's crew see what they believe is a dragon (p 212). But Quinn says 'It's good luck for us. I know it.' (p 234) and names it Nammu, Goddess of the Sea (p 235). What did you think the creature was? Did you imagine it was a mythical creature or something else?

- **Ethics & Honour**

Question: Zain is a man of principle. In which incidents in the novel does he demonstrate this?

Question: How alike are Quinn and Zain in this regard? How are they different?

- **Imperialism**

Question: 'The possibilities – for expansion, for wealth – were unlimited.' (p 25) How much of early exploration was really about scientific knowledge, or was it more about seeking economic benefit?

Activity: 'And anything Gelyn could do, Verdania could do better.' (p 26) Compare this rivalry to that between Britain and Spain in the time of the great explorers.

Discussion Point: Many explorers were so focused on seeking gold or on the notion of mapping or exploration that they failed to consider that other people might be less than pleased with their arrival. Consider the following quotes in this regard: '... he hadn't ever stopped to consider that there might be other people in them.' (p 83) 'Just because we hadn't left home to find it didn't mean there was nothing there.' (p 169) 'No, what we *knew* about our world ended at our borders. There's a difference.' (p 170)

Discussion Point: Morpeth works for legendary explorer Juan Forden. The latter might be compared to many of the great explorers. [See **Bibliography** below.]

- **Women's Rights and Powers**

Discussion Point: 'They didn't even consider trying girls out for the mapmakers' school.' (p 46)

Discussion Point: When Aysha is discovered in disguise as a stowaway (p 43) Zain is initially angry but eventually accepts her as a healer (p 50). Does he also sense that she might have other uses or skills to contribute to the journey?

Discussion Point: 'Ash hadn't been brought up to be "protected".' (p 183)

- **Slaves' Rights**

Discussion Point: 'Look at you. You've been a slave for most of your life. But you're not just going to accept that, are you? You're here.' (p 46) 'How must it feel for such a proud man, a warrior, to have been taken into slavery?' (p 68) Discuss the influence of slavery over Zain's character.

Discussion Point: Discuss these quotes: 'If a slave had them, then he should have them.' (p 137) 'Slavery is no life at all.' (p 213)

- **Shipping Life**

Activity: Life on board a ship in earlier times was not always pleasant. E.g. 'lice were, unfortunately, non-paying customers on every ship, no matter how clean.' (p 67) or 'Starvation was every explorer's nightmare, and a reality for every one of them.' (p 153) Research this life further.

Activity: Read other junior fiction novels that deal with shipping or exploration. E.g. Andrew McGahan's *The Ship Kings* trilogy (Allen & Unwin) or the *Brotherband* series by John Flanagan (Random House Australia).

- **Leadership**

Discussion Point: 'Zain managed to make every man on his crew feel their role was vital.' (p 68) What makes a good leader or captain?

- **Memory**

Discussion Point: Quinn's prodigious memory becomes very useful. Read the following incidents or quotes and discuss how Quinn makes use of his talent: When Zain asks if anything is amiss or changed on the deserted *Fair Maiden* ((p 77), Quinn can recall extremely accurately the minor changes. 'He had taught himself to speak Renz in two days the previous summer...' (p 90) 'Learning Renz had given him a taste for languages and he'd sought out books to help.' (p 91) 'This boy will now speak . . . He will plead the case for release of the prisoners, and you will understand him.' (p 100)

- **Historical Fiction**

Discussion Point: This is a fantasy but it is also a work of historical fiction since it has strong parallels with real events in history. The exploration of other continents, and the discovery of unknown tribes and lands which occurred between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries by European explorers are clearly paralleled in Zain and Quinn's journey.

Question: What other parallels with history did you discover in this novel?

- **Adventure**

Question: The story contains a number of challenges. For instance, as they encounter Odilon at the strange camp; being kept prisoner; Dolan's ship also in trouble, after which Dolan actually doublecrosses them (p143). They then find the abandoned castle, the broken jetty, and the icebound town where they fight and escape. What other aspects of the novel are typical of an adventure novel?

- **Rite of Passage**

Question: Before becoming a scribe, Quinn felt insignificant compared to his older brothers. 'Don't start with the "you will grow and then you will understand" hogwash' (p 232). Most teenagers feel this way. Is Quinn any different?

Discussion Point: Quinn learns more new skills and strengths than simply mapmaking: 'He realised that his time with Zain had given him more than traditional fighting skills – it had given him the confidence to stand his ground *without* having to use them.' (pp 222) By the end of the novel he also feels 'excited about what the next stage of the journey might bring'. (p 233)

Discussion Point: The letter from Master Blau (p 56) indicates that he has been recognised for exceptional skills and talents. What are some of those talents? And how does he learn to utilise or harness them for the journey ahead? .

- **Natural History**

Activity: Ash's (Aysha's) interest in plants is inherited from her mother, Sarina, who was regarded as a healer but driven out by her village by superstition. Ash is not only interested in propagating plants for food but also for medicine and other purposes e.g. for colouring ink for Quinn's mapmaking.

Explorers found many new plants when they journeyed into the unknown, and this became part of the economic bounty of such journeys. Research and discuss further.

Activity: Research the fact that herbal knowledge was often treated as witchcraft in earlier times.

- **Survival Tactics**

Discussion Point: There are a number of instances where ingenuity is used to trick or to deter the enemy in this novel. E.g. Ajax teaches Quinn the trick with hinges (p 7); Quinn has learned the value of 'sneaking' (p 84) from his brothers; "'A man cannot move quickly in bare feet" Zain would say if he saw Quinn now.' (p 66) Were there other instances like these?

Discussion Point: Zain teaches his crew fighting skills that are quiet but deadly, and sound akin to martial arts. How do they assist his crew in making this journey safely?

- **Home**

Discussion Point: 'It was funny how quickly a person's notion of "home" could change.' (p 118)

CHARACTERS

There are only a handful of **Major Characters** in this book: Quinn (a farm boy with special qualities who becomes a mapmaker); Zain (the Deslonder slaver and leader of the expedition aboard the *Libertas*); Ash (a feisty orphaned girl whom Quinn has known all his life); Ajax (a big friendly giant of a boy with red hair).

Minor characters include: Quinn's parents and brothers; Odilon; Dolan; Morphett; Kurt; Cleric; Ira

(son of a Lordling and arch enemy of Quinn, at Scribe School); Anders (another student); the crew members on *Libertas* (p 41+); Morpeth (an old enemy of Zain's); Kurt (an orphaned boy).

Activity: Draw up a character chart and find key quotes which give a clear picture of the natures of any of these characters, and isolate events which demonstrate their natures. Then write a brief character study of the person using the quotes and events to illustrate the points made in your summary.

Question: Which character was most intriguing and why?

Question: Which character do you feel might play a larger role in the remaining two books in the trilogy?

WRITING STYLE

This novel might be studied in terms of a range of aspects of style:

- **Devices** such as simile, metaphor, personification are used. For example:

Simile	'The trees around them were packed together like the scones his mam sometimes baked.' (p 81)
Metaphor	'this boiling cauldron' (p 124).
Personification	'The storm had them in its teeth and was shaking them like a rabid dog.' (p 124)
Sarcasm	""Get any closer and I'll be wearing you as a cloak," the Deslonder said.' (p 82)

Activity: Find other examples of the use of these devices in this text.

- The story is told from **third person subjective person** or **narrative point of view** largely from Quinn's perspective. Ch 8, though, moves to Ash's perspective (p 94), then back to Quinn's again (p 97), and again to Ash (p 183), then Quinn (p 187), to Ash (p 198), to Quinn (p 200).

Question: These alternating perspectives heighten suspense. In what way?

- **Suspense** is also created by other aspects of the narrative.

Activity: 'And stepped back in horror.' (p 182) This is an excellent ending to a section in Ch 13. Write your own sentence to follow this.

Activity: The ending of Ch 14 (p 206) is another cliffhanger ending. 'The world was ending' is a great opening sentence to Ch 16 (p 212).

Question: What other moments were particularly suspenseful in this novel?

- The **Structure** of the story can be analysed in terms of key narrative features.

Activity: Draw up a chart and identify these key points in this novel's narrative structure.

- This story falls into several **genres** – the rite of passage, the survival or adventure story, historical fiction, fantasy [See also **Themes** above].

Activity: Choose any of these genres and map out how the story fits into that genre.

Activity: Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel using texts in the

Bibliography to inform your work.

- **Series Writing**

Question: This is the first in a trilogy. What might happen in the remaining two books? Write a synopsis for a second book.

Activity: Design a cover for this book and create a unifying symbol or style to link each of the books in the trilogy.

FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION & RESEARCH

Read the following quotes and discuss them:

1. 'The only reason Quinn could read was because of his mother. She'd had schooling as a girl.' (p viii) This is a mystery in the novel, which is explained further (p 38). How did the daughter of a Baron end up marrying Quinn's father, Bayard Freeman?
2. 'It hadn't taken him long to work out that knowledge meant power.' (p x) Discuss.
3. 'But it was one thing to create beautiful maps and quite another thing to realise what those maps represented.' (p 9) What does Quinn find that they represent?
4. 'Words are always best, Quinn,' Zain said. 'Only fight when you have to.' (p 89) How often does this philosophy work in the novel? Does it work in real life?
5. 'People will always fear what they don't understand . . . The trick is to show them that what makes you different is nothing to fear.' (p 123) Discuss with reference to any character in this novel.
6. 'There is no reward without risk . . . Going home because we are scared would be no homecoming. My family would not be free.' (p 213) Zain's slavery has taught him a lot about strength. Discuss the incidents which reveal that.
7. 'Look for reasons to keep going, not for reasons to stop.' (p 214) This is a maxim which applies in every life. Discuss.
8. 'As a slave, Zain had to win in the most scrupulous way possible.' (p 217) Why does Zain feel such a need to be morally superior in his actions?
9. 'An alliance is only as strong as the trust that binds us.' (p 227) Can a partnership or agreement ever succeed if there is a lack of trust between those parties?
10. 'Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.' (p 228) This is quite a cynical but often a very pertinent statement regarding life. Discuss.
11. What is an 'Enemend' (p 229)?
12. 'You can only change how you react to those things.' (p 232) This novel is about Quinn learning to react only to those things which are really important. Discuss.

CONCLUSION

This is an excellent novel that is written in the mode of grand and lasting adventure stories. Based on a strong and intriguingly multifaceted character, it weaves a web of intrigue while Quinn embarks on an adventure fraught with moral challenges. It promises to be concluded in exciting fashion, in the two sequels still to come.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A. L. Tait, who writes fiction and non-fiction for adults under another name, grew up dreaming of world domination. Unfortunately, at the time there were only alphabet sisters B. L. and C. A. and long-suffering brother M. D. M. to practise on . . . and parents who didn't look kindly upon sword fights, plank-walking or thumbscrews. But dreams don't die and *The Mapmaker Chronicles*, the author's first series of books for children, is the result. A. L. Tait lives in country NSW with a family, a garden and four goldfish.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. She also teaches writing for children and young adults at Griffith University (Gold Coast) where she gained her PhD for a thesis on the development of the Australian children's publishing industry. Her latest publications are *Paper Empires a History of the Book in Australia 1946-2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011 she was Recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, and in 2012 she was recipient of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature.