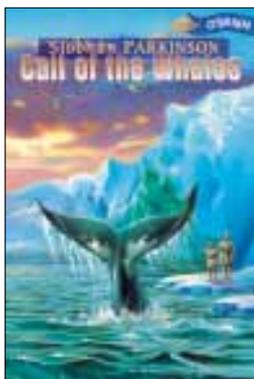


CALL OF THE WHALES



by Siobhán Parkinson

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A chance meeting with a childhood friend stirs Tyke's memories and rekindles his youthful enthusiasm for the Arctic wastes he had visited as a boy in the company of his anthropologist father. Now a lecturer, Tyke recalls the 'huge inky shapes of the bowheads' and the magical narwhal, or sea unicorn, and though much of the detail of these summer trips has been forgotten, certain people and incidents remain clear in his memory. He remembers Turaq, who had saved him from certain death after he slipped into the icy water; and Turaq's grandmother, who had explained her belief that a kindness is repaid by helping someone else in trouble. The young boy's relationship with his parents and his growing understanding of the realities of the adult world are sensitively depicted. But central to the book is Tyke's recollection of those conflicting and confusing emotions experienced during his last trip, when he realised that the unicorn's horn which had enchanted him as a boy was far from being the magical object of his imaginings.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: e.g. undifferentiated, anthropology, subsistence, glowered, shamans, hypothermia, breached, reverberate, winching, gilded, acrid, eked, quota, exploitation, conserving, evasive, deference, sonorous.
- ◆ Descriptive writing: 'the racing meltwater-swollen stream came seething down' (p.26); 'an occasional dark shape drifting elephantinely to the surface' (p.83); 'an almighty crack in the murmurous silence of the night' (p.67).
- ◆ Sustained description: the unicorn horn (pp. 14–16); sunset (p.43); the airport at night (p. 134); Arctic summers (p.34); the whale hunt (pp. 64–67).
- ◆ Similes: 'like trying to catch an ice cube in a sink with wet fingers' (p.85); 'lumbering as a hippopotamus' (p.90); 'like flying into an ice-cream sundae, a knickerbocker glory' (p. 118).
- ◆ Discussion: What does Tyke mean when he says that he is getting too old for the 'intense yet casual friendships that children make' (p. 115)?
- ◆ Story: 'Henry's grandfather had told him some of the old tales and a lot about the old way of life ... so that the next generation of people would still have the stories' (p.99). Peig Sayers and others told their stories for much the same reason. Find out all you can about the lives and works of Peig and other islanders. If you can, read some of their work and say whether you think it was important that their stories should be preserved for future generations.
- ◆ Storytelling: Take it in turns around the class to tell your friends a story. This could be entirely fictional, or it might be a retelling of some well-known story. You might also listen to a professional storyteller such as Liz Weir, a selection of whose stories are available in *Boom Chicka Boom* (ISBN: 0-86278-417-4, £4.99pb).
- ◆ Creative: Tyke was desperate to see what was going on, 'wishing it wasn't going to happen, and yet bursting for it to be over with' (p.66). Write about a time you experienced similarly confused feelings.
- ◆ Creative: Tyke says that when he tries to describe Thule, it 'comes out like a brochure

from the Greenland tourist board'. Pretend you're 'a copywriter for a ski resort' (p. 118) and use those 'exotic words' which would encourage tourists to visit.

◆ Creative: Write about the 'ultimate arctic experience' as promised by Dad or as experienced by Tyke. You might write entirely from imagination or you might use information available on www.greenland-guide.gl

SESE – SCIENCE

- ◆ Living things: plant and animal life. Recognising that there is a great diversity of plants and animals in different regions and environments; exploring some ways in which plant and animal behaviour is influenced by or adapted to environmental conditions.
- ◆ Environmental awareness and care: fostering an appreciation of the ways in which people use the Earth's resources and coming to appreciate the need to conserve resources. Read Chapter 8 again, where Matulik and 'the man in city shoes' debate quotas and the conservation of resources.

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: self-awareness. Recognising that each person is a unique individual and that this individuality is expressed through lifestyle, beliefs, interests and activities pursued. Tyke's mother thought she was 'dead unconventional' (p.35), and the family differed from those 'who talked about their holidays in Courtown or Llandudno or trips to Old Trafford' (p.37). Discuss Tyke and his parents and say how each expressed their individuality.
- ◆ Myself: taking care of my body. Food and nutrition. Dad tells Tyke that 'meat is what you eat up here, or you die', adding that it wasn't just humans that 'live off dead animals ... All of nature does' (p.56). Later, Tyke is 'kind of glad' that he doesn't enjoy the whale meat (p.98). Explore the factors that influence food choices.
- ◆ Myself: growing and changing. Appreciating the need for individual space and privacy as one is growing and developing; identifying some of the changes that are experienced in growing from child to adult: increasing personal independence, increasing personal and community responsibility. Dad can sound 'snide' and 'offhanded' about the things that are

important to Tyke (p. 110); Tyke now needs his summers for his own stuff (p. 114). Discuss these and other changes that take place as Tyke grows and matures.

◆ Myself: growing and changing. Discussing the responsibilities involved in being a parent and the emotional and physical maturity required. Tyke says that his mother 'was not what you might call reliable', that she 'didn't know much about the mother-stuff' (p.33), and that his dad could be 'plain irresponsible' (p.47). Examine the attitudes of his parents to their responsibilities, in the light of his gradual realisation that he may have underestimated his mother's concerns (p. 114) and his father's vagueness about his children (p. 138).

◆ Myself: feelings and emotions/making decisions. Discussing how to express and cope with various feelings in an appropriate manner. Examine his father's role in helping Tyke to deal with his confused feelings about whale hunting (pp. 53–59).

◆ Myself: safety and protection. Discussing risky situations and evaluating how risks may be minimised or avoided and the implications of taking risks. Assess Tyke's behaviour, and that of his father, when they discovered that Henry had gone missing (pp. 80–94).

◆ Myself and others: myself and my family. Comparing and contrasting the lifestyles of families in different cultures, e.g. descriptions of Turaq's house (pp. 35–36), Matulik's house (pp. 50–51) and village life (pp. 60–63).

◆ Myself and others: myself and other people. Appreciating the difference between close friends and acquaintances. Examine Tyke's feelings on meeting Henry so many years after they had lost contact (pp. 11–13). Also, exploring how the views or expectations of others can influence how people relate to each other. Discuss Matulik's opinion of Dad (pp. 44–45) and his attitude toward the government official (pp. 48–51).

◆ Myself and the wider world: understanding the role of the individual and various groups in the community: During the whale hunt, 'everyone had a job to do and everyone in the crew depended on everyone else doing their job' (p.66).