After coming out of hiding to reclaim her birthright, Lessa finds she must save the planet of Pern from the deadly Threads.

Award: Margaret A. Edwards Award; Misc./Other

Topics: Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Science Fiction, Other Worlds; Series, Dragonriders of Pern

Main Characters
F'lar the disciplined son of a former Weyrleader, who becomes Weyrleader at Benden Weyr and leads the people of Pern in the battle against the Threads
F'nor F'lar's half-brother and wingsecond, who is unfailingly loyal to him
Fax the "Lord of the High Reaches," who has gone against tradition by invading other Holds and is ultimately killed as a result of Lessa's need for revenge
Lessa the sole survivor of the Ruathan bloodline, who becomes Weyrwoman of Benden Weyr and ultimately saves Pern with her daring plan
Mnementh the bronze dragon, ridden by F'lar, that mates with Queen Ramoth
R'gul the incompetent Weyrleader, whose time as leader comes to an end when F'lar comes to power
Ramoth the Dragon Queen that is "impressed" by Lessa

Vocabulary
between an area of nothingness between times or places

fire-stone a phosphine-bearing mineral chewed by dragons to produce flame
Hold a place where the common people of Pern live
Impression the joining of minds of a dragon and its rider at the moment of the dragon's hatching
Threads spores from the Red Star, which fall on Pern and destroy vegetation
Turn a Pernese year
watch-wher a nocturnal reptile, often used by people to warn of nighttime intruders
Weyr a home of dragons and their riders

Synopsis

Dragonflight is one in a series of science fiction fantasies depicting the history and culture of Pern. Pern is a planet inhabited by descendants of space immigrants from Earth and a separate, highly intelligent species of dragon. The dragons have evolved to battle regular attacks of menacing "Threads," toxic to all vegetation. The Threads are emitted from a red planet that has an elliptical orbit, which brings it close to Pern at approximately two-hundred-Turn (year) intervals.

Politically, Pern is divided into Holds, similar to feudal estates, ruled by Lord Holders and populated by highly skilled Craftspeople, as well as servants and farmers. Dispersed among the populated areas of Pern are six Weyrs, or homes of dragons and their riders. The dragonriders are charged with protecting the Holds and maintaining the Laws and history of Pern. For these services, the Holders are obligated to provide tithes from the annual production of Hold lands. At the time of this adventure, only one of the six Weyrs is occupied.

In this context, the story opens with Lessa, the only survivor of consequence of a brutal invasion of the Hold of Ruath, plotting to overthrow the invader, Fax, and reclaim her birthright. Although she successfully contributes to the death of her enemy, she is asked to serve Pern by being the rider of the soon-to-be-hatched Dragon Queen, Ramoth, thereby contributing to the possible rescue of the planet from the dreaded Threads and restoring
order in all the Holds. F'lar, a student of Pernese
history and mythology, successfully installs Lessa as
the rider of the Queen and subsequently becomes
Weyrleader when his bronze dragon becomes the
Queen's mate.

Faced with the predictable onslaught of Threads,
insurrection among the skeptical Lord Holders, and
a sadly neglected force of dragons and riders, F'lar
and Lessa attempt, by both conventional and
non-conventional means, to prepare for the battles.
In Lessa's impatience to fly and experience travel
"between" places, she accidentally discovers the
dragons' power to travel "between" times. Using this
knowledge, she and F'lar contrive to build dragon
numbers by raising them in another time and
bringing them back when needed. This experiment
is driven by the first battle against the Threads,
which results in several casualties.

While a moderately successful attempt to raise
dragons in another time is attempted, Lessa
understands that it will not be enough. With help
from ballads, sagas, and the return of a crucial
historical tapestry, she determines that their
salvation relies upon traveling between times four
hundred Turns back to recruit help from ancient
dragonriders by teaching them to travel between
times. Though the risk is great and is opposed by
F'lar, she makes the journey and successfully
retrieves several thousand dragons and
dragonriders, simultaneously rescuing the planet
and solving the mystery of the five abandoned
Weyrs.

By the end of this adventure, F'lar and Lessa have
established a strong, loving, and cooperative
relationship. Respect for their unique leadership
talents and dedication to the principles of Law
suggest a return to the glory days of Dragonkind and
Pern.

**Initial Understanding**

Sequence becomes very important when traveling
between times. Describe problems F'nor faced as
he returned from the Southern Continent to give
F'lar reports.

He had to leave the Weyr, stay several Turns, and
then return in less than three days. Once he came
back before he left and became ill and disoriented.

**Literary Analysis**

Both F'lar and R'gul were well versed in the ballads,
sagas, and Laws that were written to guide the
behavior of the Holds and Weyrs. Why was their
interpretation so dramatically different? Describe the
differences in your answer.

F'lar understood the meaning and context of the
mythology because he studied the Records. R'gul
knew the words and knew they were important, but
was unable to grasp the lessons within the literature.

**Inferential Comprehension**

Taking risks or not taking risks both can lead to
positive or negative results. Identify examples of
both positive and negative outcomes from the
risk-taking behaviors of both F'lar and Lessa.

a) Lessa encouraged some of the dragonmen to raid
the Holds, which resulted in an uprising of the Lords.
b) Lessa tried to go between to Ruatha before she
was ready, but learned accidentally to go between
times. c) F'lar did not act against R'gul, thus making
the power transfer less disruptive. d) F'lar willingly
confronted the rebellious Lords and reminded them
of their duties to the Weyr. e) F'lar risked all the
dragons to go between times to confront the
Threads at Nerat. The outcome was positive.
f) Lessa went 400 Turns back to bring the
Dragonriders. Initially she was very sick, but the risk
saved Pern in the long run.

**Open-Ended Questions**

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for
class discussions, student presentations, or
extended writing assignments.
Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for
Dragonflight
by
Anne McCaffrey

Constructing Meaning
As a child, Lessa rebels against the oppression of Fax. As a Weyrwoman, she helps F'lar suppress a rebellion of Hold Lords, yet she continues to "rebel" against F'lar's instructions. What is the message the author is trying to share about rebellion or responding to authority? Cite examples to support your answer.

*Each of us is responsible for examining the reasons for authoritative rules. Under most circumstances, there is justification for compliance, as in the case of Lessa encouraging raids when she was unaware that others were handling the situation more quietly. Under extraordinary circumstances, disobedience is a matter of conscience and obligation, as in Lessa's decision to attempt going between times four hundred Turns.*

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization  Lessa is a character in the story who has natural skills and talents that influence the course of events in her life. As the story progresses, she learns to use her unique talents and strengths not only for her own benefit, but also for the good of all of Pern. Ask the students to discuss what they have been taught about how unique talents should be applied and for whose benefit. Do some of them have special talents they would be willing to share with the class?

Comparing and Contrasting  Fax, R'gul, F'lar, and Lessa were each given power by the author. Each used this power in different ways. Have the students discuss the different kinds of power each had and the pros and cons of how they applied it. Have students identify one or two people from their own experience (historical characters, characters from books, personal acquaintances) whose use of power has been memorable to them. Did the people use their power in positive or negative ways?

Understanding Sequence  By going between times, the natural progression of events was disrupted. For example, we are led to believe that five Weyrs are empty because their past inhabitants were brought into the future. Have the students develop a timeline, chart, or diagram of the "between times" excursions of the characters in this story. Then have them discuss problems for history if such disruptions of sequence could really occur.

Responding to Literature  All of the solutions in this story are derived in part by those who fully understand the history and mythology of Pern. F'lar derives his timetable from the Records. Lessa finds references for going between times on the old tapestry. Have the students choose a historical event, or events, and discuss how knowledge of those events might influence their response in the future. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of history to the present and future.

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