

Chronicles of Stone – Scorched Bone

Author: Vincent Ford

Synopsis

Trei lives with his mother, father, twin sister Souk and younger sister Rhea. He is a member of the tribe called The People of the Canyons and he longs to be initiated as a hunter. Times are tough for the people in Trei's tribe. There is a terrible drought; plant foods are exhausted and small game has disappeared from their hunting grounds. Soon people begin to die, including Trei's younger sister Rhea. His family is devastated by her death.

The situation becomes so desperate that Trei manages to convince his father to gather a few hunters and attempt a bison hunt, a risky undertaking with their simple wooden spears. Among the hunters are Trei's best friend Crien and his father Caruth. The hunt ends in disaster and Caruth is killed. Trei feels responsible for the tragedy and becomes desperate to find a way to save his tribe.

Trei's idea for the bison hunt is motivated by the visit of a stranger named Thrang. Thrang is a member of a tribe called the People of the Ink. He tells Trei's people about the Northmen, a tribe of men with strange power. It is said that they have the strength to hunt bison and bring down mammoth. Thrang's people face hardship and war. The Northmen are killing their men and stealing their territory. Thrang's elders sent him on his journey so that he could learn that other villages don't have Northmen and live in peace with their neighbours. When Trei hears Thrang's story he is inextricably drawn north, desperate to know more about the strange men who dare to hunt bison and mammoths.

Trei's sister Souk has a special gift that causes her to come to the attention of the tribe's shaman. He encourages her to leave her family and come and live with him to be trained in the ancient ways and learn how to interpret her visions. Souk, like her brother Trei hears a calling that draws her north.

Trei and Souk secretly leave their village and travel north. Crien joins them and the trio begin a perilous journey that may cost them their lives. After all, it is said that no one ever returns from the territory of the Northmen.

Text Type

Scorched Bone is the first novel in the *Chronicles of Stone* trilogy, written by New Zealand author Vincent Ford. The story is set in ancient times and was researched in the United States, while Ford was taking part in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.

The novel is Ford's first written for older readers and will appeal to teenagers of both sexes. The story is extremely fast-paced and action-packed. Students will be motivated to read the next story in the trilogy because Ford leaves a number of questions unanswered at the end of *Scorched Bone*.

Scorched Bones is based on a North American Indian tribe called the People of the Canyons. Set in ancient times the story deals with the hardship that the tribe faces when there is a terrible drought. Times were tough back then and survival required a fighting spirit. Ford has created a society that is believable and complicated. The People of the Canyons have their own technology, history, stories and beliefs. Clear roles exist for men and women.

Trei, the main character in the story, longs to be initiated as a hunter so that he can provide for his tribe. Trei is determined and adventurous and although the narrative is told in third person, this is very much Trei's story. Trei faces many challenges and hardships including his initial failure to succeed as a hunter and the deaths of his younger sister and best friend's father. Trei shows fortitude and perseverance as he journeys towards the North. He is a capable young man with good survival skills who proves himself worthy of becoming a hunter for the tribe. Students will relate to Trei's resentment and bitterness as his twin sister Souk and his best friend Crien begin to form a relationship. Trei feels very much like a third wheel and needs to find ways of coping.

The story explores the way of life and traditions of Trei's tribe. The reader learns about the skills needed to survive in this harsh environment as well as the weapons and traps used in ancient times. Themes include survival, rivalry between tribes as they fight for resources, ancient customs and traditions, family, and the quest.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-19), Chapters 3-12 (pp. 20-98) and Chapters 13-22 (pp. 99-184).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Discuss the setting of the story with students and consider how the time, place and social situation of the story affect the action. Students should have a thorough understanding of the society created in the story - its customs, history, myths and tribal hierarchy.

Have students make inferences and predict what will happen next in the story. They should examine the main characters, particularly Souk and Trei, and discuss their actions, behaviour and motivations. Have them track the development of these characters as the story progresses. Encourage students to identify main themes and ideas.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What is a chronicle?
- How does the illustration on the front cover match the title of the story?
- When is the story set?
- What is the name of the tribe that the novel is based upon?
- Why is life for this tribe so difficult?
- What do you think happens during the hunt?
- Why do Trei and Souk decide to travel north?

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-19) aloud. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-19)

- Why doesn't Trei kill the fawn right away? What goes wrong when he decides to try and throw his spear? Why is Trei so disappointed when the fawn escapes?
- Why does Trei's father tell him not to waste time "dreaming about the giants"? Why does Trei feel so upset when he thinks about his father?
- Who is Dram? Why does he call Trei a coward?
- How does Duroc punish Dram for fighting?
- What part does Souk play in the ceremony? Why is she considered special?
- Describe the shaman of the tribe. What is his role in the tribe?

- Describe the initiation ceremony. How will the tribe now be able to identify the initiates as men?
- What does Souk see in her vision?

Discussion

- When and where is the story set? What clues are there in the story that tells us this?
- What do we learn about Trei and his family in these two chapters?
- Would you like to have visions like Souk? Why/why not? What would the advantages of being able to predict the future be? Disadvantages?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 3-12 (pp. 20-98) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3-12 (pp. 20-98)

- What does Duroc say to Trei to try and comfort him after the initiation ceremony? What do you think the spirits want to teach Trei?
- Why is the shaman so interested with Souk after she collapses at the initiation?
- Describe the twins' family's hut.
- What does Trei's father say that makes him feel better about his failure?
- How do Souk and the other girls react when they see the stranger approaching the village? Why do you think they react like this? Why do some of the men in the village decide to track the stranger back to his last camp?
- How does failing the initiation affect Trei's life in the village?
- What does Trei overhear the shaman talking to his father about? Why isn't Souk surprised by this news?
- What changes will happen in Souk's life if she trains to be a shaman?
- How do the People of the Canyons greet Thrang? What do we learn about them from Brega's speech?
- What does Thrang tell the tribe about himself and his people? Why are his people facing hardship and war? Why was Thrang sent on his journey by the elders?
- How does Trei react to Thrang's speech? How does Souk react?
- Why isn't Thrang able to tell the tribe much about the Northmen?
- Why are many of Trei's tribe sceptical about the stories that the Northmen hunt and kill mammoth?

- What does Souk have to give up if she trains as a shaman? What will she gain? How does Shera feel about Souk's decision? Why isn't Souk able to console her?
- Why are the women of the tribe so supportive of Souk's decision to train as a shaman?
- Why is Trei so angry when he learns about Souk's decision?
- Why do the men of Trei's tribe question Thrang so carefully before he leaves?
- What does Souk mean when she says "I was chosen"?
- What does Souk take with her when she leaves her family's hut?
- How are the People of the Canyons affected by the summer weather?
- How has Trei's relationship with Souk changed since she began her training? How do you think Trei feels when Souk fails to acknowledge him?
- Why does Trei have so much trouble looking at Rhea?
- Why does Suth become so angry when Trei suggests that they gather a party of men together to hunt bison?
- What does Souk's training consist of? What does she begin to feel she needs to do?
- How does the lack of food affect Trei and his family?
- What does Trei discover when he awakens from his dream?
- Describe the ritual the People of the Canyons perform when Rhea dies. How do you think Souk feels about not being able to comfort her family?
- What does Brega overhear Dram saying to Trei? How does he punish him?
- Why does Suth change his mind about hunting bison? Why does he let Trei come along? Why does Suth decide to leave without permission from the council?
- Describe how Suth, Crien and Caruth attack the bison. What difficulties do they face? Who manages to spear a bison? How does Caruth get injured? Why is it so important that they leave the area immediately?
- How does Suth feel when Caruth dies? Why is the journey back to the village so difficult for the hunters? What threatens them on the way?
- What happens to Caruth's wife after his death? How do you think she feels about this arrangement?
- How does the tribe punish Suth for his actions? Is this punishment fair? Why/why not?
- What does Souk tell the shaman that she saw behind Crien?
- Why does Crien visit Souk in her hut? How does she react to his visit? What do they discuss?
- Why do the people in the village feel when it starts to rain? In what ways does the rain help their situation?
- How does Trei prepare for his journey?

- Why is Crien so unhappy with his new living arrangements?
- Describe the Harvest Celebrations. What does Souk do to ensure that she and Trei can slip away safely? Who catches them leaving the camp? What does Crien do to ensure that they can get away?
- What does the group do in an effort to slow their trackers?
- Why does Souk move off by herself when the group reaches the edge of the desert?
- How does Souk collect water? What other things does she show the boys?

Discussion

- What challenges and hardships do the people in Trei's village face? How do they overcome them?
- Describe the People of the Canyons. What is their history? What technology have they created? What are their stories and religion?
- Describe Trei's relationship with Souk. Do you believe that there is often a special bond between twins? Explain your answer.
- Why do you think that Souk makes the decision to train as a shaman? Do you believe that she makes the right decision? Why/why not?
- How is the society that Trei lives in different from the society that we live in today? Discuss particularly the role of women in the tribe.
- What special skills would you need to be able to survive during this time?
- Why do you think Souk and Trei are both drawn north? What do you think might happen when they get to their destination?

Students read Chapters 13-22 (pp. 99-184) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 13-22 (pp. 99-184)

- What routine do the travellers fall into as they follow the canyon towards the uplands? Why does Souk think that travelling will be easy once they reach the river?
- What ceremony does Souk perform after Trei kills the deer? Has Trei proved himself to be a "man of the people"? Why/why not? How does Trei feel after his initiation?
- How do the travellers choose their winter camp? What do they call their new home?
- What preparations do the travellers make for the winter?
- How does Souk prepare the hides?

- What does Souk use to make them warm clothes for winter?
- Why does Souk want to collect the mesquite pods? What creature do the travellers see that has been picking the pods off the trees? What is so extraordinary about the animal? What predator attacks the animal?
- How do the hunters know that Trei, Crien and Souk are in the area? How do the two groups react when they meet? What are the hunters' names? Why is Trei so eager to befriend them?
- Why is the sloth significant to Deva and Mandalar's tribe?
- What do the Elk Eaters call the Northmen? Why can't they give the travellers much information about them?
- What do the Elk Eaters give the travellers to help them when the snow comes?
- How does Souk's relationship with Crien change during the winter? How does Trei feel about this? Why does Trei begin to doubt Crien and Souk's commitment to the journey?
- Why does Trei storm out of the shelter alone? What does he discuss with Souk when he returns? What does she say that makes him feel better?
- Why do the trio decide to move on from their shelter? What changes does spring bring to the environment?
- How do the travellers know that they have reached the Water People? Why are they so amazed when they see the woman in the water?
- Describe the meeting between the travellers and the Water People. Why do the travellers leave their weapons behind when they approach the village? Why do you think they are masked by the Water People? Who is chosen by the Water People to speak for them? What do the travellers learn from him?
- How does Jerram react when he hears that the group is headed north?
- Who is Timmo? What happened to his father? What does Jerram refuse to allow the travellers to do?
- What aspects of the Water People's lives impress Souk and Trei?
- How do the Manhunters mark their territory?
- What does Souk believe the group's best course of action is in order for them to be able to continue their journey north?
- Why does Crien begin to doubt their mission? Why does he decide to keep going?
- What does Jerram threaten the travellers with if they choose to defy him and travel north through his territory?
- What happens to Timmo? How does Souk save him? What does she ask for in return?
- What do the Water People provide for the travellers as they continue their journey?

- What amazing things have the travellers seen during their journey? Why is it important that these stories be told to their people?
- What reason does Crien give for his journey? What do the trio vow to do?
- How do the travellers know when they have finally arrived in the Northmen's territory? Why do they find the markers so disturbing?
- How does Crien die? How do Souk and Trei try and save him? How do Souk and Trei react to the death of their friend? Why do they cremate his body?
- Why does Trei begin to feel vulnerable after Crien's death?
- What does Souk believe that Trei's destiny is? What do you think Souk's might be?

Discussion

- Souk has learnt many skills from the shaman and, as a female, has different expertise to the boys. What does she contribute to the camp? What difficulties do you think the boys would face if she wasn't with them?
- Many of the animals mentioned in the novel, such as the sabre-tooth and the mammoth, no longer exist. Which extinct animal would you most like to bring back to life and why?
- What do you think would have happened to the travellers if the Elk Eaters had refused to allow them to remain in their territory for the winter?
- How do you think Souk feels knowing what Crien's fate is? Should she have insisted that he return to the village? Why/why not? Why do you think that Souk begins to return Crien's attention even though she knows what will happen to him? Do you believe that it is possible to change fate?
- Do you think that the travellers may have underestimated the Manhunters? Why/why not? Do you think that they will find safe passage past them? If so, how?
- Make a prediction about what will happen in the next book in the series.

Activities

Research - Conduct a research assignment on an aspect of ancient North American Indians. Topics could include weapons, rituals, religion, hunting or clothing. Formulate 3 focussing questions to help guide your research. Use a range of oral, visual and written sources to gather your research. Record your research process in a diary and include a bibliography. Present your findings in a report or as a diary.

Storyboard - Choose 10 important events that occur in the novel and illustrate them in a storyboard. Under each picture write a brief description about what is happening.

Setting - Using the map provided at the start of the novel as a guide draw a more detailed one that shows the most important settings in the story.

Oral Book Report - Write a review for *Scorched Bone* and present it to your class orally. In your review include information such as what type of book it is, a brief story outline, an analysis of the setting and characters and your personal opinion about the book.

Static Image - Design a static image that depicts one of the important themes presented in the story. You may wish to do a collage, use the computer or design a poster. Use words and images from the story to convey your idea.

Character - Describe Trei's actions and behaviour in a particular situation that occurs in the story. Justify or criticise his motives in this situation.

Poem - Write a love poem written by Crien to Souk.

Questions - Write 10 discussion questions for the novel.

Drama - Choose an exciting event from the story and write a script for it. Include a list of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to your class.

Soundtrack - Imagine that this novel is being made into a film. Choose 5 songs for the soundtrack. Explain why you chose the songs and where in the film they will go.

Notes written by Vicki Williams