

Tribal Ash

Author: Vincent Ford

Synopsis

It has been a long time since Souk and her twin brother Trei followed their destinies and left their tribe to travel north. Many people have lost their lives; Souk is pregnant with Dresh's child, and Trei, having learned the secret of the Northmen's weapons, is eager to return to his own people. In return for her own freedom Souk convinces the Northmen to let Trei return to the People of the Canyon. She leaves him with the Mountain People, who she makes a deal with. Trei will teach their men how to fashion the weapons of the Northman and in return they will let him leave when his job is done. However, the Mountain People renege on the deal – they try to keep Trei prisoner. Luckily Trei escapes and manages to reach the Mountains and the men pursuing him lose his trail.

Trei's betrayal of the Northmen will have far-reaching consequences. The "Manhunters" as they are known, have dominated all of the surrounding tribes for many years. They have superior weapons that are able to bring down large game such as bison and mammoth. They have been willing to do anything to protect the secret of these weapons and have killed members of surrounding tribes to defend their territory. Now that Trei has escaped, the Northmen's secrets have escaped with him. If he teaches other tribes how to make their weapons, their advantage over the other tribes will no longer exist. In addition, many tribes will want to seek revenge on The Northmen for killing their people. All out war seems almost inevitable.

In order to prove his tribes' superiority Rajahn decides that the Northmen must attend the next Meeting of the tribes. They will challenge them in contests and show their strength. Rajahn hopes that this will deter the other tribes from attacking them if they have learnt how to make their weapons. Initially things at the Meeting are peaceful, but when some young Northmen finish off all the wine they begin to behave obnoxiously and one of them is killed by a member of a rival tribe. The Northmen seek retribution and soon a melee breaks out. The Northmen manage to escape and return back to their territory, but the seeds of discontent have been sown and it is only a matter of time before their people are attacked.

Meanwhile Trei continues to live in the woods and trade with the People of the Water, stockpiling food for the winter. His goodwill towards these people is rewarded when he has an accident and breaks his leg. They take him in and nurse him back to health. Even though Trei has had a broken leg he is determined to return to his own people, so, hoping that the winter remains mild, he sets off towards home. However, when he arrives his reunion with his father is nothing like what he hoped. His old nemesis Dram has accused him of incest with Souk the night the pair disappeared and he is cast out by his people.

After Souk has her baby, a girl called Bridi, the inevitable happens and the Northmen are attacked. Thinking that she is one of the women taken prisoner by the Northmen, Souk is left alive. Everyone else in the tribe is slaughtered. Souk is left alone and scared, facing the awful decision of what to do and where to go with her small child. Trei is also suffering, he is lonely and depressed. There is another drought coming and without his knowledge his people will die. Will they accept Trei's help or is it too late for him to rejoin his tribe?

Text Type

Tribal Ash is the third novel in the *Chronicles of Stone* trilogy. Written by New Zealand author Vincent Ford, the story is set in America during the ice-age (about 10,000 years ago). Ford spent time in the USA researching for this series and many of the details about plants eaten and used for medicine, animals hunted and weapons used are historically accurate. In addition to this, the different roles and structures in the tribes are also based

on historical evidence. Although this novel is part of a trilogy it can easily be read alone as a brief synopsis of the premise for the series is provided at the start of the story.

Tribal Ash is a fascinating novel that has broad appeal for readers of both genders. It is a gritty and realistic story that contains some violent scenes. As such it is best suited to readers 12+. The main characters in the novel are the twins Souk and Trei. The lives of these young teenagers are incredibly different from the lives of teenagers today. They are faced with life and death situations regularly. Survival is a constant struggle and they are often under threat from attacks from other tribes. In this time period people died young and were expected to become "adults" at an early age. Even though Souk is very young she has a baby and has important responsibilities in her tribe. Trei, with his new skills in creating weapons and his hunting prowess is also essential to the survival of his people.

Tribal Ash is fast-paced and full of enough action to keep even the most reluctant reader engaged. Themes include the idea of survival in harsh conditions, the consequences of trying to keep weapons and technology a secret, family, loyalty, revenge and the importance of belonging.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 5-17), Chapters 2-11 (pp. 18-92), Chapters 12-19 (pp. 93-164), and Chapters 20-27 (pp. 165-239).

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 affects the action. Students should have a thorough understanding of the society created in the story; its customs, history, myths and positions within the tribe.

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?
- Who does Trei escape from? What secret does he want to return to the People of the Canyons?
- Who is Souk? What is Souk trying to do in the Northmen camp?
- What difficulties do you think Trei will face as he journeys home?

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 5-17) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 5-17)

- Why are the Mountain tribesmen surprised when the Northmen fail to follow them? What does Trei tell them about the deal that Souk made?

- Why did Trei leave the canyons? Who journeyed with him? What lie did Souk tell the Northmen that convinced them to let the twins live with their tribe? What secret did Trei learn from the Northmen? How did Souk gain the trust of their leader? What did Dram tell Trei's village about his disappearance?
- Why are the Mountain tribe so excited when Trei shows them his weapons? What does Thuron decide to do with the weapons? How does Trei react to this? How does Thuron punish Trei?
- Why is Trei so worried about Souk?
- Why does Trei decide to escape?

Discussion

- Why do the Mountain tribesmen react the way they do to Trei's appearance? Why does Thrang feel so foolish?
- What do we learn about Trei and his past in this Chapter?
- Why does Souk chose to remain behind with the Northmen? What do you think will happen to her when they find out that Trei has left?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2-11 (pp. 18-92) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2-11 (pp. 18-92)

- Why does Souk believe that she will no longer be welcome at Shayen's shelter? Who built the new shelter?
- How does Rajahn react when he learns that Trei is gone? Why does Souk decide to tell him the truth about her tribe? What does she believe her calling is?
- What dangers does Trei face as he tries to reach the mountains? How does the lack of food affect him? How does he survive without his weapons? What does he do to slow the men pursuing him?
- Why don't any of the Northmen speak openly against Souk? Why does Marta speak to Rajahn in her defence?
- Why does Rajahn want to attend the Meeting? Why does he want Souk to accompany them? Why is Souk in two minds about the Northmen attending the Meeting?
- What does Trei do with the sheep that he kills?
- Why does Trei have so much difficulty getting through the mountains? What does he discover after the storm? What does he notice about the land? How does he know that there are people nearby? In what ways could local people be of help to him?
- How does Trei hunt for food?
- How does Trei know when he has found rock suitable for building weapons? How does he feel when he is shaping the rock?
- How does Trei kill the horse? Why is it important for him to do this?
- Describe the Sea People. In what ways are they different from anyone that Trei has ever seen before? How do they gather their food?
- How does Trei react when he tastes the water? Why does he react this way?
- What does Trei leave for the Sea People as an offer of friendship? How do the villagers react when they find it? Why is Trei convinced that these are not land people?
- What does Trei carry into the Sea People's camp with him? How does the tribe react? What does Trei do to make himself seem non-threatening but also not vulnerable? What does the man with the red beard give Trei in return for his offering?
- How does Trei prepare himself for the winter? Why is he so keen to find out about the Sea People? What creatures do they hunt that fascinate him?

- What do the Northmen take with them to the Meeting? Describe their approach to the Meeting. What does Souk notice about the weapons used by the Mountain tribe? Who is the host of the Meeting? What does Rajahn give him as a gift?
- Why does Souk decide to speak up for her tribe? Why does she tell them that they are the Children of Stone? Who is Siti? Why does he think that the Northmen should be allowed to stay? Why can't Kranag guarantee their safety?
- How does Souk try and ease the tension at the Meeting?
- What do the Brush People give Souk?
- What does Thrang tell Souk about Trei? How does she react when she hears this news?

Discussion

- Why is it possible that Trei's disappearance may lead to war? What does Souk mean when she says "a balance must be found"? Why have the Northmen been so protective of their weapons? How has their advanced technology affected the surrounding tribes?
- Do you believe that Souk makes the right decision when she decides to stay with the Northmen? Why/why not?
- Describe Trei. What qualities and characteristics does he possess?
- How would Trei's journey have been different if the Sea People were hostile towards him?
- Describe the role of women in the Northmen's tribe.
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 12-19 (p. 93-164) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 12-19 (pp. 93-164)

- Why do the Northmen dominate so much at the competitions? How do the men behave as their superiority over the other tribes becomes clear?
- Why does Souk believe that Rajahn wants to hurt the people at the Meeting to get back at her?
- Who retrieves Rajahn's spear from the target? What do they discover about the spear? Why are they careful not to show too much interest in it?
- Why does Siti believe that there will never be peace between his people and the Northmen?
- How does Kranag welcome the visitors to the feast? In what ways is it clear that some members of his tribe don't trust the Northmen or want them at the gathering? Why does Siti warn the crowd to drink his beer in moderation?
- Who steals the remaining beer? How does this affect their behaviour? What are the consequences of their actions?
- How does Rajahn stop his men from continuing to fight? What does he say to Kranag to ensure his people's safe retreat?
- Who is killed by the Northmen as they retreat?
- Why does Trei enjoy his brief contact with the Sea People so much?
- Why can't Trei cure his toothache? How does his toothache affect him and his ability to hunt?
- How does Trei injure himself? What things does he notice when he first wakes up? How long does it take him to regain a measure of health? What does Trei learn about the Sea People and their way of life while he recuperates?
- What does Kriya give Trei as a parting gift?
- What does Souk call her child? Why does having a baby bring her closer to the Children of Stone?
- Why is Souk worried about the restlessness of the men in her camp?
- What do the men who break away from the patrol do?

- Why does Rajahn want Souk to visit the kidnapped women? What does Rajahn plan to do with the women after Souk has seen them? Why is he so convinced that there won't be any retribution from the Mountain Tribes?
- How does Souk frighten the young prisoner? Why does she do this?
- How do the women react when Souk approaches them? How does she earn their trust?
- What happens to the patrol when they enter the swamp? Why is Souk's life spared?
- Why does Souk believe that the combined forces of all of the neighbouring tribes are after more than just simple retribution?
- Describe how the landscape changes as Trei continues his journey home.
- What does Trei notice when he arrives at the camp of the People of the Canyons?
- How does Trei feel when he sees his father walk out of his hut? What does his father do when Trei tells him that Souk is going to have a baby?
- What accusation does Dram make against Trei? What has happened to his mother?
- Who does Trei tell his story to?
- What will happen to Trei if the council doesn't believe his story?

Discussion

- Souk believes that Rajahn is a charismatic leader. What qualities does a good leader possess?
- Rajahn has the man who killed Deren murdered. Is this fair? Why/why not? What possible consequences could result from this action?
- Describe Souk. What attributes does she possess? Why do you think she was accepted into the Northmen's tribe despite being a stranger?
- Why did the three tribes decide to form an alliance? Are they justified in destroying the Northmen? Why/why not?
- Predict what will happen next in the story. What will happen to Trei if his people cast him out of the village?

Students read Chapters 20-27 (pp. 165-239) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 20-27 (pp. 165-239)

- Describe the council meeting. Why does Trei refuse to tell the council his story? What does this suggest about his character?
- What does Suth say at the meeting? How does this make Trei feel?
- What decision do the council make about Trei's future? How does Dram react to this verdict?
- Why does Souk feel partially responsible for the death of the Northmen?
- How does Souk try and provide comfort for Kala when she takes her eye? What does Kala tell her about Bridi when she wakes up?
- What does Souk find when she returns to the Northmen's camp? Why does she perform a chant? Why does Souk feel a measure of peace after she leaves the camp?
- Why is Souk adamant that she needs to see Rajahn's body? How do the Water People treat his body? Why does Kendo drag Souk away from the revellers?
- Why does Trei become so depressed when he is exiled from camp?
- Describe the technique that Trei's people use to hunt. Why does Trei change his mind about telling the council his story after he sees his people hunting?
- Why does Trei worry about his people as the drought sets in?
- What disadvantages does the technique used by the People of the Canyon to capture game have in the long-term?
- Describe what Trei sees when he returns to his camp. How much food remains? What suggestion does Trei come up with to help his people?

- Explain how Trei kills the bison. Why does Trei feel like his journey north hasn't been completely wasted? Who surprises Trei and helps him hunt? How does he react when he sees the bison go down?
- Who returns with Suth to the kill site?
- Where do the men tell Trei that he might find chalky stone suitable for making weapons?
- How does Trei feel when he is talking to the group of his people who set up camp near the bison?
- Why is it so dangerous for Trei to enter the valley to gather the rock? What would happen to his tribe if he had died while collecting the rock? Why is Trei so happy when he starts chipping away at the rock?
- What sad news does Lara tell Trei? Why is Trei concerned that Dram might become leader?
- How does Trei feel when Dram approaches him? What does Dram tell Trei he will say to the council? What does Dram tell Trei that he wants to happen with his weapons? Why doesn't Trei trust Dram? Why does Trei kill his nemesis? What does he do with Dram's body?
- Why do the council believe Trei's story? Why does the shaman maintain that Trei had to kill Dram?
- What does the council decide will happen to Trei after he kills Dram? Is this fair? Why/why not? What concession do they make?
- What is the name of Trei's son? Who is his partner?
- How does Trei feel when he realises that the stranger is actually Souk? What does Souk tell him about what happened after the Northmen were killed? Why didn't Trei ever return to the old village? How did Suth die?

Discussion

- What do you think Dram's motivation for lying was?
- Trei is exiled from his people and forced to live alone. What do you think the worst part of this would be?
- How does the knowledge that Trei passes on to his People change the way the tribe lives?
- Why is it significant that Trei welcomes people from other tribes into his people's camp?
- How would the story have turned out differently if Dram had successfully killed Trei?
- What do you think the main theme or idea of the story is?

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.

Story board – Choose 10 important events that occur in the novel and illustrate them in a story board. 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 *Tribal Ash* 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.

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 Ladd