

Fishtales Far-Fetched and Foul

Author: Sherryl Jordan

Synopsis

Fishtales Far-fetched and Foul is a collection of fish-themed short stories written by award-winning New Zealand author Sherryl Jordan. Each story is unique with a supernatural spooky twist.

Text Type

Fishtales Far-fetched and Foul is a short story anthology that contains 4 short stories. These can be studied individually or collectively. Spooky and adventurous, these stories will appeal particularly to boys 8+.

Introducing the Anthology

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

- Why is this book called *Fishtales*?
- What impression do the words at the start of the blurb give you about the stories? How does the choice of font help reinforce this idea?
- What genre do you think this book is? How do you know? What do you expect from stories of this genre?

Slitherly (pp. 11-42)

- Why does Danny call his eel Slitherly?
- Why does Danny think that Slitherly is the most dangerous thing he has ever caught?
- What does Danny try and feed the eel? What does he discover about eels on the internet?
- Why do you think Danny calls the eel an “abnormal freak of nature”?
- Why does Danny decide to feed the eel at night? What does he find in the garden to feed him?
- Why does having the light out change the inside of Slitherly’s container to “another world”?
- Describe how Danny feels when he watches Slitherly eat the worm.
- What does Danny notice about Slitherly after he feeds him?
- Why doesn’t Danny want to tell his mum about Slitherly?

- Why is Danny horrified by what he sees when he wakes up in the morning?
- What does Danny decide to put Slitherly into? Why is he reluctant to pick him up? Why doesn't he think Slitherly is that beautiful anymore?
- Why is Danny so worried about Slitherly all day?
- How does Danny convince Mark to drive him to the creek? Why can't they go until the next day?
- What does Danny do to try and keep Slitherly inside the pot?
- What does Danny have nightmares about? What horrible realisation does he come to when he wakes up?
- How does Danny feel when he finds himself trapped in his room? How does the rest of his family react?
- Why is Danny so worried about seeing Slitherly's head?
- How does Danny's father rescue him from Slitherly? Who helps him? Why does Danny find the experience so traumatic?
- Why do you think Danny's dad looks "half-angry, half-perplexed"?
- How does Danny feel when his father takes control of the situation? What does he decide is the best thing to do?
- How does the vet react when Danny's dad rings him? Why do you think he reacts like this? Why do they need to contact someone from the zoo?
- Why does dad's face turn grim when the truck and the vet arrive?
- How does Mr Seal react when he sees Slitherly through the bedroom window? How does he propose to get Slitherly out of the house?
- What does the builder need to have in place before he can safely remove the window?
- Why do you think the whole neighbourhood comes out to watch what is happening? What does this suggest about the nature of people?
- Why does Danny's dad have to organise a crane?
- Why do the police turn up?
- Where does the truck take Slitherly?
- Why is Danny's dad so upset about the rescue mission? What else is he worried he will have to pay for?
- How does Danny earn the money to repay his father?

- What does Danny decide his next pet should be?

Discussion

- When and where is the story set?
- Who is the narrator of the story? What is the effect of the first person narrative?
- What lessons do you think Danny learns from his experience?
- This story is both far-fetched and foul. What techniques does the author use to create a suspension of disbelief?
- Which part of the story did you enjoy the most and why?

Activities

Static Image – design a book cover for Slitherly. Make sure you combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

News Report – Imagine that you are a reporter at the scene of Slitherly’s rescue. Write a script for an on-site report of all the action as it unfolds.

Fact Sheet – Design a fact sheet about eels based on the information that Danny finds out from the internet.

Writing – Imagine you are Danny. Write a diary entry for the night after you were trapped in your room and Slitherly was rescued. Remember to include your thoughts and feelings about what occurred.

Writing – Write an alternative ending to the story.

Blackbeard’s Fish (pp. 43–72)

- Who is the main character in the story?
- What is his role in the family?
- Where and when is the story set? How do you know?
- Why is it potentially dangerous for Milo to go fishing? Why does he have no choice?
- When Milo hears the sounds of battle why doesn’t he move?
- What is the name of the King? Why is Milo grateful that he doesn’t fight about land?
- What does Milo notice about the two men who come to the river? Why does he think that they have won the war? Why isn’t Milo afraid of them?
- How does Milo feel standing next to the knight?
- Why does Milo call the man Blackbeard?

- How does Milo feel when Blackbeard asks him to hand over his fish? Why does he refuse to give them to him? What does this suggest about his character?
- How does Blackbeard try and convince Milo to hand over some fish? What is Milo's reaction to his suggestions?
- What alternative does Perkin come up with?
- How does Milo feel when the Knights ride away and he realises that he didn't give in to them?
- Describe the army camp. What does Milo see that disturbs him? How does he know which tent belongs to the king? What does Milo learn about Perkins from the soldiers?
- What does Perkins ask Milo for before he leaves? Why is Milo reluctant to give it to him? Why do you think he agrees?
- How does Milo's mother react when she learns that he lent his fishing gear to Perkins? Why is she so unhappy that he gave the extra fish away?
- How does Milo's mum react when the Knights bring back the fishing line? How do we know that she feels uncomfortable around them?
- What amazing information does Milo's mum give him about Blackbeard?
- How does Milo react when he realises that Blackbeard is really the King?
- Why isn't the King angry with Milo? How does he pay him for the fish?
- Why is the gold so important to Milo and his family?
- What does the King want Milo to do when he is older?
- Why is everyone in the village standing outside when the King and Perkins leave Milo's house?
- What does Milo plan to do with his share of the gold?

Discussion

- What qualities does Milo possess that the King admires?
- In what ways will the gold change life for Milo and his family?
- What lesson do you think Milo's experience has taught him? What has his mother learned?
- What is the main lesson you think can be learnt from this story?

Activities

Character – Write a paragraph describing Milo’s character. Back up your ideas with examples and quotes from the text.

Plot – Choose an important event that occurs in the story. Explain why this event is important and how it affects the outcome of the story.

Theme – Identify a theme or a main idea in the story. How is this theme developed by the author? How did the theme make you feel? Is the theme relevant in today’s society? Why/ why not?

Writing – Write an epilogue for the story that explains what happened after Milo grows up and becomes a Knight.

Issues – Did anything in the story make you change your mind about something? If you did, what was it in the story that caused it and why?

A Fishy Kind of Justice (pp. 73–96)

- Why does Gobby believe that fishing is cruel? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?
- Who is Tyson? Why do the boys consider him a bully? How do Gobby and Ferret deal with him?
- Why is Ferret such an expert fisherman?
- Why is the muddy river bank so dangerous?
- What does Tyson do to the fish he catches? What does this suggest about his character? How do Ferret and Gobby feel about what he is doing?
- How do Ferret and Gobby know that Tyson has hooked something big? What do they advise him to do? Why doesn’t Tyson listen?
- What are the consequences of Tyson’s decision not to cut the line?
- When do Ferret and Gobby realise that Tyson is in real trouble? How do they try and help him?
- Why does Ferret phone his dad?
- How does Ferret’s dad’s presence help calm him down?
- Why do Ferret and Gobby feel guilty when Tyson doesn’t surface? Are they responsible for what has happened? Why/why not?
- What happens after the police and ambulance arrive?
- Why do you think Tyson is described as being “terrifyingly alive”? Describe how Tyson feels as he is dragged under the water.

- How does Tyson feel when he realises that he can breathe under water? Why is his relief short-lived?
- Why does Tyson describe being under water as being in another world?
- Why can't Tyson swim to the surface?
- Why does Tyson get the impression that the fish is intelligent? Why does he begin to regret how he has treated fish in the past?
- Why does Tyson feel small and powerless under the water?
- How does Tyson feel when he is confronted with the hook? What stops him from closing his mouth around the food?
- Why does Tyson feel like the fish knows him and what he has done?
- How does Tyson feel when he thinks the fish is going after his eye?
- What emotions are contained in the currents that go through Tyson's head? How does he know these emotions are coming from the fish?
- What happens when Tyson realises that he feels sorry for his past actions?
- Where is Tyson found? Where do the police believe that he was for four hours? Why is there mystery surrounding what happened to him?
- How does Tyson's experience change him?

Discussion

- Why do you think some people are cruel to animals? How do you feel about animal cruelty?
- Do you believe that Tyson deserved what happened to him? Justify your answer.
- Have you ever been the victim of a bully? What do you think is the best way to deal with them?
- Identify examples of emotive words used by the author to create a sense of Tyson's terror in the water.
- Identify the main theme or message in the story.

Activities

Writing – Rewrite a section of the story from the fish's point of view.

Debate – Conduct a whole class debate on the topic "fishing is animal cruelty".

Research – Choose an aspect of animal cruelty such as dog fighting or vivisection and conduct a research assignment about it. Formulate focussing questions to guide your research. Use a range of different sources to gather your information. Present your findings as a report or a speech.

Writing – Imagine you are Tyson. Write a diary entry for the night after your ordeal. Remember to include your thoughts and feelings about what has happened to you and how you plan to change in the future.

Theme – Identify an important theme developed in the story and create a collage using words and images to depict this theme.

The Hole (pp. 97–125)

- Describe the setting of the story.
- Who are the two main characters?
- What advice does Felix’s dad give him when he gets a bite? How does Felix feel when he successfully catches the fish?
- What goes missing from the camp? What clues does Felix’s dad find? Why does he think Felix is responsible?
- What does Felix’s dad discover when he returns from filleting the last fish? Why does he become angry with Felix?
- What happens to Felix’s rod? Why doesn’t his dad believe him?
- How does Felix feel about being blamed for something that isn’t his fault?
- Why does Felix feel weary going to sleep near the hole?
- What does Felix do with the food scraps before he goes to bed? Why does he do this?
- What does Felix’s dad remove from the truck so that he and Felix can stretch out? Why is this item so special to him?
- Why can’t Felix sleep?
- What does Felix see when he looks over towards the hole? How does his dad react when Felix tells him what he saw?
- How does Felix know that his father doesn’t take him seriously?
- What does Felix’s dad notice about the ashes when he gets up in the morning? What is missing?
- How many years later do Felix and his dad hear the announcement about the giant squid on the radio? How does Felix feel when he realises that the announcement proves his story was true?

- What do the scientists salvage from inside the giant squid?
- What does Felix go on to become in the future? What is his greatest fishing story?

Discussion

- Have you ever been fishing? Do you agree with Felix's dad that "it's all about patience"?
- Have you ever been blamed for something that you didn't do? How did this make you feel?
- Describe Felix's relationship with his father. Why is his father so disappointed in him? How do you think Felix feels when he can't prove to his father that he isn't lying?
- Does this story contain a climax? If so, what is it and why is it important?
- What is the author's main idea or message?

Activities

Vocabulary – Identify 5 words in the story that are new to you. Use a dictionary to find out what they mean and then use them in sentences.

Research – conduct a research assignment about giant squid. Present your findings as an informative pamphlet.

Writing – write a newspaper article about the mysterious giant squid found in the lake. Remember to include the 5 W's and H. You could include interviews with the people involved.

Monologue – Create a monologue for Felix in an important part of the story. What is he thinking and feeling in that moment? Why?

Writing – Write an alternative ending for the story.

Static Image – design a poster advertising ice fishing.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd