

# The King's Nightingale

By Sherryl Jordan

• Reading • Writing • Design/Art • Thinking Skills •



## Synopsis

Sixteen-year-old Elowen lives happily on the Penhallow Isles, courting Heath, and helping out with her younger siblings. Then, one day, pirates capture Elowen, her father, brother Fisher, and Heath. Only Elowen and Fisher survive the horrific conditions in the crowded, dark hold of the pirate ship. When they finally dock, Elowen sings to bolster the slaves while they are having their heads shaved. Afolabi, the King's slave buyer, hears her beautiful voice and buys her. But she must leave her brother behind.

In the palace at Al-Zafar, Elowen soon becomes a favourite of King Shaistakhan. He admires her strong character, and her singing soothes his pain. She soon makes friends: Laila, a 10-year-old slave girl; Junaid, the King's big cat keeper (leopards and tigers); and Mahasena, the King's scribe, with whom she feels a mutual attraction. However, she must put her feelings aside and find a way to rescue her brother and return home. She petitions King Shaistakhan and he sends a very high ransom demand to the king of Anavrin, allied to the Penhallow Isles.

But when word gets back to the king that Elowen has called him a liar, she is banished. She's sold as a slave and travels to Jumanah, enemy territory of King Shaistakhan. Her new master is a cruel man, whose foundry forges weapons for the warlord's army. When the army leaves to attack Al-Zafar, Elowen manages to escape. She hides when the enemy returns and it is then she sees a way that her king can safely attack Jumanah undetected.

On arrival in Al-Zafar, she seeks an audience with the king and tells him what she has discovered. The king acts on the information and launches a counterattack. His army is victorious. They bring back slaves, fifteen of whom are too sick to be useful and so they are earmarked to be killed. Elowen begs the king to show them mercy, and he agrees. They are hospitalised, and Elowen discovers one of them is her brother. He had been badly treated by his former master, and it has affected him mentally. He tries to commit suicide but is thwarted. Elowen asks the king if she can take him home to Penhallow, but the king only allows Fisher to go. She's devastated, but puts her wants aside to prepare her brother for the trip.

Months later nobles from Anavrin arrive and present the King Shaistakhan with the ransom. It is then, when she is given her freedom, that Elowen realises she can't leave Mahasena, whom she loves. She's also happy with her role in the kingdom, as the newly appointed spokesperson for slaves' rights.

## About the Author

Multi-award-winning author **Sherryl Jordan** was born in Hawera and currently lives in Tauranga. She was a successful illustrator before she ever published a word. Once embarking on her true love, writing, she wrote 36 picture books and 12 novels before *Rocco* was selected for publication by Scholastic. Then followed *The Juniper Game* and *Winter of Fire* and her much-loved, funny middle-grade series about Denzil, a hapless young medieval wizard. *Winter of Fire* was shortlisted for the 1994 AIM Book of the Year Awards, the American Library Association's Best Book for Young Adults and Recommended Book for the Reluctant Young Adult Reader, and Best Children's Book of the Year by Bank Street College of Education, USA. Many of Sherryl's books have been translated into other languages.



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## Writing Style

A compelling story with themes about oppression, racism, gender equality ... love and loyalty. The descriptive writing evokes the sights, smells and sounds of the bazaars and palace life of a distant time. The book is set in an imaginary world, not unlike the Ottoman Empire around the 15th century, in the kingdom of Rabakesh. *The King's Nightingale* is a story of a strong, young woman who is captured and taken to a land and culture that is very different to her own.

Readers will admire the strong female protagonist who does more than survive, ensuring that slaves' lives are better off in this kingdom. The main character's driving force (her 'want') in the story is to find her brother Fisher and return with him to her home in the Penhallow Isles. Her 'need' is to find love, acceptance of who she is, and dignity. Her emotional arc goes from rebellion in order to achieve her 'want' through to achieving acceptance and dignity from those around her, and love for Mahasena (her 'need').

The story is written in the third person past tense with Elowen as the main character (the hero). Secondary characters include those she loves (Heath, Mahasena); those she helps (Laila, Fisher); the mentor (Afolabi); the ruler (King Shaistakhan); the confidant/e (Junaid, Rhaine). Tertiary characters include her father (her rebellion against him makes her stronger); the antagonists (the pirates, the slave buyers, and her betrayer Heshmon). All these characters propel Elowen to make the choices she makes and develop her emotional arc.

To complement the story, the author has included a helpful list of main characters, a glossary of Rabakeshi words with pronunciation, a map, and the author's own illustration of Elowen. A riveting read that is at times quite violent but will keep mature readers of 14+ enthralled.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

The novel has been divided up into four parts as follows: Part 1: Taken, chapters 1-8; Part 2: The Golden Cage, chapters 9-17; Part 3: A Loyalty of Pain, chapters 18-26; Part 4: Freedom of the Heart, chapters 27-30.

During shared sessions, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions, inferences and relate to their own experiences. Also encourage students to identify themes and explain how they are developed in the novel. Read the passages aloud with students reading alongside, or have them read by themselves.

### ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the cover and read the blurb.

- When and where is this story set? How can you tell?
- Who is the main character in the story?
- What do you think this story is about? Why do you think that?
- What do you already know about slave trading?

### Comprehension questions (Part 1, Taken, Chapters 1-8)

- The story is told in four parts, why do you think the author has decided to structure the story like this?
- What do you learn about Elowen's personality and attributes and who are the important people in her life at the beginning of the story? How can you tell that?
- When you reach Chapter 2, you discover that the author is taking you back in time. How does the author signal the time change in chapter two? Why do you think she has done this?
- What does Heath see on page 46 that frightens him and how does he react? What does that say about his personality? And what is the author hinting about Heath on page 59? What is she possibly foreshadowing?
- Why is Elowen thankful to her father on page 69? How do you think it will help her throughout the story?
- What did Elowen do on the deck of the ship (page 15) that raised the ire of the pirate and what were the consequences? Do you think she was foolhardy or brave? Why?
- How does Elowen capture the attention of the King's slave buyer and what is Elowen's reaction?
- In what way does Afolabi treat Elowen differently from the pirates, and how are his customs different to hers?
- Elowen asks Afolabi lots of questions about the desert in Chapter 8. What is her motive, and do you think Afolabi has cottoned onto why she is asking them? Give examples.



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### Comprehension questions (Part 2, The Golden Cage, Chapters 9-17)

- How do the King's quarters differ from the women's harem? What imagery and senses has the author used to give the reader a mental picture of these rooms?
- Part 2 is titled 'The Golden Cage'. What do you think this represents?
- Why is Elowen to be called the King's Nightingale?
- Elowen stubbornly sticks to calling herself Elowen in Chapter 10 and it has severe consequences. What does she do and why do you think she does this when she knows it could cause problems?
- How does the King react in Chapter 11 when he hears she has been whipped? Why does Elowen still insist on calling herself Elowen? What does this tell you about her personality?
- What is the difference between a king and a warlord? How do you think it affects how they govern?
- Elowen meets someone in Chapter 13 with whom she has an immediate attraction. Who is it, and how has the author foreshadowed that this man might be important to Elowen?
- An archetypal character of a 'child' is introduced into Chapter 14. Who is it and how will she impact Elowen's life?
- Why does Mahasena's sister visit Elowen, and how does she feel about their conversation in Chapter 15. What is this chapter foreshadowing?
- What does Elowen ask of the king in Chapter 16 and how does he respond? What words does she utter when she is with Mahasena on hearing how high her ransom fee is? Do you think this will have repercussions? What do you think it will be?
- Elowen buys Laila a gift early in Chapter 17, but this gift causes a cruel twist in the story. What is it and how does it change Elowen's trajectory in the story?

### Comprehension questions (Part 3, A Loyalty of Pain, Chapters 18-26)

- Elowen faces several dangers in Chapter 18. What are they and how does she react differently to each danger?
- Why has the slave owner bought Elowen? What do you think his intentions are in Chapter 19?
- Oja's first wife commands Elowen to fetch water. What does Elowen learn while fetching the water that could help her escape? (Chapter 20)
- Elowen meets the warlord's army retreating from battle. How can she tell they have not been victorious? (Chapter 21)
- How does Junaid help Elowen, and why does she not go on the camel train when it is her chance to escape? (Chapter 22)
- What does the king mean when he says, "Yours is a rare and strange loyalty, El-owen. A torn loyalty. A loyalty of pain."? (Chapter 23)
- What law does Mahasena break in Chapter 24, and why?
- What does Elowen see in Chapter 25 that compels her to talk to the king again and ask for a favour? Why do you think she does this and what are the benefits of this action?
- Why does Elowen defy the King once again when she knows the harsh realities of what the king can do to her if she disobeys? (Chapter 26)

### Comprehension questions (Part 4, Freedom of the Heart, Chapters 27-30, Author's Note pp 465-467)

- Why does Fisher try to take his life when it has changed for the better? How does this action force Elowen to ask the king a huge favour? And why do you think the king has only granted half her of wish? (Chapter 27)
- Elowen sees something in the courtyard that shocks her. It forces her once again to ask the king for a favour. Why has she taken this action for someone who is not a friend nor relative?
- What name does Elowen call herself at the end of the story? What does this signal? (Chapter 30)
- Where did the author get the idea for this story? (Author's Notes)
- What countries has the author loosely based the settings in the story?
- Who has the author based King Shaistakhan on, and what was it about his personality that she thought would make an interesting character for the story?
- How was the Ottoman Empire more advanced than other countries during that era?



# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: CHARACTER STUDY

Do a character study of Elowen and one other character in the story, and complete the following tasks for each:

1. Describe their personality. What traits do they have? What are their strong and weak traits?
2. Describe what they look like from descriptions in the book. Include hair, eye and skin colour, as well as what they wear.
3. Identify the character's goal throughout the story. What does she/he want at the start of the novel? And what is their need? And how is that realised by the end of the story?
4. List the problems/obstacles that get in their way and write how the character tries to overcome the obstacles and obtain their goal. Some examples are given below.

CHARACTER	PROBLEMS/OBSTACLES	OVERCOMES IT
Elowen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captured by pirates</li> <li>• Sold as a slave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survives the ship journey</li> <li>• Doesn't starve</li> <li>• Survives a beating</li> <li>• Sings to keep her spirits up</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
Character of your choice		

## ACTIVITY 2: SECONDARY CHARACTERS

Some of the secondary characters help the reader understand the main character. We know their names and personalities, and they have an impact (positive or negative) on the main character. Sometimes they are part of the obstacle or cause conflict for the main character.

Describe these secondary characters: what they look like and their personality. Then explain the impact they have on Elowen's life.

CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION	IMPACT ON ELOWEN
Fisher		
Heath		
Laila		
Junaid		
Mahasena		
King Shaistakhan		
Heshmon		
Afolabi		



### ACTIVITY 3: STYLE IT DIFFERENTLY!

*The King's Nightingale* is written in the third person point of view in the past tense. We can tell that as the author uses the main character's name, and pronouns 'he, she, they' to tell it from Elowen's point of view. The author has also written the story in the past tense, as if it has already happened.

Choose a scene in the story and write it from a different character's point of view. Keep it in third person point of view, but you can change the tense to present or future tense if you wish. Just make sure you keep the same tense throughout the scene.

### ACTIVITY 4: IMAGERY UP CLOSE

Find examples in the story that show examples of some of the following techniques: personification (the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects), simile (a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another), metaphor (a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another), onomatopoeia (words that mimic sound), and the use of senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell) in the following chart.

Type	Page #	Example from book
<i>Personification</i>	50	<i>black shadows danced</i>

### ACTIVITY 5: WHAT IF!

What if Fisher had died in the ship's hold and Heath survived? How would it change the story? Write a plot outline for the story, showing how Heath's survival might change the story. Would she still fall in love with Mahesena? Would she be faced with a choice between the two? Would she stay in Al-Zafar or choose to go with or to Heath?

### ACTIVITY 5: A PALACE OF GOLD AND RICHES

The author describes the different settings with imagery and the senses so you, the reader, feel you can see it.

Draw a plan of the palace, including the harem, King's quarters, music room, hall, and other rooms. Or draw the interior of one of the rooms as described in the text.

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