

Using
Captain Jenny and the Sea of Wonders
in the classroom

Captain Jenny and the Sea of Wonders is the counterpart to Duncan Thornton's first book, *Kalifax*. Where *Kalifax* was a "New World" fantasy inspired by the search for the Northwest Passage, Jenny's search for the Lost City is an "Old World" fantasy inspired by ancient exploration legends – from Homer's *Odyssey* to the story of Atlantis. Although it takes place in an imaginary history and geography, as well as using story motifs from those ancient tales, the adventure is also set in a place – the Old Sea – very much like the Mediterranean.

- Like many children's books, Jenny is also a story about growing up. Jenny has many difficulties leading the adventure. Invite discussion about why she waits until the end of the story before she asks for help. How is Jenny different at the end of the book than she was at the beginning? What made her change? The Cook doesn't call Jenny "Captain Jenny" until almost the very end of the story. Why does he wait so long? Why does it matter to Jenny what he calls her?
- When Jenny is in the cave after the shipwreck, the Maid of Saltwaters offers her a chance to go home. Why doesn't she accept? Have the class write a few paragraphs describing what they would have done.
- Jenny finds the boy Gimlet very annoying. Discuss whether it was a good thing or a bad thing that Jenny let him come on the trip.
- Jenny is good friends with Tom, who has already sailed around the world with the same crew of sailors. Invite discussion about how Jenny's trip would have differed if Tom had come along. Why did the author decide Tom should stay home?
- In the story, Tom doesn't come along partly because he is helping his father write *The Universal Encyclopaedia Comprising All Things Worth Knowing*. Discuss whether or not Tom's father will ever finish the book. Tom's father has to remember so many things for his Universal Encyclopaedia that Jenny had to remind him to include an entry for her hero, Maxim Tortuca. Have the class write the entries for two or three other imaginary things Tom's father might have forgotten.
- At the end of the book, Jenny finally has a ship called the *Nonesuch*. Is it the sort of ship she thought it would be? Do you think she's disappointed with the *Nonesuch*?
- Jenny's Godmother, the Wise Woman of the Woods Nearby, is a good person, but some of the people in town are afraid of her. Discuss some of the reasons people might be afraid of her. What kind of story might happen to a child who came across the Wise Woman's stone hut unexpectedly?
- There are a lot of strange words in *Captain Jenny and the Sea of Wonders*, such as old-fashioned sailing and cooking words, but none of them are made up. Have students look up some of the strange words on the Web site www.kalifax.com/pages/strangewords.html, or see how many they can find in a big dictionary.
- Much of the action takes place aboard a ship, and the sailors are familiar with all sorts of knots, etc. Students can learn about knots from this Boy Scout site:
www.scoutingresources.org.uk/knots_index.html
- Invite discussion about whether the story of *Captain Jenny and the Sea of Wonders* is happy or sad. Why?
- Duncan Thornton, the author of *Captain Jenny and the Sea of Wonders*, makes sure that readers know his e-mail address thornton@kalifax.com. What are 5 or 6 questions the class would like to ask the author?

