



A DARKNESS OF DRAGONS

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TEACHERS' NOTES

SYNOPSIS

Patch, a young Piper, is in big trouble. Arriving in Patterfall without his memory, the villagers believe that he is the piper they sent for to deal with their rat problem. Believing this must be true, Patch plays a song to solve their problem, but the song he chooses is illegal, and soon Patch finds himself in Tiviscan dungeon with a life sentence ahead of him.

Whilst there, Patch makes friends with a bewitched rat called Wren, who is desperate to return to her human form. Also in the dungeon is the notorious Hamelyn Piper, guilty of kidnapping human and dragon children who were never to be seen again.

Unhappy with the way that the humans are handling the case of the Hamelyn Piper, the dragons storm Tiviscan castle, leaving the dungeons in ruins, and allowing Patch to make his escape with Wren by his side.

But before Patch escapes, he learns the terrible truth about the Hamelyn Piper – they've imprisoned the wrong man. Unsure what to do with this information, Patch keeps it to himself, and sets off with Wren to find someone to get her back to her human form. On their way they come across Barver, an injured Dracogriff, and the trio of adventurers is formed.

When the trio arrive at Marwheel Abbey to seek help, they discover that one of the eight who captured the Hamelyn Piper has been cursed, and that all the eight are in danger. Patch knows who must be behind the curse, but is unwilling to admit to being an escaped prisoner, so keeps the knowledge of the Hamelyn Piper to himself.

And it isn't just Wren who has a journey to make, Barver has been set a task by his deceased mother that he is determined to complete, and Wren and Patch are there to help him. But as their journey continues, the three soon discover that there are many secrets to the world they live in, and that a desperation for power might well bring about its downfall.

When Patch finally admits the truth about the Hamelyn Piper, the three know they need to stop him, but their surprise encounter with the real Hamelyn Piper proves more deadly than they could ever imagine, and they learn that the people who are supposed to protect them, may just be the very ones to put them in harm's way.

THEMES

There are many key themes in the novel. Firstly, fear plays a big part in the novel, and this is often linked to a lack of understanding and knowledge. Contrasting with this is courage, and the bravery shown by those characters that are often underestimated.

Judgement and prejudice are recurring features of the novel. There is a clear divide between the Pipers and the Sorcerers and the humans and the dragons, with both sides casting judgement against the others without clear reason to. Contrasting with this is a sense of morals and the difference between right and wrong, which some characters strongly adhere to, whilst others are easily corrupted.

Imprisonment in both its physical and mental sense is something that affects many characters and the situations that they find themselves in, and is something that some characters accept, whilst others are striving to break free of.

Power and obsession are also key themes, with both shown to overpower some characters, and to control their actions throughout the novel. The quest for power is shown to be incredibly dangerous, whilst the obsession with the truth behind the Hamelyn Piper is shown to alienate some characters from the people closest to them.

Finally, friendship is a key theme. The bond formed by Barver, Wren and Patch is what helps them to continue on their journey throughout the novel, and what helps them to fight against the corruption that surrounds them.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES

SYMBOLS

There are several recurring symbols across the novel. What do you think each of these suggest? Are there any others that you think are important?

- The Hamelyn Piper's Mask
- Patch's pipe
- Obsidiac or Black Diamond
- Wren's bracelet
- Barver's letter

SETTING AND PLACE

- How is Patterfall shown to be a difficult place to live in chapter 1? Use quotations to support your answer.
- Read the description of Tiviscan Castle on pages 54-55. What do you learn about it? What kind of atmosphere is created by this description?
- In chapter 7, we come face to face with Tiviscan Castle. What does the description of it suggest to you? Why do you think it has been built in this way?
- Read the description of Marwheel Abbey on page 171. What does it suggest to you about the type of place it is? How is it similar/different to the previous locations of the novel?
- In order to help Wren and Rundel Stone, Patch, Wren, Barver and Brother Tobias must journey to the Gemspar Range. Read Patch's description of it on page 205, what kind of

place is it? Why was Brother Tobias reluctant to go there before? Use quotations to support your points.

- What does the description of the Dragon Wastes on page 320 suggest about it as a place? Why do you think Barver was initially reluctant to take Patch and Wren with him?

PATCH

- How is Patch shown to be extraordinary in chapter 1? Use quotations to support your points.
- Why does Patch choose to play the illegal song in chapter 3? What does this show about him as a character?
- When Patch creates a new pipe on page 168, he says to Wren "I don't quite feel whole without one." What does this suggest about his identity?
- On page 193, Patch tells Wren that the Pipers had wanted him for the Battle Elite. Why didn't he want to join them, and how does this link to everything you have learned about him so far in the novel? Use a quote to support your answer.
- When Patch says that he would part with the Hamelyn Piper's mask to save Wren, Barver tells him "You have very high principles [...] You should be proud." p273 Do you agree with this description of Patch? Are his high principles always a good thing?

WREN

- Why do you think Wren lies to Patch about her family at the start of the novel?
- Throughout the novel, Wren is shown to be a courageous character. Find 3 examples of where she shows her bravery and use quotes to support them.
- Wren is often underestimated by other characters. Find 3 examples of this in the novel and explain why you think this happens.
- At the end of the novel, Wren breaks her bracelet to save herself, even though she knows it may mean she will be a rat forever. Why do you think she does this? Is there more to it than a simple desire to save her own life?

BARVER

- Barver shows himself to be a real gentle giant throughout the novel, however others don't always see that. What does he teach us about judgement?
- Barver is often shown to be the one that brings Patch and Wren together, why do you think he has this role in their friendship?
- How has growing up as a dracogriff shaped Barver as a character?

FEARS

- Why are the villagers shown to fear Pipers in chapter 2? How might that affect the way they treat Patch?

- The villagers of Patterfall are shown to live in fear of the unknown, believing in things such as 'Ice Beast' and the 'Devil'. Why do you think they believe in these things? What does it tell us about them?
- After reading the story of the Hamelyn Piper on pages 86-94, why do you think the world is so fearful of pipers? Do you think there are any similarities between the Hamelyn Piper and any of the other pipers you have met so far in the novel?
- On page 96, it says 'Humans had always feared dragons, and fear could easily turn to hate.' Why do you think fear can turn to hate? What else could this link to in the novel? How can this link to the world you live in?
- When Patch confronts the Hamelyn Piper in chapter 11, he 'marvelled at how he felt no terror, even though he was in the company of the most evil Piper ever to have lived.' p131 Why do you think Patch doesn't fear him?
- How is a sense of fear created on pages 220-222? What do you think the characters are most afraid of?
- What does meeting the witch on pages 224-225 show us about fear?

JUDGMENT AND PREJUDICE

- When Patch's song goes wrong and controls not just the rat, but the villagers too, they say "He's like the Hamelyn Piper! [...] Twisted, evil! Lock him up and throw away the key." p32 Why do you think they are judging Patch so quickly? Can you sympathise with the villagers?
- Why do you think Rundel Stone judges Patch so harshly for his actions? Why does he claim that he is dangerous in chapter 7?
- How are the dragons shown to be prejudiced against Barver?
- Barver explains that there are two kinds of dracogriffs "One is called a higher. The other is called a lower. Highers have a blend of the prettier aspects of dragons and griffins, but they're a bit delicate. Lowers have a blend of the more durable qualities. We're ugly, but very hard to kill. Naturally, dragons and griffins prefer the pretty ones, but I know which I'd rather be!" p151 What does this suggest about the world they live in and what it values? Are there any similarities between this and how our society views things?
- Barver then tells Wren and Patch that the dragons "They tend to look at me as some kind of unfortunate mistake." p152 Barver doesn't seem bothered by this treatment, but Patch and Wren are. What does that show you about the three of them as characters?
- In chapter 16, Father Tobias tells the trio about the attack on Tiviscan Castle by the dragons and says to Barver "given recent events, you might find things a bit awkward for a while, being part dragon." p174 How does this reflect common attitudes in the novel so far? Why is this an unfair comment for Father Tobias to make?
- The Pipers are shown to have made a harsh judgement of Alia for being a Sorcerer. She says "Even though the Council declared me a witch and cast me out, I don't regret it one bit." p237 Why do you think the Council's treatment of her was so cruel? How do you think they justified it?

- On page 242, we find out that Wren's family were poor, and that she wasn't the daughter of a wealthy nobleman as she had told Patch. Why do you think she lied about who she was and how might this link to judgement and prejudice?
- How is Wren shown to be prejudiced against in chapter 21? Use a quote to support your point.

IMPRISONMENT

- You could argue, that throughout the novel, many of the characters are either imprisoned physically or mentally. Explain how each of these characters are imprisoned during the novel using quotations to support your points.
 - The villagers of Patterfall
 - Patch
 - Wren
 - Barver
 - Brother Tobias
 - Alia
- Re-read the start of chapter 9, how is imprisonment already starting to change Patch? Use a quotation to support your point.
- In chapter 9, Patch says of the prison 'It feels more like a home than a prison, he thought. Just because I'm here with a friend.' p112 What does he mean by this? What do you think his life must have been like in the outside world for him to consider the prison a home?
- How does the author create an oppressive feel for Patch in chapter 10? Use quotations and talk about specific devices used if you can.

MORALS

- In chapter 7, Patch sees a carving depicting the Battle of Dornley Flats where Pipers were paid to slaughter the opposing army. Seeing his disapproval, Stone questions him why, and Patch says "'Before then, Pipers could only fight for causes that were just, not for money.'" p66 Why does Patch disapprove of how Pipers behave now?
- Stone then replies saying "'Pipers didn't invent war, boy [...] The many nations of these lands have always quarrelled with each other. Sometimes those quarrels grow. Sometimes they become wars. If Pipers have skills that are useful to an army, shouldn't they be able to profit from them?'" p66 What are the flaws in Stone's argument? Why does Patch disagree with him?
- Re-read page 106. Why did Patch want to join the Custodian Elite? How does this link to his sense of what is right and wrong? Use a quotation to support your point.
- When a dragon with a white flag approaches Tiviscan Castle, the Pipers take him down anyway. 'Patch felt a wave of empathy for the messenger, accompanied by a strong feeling of shame at how the Pipers had attacked him from the rear while he carried a white flag.' p137 What do you learn about the Pipers from this quote? Why does Patch feel this way about their actions?
- When trying to climb down the walls of Tiviscan Castle, Patch uses both a Song of Courage and Song of the Climb to help him. 'As he whistled, he put out of his mind the knowledge of where many Songs came from, where many had originated and been refined. War.' p139 Why does this cause a sense of moral conflict for Patch?

- Brother Tobias tells Patch that he was in the Battle Elite and said "You made the right decision, lad. The scars cut deep, and they stay with you for the rest of your days." p219 What does this show you about Brother Tobias? Why do you think he left the Battle Elite? What does he mean by 'scars'?
- After reading his mother's letter and finding out the truth about the dragon children, Barver says "My mother did what she knew was right, even though it caused such pain. She sacrificed everything in her quest for the truth – a truth that we are the first to really know." p334 Why do you think Barver doubted his mother before? What did her sacrifices show about her as a character? Does Barver have any similarities to her?

CONFLICT AND DIVISION

- What does the end of chapter 8 tell you about the relationship between humans and dragons? Why is there tension between them?
- Why is there shown to be a division between Sorcerers and Pipers on page 101?
- How does the author create a sense of chaos in chapter 11, when the dragons attack Tiviscan castle? Use quotations to support your answer, and try to talk about specific devices used if you can.
- Barver tells Wren and Patch that "There is an uneasy peace between humans and dragons, but there are those who dream of more, of cooperation and coexistence, working together. Truly sharing this world. Black diamond makes this impossible." p190 Why is this? How does this resource pit humans against dragons? Is this similar to anything in your own world?
- A division between Pipers and Sorcerers is clear from early in the novel. What does Alia tell us about this divide in chapter 20? Who seems to be most at fault?

JUSTICE

- In chapter 11, the dragons kill who they believe to be the Hamelyn Piper. Why do you think they do this? How might it bring them a sense of justice, how might it not?
- When Patch realises that he was the only one to know the Hamelyn Piper's last words 'the knowledge was a terrible burden: the prisoner had suffered a great injustice, if those last words had really been true, and worse – it would mean that the real Hamelyn Piper must still be free.' p142 Why do you think Patch doesn't share the burden straight away with Wren? Why do you think no-one ever realised they hadn't caught the real Hamelyn Piper before?
- Does Wren's punishment on page 248/9 match her crime? Why do you think Underath's actions were so severe?

POWER

- "The power of music was clear even to those who knew little of the Piping Arts. But as he'd learned the ways of the Pipe at Tiviscan, his eyes and ears had been opened to the real power that music could conjure.' p138 What are the pros and cons of this power? How has Patch been shown to face a conflict so far in the novel about his feelings towards the power of piping?
- After finding out about Wren's curse, Barver says that "It always saddens me that Sorcerers

are such awful people. Think of all the good they could do if they were nicer.” p149 How could this be linked to power?

- Throughout the novel, the Eight are really put on a pedestal, and Barver, Wren and Patch all talk about how much they loved the stories of the Eight and how often they read them. How do you think this fame impacts the view that the Eight have of themselves and their own power?
- When Barver discovers the Hamelyn Piper’s mask has obsidiac in it, he talks about humans’ wonder of it and says “Dragons, though, have long known that it is a dark, evil substance. Corrupting. Black diamond is a much more suitable name. Just as diamond is a rare form of beauty, black diamond is a rare form of darkness.” p189 What does he mean by this? How could this link to power?
- When the three meet the witch Alia, she’s not what they were expecting. She says to Patch, “Do I disappoint? [...] Did you want to see the old Witch, the mad Witch? I can pretend to be like that, if you want. I can be what the Council thought I was. A seeker of unnatural power, dabbling in things no Piper should touch!” p229 What does she mean by this? Do the Pipers have a right to judge her and suggest she’s a ‘seeker of unnatural power’?
- Why do Pipers seem to have power over Sorcerers throughout the novel? Find quotes to show where this is the case.
- How could The End of the Skies (page 329) link to power? Use a quotation from that page to support your answer.
- When confronted by Patch about the reasons for his actions, the Hamelyn Piper says “There are so very few people deserving of power. The rest [...] cattle. Sheep.” p371 What does he mean by this? Who has power in the novel, do any of the Hamelyn Piper’s words match them?
- When the Piper’s Council find out that the enormous pipe created by the Hamelyn Piper was glazed with obsidiac, Lord Cobb says “Wherever it came from, it’s ours now [...] It’s a source of unspeakable power, and it will be researched. I’ll put our top people on to it! [...] One thing’s for certain, that amount of obsidiac will be very handy in rebuilding the Castle defences.” p384 What are the flaws in his argument? How is he controlled by a desire for power?

OBSESSION

- Throughout the novel, the Hamelyn Piper is shown to be a source of obsession for the characters. Why do you think this is?
- On page 166-7, Barver talks about his mother’s obsession with the Hamelyn Piper and her desperation to find out what happened to the children. Why do you think this drove a wedge between her and Barver?
- What do you think the Hamelyn Piper is obsessed with?

FRIENDSHIP

- Why do you think Patch, Barver and Wren build such a strong friendship so quickly? Use a quotation to support your answer.
- When the truth about Wren comes out in chapter 21, Patch can’t believe she lied to him,

and she is concerned that he only wanted to be her friend for the money. Fed up of the argument, Barver says "Enough! [...] You would risk your lives to save each other! Here we are, on the cusp of a cure for Wren, and you squabble over things that don't really matter!" p250 Do Patch and Wren have reason to be frustrated with each other? Why do you think Barver is the peace keeper?

- When Wren is told by Alia that the only way to permanently break her curse is to go back to the sorcerer that cast it, it says 'Wren despaired for a moment, but suddenly she smiled again. "Oh, I think he'll be only too willing to help! He'll know he has no choice when he sees what powerful allies I've brought with me! The greatest Piper in the world, and the most fearsome beast you'll ever meet!" p270 Why has Wren got such strong faith in her friends? Is her faith in them justified?
- Is Erner a good friend to Patch? Use quotes to support your points.
- Do you think Erner is a traitor as suggested in chapter 25? Why? Why not?

CREATIVE TASKS

WRITING TO PERSUADE

- Re-read Patch's trial on pages 71-80. Write a speech persuading Rundel Stone why Patch should have a much lighter sentence.
- Write a speech arguing either for using Piping in war or against it.
- Imagine you are a travel blogger. Pick one of the places featured in the novel and write a blog about your visit to that place and why you think other people should go there.

USING A STIMULUS

- Pick one of the chapter titles and use it as the basis for a short story.
- Rewrite the battle scene in chapter 11 from either the dragons' or pipers' point of view.
- At the end of the novel, Patch, Wren and Barver know that there are several things they need to do: find Erner; talk to Alia, Rundel and Tobias about the Hamelyn Piper; and find the griffin. Pick one of these things to start the second novel with.

CHARACTER PROFILES

- Create character profiles for Wren, Barver and Patch that include: A picture, bullet points listing their character traits, key quotes and the different relationships they have with other characters in the novel.

PROMOTING THE NOVEL

- Imagine you work in the marketing department for Usborne publishing. Plan a marketing campaign to promote A Darkness of Dragons. Include:
 - o A poster to go up in school libraries
 - o A bookmark aimed at readers
 - o A review of the book (can be written or recorded)
 - o An advert in a newspaper or magazine
 - o Merchandise to be sold in bookshops