



## Bone Music by David Almond

### Themes and Discussion Questions

This mesmerising story transports the reader from the city of Newcastle to the forests and fells of Northumberland. Under a boundless starry sky, the fifteen-year-old Sylvia Carr, brave hearted and rebellious, reconnects with the ancient past and discovers what it really means to be young in the world today.

From the award-winning author of *Skillig* and one of this generation's finest storytellers.

9781510107618 HB £12.99

978144495226 PB £7.99

### Introduction

*Bone Music* by David Almond is suitable for sharing with students ages 12+ – either in the classroom, as recommended reading at home or in extra-curricular book clubs. The quotes and discussion questions included in this pack are linked to prominent themes in the book and help young people to explore the ideas in the story.

Note: This book covers some sensitive issues. It is advised that teachers/parents/carers read the book before sharing with students.



# BONE MUSIC

David Almond



## 1: IN FAR NORTHUMBERLAND

*Nothing. Darkness everywhere.*

*Darkened street below, darkness of the undulating land, blackness of the forest at*

*the village's edge, light of a farmhouse far, far off, pale glow on the southern horizon, immensity of stars above.*

(Page 1)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How does Sylvia feel at first about her surroundings? Why do you think she feels this way?
- What is the effect of all the question marks on pages 1–3? How is Sylvia feeling?
- Sylvia describes 'sky, sky, bliddy endless sky'. What picture do you get of her new home in Northumberland?
- Sylvia describes herself as a 'city girl'. What does she mean by this?
- How is the city contrasted to Sylvia's new home in Northumberland?
- What is Maxine's role in the story? Who or what does she represent?
- How are technology and machines presented in the story?
- Have you ever experienced the emptiness and isolation that Sylvia describes in the opening pages of the story?
- How does Sylvia begin to like her surroundings – what changes her?
- Create a collage or visual depiction of Sylvia's surroundings using the descriptions in the first few pages.



**BONE MUSIC**

*David Almond*



## 2: THE PAST

*'The past is all around us,' said Andreas. 'It is just beneath us. It is deep within us.'* (Page 23)

*'Perhaps,' Andreas said, 'the ancient Sylvia is just below the surface of the modern you.'* (Page 24)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What does Andreas mean when he describes the past as being 'deep within us'? Do you agree with him?
- What does the word 'ancient' mean?
- What are the ways we can connect with our ancient ancestors – and therefore *ourselves* – through nature?
- Do you think it is possible that 'ancient Sylvia is just below the surface' or her modern self? How is this idea explored in the story, particularly in the latter chapters where Sylvia meets 'the girl in a seashell necklace'?
- How is the relationship between the living and the dead explored in the book?
- What is the significance of all the 'old forgotten places' in the forest?
- How does nature hold so much of the past? How is this idea explored in the story?
- What are the personal histories of each of the characters in the story? Why is this important?



**BONE MUSIC**

*David Almond*



### 3: REWILDING

*She felt the closeness of the trees to herself, of the earth to herself, of the air to herself. She was not just Sylvia. She was these things too. They were her. She was the forest, she was the earth, she was the air. They gave each other life. She wanted to love them and they wanted to love her. Why did we not realise that when we do things to the earth, we do things to ourselves; when we harm the earth, we harm ourselves?*

(Page 89)

*'I was rewilded, Gabriel. I died and I was brought back to life. The forest grew on me.'*

(Page 186)

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What does the word 'rewilding' mean or refer to?
- What experience is Sylvia describing when she says that she is 'not just Sylvia'? Have you ever experienced a feeling like this?
- How does *Bone Music* comment on the things we (humans) do to the earth?
- What message can you take from the book about your role helping to create a better world?
- Do you think the story presents a positive or a negative view of humans' relationship with the earth?
- What do you think Sylvia means when she says: 'I died and I was brought back to life'?
- How does Sylvia's rewilding affect her? How does she change in the story?
- What are the ways that you can rewild yourself?



**BONE MUSIC**

*David Almond*



#### 4: BONE MUSIC MAGIC

*'All music was magic,' said Gabriel. 'All song was a spell. When the magician played the hollow bone, they merged with beasts and birds. Play the bone of an eagle and you became the eagle. The bone of a fox and you became the fox. Play it well enough, and you cross the borders between the living and the dead.'*

(Page 79)

*Sylvia was Sylvia and not Sylvia.*

*She was the music.*

*She was the hollow bone.*

(Page 118)

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How are the themes of magic and ancient ritual explored in the story?
- What is the 'magic' of music, according to Gabriel? Does Sylvia find this magic? How?
- Which animal does Sylvia's 'hollow bone' come from? Why is this significant?
- Read the passage where Sylvia and Gabriel take the wing apart. What is your reaction to this passage?
- How is the relationship between 'creativity' and 'destruction' presented in the story? What about 'beauty' and 'ugliness' or 'peace' and 'violence'?
- What 'magical' things happen in *Bone Music*? Which is the most magical of all of them, in your opinion?
- Do you think religion is important in the story? Why or why not?
- How does music affect the different characters in the story?



**BONE MUSIC**

*David Almond*



## 5: FINDING YOUR VOICE

*'I am Sylvia Carr,' she whispered to the air.  
She smiled at the delight of being Sylvia Carr.  
And time moved on, and the light strengthened all around her.  
'Sylvia! Sylvia Carr!'  
The voice, high-pitched, still far away.  
'Sylviaaaa!'  
(Page 156)*

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Do you think that *Bone Music* is about finding your voice or your identity? Why or why not?
- How does Sylvia develop in the story? What does she learn and how does she feel as the story progresses?
- What or who helps Sylvia to find her voice or embrace her identity?
- Do you get a sense of freedom from Sylvia's outlook in the later chapters of the book?
- How would you describe Gabriel's relationship with Sylvia? What is their impact on each other?
- Who does Sylvia help in the story? How?
- What is Sylvia's connection with the world by the end of *Bone Music*? How has this happened?
- In what ways has Sylvia grown by the end of *Bone Music*? Does Sylvia's story inspire you? Why?
- Reflect on the ways that reading *Bone Music* has affected you.



**BONE MUSIC**

*David Almond*

