

THE SMUGGLER'S CURSE

NORMAN JORGENSEN

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YEAR LEVEL: Y4–9

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia

ABOUT THE BOOK

Red Read's life takes an alarming turn when his mother sells him to an infamous smuggler plying his trade off the north-west coast in the closing days of the 19th century. From terrifying encounters with cut-throat pirates to battling the forces of nature in a tropical typhoon, Red is in for the adventure of a lifetime.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Norman was born in Broome in 1954, the eldest of four brothers, and lived in several country towns throughout Western Australia during his childhood. The family then moved to Kalamunda, in the hills above Perth, where his parents still live. Norman worked in the book trade for much of his life and, in his spare time, he loves to read, travel and take photographs, especially of castles, cathedrals, villages, battlefields, sailing ships and all the things that make history so exciting. He now lives in a 100-year-old house near Perth city with his wife, a children's book devotee.

THEMES

- Colonisation
- Exploration
- Sailing
- Smuggling
- Violence
- Revenge
- Coming of age

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

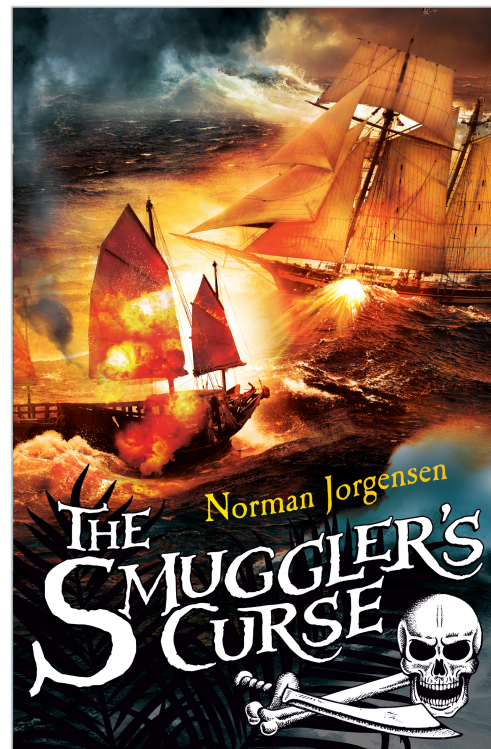
Y5–9 English

Y5–9 History

Y5–9 Geography

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: www.normanjorgensen.com.au
- Author's blog: normanjorgensen.wordpress.com



CLASSROOM IDEAS

Historical context

1. Create definitions for the terms *pirates*, *smugglers*, *privateers*. How do they differ?
2. When was the 'Golden Age of Piracy' and why did it end? Create a timeline of significant dates in the history of pirates and smugglers. (Suggested resource: *Pirates* by John Matthews, HarperCollins, 2006.) Are pirates still active in parts of the world today?
3. Label the South-East Asian colonies of the European powers in the 19th century on a world map.
4. How are the living conditions in late 19th century Australasia depicted in the book?
 - a. Use the following subheadings to research everyday life in this period: food, shelter, law and government, education, travel, sanitation, technology, health and medicine, life expectancy. (Provide a reference list.)
 - b. How have living conditions changed in 2016? Would you have liked to live in the 19th century?
5. Create a glossary of nautical terms as you read the novel (e.g. *bosun*, *coxswain*, *tiller*, *starboard*).
6. Write a historical report about a famous pirate of your choice (e.g. Edward Teach, Anne Bonny).

Discussion questions

1. What difficulties would Red have faced in adjusting to life at sea? Consider the constant danger, food, extreme weather, seasickness, physical labour, homesickness and bullying by the crew.
2. How would you describe Captain Bowen's personality? Would you label him as a protagonist or an antagonist? Neither? As a hero, a villain or an anti-hero? Consider Red's description of him on p. 180.
3. Why do you think literary references (like those to Shakespeare) are so important to Captain Bowen? What might this reveal about his character?
4. Do you think that the crew of the Black Dragon have become somewhat desensitised to violence? Find examples in the text that could be used to support this claim. Does Red gradually begin to demonstrate this too? Why might life as a smuggler cause this to happen?
5. The theme of colonisation is central to the novel. What effects, both positive and negative, do the European settlers seem to be having across the various parts of South-East Asia that Red visits? What insights into foreign cultures, beliefs and environments does he gain? How are issues of racial inequality depicted?
6. Captain Bowen is surprised that the Sumatran rebels are led by a woman. What were the conventional gender expectations for women in the late 1800s? How does the Black Widow challenge them? Research and write a historical biography of another famous female from the period who defied gender norms (e.g. the pirate Anne Bonny).
7. Do you think Captain Bowen is Red's father? Collect clues in the text that would seem to infer this.
8. How does Red change as a result of his time aboard the Black Dragon? Using a Venn diagram model, compare and contrast his values, attitudes and beliefs at the beginning and end of the book.
9. The final chapter presents an open ending: do you think Red will attend school in Perth and become a wealthy landowner as his mother wishes? Or will he become captain of his own schooner? Which would you rather be and why? Discuss with a partner.

Creative writing

1. Continue the story: write about Red's next voyage to Shanghai! Will anyone be injured? Will he and the crew survive? What goods will they smuggle this time? Will Red make it back in time for school? What problems might he have adjusting in his new class? Will he court Emma? Is Captain Bowen really his father? If so, how will he react to this news? You decide: write the next two chapters!
2. Norman Jorgensen effectively uses adjectives and figurative language (similes, metaphors, motifs) to create powerful imagery appealing to multiple senses.
 - a. Reread the last paragraph on p. 232 – what mood does this setting evoke?
 - b. Write a description of your own imagined piratical location, experimenting with figurative language in the style of Norman Jorgensen.
 - c. Give your description to a partner to sketch. Does what they imagined resemble what you intended? How effective was your description?
3. Write a ship's log entry reflecting on the events of your favourite chapter, from the point of view of one of these characters: Captain Bowen, Bosun Stevenson, Sam Chi, Teuku, Black Widow, Mr Smith.

Craft and design

1. Red has to learn to use signal flags aboard the ship (p. 32). Make semaphore flags from cardboard or fabric and then 'flag chat' in pairs using the semaphore alphabet.
2. Design an authentic looking late 19th century 'wanted poster' for Captain Bowen.
3. Label the different parts of a schooner and then design your own pirate flag.

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Where did the idea for *The Smuggler's Curse* come from?

The initial idea for the story was sparked by a visit to the Shetland Islands off the coast of Scotland. Staying there, I discovered it is where Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island*, my favourite book as a kid. Later that first night, I tried to write my own pirate story set in 1810, but it quickly evolved into a smugglers' tale. Later on, after I returned to Perth, I moved the plot up to 1895 and reset the action in Broome and South-East Asia.

What kind of research did you undertake in writing *The Smuggler's Curse*? Did you discover anything that surprised you?

I read a lot about Broome and the pearling days, discovered the little known Aceh Independence War, visited Broome, Singapore, and the places in South-East Asia where I set scenes in the book, including visiting a longhouse where the recent descendants of head-hunters still have skulls hanging from their ceilings. Luckily, they ceased collecting them about 1948. I frequently used Trove, the National Library digitised newspaper and historic photo collection, to immerse myself in the period. I learnt how to shoot a blowpipe, fire a musket and load a cannon, all essential skills for a smuggler, and I polished up on sailing ships of the 19th century.

One interesting discovery was the story of the female leader of the Sumatran resistance, who continued the war against the Dutch invaders for many years after her father and husband were killed. I also had no idea of the extent of piracy in that region. Some pirates owned hundreds of ships and became massively wealthy.

How similar is this work to your earlier books?

The Smuggler's Curse is similar to my World War II novel set on Rottnest, *Jack's Island*, in that the main characters Red Read and Jack Jones are about the same age and tell the story in first person. Other than that, I hope they are both exciting yarns. The only similarity with *The Last Viking* is that the main characters are young and brave and fight against the odds. In fact, thinking about it, that seems to be a theme in all my work.


What do you hope readers will take away from *The Smuggler's Curse*?

I hope it is a swashbuckling good read that will leave my reader breathless with anticipation as Red, the hero, bravely faces all sorts of battles, hardships and challenges that nearly kill him on numerous occasions. I hope, too, readers come away with an appreciation of the tough times and interesting real characters from Australia's past that some of the fictional characters in this book are based on.

What's next for Norman Jorgensen?

The sequel to *The Smuggler's Curse* is underway, as is another picture book called *Mary Christmas: The Real Santa* about a young reindeer keeper who is accidentally appointed the official Santa when the jolly red man retires. *In Search of Jack Kelly: Ned's Brother* is also being developed, as well as a historical novel set in the Western Australian Goldfields.

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