

Salt

Maurice Gee

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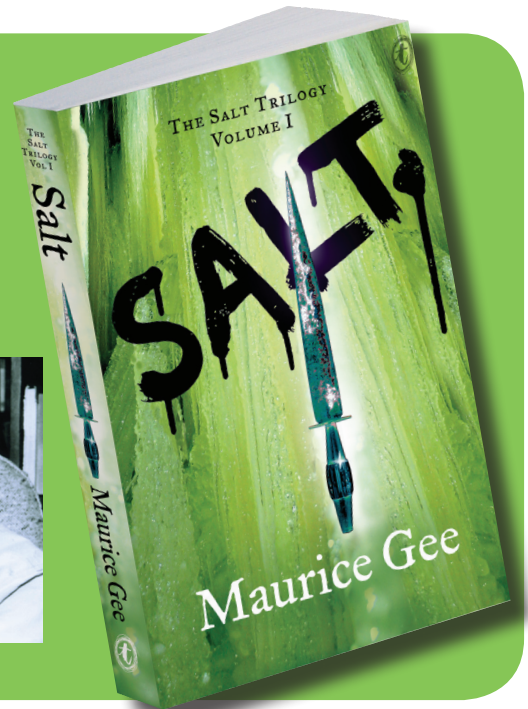
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Recommended for Upper Primary/Lower Secondary

Resource Kit Contains

- Praise
- Synopsis
- Author information
- Themes
- Language
- Close study of the text
- Activities



Praise

'It only takes the first half a dozen pages for New Zealand author Maurice Gee to create a fully realised world wherein he draws his readers with gusto...A genuinely exciting story line that never falters, even as Gee tests the very limits of his young protagonist.' Fran Atkinson, *Sunday Age*

'Gripping...Gee is imaginative and masterful with his descriptions in this first of a trilogy.' *Herald Sun*

Synopsis

Belong is a ruined country over-run by an evil dictatorship where Whips with electrified hands capture men to go to their deaths in Deep Salt mines. The emphasis is on power, greed and cruelty. It seems nobody cares. But hope and love can be found with the Dwellers, who, too, have extraordinary powers. Can goodness win through or will the powers of evil prevail?

The young boy, Hari, lives in Blood Burrows. The Burrows people live in appalling poverty and Hari has learnt to be cruel and frightening in order to survive. He has his own special powers and is able to communicate with animals. As the book begins, he is watching his father and others being coerced into forced labour by the electric whips of the Company guards. The Company rules Belong and has destroyed the world of the Burrowers. He watches as his father, Tarl, is branded and taken away to the Deep Salt mines, from where no one returns.

Radiant Pearl of the Deep Blue Sea is a member of the wealthy Families, despised by the Burrows people. She, with the help of her maid, Tealeaf, who is a Dweller, is escaping from an arranged marriage. Tealeaf also is able to communicate through her mind.

Salt is a very exciting adventure story, full of tension and suspense. In this thrilling fantasy Gee has created a thought-provoking allegory about the times we live in, about greed and corruption and the utter pointlessness of war.

Gee creates characters who are well-drawn and believable and his writing is both very exciting and glowing with wonderful word pictures.

About the Author

Maurice Gee is one of New Zealand's finest writers. He has written more than forty books for adults and young adults, and has won several literary awards. His young adult novels include *The Fat Man*, *Under the Mountain* and *The Salt Trilogy*. Maurice lives in Nelson, on New Zealand's South Island.

Salt won the Young Adult Fiction Section of the 2008 New Zealand Post Book Award.

Themes

But although Company lies in ruins over the sea, the cycle will come round again and there will be huge armies, and conquest and massacre again and fleets on the seas with their cannons and riches again, and starvation again, and factories pouring out smoke that kills the air, and poisoned rivers, poisoned seas and a dead land. (p114)

1. The novel addresses the difficulty that we have in learning from our mistakes and learning from our history.
2. It addresses the problem of war and the fact that there are no real winners in war. The cycle comes around again and the victors become the victims of someone else. Fighting gets us nowhere.

3. It shows us the effects of greed, both for material possessions and for power over other people.
4. It demonstrates what happens when people lose compassion and care for others. It shows what hate can do to people and how people can reach a place where hate takes them over.
5. The novel causes us to think about how mankind can destroy the world—through pollution, the pointless cutting down of trees, nuclear radiation and other environmental issues.
6. Tarl tells the Whips that they can never take his name away from him. Lo tells Hari that he must find out things for himself. On p 35 Tealeaf tells Pearl she can put off her past and find her true self. It is obvious that the importance of believing in yourself and following your true self is very important for personal development and is an ongoing theme in the book.

Some of these themes make it sound like a very bleak book. But it also has its share of love and goodness and hope and lots of thrills as Hari and Pearl try to save Tarl.

Language

As we read the book we will look at how Gee creates suspense and tension through his writing. It is a very difficult book to put down once you start reading.

It is also a very vivid book.

Hooded lamps made puddles of light in the corridor;
the staircase was like a waterfall;
(the buildings) looked like frogs squatting in a lily pond;
the moon slid across the sky, shining so brightly it threw
black shadows like hour-hands out to the travellers' sides;
she swam underneath her terror.

The book is full of such colourful language. Make your own list of images which you specially like.

Close study of the text

Chapter 1

The Whips, as silent as hunting cats, surrounded Blood Burrow in the hour before sun-up and began their sweep as the morning dogs began to howl.

What ominous signs are in the opening pages of the book?

Do the Whips seem human? Draw a picture of how you imagine they look.

Describe the Burrows and the people who live there.

Long live Company. Company cares. Does Company care? Who are they?

Write a description of Hari as you first meet him in this chapter—his appearance, his personality, his special skills. Would you like to have him as a friend?

What is your impression of his father, Tarl?

What stories have the people of the Burrows made up about the Deep Salt mines? Why do people make up horror stories about places they fear?

How did Hari escape? What is his special skill? How does Hari let Tarl know that he is alive?

Chapter 2

Who were the Families? Describe them and their way of life in your own words.

Who was Lo? What does he mean when he says, between what happens now and what will happen a curtain hangs?

In your own words tell how the Company came to win over Belong.

Who was Cowl?

What do we call a state where one man rules without a parliament? Name some places where that is virtually the case today.

Why do some people feel the need for absolute power?

Lo says that the Company or something like them will rule forever unless there is another way. Hari does not yet believe there is another way but Lo tells him he must follow his own heart. We can only wait and see.

Chapter 3

Pearl is a member of the Families and Tealeaf is her maid. She is also her mentor and guide. Tealeaf is a member of the Dwellers.

What special powers does Tealeaf have?

Would you like to belong to Pearl's family? Give your reasons.

What special exotic name would you like to have?

Describe how Tealeaf and Pearl escape.

How does Ceebeedee differ from the Burrows?

What is Pearl's first reaction to Tilly's place?

What do Dwellers look like?

What had Tilly taught Pearl?

If you had an extraordinary power what would you like it to be?

Why did they need to find the boy who killed Pearl's brother?

Chapter 4

Why does the boy smell of hatred? How did Pearl escape from him?

There are short sentences and paragraphs on pp 63-64. How do they heighten excitement? What is the effect of verbs like jerk, force, wrench?

Why were the commands given by Pearl different from those of Tealeaf?

On p 68 we see that the certainty of Pearl's name is very important to her. What do you think this means? It is a

theme taken up throughout the book—the idea of being true to yourself and knowing what sort of a person you really are.

What do you feel is the significance of Hari's dream on p 68? Recount a vivid dream that you have had and can still remember. Can you think of any reason why you dreamt it?

Why is Hari so obsessed with killing? Do you think he will ever get over it?

Chapter 5

Pearl still seems to have a lot to learn. She doesn't like Hari and we wonder if it is his colour or his dirt or her prejudices which are still clinging from her background.

What has happened to the city? Does the Company show any compassion or kindness or real love to anyone, even among themselves?

There is a very exciting chase in this chapter. Discuss in small groups how the writer creates the suspense and then report back to the class.

Chapter 6

They are in the jungle. How are the jungle people different? Even Tilly changes. In what way does this happen?

Nevertheless the jungle is described as dangerous. How do the jungle people keep the three of them safe?

Describe how the jungle changed Pearl and Hari.

Chapter 7

In this chapter we meet Tealeaf's village and family. It is a place without fighting and it is full of love. How does Maurice Gee describe the atmosphere (e.g. the sounds) in order to show us this all pervasive sense of love and peace?

What do we learn about the effect of Deep Salt on people?

Hari still believes it is necessary to kill to survive. However read p 111 carefully. What do the Dwellers believe about the universe?

Why does Tealeaf believe there is still hope for the city?

Chapter 8

In what ways do the symptoms of Deep Salt sickness resemble the effects of nuclear bombing and radiation sickness?

Chapter 9

Why does Pearl feel happy on the boat?

Mutations and deformities are further evidence of radiation sickness like that which affected Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What mutations were in the rats in Deep Salt?

Chapter 10

How do we know killing is the only option for Tarl?

Tarl's sickness is symbolic of his lust for blood. How is this shown?

Pearl says, 'The old ways are gone. There are new things to fight.' What is there still to fight?

Why did Pearl and Hari feel they had to go back to Deep Salt?

Describe Tarl's experience in your own words.

Make a note of any new clues in your notebook.

Chapter 11

How do we know that Hari is learning that fighting gets you nowhere?

Tarl on the other hand has learned nothing. Do you feel that war will never achieve peace? What are your reasons?

Chapter 12

Draw a picture of Ottmar or describe him in your own words.

Pearl could feel Kyle-Ott's hatred. What was the physical effect of hatred on him.

What physical effects do you feel from hatred and fear?

How did the bullets work?

Reread p 177. How can we reach a place where hate takes over?

How do we know Hari is aware that hate is not his true self and how does he try to escape it?

How does Pearl manage to escape from her past, both physically and mentally?

This chapter is horrifying and scary. Discuss the techniques the writer has used to create the sense of menace in this chapter.

What happens to Tuck, Candy and Fat?

Chapters 13 & 14

Pearl and Hari return to the city to see Tarl even though there was something in him hurt beyond cure. Why do you think he is seen as beyond redemption as a human being? Hari says he he has never felt so close or so far away from his father. Can you explain this?

How does the weather in this chapter reflect the mood?

Why do Pearl and Hari pity the cruel tyrant Ottmar?

Why are there no winners in this war?

How does the tension build in this chapter?

What has happened in the Burrows and in the City

Chapter 15

Why was Hari sick?

What were the results of war?

There is hope and optimism in the last chapter. Where does this come from?

ACTIVITIES

Create a large class poster to hang on the wall. On it everyone could write their favourite image or word picture from the book. Remember you have been collecting them as you read the book.

Debate

There is no solution to war. It will always happen.

OR

There are no winners in war, only victims.

Creative Writing

Write a story telling what happens to Tarl and Dog after they disappear from the story.

Film

This is a very exciting and very colourful novel. It could make a good film. In small groups find a chapter which you could see as a film and write a screenplay, including details like costume, setting, lighting, close-ups etc..

Essays

1. Tealeaf tells Pearl that she is not running away, but running towards. Why is it so important for Pearl and Hari to leave the unhappiness of the past and find their true selves in the future?
2. Hari says it is important to find another way other than war to solve the world's differences. What other solutions can you think of rather than a thirst for power and a desire to hate and kill others?