

# The Crystal Runners

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## Synopsis

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Jaelah and her brother Aydan live in a village deep under the ground. Their father is a crystal runner. The villagers need crystals to provide them with vital heat and light. It is their father's job to fill the crystals with the earth's energy using his unique staff. Jaelah is an adventurous girl who has no intention of following in her father's footsteps. She would much prefer to be a trader like her grandfather, who gets to go up to the surface and deal with the surface dwellers.

Jaelah's opportunity to embark on an adventure comes sooner than she ever imagined when the life source that her village relies on begins to disappear. Jaelah convinces her brother Aydan to accompany her on a journey to find answers. Their mission to fill the crystals leads them further up the tunnels than any of the other crystal runners ever go – to the very life of the river. Not realising the significance of what she is doing Jaelah taps the life of the river, placing her village in even more danger than before. As Jaelah and Aydan complete their mission they discover Kaen, the Prince of the surface dwellers, lying injured in a tunnel. Despite their misgivings the pair agrees to help the Prince return to the surface, in return for fresh tree fruits. What starts out being a simple agreement soon turns into a dangerous undertaking that sees Jaelah and Aydan both risking their lives and the destruction of their father's precious staff. In addition to this when Kaen is safely returned to his people Jaelah and Aydan are mistaken for the enemy and are imprisoned.

Using the knowledge of the tunnel system that Jaelah learned from her grandfather, Jaelah and Aydan manage to escape and make their way to their grandfather's boat. Their adventures are far from over however. Realising that now that Jaelah has tapped the very life of the river it is only a matter of time before the underground villagers will be forced to move above ground to ensure their survival, Jaelah's grandfather takes his grandchildren on a perilous journey. Narrowly escaping dangerous dragons and a roaring volcano the group enters another village. It is here that Jaelah makes a startling discovery. She is in fact a royal and without her the village cannot tend the crystal fields. The fate of Jaelah's family and all of her village now rests in her hands. Does she have what it takes to ensure the future survival of her people?

## Text Type

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*The Crystal Runners* is a fast-paced adventure fantasy novel. With strong protagonists of both sexes the novel has broad appeal for both boys and girls. Jaelah is a likeable and courageous heroine who faces many challenges in

the story. She shows loyalty to her brother and strength of character when she decides that the life of a crystal runner is not for her. She loves adventure and is willing to risk her own life to help her village. Her brother Aydan is also adventurous, although he is naturally more cautious and suspicious than his sister. He is forced to confront his prejudices regarding surface dwellers when he meets Kaen. Despite his misgivings Aydan eventually concedes that Kaen is a man of his word. Not only does Kaen attempt to find a forest so that Aydan and Jelah can replace their father's precious staff, but he also accompanies the group to Fire Mountain, ensuring them access to the forbidden area. Kaen himself learns a valuable lesson about greed during the story. It was the intrepid young Prince who stole a large crystal from the fields and destroyed many of the crystals that remained there, setting off a chain of events that places everyone in jeopardy. Kaen must face up to what he has done and deal with the guilt and shame of his actions.

Themes in the story include the fragility of nature and the need for conservation, family loyalty and secrets, prejudice, acceptance and the importance of working together to achieve a goal.

## Sharing the Novel

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***The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-17), Chapters 3- 5 (pp. 18- 73), Chapters 6-9 (pp. 74-129), Chapters 10-13 (pp. 130-178).***

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas. Have them make predictions about what is going to happen in the story. Students should read closely and make inferences. Wherever possible have students relate events that occur in the novel to their own personal experiences. Students should be able to identify the elements of the novel that make it a fantasy. Have them study the main characters in the novel and track how they develop and change throughout the story. Encourage students to identify and discuss the main themes and issues raised in the text.

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What kind of novel do you think this is? What do you expect from this kind of novel?
- Who do you think the two people on the front cover are? What are the glowing things on their armbands and in the staff? Why are these things important?
- Who is the main character in the novel? Where does she live? What does she want to do when she grows up?
- What happens that gives the main character a chance to embark on an adventure? Who must she and her brother work with to ensure the survival of their worlds?

**Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-17) aloud. Students follow along in their books.**

### **Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-17)**

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- Where do Jaelah and Aydan live?
- Who is Magda? What is her job?
- What does Jaelah and Aydan's father do for a living? What does Jaelah want to do when she grows up? How does Aydan react when she tells him her plans?
- What does Jaelah notice about the river as she and Aydan return to their village?
- How do Jaelah and her brother feel about the surface dwellers? Why do you think they feel this way?
- Why do Jaelah and Aydan think that there is something wrong when they return home and see their father's things? Why is Aydan surprised when the staff allows him to pick it up?
- What do Jaelah and her family rely upon the crystals for? Why are Aydan and Jaelah shocked when they enter the crystal room?
- How do Jaelah and Aydan decide to solve their crystal problem? How do they plan to make it up to their grandfather? Why are they shocked when they open the sacks?
- Where is the only safe place to fill a crystal?
- Why is Selan worried that Grandfather will kick them out of the house? Why do you think that she kept the situation secret from her children?
- Describe what Grandfather looks like. Why is his appearance so different from that of the other cave dwellers?
- Why does Jaelah lie to her grandfather?
- Why does Jaelah wrap a cloth around her hand before she picks up the staff?
- Describe what happened when Jaelah's father went on his crystal run. What does the fact that the life force of the river is running out mean for the future of the village?
- Why do Jaelah and Aydan decide to try and fill the crystals themselves? What possible problems could they face trying to fulfil their mission?

### **Discussion**

- Describe the village where Jaelah and her brother live. What would it be like to live completely underground and never see the sun? Why are the crystals so important for the village? What do you think Jaelah and Aydan are going to find when they reach their destination?
- How do the villagers feel about the surface dwellers? Why do you think these prejudices exist? What do you think the huge "day stone" that Jaelah talks about really is? Why do the cave dwellers need to trade with the surface dwellers?
- Describe Jaelah. What qualities and characteristics does she possess? How is she different from her brother Aydan?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

**Students read Chapters 3-5 (pp.18 - 73) independently before the next shared session.**

## **Comprehension Chapters 3-5 (pp. 18 -73)**

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- How do Jaelah and Aydan know which tunnels to use?
- What do Jaelah and Aydan use the arm bands for?
- Why is it so cold in the tunnels?
- How do Jaelah and Aydan prepare for their mission? How does Aydan know how to read the markings on the walls of the caves?
- Why does the staff that Jaelah is holding start vibrating?
- What do Jaelah and Aydan find when they reach the first rest stop? What is significant about the scrape mark that Jaelah sees in the earth? What happens that encourages Jaelah and Aydan to move on and find the first point?
- Describe the first point. How does Jaelah know where the tapping point is? How does she attempt to fill the crystal? Why doesn't the crystal fill?
- What does Jaelah notice when she studies the small life-line?
- What realisation does Jaelah come to when she and Aydan reach the last tapping point?
- Why does Aydan believe that they should return to the village? Why does Jaelah refuse to go?
- What does Jaelah discover behind the rubble? Why is she so excited when she finds it?
- How is the new tunnel different from the others? What does Aydan do to ensure that they don't get lost?
- What does the noise that the pair can hear turn out to be? What does Jaelah discover coming through the hole in the cavern wall? Who discovers the second life-line? What does Jaelah use to create a tapping point?
- What makes Aydan believe that the crossing they have discovered is much stronger than the others?
- Why is Aydan so worried that Jaelah won't be able to reach the rest stop? What does he hear that makes him want to continue looking through the tunnels? How does he convince Jaelah to accompany him?
- How does Aydan react when he sees who was calling for help? Why does he react like this?
- Describe the boy that Jaelah and Aydan discover in the tunnel. Why is Jaelah so surprised by his appearance? What does he tell the pair about himself and how he ended up in the tunnel?
- What is a Trog?
- What is the Prince's name? Why are Jaelah and Aydan confused when Kaen says he is about to be crowned King?
- What does Kaen offer Jaelah and Aydan in return for their help? What plan does Jaelah come up with to help the Prince? What objections does Aydan raise about the plan?

- What do Jaelah and Aydan build to speed up their journey to the surface?
- What happens that leads Aydan to believe that surface dwellers can't see the life in the earth? How does he feel about this realisation?
- What does Jaelah plan to steer the raft with? What question does Kaen ask when they are travelling on the raft that shocks Jaelah and Aydan?

### Discussion

- What sort of person is Kaen? What have we learnt about him so far? Who do you think was chasing him and why? Describe his attitude towards Jaelah and Aydan. Why do you think he has this attitude?
- How does Jaelah's attitude and behaviour towards Kaen differ from Aydan's? Why do you think this is? Do you believe the pair makes the right decision when they decide to help the Prince? Why/why not? What factors influence their decision?
- Why do you think that the life in the earth is fading? Can you draw any parallels between what is happening to the natural resources in the story and what happens on earth? Why is conservation so important?
- Predict what is going to happen next in the story.

***Students read Chapters 6-9 (pp. 74-129) independently before the next shared session.***

### **Comprehension Chapters 6-9 (pp. 74-129)**

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- What terrifying obstacle appears in the water in front of the raft? Why is Jaelah so worried about ending up in the water? What happens to Jaelah and Aydan when the raft smashes into the obstacle? What devastating discovery does the pair make about the crystals? How does Kaen end up on the shore?
- What does Kaen do to help Jaelah and Aydan reach the shore?
- What does Jaelah use to slide down the rope? Why do you think she makes the decision to risk this object?
- How do Jaelah and Aydan react when they realise that the staff has been destroyed? Why does Aydan blame Kaen for the loss?
- Why is the staff so important to Jaelah's father and the village?
- Why does Kaen have so much trouble navigating his way through the tunnels? How does Kaen react when Jaelah lights a stone for him?
- Describe what Jaelah sees when she first reaches the surface. What does she mistake for the mythical day stone? How does she feel about the fact that there is no roof?
- How does Kaen convince Jaelah and Aydan to accompany him to the castle?
- Why do the guards capture Jaelah and Aydan? How does the guard react when he sees the crystals? Why do you think crystals are no longer valuable on the surface?
- Where does the Captain tell the guards to put Jaelah and Aydan? What does Jaelah notice is missing from the stand in the cell? What does the

guard tell Jaelah that the Prince found that means surface dwellers no longer need the Troggs?

- Why are Jaelah and Aydan convinced that they need to find a blue crystal of their own?
- How do Jaelah and Aydan escape from the cells? Why do they decide to visit the main crystal room? What do they find there?
- How does Merel react when he finds Jaelah and Aydan asleep on his boat? Why do you think Merel is so angry when he learns that Jaelah tapped the life of the river?
- What information does Jaelah learn from Merel about the staff? Where does the wood for the staff come from?
- Who makes an unexpected visit to Jaelah and Aydan on their Grandfather's boat? What is the purpose of his visit?
- What does Kaen reveal to Jaelah and Aydan about Merel?
- What does Kaen find for Jaelah and Aydan to wear over their heads? What two purposes does the headgear serve?
- How does the group travel to the forest? Why is Kaen worried that it might not be easy to find wood for the new staff?
- Why does Kaen take Jaelah and Aydan back to the palace? Why doesn't he want to be seen entering the palace?
- Why does Jaelah faint?
- Why are Jaelah and Aydan so disappointed when they finally see the red lines from the tower?

### Discussion

- Has your impression of Kaen changed at all since his character was introduced? Why/why not? What qualities does he possess? Find examples in the story where Kaen displays attributes such as keeping his word, courage and loyalty.
- What challenges does Jaelah face on her mission? How does she deal with these challenges?
- Would you rather be a surface dweller or a cave dweller? Explain your answer.
- In what ways have the cave dwellers worked with the surface dwellers in the past? Explain how mutual trade has meant that a relationship between the two communities is necessary. How will the fact that the surface dwellers no longer need crystals affect the cave dwellers?
- How do you think Jaelah and Aydan will find the forest if they can't see where the lines cross?

***Students read Chapters 10-13 (pp. 130-178) independently before the next shared session.***

### **Comprehension Chapters 10-13 (pp. 130-178)**

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- What do Jaelah and Aydan overhear the angry traders talking about on the pier? How do you know that the traders are getting desperate? Why do the traders turn on Aydan and Jaelah? How does Jaelah escape?



- Why does Merel believe that the “world is dying”? Why is it necessary for the traders to bring their families to the surface?
- Where do Merel and the others have to travel to find where the life-lines cross? Why does Merel insist that the Prince accompany them? Why is their journey going to be so dangerous?
- Why did Kaen travel to Fire Mountain when he was younger? What does he tell Aydan about his adventure?
- Why will Kaen get into trouble with the King when he insists that the guards remove the net? Why do you think the Prince ordered that no one be allowed to go to Fire Mountain?
- Describe the feelings that engulf Jaelah when she becomes aware that there is no roof above her?
- Why does the largest dragon stop the others from attacking Merel? What happens to upset the dragons and allow the group safe passage through the tunnel?
- Why is Aydan so surprised when Jaelah lights a stone?
- Who lives in the village by Fire Mountain?
- What does Jaelah notice about the trees that grow in the cavern?
- Who did Merel take away from the village? Who is Taina? Why is she so excited to meet Jaelah? Why are the trees dying?
- What signs does Jaelah show that indicate she has royal blood?
- What does Taina tell Jaelah that helps explain the dying trees and the earthquakes?
- What were the consequences of Jaelah’s decision to tap the river?
- Why is the crystal field failing completely? Why does Jaelah need to get to the crystal field so urgently? Why do all of the dragons fly out of their cave?
- Why is Jaelah so reluctant to go to the crystal field? What motivates her to attempt to restore the crystals?
- What information does Merel reveal about Kaen when the group sees the blue crystals? How does the Prince feel about what he has done? How did Kaen’s actions affect the world? Why did he ruin all of the crystals?
- Describe how Jaelah restores the life to the crystals. Why is it necessary for Kaen to return the crystal that he stole? What does Kaen stand to lose by returning the crystal? How will this action benefit the cave dwellers?
- Why do the villagers want Jaelah to stay with him? How does Jaelah feel about this? What compromise does Kaen come up with that ensures everyone is happy?

### Discussion

- What lessons do you think Jaelah has learnt from her adventure? In what ways will her life be different from now on? Do you think she will make a good Queen? Why/why not?
- Discuss the ways that Kaen has developed and changed throughout the course of the story. What lessons has he learnt from his time spent with Jaelah and Aydan?
- Identify the climax in the story. Why is this event important?

- What is the theme or the author's message? Discuss how this idea is developed throughout the story.
- Identify a major conflict that occurs in the novel. Explain how this conflict is resolved.

## Activities

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**Plot** – Create a flow diagram that shows all of the important events in the novel in the order that they occur.

**Board game** – Design a board game for *The Crystal Runners*. For every positive event that occurs reward the player, for every negative one penalise the player. Illustrate your game with important settings and scenes from the novel.

**Character** – Complete a character profile for a main character in the novel. Include information about their name, age and role in the story. Explain the challenges that they face during the story and how they overcome them. Discuss how their character develops and changes throughout the course of the story. Use adjectives to describe what qualities and characteristics they possess. Include important quotes that reveal important aspects of the character.

**Writing** – Write a news article about an important event that occurs in the story. Include a catchy headline to capture the attention of the reader. Remember to use the inverted pyramid style of writing and include the 5 w's and h in the first two paragraphs of your article. In the rest of your article develop your ideas more fully and include quotes from people involved in the event.

**Static Image** – Design a static image that depicts an important theme from the novel. You may wish to do a collage that uses important words and images from the story or you could design a web page.

**Advertisement** – Imagine that you work at a recruitment agency in Jaelah's village. The village needs more crystal runners. It is your job to design a recruitment poster that encourages villagers to apply for the job.

**Writing** – Write a letter to a friend explaining to them why they should read *The Crystal Runners*.

**Character** – Draw a diagram to show how the characters in the novel relate to each other.

**Trial** – Imagine that Prince Kaen is being put on trial for his role in nearly destroying the world. Your class is going to run a mock trial. Allocate the roles of prosecutor and defender to members of the class. Another student will need to act in role as Kaen. You may need other members of the class to be characters in the novel who will be called as witnesses. The role of judge



might be a good one for the teacher to play. The rest of the class are to act as the jury.