



SKIN TAKER

MICHELLE PAVER

Teaching Resources

First Look

Look at the cover of the book. What do you think it's going to be about? What genre is it? Why do you think there are illustrations like cave etchings? What do you think the marks represent?

Writing style and structure

Opening

Read the first section.

DISCUSS: What do you think the bright star could be? When and where do you think the book is set? Give evidence from the text to back up your answer. What does the author mean by *'the sun is asleep in its cave and doesn't show its face for two whole moons.'* (Page 1) How does the author build tension and a sense that something dramatic is going to happen?

ACTIVITY: If the sun doesn't show its face for two moons, it would be very dark. Research where in the world this happens. See if you can find first person accounts of what it is like to live there. Using this information, write your own piece of descriptive writing. Are there things you typically do that you couldn't do there? Are there new activities you would seek to do in the dark?

Now read the rest of the first chapter.

'The Thunderstar blasted entire valleys to cinders. It turned frozen rivers to raging torrents. It obliterated the heart of the Forest.' (Page 7)

DISCUSS: Has this changed your opinion of what the Thunderstar could be? Why does Paver end the first chapter with this sentence? What is implied by having the Lynx Clan hunter anonymised, and the other characters named?





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Language

Because the novel takes place in the Stone Age, and we don't know about Mesolithic language, Paver has created her own terms for certain things.

ACTIVITY: Pick out some words or naming devices that Paver has invented, e.g. 'First Tree', and 'Sunwake'. Draw up a grid with her words in the left hand column, and your interpretation or the modern word in the right hand column. What do you notice about her words?

ACTIVITY: Many of Paver's words are compound words: 'starlight' 'snowglow' 'thunderstar'. Create your own mini dictionary of made up compound words. If you're in a classroom, you may wish to do this in groups.

'The Moon of Long Dark was over and they were into the strange days before Sunwake, when the endless blue night was briefly lightened by a false dawn. The sky would grow pale, as if the sun was about to show itself above the Mountains – only for darkness to return as the sun retreated into its cave.' (Page 3)

'The river dreaming under the ice, the alders asleep on the banks. Even the pines were dozing, only a single watch-tree remaining properly awake.' (Page 4)

'He saw pines bending like blades of grass, others flying overhead like spears.' (Page 6)

DISCUSS: Which literary devices does Paver use in this first chapter?

ACTIVITY: Make a grid of the different literary devices and find examples in the text. Then make up your own. E.g. personification, simile, hyperbole, metaphor, descriptive language, dialogue, onomatopoeia, powerful verbs. Note particularly, Paver's awareness of all the senses in her descriptions. What does the hunter feel? See? Hear?

DISCUSS: Why might the senses be particularly pertinent to the characters at this time? How are Paver's literary devices appropriate to her story's setting and time?

ACTIVITY: What is an anachronism? Make up some inappropriate similes and metaphors for Paver's text. E.g. 'He saw pines bending like plastic straws.'





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Points of view

Skin Taker is written from many different points of view, including Renn's, Wolf's, Torak's and Dark's.

DISCUSS: How do you know when Paver has 'switched heads'? Does one viewpoint narrative appeal to you more than the others? Why? Why do you think the author leaves each viewpoint at a particular cliffhanger moment? Look particularly at chapters 22 and 23.

ACTIVITY: Create a PowerPoint on the different types of points of view in narrative. Think about first person, third person, omniscient, limited. Which does Paver use? Using other books, find examples of all these different points of view. Which do you prefer? Are some more appropriate for different types of narrative? Are any limiting?

ACTIVITY: Create a Venn Diagram of the different characters' experiences of the Thunderstar. Your circles could represent Dark and Torak. Which emotions/sensations do they share, and which are different?

'Wolf's flank still hurt when he sneezed, and he was sneezing a lot, because of all the ash.' (Page 36)

Read the full passage from pages 36-38 told from Wolf's point of view.

DISCUSS: How does Paver differentiate a wolf's point of view from a human's? One way is to use a large number of 'sensory' descriptive names for things, such as *'Bright Soft Cold,'* and *'Fast Wet'*. Can you find more in the book?

ACTIVITY: Can you make up your own wolf-speak for natural objects? Try and describe the following in wolf-speak – sunrise, oak tree, rose, field, ocean, stars, wind. Now try modern objects, such as tap, teacup, phone, car.

DISCUSS: Which is easier to do – the natural world's, or the modern objects?





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setting

Skin Taker is historical fiction, set 6,000 years ago, during the Stone Age, or the Mesolithic period, in what we call prehistoric times.

DISCUSS: What is meant by prehistory? What is BC?

ACTIVITY: Create a timeline dating back through prehistory with a roll of paper. You may want to use the following website: <https://www.inrap.fr/en/periods>

DISCUSS: After you have made the timeline, have a look at where we are today. Can you add relevant important dates in history – world wars, kings and queens, nation formations? When do most of these happen? Why is this?

Skin Taker has a map on the opening pages.

DISCUSS: What do you notice about the map? What clues does it give about the story to come? Where would you want to live on that map?

ACTIVITY: Create your own literary fictional map. Which natural features are on your map? How are borders created? Do you need a key? Does it resemble a real country? What are you naming your rivers and landscapes – look at how Paver has labelled her rivers.

Paver's map doesn't indicate where in the world it is based, but in her author's note she refers to setting the book in Northern Scandinavia.

ACTIVITY: Make an advertisement to entice someone to visit modern Northern Scandinavia. What persuasive language will you use? Which photographs or illustrations will you use?

DISCUSS: How is it different from other places in the world? What are its key attractions?





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Characters

There are many key characters in *Skin Taker*.

DISCUSS: How does Paver show the relationship between Renn, Torak and Wolf the first time the reader meets them? Who do you think is the protagonist? Does a book have to have one main character? Compare with other books you have read with different narrative viewpoints. What does an author achieve by doing this?

Torak

Torak is portrayed mainly through his emotions, and he is troubled by the black web from the time of the Thunderstar at the start of the book:

'The black web is still with him, but now it's inside his head.' (Page 59)

'Now Tall Tailless was sick: a darkness inside, all happiness gone.' (Page 65)

'Sometimes Tall Tailless was sad, sometimes angry, sometimes recklessly seeking danger.' (Page 66)

'Taillesses...can keep their anger alive and snarling inside them for many Lights and Darks.' (Page 146)

DISCUSS: What do you think is wrong with Torak? What would we call it today? Why is the term 'the black web' a good metaphor for sadness or depression?

ACTIVITY: Create a mind map of black web feelings. Which emotions can you name? Now create a mind map with the opposite feelings.

ACTIVITY: How do emotions manifest physically? Take one emotion. Now draw a stick man and label the body where this emotion might show. For example, nervousness might cause a person to feel 'butterflies' in their stomach. Anger might make their forehead crease.

Sometimes a life event can cause someone to feel bad.

'He'd changed so much since the Thunderstar. Prickly one moment, disturbingly absent the next.' (Page 64)

'Let's get going. It's better when I'm on the move.' (Page 62)





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'At such times the only thing that had helped had been to concentrate on now.' (Page 197)

'He was amazed at how much better he felt for having told her. He hadn't realized what a burden it had been to keep the black web secret.' (Page 75)

ACTIVITY: Which actions can help somebody to move from the 'black web' into a happier place? Draw a grid with the life event on the left column, the emotions in the centre column, and then ideas to assuage the sad feelings in the last column. For example, Torak and Dark talk about keeping moving (exercise), and thinking about the present moment, as well as sharing their emotions with someone else.

'She saw his clan-tattoos, two dotted lines on his cheekbones with the scar cutting across the left. She saw the quartered circle tattooed on his forehead.' (Page 50)

DISCUSS: How do you picture Torak?

ACTIVITY: Draw what you think he looks like. Now look at <http://wolfbrother.com/museum/> Do any of these representations match your own?

Renn

'Her face was so filthy Torak couldn't make out her clan-tattoos, the three blue-black bars on each cheek, with the red moonbleed mark under the left one.' (Page 11)

DISCUSS: What do you think the clan marks represent?

ACTIVITY: Renna belongs to the Raven clan. Design your own clan. What marks would you have on your face to represent your clan? Design them on paper, and then using face paints, see if you can decorate your face or your partner's. How does it change how you present yourself?

Renna suspects that Naiginn is alive, but keeps the information to herself.

'Renna had been half-hoping that Torak would dismiss her suspicions...the fact that he was even conceding it might be true made it horrifyingly real.' (Page 118)

DISCUSS: Is she right to tell Torak? Should she have told him earlier in the novel? Have you ever kept something to yourself because saying it out loud made it seem more real?





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At the end of Chapter 16, Renn gives herself up to the Chosen Ones.

DISCUSS: Why does she do this? Is it a bad decision? What would you have done?

ACTIVITY: Write a diary entry from Renn's point of view, either before Torak is captured when she is weighing up whether to tell him about Naiginn, or after she has told him, or when she decides to give herself up. Which emotions would she have? Relief, guilt, fear?

Dark

Read Chapter 3 again.

'No wonder its clan threw it out! Hair like cobwebs, moon-milk eyes...Eyes that see ghosts.' (Page 28)

ACTIVITY: Write a list of everything you find out about Dark.

DISCUSS: Why do you think Paver features him as a key character in the novel?

'The man's long hair was nutbrown, but in his hollow cheeks and prominent jaw Renn detected a resemblance to Dark. As her friend approached she said quietly, "That man, is he—" "My father," Dark said between his teeth.' (Page 44)

DISCUSS: How is the relationship between Dark and his father first represented? What makes a group of people a family?

ACTIVITY: Using a pad of post-its, each class member writes down the title of a family member, e.g. mother, step-sister. Shuffle the post-its around. See how many different combinations of types of families you can make.

DISCUSS: What makes a good relationship? Think of words in a group.

ACTIVITY: Now form your words into a word cloud. Which word stands out the most?

ACTIVITY: Draw a small circle in the middle of the paper – this is you. Now draw circles round and write the names of your important relationships in the rings. Which relationships are close to you? Think about what makes them work well, what makes them important.





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'He started to run, but Dark grabbed his arm. With the speed of a snake Realvi spun round and kneed him in the groin. Dark crumpled in the snow.

"I'm not sorry I abandoned you in the Mountains," spat Realvi. "I'm sorry you survived! I should have strangled you at birth!" (Page 136)

DISCUSS: Why does Paver compare Realvi to a snake?

'I always end up alone, thought Dark...the loneliness, the anger and the shame. His father was a thief and a spy,' (Page 139)

'You can't choose your parents, Dark.' (Page 203)

DISCUSS: What are some of the pressures on relationships between parents and children? How can both sides work to ease these pressures?

ACTIVITY: Imagine you are Dark. Write a letter to an agony aunt/uncle about how you feel about your father. What advice would you receive in response?

DISCUSS: Dark doesn't manage to reconcile with his father in the novel. Why is this? Why is it important for Dark to confide in others? What is the role of his relationship with Fin-Kedinn? When is it important to seek help in a difficult family relationship?

ACTIVITY: Can you act out a scene of reconciliation between an estranged family member and their family? Which words are important for both sides to use?

In the end, Dark says he doesn't care about what happened to Realvi (page 244). But both he and Renn know that isn't true.

DISCUSS: Why do we have such strong relationships with our kin? How important is it to know our family history?

ACTIVITY: Consult an elderly relative and see how much you can find out about your family. You may wish to draw up a family tree, or to write down a family history. Consider how knowing more about your family makes you feel.





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Dark, Raven and Torak are tasked with carrying out a mission in the book – to perform a rite to bring back The First Tree:

“He means the sacred grove,” said Torak in an altered voice. They stared at him. The Walker was nodding.’ (Page 56)

‘Chalk boy knows about stones, Raven girl can shoot,’ (Page 57)

DISCUSS: Which characteristics do they need to complete their mission? Do they all have the same skills?

In the end, the characters need to work as a team.

ACTIVITY: Form into groups and using a newspaper, a pair of scissors and sticky tape, make the highest self-supporting structure you can. Then, analyse what you needed to do to work effectively as a team.

DISCUSS: Are you part of a team? For example, a sports team, a community club, a class at school. Which skills do you bring? What benefits are there to being part of a team?

ACTIVITY: Make up a recipe for a great team, e.g. A spoonful of compromise.

Themes

Survival/Hunter-gatherers

The characters in *Skin Taker* are hunter-gatherers from the Stone Age.

‘They didn’t have writing, metals or the wheel – but they didn’t need them.’ (Author’s Note, Page 265)

DISCUSS: What did hunter-gatherers need to survive?

‘The Forest was everything. It gave shelter and fire, bark for rope-making and nets, nuts and berries for medicine and food. Hunters and prey depended on it to survive, and it never let them down.’ (Page 41)

DISCUSS: How would your life be different without writing, metals or the wheel?





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ACTIVITY: Record a day in your life supposing that these things don't exist. Which other resources would you need to use instead?

'Luckily they both always carried what they needed tied to their belts, so they still had their flint knives, tinder pouches, sewing kits, medicine pouches, waterskins. Torak still had his slingshot, but he'd lost his axe and bow. Renn had her axe, but had lost her quiver and bow.' (Page 14)

DISCUSS: What do you carry on you? Do any of your personal items have the same purpose as those belonging to Torak and Renn?

ACTIVITY: Draw a picture of Torak and Renn's kitbags. Do you know what all the items are? Research what they may have looked like.

Clothes

'Even without a sleeping-sack they were fairly snug, thanks to the clothes they'd got in the Far North last autumn: duckskin jerkins with the feathers against the skin, seal-hide parkas and leggings with the fur on the outside, whale-hide boots and musk-ox wool socks.' (Page 16)

'under-jerkin and -leggings of fluffy white hare fur...leaf-shaped snowshoes strung with sinew.' (Page 244)

DISCUSS: Where do our clothes come from? How much of the fabric is natural?

ACTIVITY: Research and then draw a flowchart to show how clothes are made. Take an item of your own clothing and examine the label. Where was it made? Which fabrics is it composed of? Is it made from synthetic or natural materials? Where did they originate? How did it get into your possession? How many people were involved in the production of your clothing item?

Food

'She was so hungry she stayed where she was in the branches and ate the pigeon raw: the warm, sweet, slippery liver, the tough little heart, the deliciously chewy flesh.' (Page 152)

Now look at how Torak gets honeycomb on page 245.





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DISCUSS: How much of the food you eat is raw? Is it healthier to eat food raw?

ACTIVITY: Draw up a week's meal plan to show your average day's consumption of food. What do you eat? Is any of it raw? Highlight those meals you cook from raw ingredients. Now compose a menu made entirely of raw ingredients that you would find acceptable to eat.

Hunting

Read the chase of Wolf on pages 106-109.

DISCUSS: What does the passage tell you about the forest? How would it feel to be hunted?

ACTIVITY: Write a passage in which you are being hunted, just like Wolf. Maybe you are a fish in a river being fished, or an animal on land being tracked. Perhaps you are a bird in the sky?

Territory

As well as carrying things on their person, the characters in *Skin Taker* need to know their landscape.

'On a clear day from Bees' Nest Ridge you could see all the way north to Lake Axehead, and east to the High Mountains, south to the Deep Forest and west across the Open Forest to the Sea. Now, through the charcoal haze, all Torak could see was devastation.' (Page 19)

DISCUSS: How used to a view do we get? Take a proper look at the landscape you can see from your house. Do you see buildings, roads, shops? Do you see any trees? Do you see fields or land? What is the land used for? How well do you know your local area?

ACTIVITY: Map your local area, taking special care to see what is part of the natural landscape and what is manmade. Trace your route from home to school. How many different routes could you take to get from one to the other? Work out the distance. How long would it take by foot? Explain the route to a friend using only landmarks rather than street names or signs.

'As night deepened, she realized she'd lost her bearings.' (Page 150)





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Read to the end of the chapter.

DISCUSS: What is the difference between day and night in the forest?

ACTIVITY: Make two comparison columns showing the differences between day and night in a forest. Think particularly about the different animals one might encounter. What would the light sources be?

Torak and Renn live in the forest, and it is important for them to know the different trees and their uses.

DISCUSS: Can you identify different species of trees? E.g. Ash, Holly, Rowan, Lime.

ACTIVITY: Make an identification poster of trees. Find pictures of each as well as pictures of the leaves. When you label them, think about how else you could identify them. Do they have a certain texture or smell? What could they be used for?

A forest can be a source of food and shelter but also harbour dangers. Read again the scene with the bear on pages 68-69.

DISCUSS: How does the author build tension? What do you learn about the forest from these pages?

ACTIVITY: Create a leaflet warning forest visitors of what to do if they come across a bear. You may wish to research this more online.

ACTIVITY: Now try to write the scene from the bear's point of view. Think about how Paver writes from a wolf's point of view. What language are you using?

The characters need to be hyper aware of their surroundings in order to survive. They have to have a sensory knowledge of it, as well as a visual knowledge. Think about the sounds and smells of the landscape.

'The swish of the raven wings and the hiss of snow slipping off branches.' (Page 103)

'he sought the scent of the pack-sister amid its confusion of smells.' (Page 194)

'They fell silent, listening to the creak of the pines, snow pattering onto the shelter.' (Page 203)





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ACTIVITY: Create a soundscape of the Forest. Note all the sounds you might hear, and see if you can recreate any using musical instruments, recycled materials, or objects around you.

If you can visit woods or a forest, you could play sound bingo using this resource from the National Trust.

https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/sounds-of-nature-bingo.pdf?utm_campaign=1896144_TDH%2026%20February&utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Day&dm_i=32K1,14N20,7H6DGN,4CJOV,1

If you live in an urban environment, try making your own sound bingo card. Which sounds would you choose?

At the end of the novel, a different sound is heard:

'The brightest souls in the Forest were singing...the warmth of love and the teeming life of the Forest.'
(Page 238)

DISCUSS: What effect does the sound have?

ACTIVITY: Think of a sound or piece of music that has a positive effect on you. Describe the feelings you have when listening to it. If you are in a classroom, share the music and see if it has the same effect on others.

Natural Disaster

Paver has set *Skin Taker* in the aftermath of a natural disaster:

'The earth had ceased its terrible shaking, there hadn't been a landslide for a while, but the valley still rang with the crash of falling trees. Through the bitter grey haze Torak made out the red glimmer of fires dotting the slopes. To the south the sky glowed a dreadful crimson. Above it an immense cloud of black smoke was spreading like a gigantic hand.' (Page 9)

ACTIVITY: Imagine yourself in the aftermath of a natural disaster, such as a volcanic explosion or earthquake. Write a descriptive passage. What might you see, smell or hear? What would you know about what has happened? Who is with you?

'Renn, it's the middle of winter, we've no shelter, no sleeping-sack, no food —' (Page 11)





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ACTIVITY: Today, we have global rescue services that help after a disaster. Can you research an international aid organisation that does this? What do you think they need to provide for people? Which sort of people work for them? Design a recruitment poster for the organisation. Which skills are you looking for?

'To gain insights into how Torak's people perceive the meteorite strike, I've studied eyewitness accounts of the Evenk people of the remote Tunguska region of Siberia, which was famously blasted by a meteorite in 1908.' (Author's Note, page 266)

DISCUSS: What is a meteorite strike?

ACTIVITY: Can you research what happened in the meteorite strike of 1908? Are there more famous meteorite strikes? Find a map of the world and pinpoint where they happened. Take one and create a PowerPoint presentation about what happened.

'How can we hunt when there isn't any prey? How can we fish when the rivers are poisoned?'
(Page 46)

DISCUSS: How is what happened to Torak and Renn like a modern environmental disaster? How important is nature in sustaining us? What is the difference between a natural disaster and a man-made disaster? Should humankind be more ethical in how we look after and respect nature? How can we learn resilience in the face of our changing climate?

ACTIVITY: Take a modern environmental disaster or an effect of climate change, such as the burning or deforestation of the Amazon. Write a persuasive letter to the world's leaders about why natural resources need to be protected. You will need to do some research to back up your arguments.

'A new river is flowing, filling the hollow gouged by the Thunderstar to make a beautiful blue lake.'
(Page 240)

DISCUSS: How does nature heal itself? Can you think of other scenarios in which nature regenerates?





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Beliefs

Paver shows a world of hunter-gatherers in which shamanism is an important part, as is respect or worship of the natural world, and also a world in which people seek comfort in a spiritual world for occurrences that they cannot explain by science.

DISCUSS: What is shamanism?

ACTIVITY: Find examples of beliefs held in the book.

'His hand crept to the fur amulet at his throat and under his breath he whispered a prayer to his clan-creature.' (Page 5)

'According to the ice clans, a snowfall means the moon is making a new face for itself of walrus ivory, and sweeping the shavings from its shelter.' (Page 50)

DISCUSS: Why does the Lynx-Clan hunter feel for his amulet? Why do you think the ice clans hold this belief about snowfall?

ACTIVITY: Do you have any objects that you use for comfort or faith? Is it an inherited or gifted object? Draw a picture of it and write a label as if it were an object in a museum. How would the curator describe it, its value and its purpose? If you are in a classroom environment, you could create an exhibition of all the objects.

ACTIVITY: Look at Stone Age artefacts at the Museum of London <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/schools/learning-resources/3d-objects-stone-age-to-iron-age>

'In the time that was, when even the stars were dark...'

Read the creation story on page 49.

DISCUSS: What is the purpose of creation stories?

ACTIVITY: Investigate two other creation stories from different cultures that you didn't know before. Are there any comparison points? Research the Yggdrasil from Norse mythology. Create a piece of artwork showing one of the creation stories you have researched.





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'...and the rippling green radiance in the sky which the clans call the First Tree.' (Page 1-2)

DISCUSS: What is the First Tree? Why do the characters call it this?

ACTIVITY: Find a scientific explanation for the Northern Lights. Can you rewrite it in your own words?

'Four arrows to bring back the First Tree. A bridge of light to fly beyond the moon and stars....The Voice of Then becomes the Song of Now...If the brightest souls in the Forest can sing the arrows on their way, they will bring back the First Tree – and the world will be saved.' (Page 55)

This is the prophecy of the Walker, and the mission that Renn, Dark and Torak must fulfil.

'At least – Dark thought it was a man.' (Page 27)

ACTIVITY: What do you think the Walker looks like? Using examples from the text, draw a picture of him, or write a descriptive poem about him.

DISCUSS: What is the difference between a prophet, an oracle and a mage? What do these words mean today? Can you find any other religions or cultures that relied on oracles or prophecies?

'The seedling was the only living tree within reach, so Torak would have to spirit walk in that.' (Page 212)

DISCUSS: What is spirit-walking? Why does Torak believe it will help?

ACTIVITY: Describe the difference in experience between Torak spirit-walking in the trees, and spirit-walking in the bear (page 226).

DISCUSS: If you could spirit-walk, what would you choose to inhabit?

ACTIVITY: You may wish to write about your experience, or use silent drama or freeze frame to present your spirit-walking to the rest of your class. How does your body change shape? Which emotions will you show?





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The hunter-gatherers in *Skin Taker* also form beliefs around death:

'Death Marks kept the spirit intact on its journey. They stopped it turning into a demon or a ghost.'
(Page 88)

And mourning:

'Like the others huddled within, she was smeared from head to foot in ash. Guvach, the boy who'd found them, had explained that they were mourning their sisters: the trees in the Dead Lands beyond the Shield.' (Page 93)

DISCUSS: How does the spirit journey in *Skin Taker* compare with the journey of the spirit in the afterlife in Ancient Egyptian or Ancient Roman civilisations? How does the smearing of ash compare with modern rituals for mourning?

ACTIVITY: Investigate the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. This is a collection of spells for navigating the afterlife. Now write your own spell or poem for navigating life itself.

Community and Leadership

In *Skin Taker*, people are organised into clans (tribes/communities). Each clan has its own hierarchy.

DISCUSS: Using the book and its map, explore what is meant by a clan system. Why did people in the Stone Age organise themselves into clans? Think about why people belonged to a certain clan. Is this similar to anything we have today, perhaps in societies that aren't in the West?

'Last summer I dishonoured my clan by putting on the marks of another,' (Page 103)

DISCUSS: Does modern society organise itself into groups? Why? Think about why different groups form – shared identity, views, rights, experience, skills?

ACTIVITY: Make a grid of the different things which bring people into a group, and give examples of modern day groups.





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The clans use tattoos as signs of their identity.

DISCUSS: Which signs or graphics do groups use to represent themselves? Think about religious symbols, political symbols, business logos.

ACTIVITY: Design your own symbol for a group you'd want to belong to. Think carefully about the design and colours you use. What message does it give?

'When Dark was a boy, his father had taken him into the mountains and abandoned him. For seven winters he'd survived on his own. Renn couldn't imagine how it must feel to come face to face with the clan which had left you to die.' (Page 42)

'(The Walker, who was an outcast from the Otter Clan, had quietly vanished.)' (Page 255)

DISCUSS: What is an outcast? Does such a thing exist today? Can you be cast out of a club, a school, a country? Can you be cast out of society?

ACTIVITY: Draw up a list of rules for the 'group' you created for your symbol. Who can be a member? Would there be any circumstances in which you would cast someone out of the group? Write a dialogue that would articulate a ruling member casting out a member of the group. How do you think each person is feeling? Which feelings are articulated, and which hidden?

'I can't change what I was born, but no one can tell me how to live!' (Page 130)

Re-read page 130 and write a diary entry from the evening in which Dark comes face to face with his father again. How does he feel? Does he have conflicting emotions?





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Clan-fighting

“It’s not our fault, it’s the Kelps!” yelled a Viper man.

“Everyone knows Sea clans hate the Forest!”

“And Forest clans dishonour the Sea!” Halut shot back.

“This is your fault, not ours!”

“What about the Mages?” shouted a Whale girl. “Why didn’t they see this coming?” (Page 46)

‘When disaster strikes and people are frightened, they turn on each other. It’s people you’ll have to fear the most.’ (Page 58)

DISCUSS: Do you agree with this statement?

“And why,” he added accusingly, “are we feeding strangers when we haven’t enough for ourselves?” (Page 46)

“I don’t mind if they’re able-bodied,” Sialot went on. “But we can’t waste supplies on strangers who can’t pull their weight.” (Page 46)

‘their ferocious conviction that theirs was the only True Way: that other people were less human, and deserved to be killed.’ (Page 63)

DISCUSS: Is it important for people to work together in the aftermath of a disaster? Is it important to keep individual clan identity? Can the two ideas work at the same time? How? Is there any scenario today in which groups of people view others as lesser than themselves? Why is it dangerous? How can you combat this?

ACTIVITY: Imagine you are debating with the Deep Forest people and trying to convince them that other people are equal to them, not less human. Which persuasive arguments and techniques can you use? Stage a live debate.

“The Chosen Ones,” corrected the Forest Horse hunter. “We’re one clan now!” (Page 155)

DISCUSS: Is it a good thing that several clans have grouped together? Is it provocative to call themselves the Chosen Ones?

ACTIVITY: Animals also arrange themselves into groups. Find out which animals live in packs. What benefits does being in a pack give them? Focus on one particular species and create a poster showing how it lives in its pack. Now take a solitary animal and do the same for them. Which would you prefer to be and why?





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'All this talk about differences – but one thing binds us together.' (Page 47)

DISCUSS: What does bind the people together?

'Every one of you knows our ancestors' story: how all the creatures came together and survived the Great Wave. Well, we're going to make a new story: how the clans moved the mountain and saved the river! Who's with me?' (Page 253)

DISCUSS: Is it easier to complete a large task as one people or separate clans?

ACTIVITY: Have a game of diversity bingo. Draw up a sheet with squares of skills and attributes, e.g. good at maths, has brown eyes, speaks two languages. Then see how many of your classmates fit into each square. Do all the squares get filled?

Now write down all the things that everyone in the class has in common e.g. goes to school, drinks water, etc.

DISCUSS: How important is it to recognise and respect others' differences? How can peoples' differences be used in a good way?

Leadership

'Fin-Kedinn declared the clan meet open and people quietened down, eager to hear from the scouts. As the speaking-stick was passed from hand to hand, a shocked silence fell.' (Page 45)

DISCUSS: Does a group always need a leader or facilitator? Explain the function of the speaking-stick. What tools do we use today instead of a speaking-stick?

ACTIVITY: Hold a group meeting without a clear leader. What happens? Does using a speaking-stick help?

"Don't you ever get tired of being Leader?" Dark burst out.' (Page 134)

'You call him a Leader? You don't know what that means! In the Deep Forest we have a real leader.' (Page 136)

'Torak felt a surge of love for him: for being wiser, braver and kinder than anyone he knew.' (Page 252)





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'Fin-Kedinn was tireless: advising, lending a hand, sounding the shift changes on his birch-bark horn'
(Page 254)

DISCUSS: What does it take to be a leader? Are there good and bad leaders? Can everyone be a leader?

ACTIVITY: Write a list of qualities a leader needs. Pick a modern-day leader. This might be a politician or a leader of a smaller group such as a manager of a football club. Which leadership qualities do they display? Are they good or bad leaders? Can you present your findings as an argument?

DISCUSS: Can leaders be good at leading but have negative intent? Why would people follow a leader with negative intent?

'Everyone agreed that Fin-Kedinn must be in charge...' (Page 254)

DISCUSS: Is consensus on the leader important? How do we establish that in modern times? Look at different countries around the world. Do the people choose their leaders?

'Smooth, strong, made to instil trust and sway a mob, it raised the hairs on the back of Torak's neck.'
(Page 162)

'abasing themselves in an ecstasy of obedience.' (Page 163)

DISCUSS: What does Paver mean by an 'ecstasy of obedience'? How important is skilful oratory in the voice of a leader?

ACTIVITY: Watch and listen to famous speeches on YouTube. E.g. Malala Yousafzai's UN speech 'On Youth Education', Amanda Gorman's poem at President Biden's Inauguration, King George VI's radio address in 1939. Think about the delivery and content of the speeches. What makes them effective or convincing?

'They were utterly in thrall to Naiginn, they would obey his every command...they wouldn't listen to reason...Their minds were as rigid and shut as their white, scarred faces.' (Page 144)

DISCUSS: How has Naiginn manipulated the Chosen Ones to obey him? Use examples from the text.





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'Naiginn ruled the Deep Forest through fear, feeding his people lies to keep them under his sway.'
(Page 179)

DISCUSS: Do modern political leaders ever use fear to control their citizens? What other emotions can political speeches or posters evoke? Do emotions play a part in how people think about their leaders?

ACTIVITY: Have a look at some recent political posters. Which emotions do they make you feel? Label each poster with the different emotions. You may wish to start here: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/apr/03/the-10-best-british-political-posters>

*"Mages say they can see the future, but that's a lie. They didn't foresee the Thunderstar."
"And your Leader did?"
"Better than that, he protected us from it."* (Page 157)

DISCUSS: Why is it easier to persuade people of something after an unexplained event or huge change?

Read Chapter 17 and see how Renn tries to persuade her captors about the truth of Naiginn.

ACTIVITY: Write a persuasive letter from Renn to the Chosen Ones to convince them of the truth. Which techniques will you use? Remember the rule of three, facts, and speaking to their emotions.

Colours

Re-reading the text, look again at Paver's use of colour throughout. Colours are often linked to emotions.

'...tinged with red. As Torak and Renn stood watching, this intensified to a searing crimson... expanding, brightening to orange...a silent explosion of dazzling brilliance – ...turning the snow to glittering gold.' (Page 78)

'She wondered whether, now that the black web was gone, he could finally see green.' (Page 246)

DISCUSS: Do emotions have colours? Why do you like some colours more than others – do they have connotations to other things?





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ACTIVITY: Make a colour chart for emotions. Why have you chosen those colours for those emotions? Compare with a friend. Have they chosen the same pairings?

'She is in the ice cave at the Edge of the World, trapped in its freezing unearthly blue glow.' (Page 80)

'his mouth is blue as midnight,' (Page 80)

'his ice-blue stare' (Page 183)

'Dawn was breaking, chill blue daylight flooding the ice demon's lair.' (Page 178)

DISCUSS: Why is Naiginn associated with blue? Are other characters associated with different colours? How does Paver tie her landscape to colours?

'She wasn't sure if she'd actually seen those colours, or just imagined them afterwards – and this mattered, because only her coloured dreams came true.' (Page 242-243)

DISCUSS: Think of other stories in which colour is a central theme or holds meaning. How do the meanings relate to those in *Skin Taker*?

ACTIVITY: Pick a colour and write down all the different words you can think of to describe that same colour or variations of it. Now write your own descriptive passage or short story using that colour as its theme.

ACTIVITY: Finally, make a storybox to encompass the whole novel. Think about the characters, the historical setting, the physical setting and themes. Which objects would you put in your box to represent the book? You probably want to limit it to between 5-10 objects. You may wish your objects to be natural, such as a leaf or a crystal, or created, such as a drawing of a wolf.





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Further Reading

Wolf Brother series 1-7 by Michelle Paver

Wandering Warrior by Da Chen

Promise of the Wolves by Dorothy Hearst

The Broken King by Philip Womack

The Dark is Rising by Susan Cooper

The Snow-Walker's Son by Catherine Fisher

The Lost Words or *The Lost Spells* by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris

