

# The Coming of the Whirlpool

## Ship Kings Book One

By Andrew McGahan

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### Summary

*The Coming of the Whirlpool*, the first book in the Ship Kings series, is a majestic and intriguing immersion in a deftly rendered fantasy world. Exquisitely written, the adventures of Dow Amber bring an alternate world alive by involving readers in a gripping tale of the seas.

Dow is a village boy, set, as all first-born sons, to follow in his woodcutting father's footsteps. But history and fate intervene, throwing Dow on a collision course with the ruling and all-powerful Ship Kings.

Suitable for students aged 14+ (particularly years 8-10)

Australian Curriculum (Draft version 1.1.0) years 8-10. VELS levels 5 and 6 (Victoria), Stages 4 and 5 (N.S.W.), Standard 4 – stages 9-13, and Standard 5 – stages 14-15 (Tasmania), Years 8-10 (Queensland), Early and Late Adolescence (Western Australia), SACSA Standards 4 and 5 (South Australia), Band 4-5 (Northern Territory) and Early Adolescence (ACT).

*The Coming of the Whirlpool* is an exciting adventure fantasy sure to keep students (particularly boys) engaged in reading.

### Use in the curriculum

Using *The Coming of the Whirlpool* as a class text could lead to in-depth discussions relating to the definitions of fantasy, of destiny, heroism, role of women, role of boys, and historical life. It is suggested that *The Coming of the Whirlpool* be studied:

- as an example of fantasy fiction
- as an example of the use of language to construct a specific time and place
- as a resource to debate and discover what elements are used in constructing and classifying a book as fantasy
- as a resource to define heroism and what elements make a 'hero' in literature
- to research the origins and literary uses of archetypes such as the scapegoat, the hero etc.
- to study the aftermath of war and effects on society of a land subjected to foreign rule

An excellent companion to Melina Marchetta's *Finnikin of the Rock*; Ursula Le Guin's *Wizard of Earthsea* series; *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. Teaching tools to support the study of *The Coming of the Whirlpool* include the *Horatio Hornblower* DVDs (Ioan Gruffudd, Robert Lindsay), *Moby Dick* DVD (2010 - Ethan Hawke, William Hurt version), Jessica Watson's *True Spirit* and Jesse Martin's *Lionheart*.

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In the classroom...

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## Discussion Questions

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1. 'It will be shame enough for your father and me when it comes out' (p. 21). Why is it such a shame on his family if Dow chooses to go to sea?
2. '...it was allowed, on this night, that a woman speak at council.' (p. 25), '...even though he comes only through the female line...' (p. 29). What do these quotes show us about the role of women in New Island society?
3. 'He had always thought that he lived in a poor land, an empty place of little importance. Now he saw that it was only his home in the valley that fitted such a description. It made him feel awkward somehow. And ignorant.' (p. 45) Why was Dow ignorant about New Island? In what other ways do the Ship Kings keep the New Islanders ignorant? Consider the maxim: Knowledge is Power.
4. 'Where such innate abilities came from, he didn't know - unless it really was the ancient blood of Honous Tombs in his veins...' (p. 98). Is there evidence that skills can be passed on by blood (and/or DNA) alone? Do you believe in Fate or Destiny?
5. How is the tribute that the Ship Kings take different from taxation?
6. 'The Great Ocean rose and fell with different waves then, and different creatures moved in its depths—some vast and deadly, some unearthly and cold, and some small beyond sight yet of immense consequence.' (p. 1) How could a microscopic organism in Dow's ocean change the fate of the world?
7. 'That's not true!' Dow objected. (p. 181). What do you think hurt Dow more, being labelled a poor sailor or having subjected Nathaniel to the lash? Why?
8. After surviving the maelstrom, he is labelled a hero, but Dow feels '...cold and numb, as hollow as an old shell upon a beach, and as brittle as a rotten tree trunk...' (p. 235). Why does Dow feel this way?
9. Do you think the crew of the *Chloe* will accept Dow? Explain your thoughts.
10. Can you make predictions as to what might happen in the forthcoming books? Can you guess what/who Dow will have to battle in the future? What role do you think Nell might play in the next books in the series?
11. The fantasy genre often draws on cultural, literary or religious archetypes to give depth or resonance to its storytelling. What elements in *The Coming of the Whirlpool* could be said to make this a Tale of Destiny? Who or what does Mother Gale represent?
12. Do you classify *The Coming of the Whirlpool* as a fantasy novel or a historical novel containing fantastical events? Why? What real-world elements does the author use to build up the fantasy world of the Ship Kings?

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Curriculum recommendation and discussion questions prepared by Judith Way. Judith is a teacher librarian with a Graduate Diploma in Children's Literature and a Master of Arts. She was the recipient of the IASL/Softlink International Excellence Award for 2010, the School Library Association of Victoria's Innovators Grant in 2009, and the SLAV John Ward Award for outstanding contribution to teacher librarianship in 2007. She was awarded the Children's Book Council of Australia's Eleanor E. Robertson prize in 2003. She has presented at conferences locally and internationally. Judith blogs at <http://jway.global2.vic.edu.au>

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