

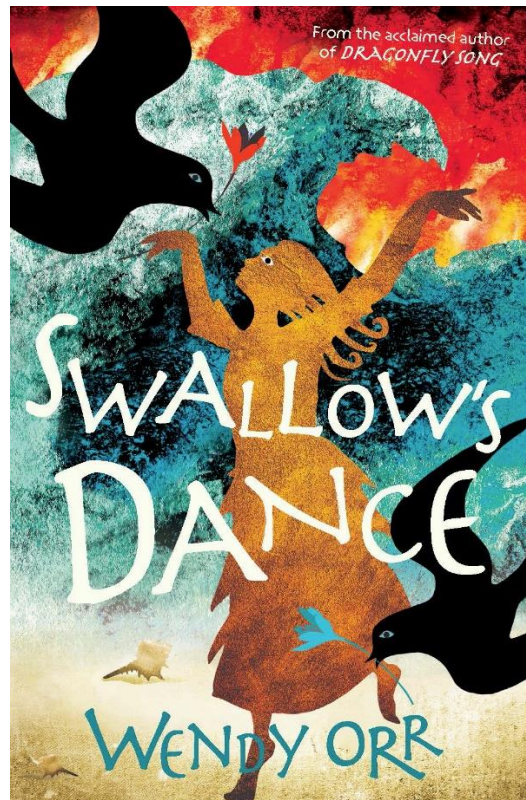
Teachers' Notes
by Joy Lawn

Swallow's Dance
by
Wendy Orr

ISBN 9781760297879
Recommended for ages 9-13 yrs

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Introduction	2
Curriculum alignment	3
Activities for the classroom.....	4
English	4
History: the ancient world	7
Visual arts	8
Dance	9
Author's inspiration	10
Resources and further reading	10
About the writers	11
Blackline masters.....	12



INTRODUCTION

Swallow's Dance is historical fiction that takes the reader far back to 1625 BCE in the Minoan Bronze Age where the Goddess is worshipped and natural disasters threaten homes and lives. The writing is a mixture of prose and poetry and these both extend the narrative. Songs and recurring imagery about swallows create a sensory literary atmosphere.

Swallow's Dance is a companion novel to Wendy Orr's multi-awarded *Dragonfly Song*, but each can be read independently of the other. They are both set in Ancient Crete, have a young female protagonist and describe a rite of passage where the main character is forced to leave her home and consequently develop, change and grow.

The two books are middle-grade novels, suitable for younger and older readers.

Swallow's Dance has application for the subjects of English, History, Visual Arts and Dance.

TOPICS AND THEMES

- Ancient History: Bronze Age Crete; Minoan Civilisation
- Goddess worship
- Family
- Role of women
- Trade
- Natural disasters
- Trauma, change and refugees
- Strength, kindness and trust

PLOT SUMMARY

Leira, named after the saffron crocus flower, is part of the nobility on the Island of Swallows. Reaching puberty late, she undertakes the 'Learning of the Swallow Clan', novice priestess rites; it is an idyllic time where the young and older women gather flowers and dance to celebrate the initiations. However, it is a short-lived ceremony and 'Learning' this year.

In a contrast of tone and atmosphere, the goddess starts to 'belch' – warning of an impending volcanic eruption. Leira's house is almost completely destroyed and she is trapped with her severely injured mother and old nurse, Nunu. Much of their town is also decimated although Leira's father uncovers a puppy in the debris. She names him 'Chance'. The Lady and her novice, Kora, die but Leira's mother, who was next in line for this exalted role, is overlooked because of the brain injury she acquired in the disaster.

Her father realises that sometimes 'even the gods have to change to survive' and plans a sea journey to take the family to Tarmara Town. Leira suspects that there is more behind their departure than she is told.

When life there is no longer safe, Leira leads her old nurse and her incapacitated mother to the larger island of Crete where they become refugees, unable to find adequate food, shelter and work. Leira sinks lower than she would have believed, struggling to find opportunities to ensure their survival, until she finally finds a way to a safe future.

CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

ENGLISH

The suggested English Learning Intentions are from the three strands of the Australian English curriculum.

- Literature: understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature
- Language: knowing about the English language
- Literacy: expanding the repertoire of English usage

The Learning Intentions are either from one strand or integrated strands.

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

- History

THE ARTS

- Visual Arts
- Dance

Learning Intentions are highlighted in shaded boxes at the end of the section to which they refer and are from English, HASS, Visual Arts and Dance.

The majority are for Year 7.

The Australian Curriculum can be downloaded at <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Home> .

ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

ENGLISH

Writing Structure and Style

Stories

The importance of story is highlighted throughout the novel.

After the volcanic eruption, Leira and her friend Pellie share their fraught experiences: 'Our stories become truer, more real, as we tell each other.' (p. 59)

In pairs, students tell each other the story of a traumatic, painful or embarrassing experience that they are comfortable sharing.

In small groups students discuss how telling personal stories can make the experiences become more real to others (and sometimes even to the one who has experienced it) and makes the teller more 'knowable'. For example, when we hear personal refugee stories we are more likely to feel empathy.

Also discuss which attributes about the book's characters and details about their stories (told through the plot and Leira's thoughts) build characterisation and add interest and depth to the novel.

Assessment Task: Human-interest article

- **In pairs**, students read a 'human interest' newspaper or magazine feature about someone who has experienced trauma, e.g. a natural disaster, moving to a new country or facing a serious illness. (Good examples are often found in weekend newspaper magazines available in print form and online.)
- Highlight sections where the story gives insight into the character and emotions of the person.
- **Individually** write a feature in the style of a newspaper or magazine to show how their story is used to build, and give insight into, a person's character and personality. The feature could be based on the student or classmate's personal experience or on someone else from real life.

(See [Black Line Master 1](#) at the end of these teachers notes. The suggestions are a starting point and could be adapted to suit content, style and readership.)

Free Verse

Wendy Orr has stated that writing in free verse enables her to access and portray her protagonist's emotions. Read and list examples of where Leira's emotions are shown in verse such as:

I am more alone,
colder than I've ever been
because I was searching for safety
and I failed.
I am not good enough
to save my Mama,
to help my homeland
or even myself

(p. 187)

Rhythmic writing, which is reflected in some of the free verse while Leira watches and makes pottery, is a feature of the verse. (read pp. 12, 262)

Free verse also provides a contrast to the prose and can extend and move the narrative along more quickly.

Assessment Task: Singing a Story

Song is important in the novel and Leira sings her own story on pages 69–72.

- Students use first person and the author’s free verse style and structure to write their own story. Some rhythmic writing could be incorporated if appropriate to the subject and emotion.
- Like Leira, students incorporate an early memory, a childhood memory and a significant sensory memory from recent times.
- Read the free verse story aloud to the class using appropriate voice effects such as tone, volume, pitch and pace to engage the listeners and assist their understanding and insight into the story.
 - Some students may wish to sing or chant their story to the class.

An example of a free verse or story poem is Mirrah’s *I Reflect as a Modern Woman*, performed in response to ‘The Lady and the Unicorn’ medieval tapestries. This experience was curated by Red Room Poetry as part of the 2018 Sydney Writers’ Festival.

- Poem Script: <https://redroomcompany.org/poem/mirrah/i-reflect-modern-woman/>
- Performance excerpt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=km8mRQC25YA>

N.B An extended version of this performance is being produced but is not available at time of writing these teacher notes.

Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (ACELT1621 - Scootle)

Use interaction skills when discussing and presenting ideas and information, selecting body language, voice qualities and other elements, (for example music and sound) to add interest and meaning (ACELY1804 – Scootle)

Symbols and Images

Swallows

Leira is part of the Swallow Clan from the Island of Swallows. ‘All my life, I’ve thought that being Swallow Clan meant we were safe.’ (p. 155) Swallows are an important symbol in *Swallow’s Dance*. Students find examples of swallows as symbols in the novel. [possible suggestions and page references are in square brackets]

- Swallows may symbolise warmth, spring and life. [Leira’s father said he would return with the swallows in spring, p. 120; the girls are calling the swallows and the maiden home for spring, p. 140; swallows nest and dance, p. 266,267]
- Swallows can be used as omens or foreshadowing. [swallows leaving for winter, p. 5; the swallow vase has gone like the swallows, page 23; the swallows haven’t returned for spring, p. 118; omen, p. 185; Leira dreams she is a lowly snail who loses its shell to fly free as a swallow, p. 216]

Assessment Task:

The oracle prophesies using swallow imagery. The Lady and Leira's father interpret the prophesy differently.

- Students read and interpret the prophesy **before** reading the other interpretations on page 118.

In pain the goddess cries
for the swallow who comes no more
in this dark change
of chaos and death.

Cry the swallows
cry the land
cry the changes to come.

Great mother's pain
labour of childbirth
labour of death;
from her belly
spews the dark.

Swallows flee
swallows fly
swallows come no more
yet live again.

(p.118)

This prophesy could be described as a lament—an expression of great sorrow and grief in poetry or song. (*Shelley's famous 'A Lament' is available as [Black Line Master 2](#) at the end of these notes.*) There is a book in the Bible titled '[Lamentations](#)' and other [poetic](#) laments can be found at Poetry Soup <https://www.poetrysoup.com/famous/poems/lament>.

- What are the features of a lament?
- Students write their own laments after reading a number of laments as models. Include a recurring symbol.

Create literary texts that adapt stylistic features encountered in other texts, for example, narrative viewpoint, structure of stanzas, contrast and juxtaposition ([ACELT1625 – Scootle](#))

Extension Task:

'Chelidon' is a genus of swallows and one of wordsmith Robert MacFarlane's words of the day is 'Chelidonia'. He describes it: 'in Ancient Greek weather-lore, a "swallow-bearing wind"; i.e. a westerly or southwesterly warm spring wind that accompanies (and aids) swallows on their spring migration'.

<https://twitter.com/RobGMacfarlane/status/988296534663024640>

- Students view images of still and moving swallows and animate a still image to represent migrating and returning swallows. [Plotagraph](#) in Adobe Photoshop or other tools could be used.

(A possible swallow image is included as [Black Line Master 3](#) at the end of these notes.)

Language

Complex Sentences

Wendy Orr's sentences in this novel are often quite complex: dense with information, atmosphere and texture; and with numerous colons and semi-colons.

Examples from page 149 include:

'The gods have ended their war, but it's an uneasy peace: ash still falls like rain, and the torn-apart sun never rises.'

'There is food in the kitchens but no one serving; we scavenge and bring it back to our room, keeping out of people's way.'

- Students find other examples of complex sentences from the text.

Leira does not return to the Island of Swallows after it is destroyed in a volcanic eruption.

- Students use their knowledge of the island from the novel and their imaginations to write a description of what the island may look like in the aftermath of further destruction using complex sentences as modelled by the author. Include colons and semi-colons.

An [online tutorial](#) on colons and semi-colons may be helpful.

Understand the use of punctuation to support meaning in complex sentences with prepositional phrases and embedded clauses ([ACELA1532 – Scootle](#))

Recognise and understand that subordinate clauses embedded within noun groups/phrases are a common feature of written sentence structures and increase the density of information ([ACELA1534 - Scootle](#))

HISTORY: THE ANCIENT WORLD

Minoan Civilisation in the Bronze Age

Swallow's Dance is set in the Ancient Greek world in and around Crete.

Many students will not be familiar with the Ancient Crete setting and period in history.

The short video 'Exploring the Lost City of Knossos' gives background to Crete and suggests that it and surrounding islands (the setting of much of *Swallow's Dance*) may have been destroyed by volcanic eruptions and tidal waves (as in the novel) or by invaders.

<http://education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/1479327/>

History writer Mark Cartwright introduces Minoan Crete:

The earliest evidence of habitation on the island goes back to at least 7,000 BCE when settlers from Anatolia arrived but its first recognisable culture was the Minoans who would provide some of antiquity's most recognisable legends, architecture and artworks, as well as going on to influence many subsequent Mediterranean civilizations. The Minoans rose to prominence from around 2000 BCE, and they would be one of the most successful Mediterranean trading cultures of the Bronze Age. Agriculture and trade allowed the formation of large centralised centres at Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, Zakros, and other sites where grand palatial buildings were constructed and local trade was centralised...

<https://www.ancient.eu/crete/>

He continues with reference to the earthquakes and eruptions which are pivotal to the plot of *Swallow's Dance*.

Students of ancient history often depend on artwork that has endured through the centuries.

Because of its durability, Ancient Greek pottery is still able to be viewed in museums and Minoan pottery is of particular importance in revealing information about its people and their lives. It is an important dating tool.

Mark Cartwright says:

The art of the Minoan civilization of Bronze Age Crete (2000-1500 BCE) displays a love of animal, sea, and plant life, which was used to decorate frescoes and pottery and also inspired forms in jewellery, stone vessels, and sculpture. Minoan artists delighted in flowing, naturalistic shapes and designs, and there is a vibrancy in Minoan art which was not present in the contemporary East. Aside from its aesthetic qualities, Minoan art also gives valuable insight into the religious, communal, and funeral practices of one of the earliest cultures of the ancient Mediterranean.

https://www.ancient.eu/Minoan_Art/

Cartwright explains more about Minoan pottery, including the 'Marine Style' that is relevant to an island habitat: <https://www.ancient.eu/article/391/minoan-pottery/>

- Students explore images of early examples of Minoan pottery, for example, replications are shown on this site <http://www.hellenic-art.com/pottery/cre/>
- They discuss why they may have been created and what they represent from Minoan life as shown in *Swallow's Dance*.

Note the representations of island life in the form of marine life, sea creatures and the typical flowing and spiral shapes and lines on the curved surfaces of the pottery to represent the sea.

- Students make and decorate their own pottery in 'Visual Arts' below.

the evidence for the emergence and establishment of ancient societies (including art, iconography, writing tools and pottery) ([ACOKFH002 - Scootle](#))

VISUAL ARTS

Pottery: Swallow Pots

Leira watched Nunu's craft-folk family mixing and pounding red and white soil into clay; rounding balls; pinching out pots; rolling tubes coiled into jars and throwing pots on the wheel on pages 11-12. Her brother Glaucus had swallow pots and purple cloth to trade (p. 123) and her father trades pots and jugs 'decorated with the swallows of our clan' (p. 125).

Leira has some skill and interest in pottery and hopes to find work as a potter when her circumstances deteriorate. At the end of the novel, in almost a mirror-image poem, Leira works the clay herself (pp. 262-4).

- Students make pots (or clay tiles) and use the 'sgraffito' technique to scratch swallow motifs onto their pieces in an aesthetically-pleasing pattern. A stencil could be used.

Sgraffito means 'to scratch' and the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines sgraffito as 'decoration by cutting away parts of a surface layer (as of plaster or clay) to expose a different coloured ground'.

<https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/daily/clay-tools/decorating-tools/three-potters-share-their-best-sgraffito-tips-plus-a-bonus-video/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWbsAO6qb24>

(The image of the swallow in [Black Line Master 3](#) at the end of these notes could be used or adapted.)

Practise techniques and processes to enhance representation of ideas in their art-making ([ACAVAM121 - Scootle](#))

DANCE

Swallow Dance

The swallow dance is a significant part of Leira's community ritual (p. 7). Signalled by the title, dance is an integral part of the novel, particularly towards the end.

- Students read the end of Chapter 18 (p. 266) and Chapter 19, noting the descriptions of swallows dancing. For example:

'That there's a swallow's nest
over the door of our home;
that I've seen swallows dance
in the sky
and hope to see fledglings
in the nest come spring.'

(p. 266)

'we danced like swallows at sunset'

(p. 267)

'Dancing our grief ...
dancing our mourning
till it turns to joy,
and in the midst of the swirling dancers,
the chanting and clapping,
I dance for the swallows ...'

(p. 273)

- Students begin their dance by emulating the movements of the swallows' flight and that of the dancing girls from the novel. They then develop new movements that maintain the essence of these original movements and extend them to form a dance.

Combine elements of dance and improvise by making literal movements into abstract movements ([ACADAM013 - Scootle](#))

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Wendy says:

'The vision for *Swallow's Dance* came from a long fascination with the world of the Minoans in the Aegean Bronze Age, and especially the consequences of the volcanic eruption on Santorini in 1625 BCE – thought to be the largest eruption in human history. During my research for *Dragonfly Song*, my first book set in this era, albeit 200 years later, I discovered so much new research into the disaster that my interest was rekindled. As this was at a time when the refugee crisis in Greece was particularly in the news, I also began to wonder how refugees from the volcano might have been received 4000 years ago – and the story of Leira was sparked.

'I'm very grateful to have received an Australia Council grant to write this book, enabling me travel to Crete and Santorini for research. I spent time with the archaeologist Sabine Beckmann, and, under strict instruction, learned to find stone tools and ancient pot sherds on archaeological sites, and to distinguish Minoan pottery of 2000 BCE from the 1625 BCE era of *Swallow's Dance*. Dr Beckmann, who had excavated at the archaeological site of Gournia, also showed me around the ruins of the ancient town, and pointed out the floor of the pottery workshop, which is still covered in fine soft clay, unlike the rock floors of the rest of the site. When I later discovered a potsherd with the maker's fingerprint captured in the slip, I knew that pottery would be a theme in my story. Under Dr Beckmann's instructions, I also climbed to the summit of the Minoan peak sanctuary of Mt Juktas, and to the depths of the Psychros Cave—experiences which I knew would be key to the story, although, as *Swallow's Song* is fiction, these two locations were merged and moved geographically!

'Visiting Santorini's archaeological site of Akrotiri—the partially excavated town buried under 30 metres of ash—I was sobered to find that, contrary to the earlier theory that the island was evacuated with no loss of life, the latest theories suggest that it was inhabited at the time of the final eruption, and that no one on the island could have possibly survived. (Of course, as the island was a trading nation, a certain number of people would have been travelling and therefore survived, in much the way that I had planned the story). Although my characters are fictitious, they are based on the real people who inhabited this beautiful, sophisticated city, and I was deeply saddened as the revised history took this tragic turn.

'On the other hand, I loved the nerdy joy of studying more and continuing to discuss theories with my archaeologist friend, doing some of my own practical experiments such as taking pottery lessons and following an archaeologist's dress patterns to make Minoan dolls' clothes...

'My first two granddaughters were born during the writing of *Swallow's Dance*, and this made me even more aware of the importance of girls being able to be strong, confident, and secure in their own bodies and body image. The Minoans lived in a very different world to ours, but these are themes that they seem to have believed in, and that I hope can be discerned in this book.'

RESOURCES & FURTHER READING

ONLINE RESOURCES

In the notes above, hyperlinks are included where helpful or where their use is suggested.

FURTHER READING

Dragonfly Song by Wendy Orr is the companion novel to *Swallow's Dance*. It is also set on Ancient Crete.

Nim's Island, *Nim at Sea* and *Rescue on Nim's Island* by Wendy Orr. These novels for children have also been made into movies.

Peeling the Onion by Wendy Orr. A novel for teenagers.

Arabella by Wendy Orr, illustrated by Kim Gamble, is a thoughtful picture book. The illustrations tell the full story.

Oracle by Jackie French traces the escapes of Nikko and mute Thetis in Mycenae in Ancient Greece.

Gods and Warriors by Michelle Paver is set in Bronze Age Mediterranean times.

Pankration by Dyan Blacklock is about a young slave boy who experiences the ancient Olympic Games.

A Single Shard by Linda Sue Park won the Newbery Medal and is about a homeless boy in 12th Century Korea who becomes a potter.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

WENDY ORR

Wendy Orr was born in Canada, and grew up in France, Canada and USA. After high school, she studied occupational therapy in England, married an Australian farmer, and moved to Australia. They had a son and daughter, and now live on five acres of bush near the sea. Her books have won awards in Australia and around the world, and have been translated into twenty-six languages.

Although Wendy first learned to read and write in French, her family spoke English at home. She clearly remembers the excitement of reading a story in her own language for the first time. She immediately started writing stories and poetry. (How thrilled her grandmother must have been to receive a poem on death for her 60th birthday!) She was particularly fascinated by ancient history and mythology, an interest that, like writing, has continued to this day, and finally came to fruition in *Dragonfly Song*, and now with *Swallow's Dance*.

Wendy has had many highlights in her writing career, including winning the Prime Minister's Award for Children's Literature and the CBCA Book of the Year and walking the red carpet with Jodie Foster, who starred in the first Hollywood adaptation of Wendy's Nim books. But Wendy believes that nothing compares to the thrill of the first vision of a new book idea.

Wendy and her husband live on a small bush block in the Mornington Peninsula, south of Melbourne. They built a house and have restored the bush to its natural state as a home for wildlife. Wendy writes in her office overlooking the bush, but two small hairy dogs ensure that she has a walk before and after every day's work.

She writes because it's the best way she knows of to explore ideas and find out what life's about.

Website: <https://www.wendyorr.com/>

JOY LAWN

Joy Lawn is a freelance writer and reviewer for *The Weekend Australian*, *Magpies Magazine*, ALEA and [Boomerang Books](#) blog, specialising in children's/YA and literary fiction. She judges the Prime Minister's Literary awards, the NSW Premier's Literary awards, the CBCA awards and has judged the Queensland Literary awards and others. Joy has taught in schools and universities, has worked for indie bookshops as a literature consultant and has an MA in Children's Literature & Literacy. Joy is fascinated by ideas and images and how authors and illustrators express these with truth and originality.

Features of a human-interest article for an online or print magazine

Photographs Use a good-quality camera if possible to photograph the subject of the feature or use an existing photograph (acknowledge the photographer). Place a large photo of the subject at the beginning of the article. Select glossy colour or edgy black and white to create the appropriate tone. Some smaller photographs or other images could be interspersed throughout the feature. Different sizes add interest but should not overwhelm.

Caption A caption for the photograph may or may not be necessary. The photographer should be acknowledged: 'Photo XXX'.

Headline Choose a headline that draws the reader into the feature story. This could be chosen after writing the article. Use a large, possibly coloured, font for the headline. It could be placed inside a box or as part of a visually interesting geometric or other design. The colour could be taken from the large photograph at the start.

By-line Credit the writer of the article. Appears at top or bottom of article.

Hook The written text should begin with a dramatic or interesting statement or question that will grab the reader's attention.

Background Orientate the reader by providing some background information about the person featured and what they have experienced. Outline what the article will explore, e.g. the person's experiences as a refugee.

Body A magazine feature may have short paragraphs. In each paragraph write about one idea. Use descriptions, examples and quotes from the subject where appropriate. Try to engage the reader's curiosity and empathy by including interesting information and heartfelt experiences and responses from the subject.

Blockquotes Use blockquotes as well as photographs to break up blocks of written text. These are short quotes from the text that highlight interesting ideas or summarise important points. Format these differently from the main text using change of font type and colour.

Conclusion End with a well-formed summary of the subject's experience, how they have faced it and how they may move into the future.

Design Position the text and visual elements in a clean design that grabs the attention of the reader and then leads them through the information.

A Lament (O world! O life! O time!)

O world! O life! O time!
On whose last steps I climb,
Trembling at that where I had stood before;
When will return the glory of your prime?
No more -- Oh, never more!

Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight;
Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
No more -- Oh, never more!

— *Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1821*
(this poem is in the public domain)

Percy Bysshe Shelley was one of the major English Romantic poets, and is regarded by some as among the finest lyric poets in the English language, and one of the most influential.

—[Wikipedia](#)

BLM 3: Swallow template

