



Teachers' Notes

Dinosaur Knights

Michael Gerard Bauer

OMNIBUS BOOKS

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Introduction

The opening in the forest before them was an eerie jumble of shapes and shadows ... Roland and Oswald scanned the shadows of the clearing, constantly finding imaginary monsters in the bulky bushes and arching tree limbs.

Then they saw a real one.

Somewhere in the future a scientist is conducting the experiment of his life – stretching time to bring a living dinosaur to the present. But the giant prehistoric beast is stranded in the Middle Ages. There, a boy desperate to be a knight and his unwilling brother must face their fear and do battle.

About the Author

Michael Gerard Bauer was born in Brisbane. He taught at schools in the Brisbane–Ipswich region before resigning from teaching to pursue his dream of being a published writer. *The Running Man* was winner of the CBCA Book of the Year (Older Readers) award, and shortlisted in both the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards and the Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards in 2005. In 2006 *The Running Man* was shortlisted for the SA Festival Awards for Literature. In 2008 it won the prestigious German literature prize, the *Katholischer Kinder- und Jugendbuchpreis* and was shortlisted for the *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis* readers’ section award.

Michael’s second book, *Don’t Call Me Ishmael!*, was shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year Awards and the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards in 2007, selected for ‘The White Ravens 2007’ exhibition at the Bologna Book Fair, and won its category in the Children’s Peace Literature Award in 2007 and the SA Festival Awards for Literature in 2008. The sequel, *Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs*, was a notable book in the CBCA 2007 Book of the Year Awards.

Note on the Text

Michael Gerard Bauer’s latest novel is a thrilling adventure story based on the theory that dragon myths developed from the discovery of dinosaur bones. Bauer displays a gift for

clever storytelling, weaving together plots from past and present that intersect in dramatic style. His writing is fast-paced and exciting; each chapter builds to a suspenseful close. The drama is heightened by characterisation – his likeable heroes and despicable villains leap off the page. The sensitive portrayal of the dinosaur adds conviction to the narrative.

Before Reading the Text

Scientific procedures in *Dinosaur Knights* are based on Einstein's theories. It might be a good idea to familiarise yourself with these before reading. For information, visit < <http://whyfiles.org/052einstein/> >.

Reading the Text

Part One

Class Discussion: first impressions

Read the initial chapters together as a class and talk about your impressions. *Dinosaur Knights* is a science-fiction novel with historical elements. How familiar are you with this genre and how does *Dinosaur Knights* compare with other time-travel stories you have read? Consider what makes a good science-fiction book. What are common science fiction conventions? How hard is it to create an original science-fiction story? Discuss how authors make these concepts plausible.

Research Task: creating a newspaper article

Murdo McCormick is an investigative journalist and has been invited to write a story on the Professor's invention. Imagine that like Murdo you write for a living. Choose something from the book that immediately interests you – palaeontology, the Middle Ages, knights, time travel – and gather information on this topic for the purpose of presenting your findings as a newspaper article. As you research your topic, consider a particular angle that makes it news-worthy. In order to create a piece suitable for a newspaper, select an existing article from your local newspaper and analyse the structure, language, content and heading. Drawing on this information, construct a plan for your own article. Imagine your story has been chosen for the front page and present your final piece in this format. Attach your newspaper analysis that demonstrates your understanding of reporting techniques and

shows how you've applied them in your own article. For more information to help prepare your article visit <http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/handouts/broadcast_news/news_article_formula.cfm>.

Literacy Component: keeping a journal

Start a response journal to *Dinosaur Knights*. To begin, include a character chart where you map characters' relationships and keep a record of everyone in the story, and start a word bank where you keep a record of unfamiliar words you encounter in the text. As you progress through the novel, take note of your impressions and observations. You could include chapter summaries, comments on things that interest you, what you think is successful or what you think doesn't work, speculations about the plot, thoughts on characterisation etc.

Part Two

Class Discussion: working in the Middle Ages

- 1) William O'Dale is a physician. Unlike our doctors, he doesn't have access to today's medical knowledge; instead, he has to experiment with natural elements to test their healing powers. This is dangerous, and the results are physically and socially detrimental. At what point should we consider stopping these types of experiments? Consider to what extent you would experiment to advance science.
- 2) Roland dreams of becoming a knight because he feels it is a heroic vocation. Do you agree with his assessment of knighthood? In your opinion, is it a worthy career? What do you consider a modern-day equivalent?

Research Task: winning a grant for your invention

Divide into teams of four people. Professor Shaw has invented a machine that can stretch time, allowing something from the past to be pulled into the present. To achieve this he needed financial backers. Imagine you are one of a group of scientists and have come up with an original idea. In order to proceed, you need to obtain a grant that will finance your project. Research your idea as much as you are able. Remember, the purpose of gathering information is to find material that can be used to argue your case. Gather statistics and valid information for why you should be allowed to make your invention and why there is an urgent need for it, determine what materials you will need, and compare its usefulness to other inventions. You will use this information to present a proposal to the class. Make sure

that you incorporate visual tools to help the audience understand your ideas. You can display either a model of your invention (made from recycled materials) or a poster of your invention's design. A panel of judges (made up of your classmates) will decide which invention is the winner.

For information on how to construct your proposal see the *How to Write a Proposal* sheet.

Literacy Component: arguing your case

- 1) Consider this statement: bringing living things forward in time is a good idea. In five hundred words argue *for* or *against* this assertion. Remember the idea is to convince the reader that you are right, so use persuasive words and construct a clear and coherent argument. It would be sensible to plan your argument first to ensure your ideas flow logically.
- 2) Make sure you continue to write in your journal. These observations and summaries will be useful when it comes to writing an evaluation piece on *Dinosaur Knights*.

Part Three

Class Discussion: characterisation

- 1) Lady Cristiana is the only female lead in *Dinosaur Knights*. What do you think of her character and her role in the story? Do you believe the author has accurately portrayed a female from the Middle Ages? Do you think other characters are accurately represented? Is historical accuracy important in a novel like this?
- 2) Who or what is the hero of *Dinosaur Knights*? Can a book have more than one hero?

Research Task: origins of popular myths

Dinosaur Knights is based on the premise that dragon myths arose from dinosaur bone discoveries. Some palaeontologists share this belief, citing the similarities found in European and Chinese folklore to the dinosaur *Dracorex*, which has a long muzzle and spiky horns, but there are other views too. One is that no relationship exists between the two, and another is that any discovery of bones merely perpetuated an already existing belief. Choose a popular mythological creature to investigate (such as vampires, werewolves, zombies, fairies, goblins) and once you've gathered information, speculate on what has caused these myths to evolve. Do some experience surges in popularity? Are others specific to certain regions?

You may like to work in teams, and if your class has access to a video camera, you could record your findings as if you were on a documentary show.

Literacy Component: creative writing

- 1) Create a short story that involves characters reacting to something unnatural occurring in their environment (like a knight arriving in today's world).
- 2) Imagine you live in the village near the forest where the dinosaur is hiding. Write a letter to a relative telling of the strange events.

After Reading the Text

Class Discussion: final thoughts

What are your thoughts on finishing *Dinosaur Knights*? Did the book meet your expectations? What did you like about it? Where there any parts you disliked? Do you think the ending was satisfactory?

Literacy Component: reviewing the book

Write a book review of *Dinosaur Knights* analysing the book's merit. You may like to find examples of book reviews to study the structure. When evaluating *Dinosaur Knights* consider the following elements:

- Plot
- Setting – what roles do atmosphere and mood play?
- Characterisation (Are the characters flat or round? What are their motivations, relationships? Who are the heroes/heroines?)
- Narrative (What type of narration, point of view, tone is used?)
- Significance of style, language – is the language formal or colloquial? What sort of devices does the text use: metaphor, symbolism, motifs, imagery or allusions?
- Structure (How many chapters are there? Is the story told chronologically?)
- Pace
- What is the book's climax?
- Consider the significance of the opening and ending – how effective are they?
- Was the book predictable?
- What are the themes, issues or concerns?
- Does the book have a message or a moral? (What is its contemporary or historical relevance?)

- Who is the intended readership?
- What is the significance of the book's title?
- What is the book's genre?
- The significance of the author (What have they previously written?)

You won't need to discuss all of these in writing your report; choose the ones you believe are most relevant.

Extension Activities

- 1) Design a new cover for the novel that you think would be relevant to the story and attractive to potential readers. Either in a talk or a written response, explain and justify the features of your design to the publishers.
- 2) Explain how each of Einstein's quotations is relevant to what happens in the sections they introduce.
- 3) Choose a scene from the novel and write a script to act out as a group or in pairs. The scene might be presented as a live performance in class or as a film.
- 4) Prepare a monologue as one of the characters from the novel. Try to reveal your chosen character's personality and thoughts and feelings about particular events and people in the story.
- 5) Select a scene or section from the novel and present it as a storyboard or as a graphic novel with words and pictures.
- 6) Chose an incident or a chapter and rewrite it from the point of view of one of the other characters involved.
- 7) If you liked *Dinosaur Knights*, write and tell Michael Gerard Bauer why. Or if someone in your class comes up with a question about the book that no one can answer, write and ask him about it. Don't forget to include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply. You can address your letter to the following address:

Michael Gerard Bauer c/- Omnibus Books, 335 Unley Rd, Malvern SA 5061

How to Write a Proposal

Divide your proposal into four sections.

1) Project Overview

This summarises your ideas (you don't have to go into great detail here, as you'll do that later). This overview should paint a picture in your listeners' minds of what you intend to do. It's a good idea to write this last, as it outlines everything in your proposal.

2) Background Information

Here you will demonstrate why your proposal is needed and who it is needed by. This is where you can show your research. Make sure you present a compelling case. After all, you are trying to persuade someone to fund you!

3) Project Details

This is where you outline your goals and objectives: what you want to achieve and the expected outcomes, what you need to achieve it, and how you will go about achieving it.

4) Conclusion

Wrap up your argument and reinforce key points.