

# Connections

with  
**T.A. Barron**

A TEACHER'S GUIDE  
to  
**THE ANCIENT ONE**  
by *T. A. Barron*

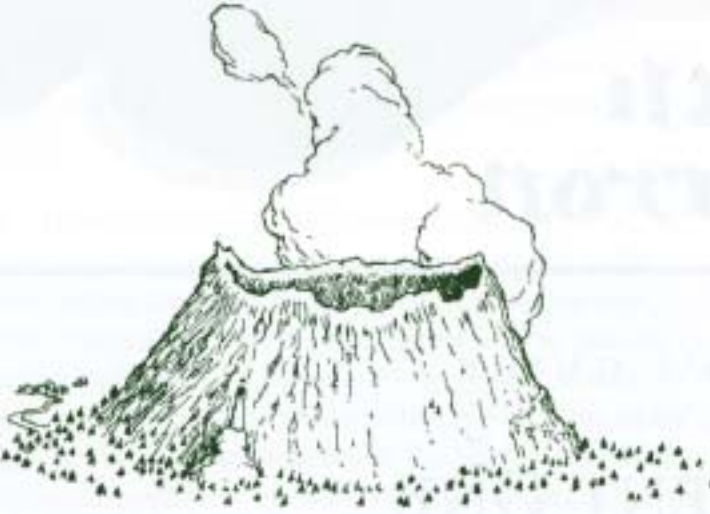


"This book is about connections. Connections across time, space, culture, belief—and even species. In writing *The Ancient One*, I did everything I could to build bridges,



some in surprising places. Throughout Kate's quest, I am asking: Are we all connected somehow? Are we all linked to each other in ways we don't always understand?"  
- T. A. Barron

# THE ANCIENT ONE



**T**he *Ancient One* takes place in two different times—one of them centuries ago among a vanished Native American tribe in the Pacific Northwest, and the other in a modern-day logging town in Oregon. The two times are mysteriously connected by the life of a single living being, a great redwood tree whose life stretches across the centuries. Even in the days of the Native Americans, this tree was so old that they called it "the ancient one." Kate and a young man named Jody enter a strange place called Lost Crater and find themselves thrown back in time. Together, they must learn to communicate with each other—no easy task. Then they must unravel a half-remembered riddle and defeat an evil force of volcanic power. And they must complete their quest before the ancient redwood tree is cut down, for that would destroy the link between the two times—and strand them in the past forever.

## Connecting with the meaning

NOTE: In discussing these issues with students, responses could take many forms other than a large group discussion. Activities such as small group discussions, panel debates, persuasive speeches, and role playing should be encouraged.

1. Prior to reading *The Ancient One*, discuss with students the many different kinds of gaps that can separate people. Have students arrange the following

kinds of gaps in order of least to most difficult to bridge: Gaps in age, knowledge, language, culture, background, political beliefs, religious beliefs, power, species, location in space, location in time. Let students defend their ratings. Then, after finishing the book, let students review their lists. How would Kate arrange her list? Have them compare their lists to the one they think Kate would create. If there are differences, what causes them?

2. Ask students to read each statement and place an X at the point on the scale that reflects their feelings. Then ask students to defend their ratings.

1   2   3   4   5  
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Disagree                  Agree

- Aunt Melanie knew, at the beginning of the story that Kate would be traveling back in time.
- Kate was wrong to sacrifice the Stick of Fire to save one person since the Stick could have kept an entire civilization alive.
- Kandeldandel acted out of guilt rather than bravery.
- Chief Solosing de Notnot's choice to not repair the broken Touchstone was a good choice.

3. Reproduce the following scale. Then have students read each of the statements and mark their response for each statement on the scale. They should explain their marking by using passages from the book as support.

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SD                  D                  A                  SA

SD = Strongly Disagree      D = Disagree  
SA = Strongly Agree          A = Agree

- Power is a dangerous thing.
- The needs of an individual are more important than the needs of the group.
- Endangered wildlife and nature should be protected even at the cost of putting people out of jobs.

4. On page 225, Jody defines courage when he says "The best part was when he had the guts to stand up there and say he was gonna try. To take a risk. In front of everybody. That took real courage." In Jody's mind, courage is the willingness to take a risk. Ask students if they agree. Is all risk-taking courageous? Have them give examples of when it, is and isn't. Presuming that Jody's definition of courage is accurate, let students rate the amount of courage shown by Kate, Jody, Laioni, the town's loggers, Kandeldandel, and Aunt Melanie on the following scale.



5. Kate worries about Laioni's reaction when she learns that Kate sacrificed the Stick of Fire. Kate wonders if Laioni will resent her for valuing her life above everything else. Why might Laioni resent her? Would the resentment come from anger or guilt? What might Laioni feel guilty about? Did Kate make a wise choice'?

6. "Knowing she faced certain defeat somehow liberated her deepest reserve of courage" (p. 264). Explain this thought of Kate's. What do some people do when faced with certain defeat? What does Kate's choice tell readers about Kate? How would other characters in this book react to certain defeat? Have students reflect on their own tendencies. What do they do when facing defeat?

### Connecting with literary elements

1. Kate faces multiple conflicts throughout the book. However, not, all the conflicts involve person against, person, such as Kate against the evil Gashra. There are also many examples of person against nature and, more importantly, person against, him or her self. Have students identify where these other major conflicts take place in the book. Which conflicts are the most difficult for Kate? Does any one conflict represent a turning point for her? Which conflicts can be removed from the story and not change the story? Which ones cannot be removed? What is the purpose of conflict in any story?

2. Tell students that this book is to be made into a two-part, movie and they need to decide the following:

a. Which chapters should be turned into movie scenes? In other words, which parts of the book must be kept for the story to make sense?

b. At what, point would you end part one? Remember to provide a cliffhanger to end part one.

3. Quest fantasies have the following types of characters: the protagonist who is trying to accomplish an impossible looking task; the antagonist who is trying to block the protagonist; the outside positive force who offers important assistance to the hero or heroine. Which characters play those roles in this book?

4. "Wait long enough and fantasy becomes reality" (p. 152). Though this book has elements that obviously won't become true, as with all good fantasy, it does contain truths. What are those elements of truth found in this book? Why does a fantasy need to have truth? How can fantasy become real for readers?

5. Have students discuss how the following changes in point of view alter the story.

- Kate tells the story from first person point of view.
- Kate and Jody tell the story from first person in alternating chapters.
- Gashra tells the story from first person.

6. Have students choose what they consider to be the single most important word in the book. They should prepare a list of reasons that defends their choice. In small groups, let students share their selections. As responses will differ from reader to reader, give students time to reflect upon each other's choices. As a large group, list all the words chosen. Help students to see that the words capture the ideas Barron is trying to get across to the readers, or in other words, the themes of the novel.

7. An author's style, his selection and arrangement of words, can in part, lie studied by looking at, what figurative language devices he uses. These devices include simile, metaphor, and personification. Review these terms with students, then break them into groups so they can find examples of these devices.

### Connecting with composition

I. Parts of this book could easily be rewritten as articles for a newspaper. Have students identify the parts of the book that would make interesting

editorials, letters to the editor, lead articles, human interest stories, want ads, weather news. Then have students rewrite those parts and create a newspaper that uses *The Ancient One* as the source of the news.

2. Aunt Melanie believes in the preservation of forests. Have students write a persuasive speech that Aunt Melanie would present to a town meeting on this topic.

3. Have students identify passages important to them. Let them choose one passage and look at the idea behind that passage. For instance the passage "The Chieftain believed it was better for the Tinnanis to live without the Touchstone's full power than to risk its falling into the hands of the Wicked One again" (p. 180) is really a comment on the dangers of power. After students have identified an idea that comes from their selected passage, have them write a critical essay that discusses the idea and uses that passage as support for their comments.

4. Many wonderful poems about nature exist. Bring in some of the following collections: *North of Boston, Poems* by Robert Frost; *We Animals* edited by Nadya Aisenberg; *Earth, Air, Fire, and Water* edited by Barbara Brenner; Wordsworth's poems about the English countryside. Let students look through the books and select a poem they would use as an introduction to this book. If students don't find a poem they like, encourage them to write their own.

5. Barron says this book is about connections. Have students write a paper that explores the connections that exist in this book. Why are those connections important? What would happen without those connections?

6. Part of this book explores the very timely issue of forest destruction through logging. Let students spend some time in the library looking at recent articles on this issue. Make sure students look at both the economic sides of the logging industry as well as the environmental consequences. Then let students share their information through persuasive writing, such as a letter to the editor, or creative writing, such as an informational book for younger children to introduce them to these issues.

## Connecting with T. A. Barron

"Writing allows me to explore, whoever and whatever I choose. It's taken me back in time, to a distant galaxy, to the place where the sea begins. Best of all, though, writing is a way to explore the biggest questions of life. Not to find the answers, perhaps, but to do some thoughtful exploring of the questions.

"I write all the time: when I'm traveling, going for a hike with my kids, even sleeping. I always write the first draft with a blue felt pen and a pad of paper. And I do lots of rewrites. Most of my novels take six or seven full rewrites and two years to finish. I do extensive research for my books. If I as a writer am going to convince you as a reader to come with me to some fantastic place or time, I must first win your trust. The only two ways to do that are to engage every one of your senses fully, and to do my research. Then my story can come alive. Truly alive."

## Other Books in this Series

**Heartlight**, Tor Books (paperback) 1995; Putnam (hardcover) 1990

**The Merlin Effect**, Tor Books (paperback) 1996; Putnam (hardcover) 1994



Study guides for these books are also available.

Study guides for T. A. Barron's books were written by Dr. Kyleen Beers. She teaches children's and young adult literature at Sam Houston State University in Texas.