



Pharaoh

The Boy Who Conquered the Nile

Jackie French

Teaching notes prepared by Christine Sarandis

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Book Description

Prince Narmer is fourteen and, as his father's favourite, destined to be King of Thisis, one of the towns along the River, the only world he knows.

But Narmer is betrayed by his brother, and mauled by a crocodile. Now lame and horribly scarred, he is less than perfect and no longer the Golden One. His brother Hawk will be King of Thisis. And rather than remain as Hawk's Vizier, Narmer decides to leave his home and take his chances with the mysterious Trader and the crippled Nitho, whose healing skills have saved his life.

Now Narmer must face the desert, and the People of the Sand as well as the challenges in Ur, the largest and most advanced city in the world of 5,000 years ago. Here Narmer learns of farming, irrigation, tamed donkeys and carts with wheels. Most of all, he learns what it means to be a true king and leader.

Ages 10-14

Jackie French Biography

Jackie French is a full-time writer who lives in rural New South Wales. Jackie writes fiction and non-fiction for children and adults, and has columns in the print media. Jackie is regarded as one of Australia's most popular children's authors. Her books for children include: *Rain Stones*, shortlisted for the Children's Book Council Children's Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers, 1991; *Walking the Boundaries*, a Notable Book in the CBC Awards, 1994; and *Somewhere Around the Corner*, an Honour Book in the CBC Awards, 1995. *Hitler's Daughter* won the CBC Younger Readers Award in 2000 and a UK National Literacy Association WOW! Award in 2001. *How to Guzzle Your Garden* was also shortlisted for the 2000 CBC Eve Pownall Award for Information Books and in 2002 Jackie won the ACT Book of the Year Award for *In the Blood*. In 2003, *Diary of a Wombat* was named an Honour Book in the CBC Awards and winner of the 2002 NielsenBookData/ Australian Booksellers Association Book of the Year - the only children's book ever to have won such an award. More recently, in 2005 *To the Moon and Back*, which Jackie co-wrote with her husband, Bryan Sullivan, won the CBC Eve Pownall Award for Information Books and *Tom Appleby, Convict Boy, My Dad the Dragon* and *Pete the Sheep* were also named Notable Books. Jackie writes for all ages - from picture books to adult fiction - and across all genres - from humour and history to science fiction.

Characters

Prince Narmer	Fenotup the baker	Simo
King Scorpion of Thinis	Nithotep or Nitho	Thammer
Prince Hawk	Bast the wildcat	Marduk the trader
Seknut	The Trader – later	Kuumas
Berenib, Princess of Yebu	known as Father	Akkadians
People of the Sand	Nammu	People of Salour
People of Yebu	Porto, Nid and Jod, the porters	Nabat the carpenter
		Sithentoe the potter

Themes

Discuss the main themes of the book and their significance.

Early civilization – lifestyle related themes including wealth creation, leadership issues, crafts, food and recipes, housing, clothing, language, shelter, medicines and remedies

Themes relevant to the characters – friendship, courage, loyalty, responsibility, trust, vision, determination, personal and social development, adventure

Locations

The Endless Desert, Thinis, Yebu, Min, Ka'naan, Sumer, Punt, the Great Blue, Khorassan, Temple of Ianna, Ur, the Euphrates River, the Tigris River, Temple of Nanna, Uruk, Eridu, Kish, Akkadia, Temple of Horus

Gods

Hapi, God of the River's flood

Ra, the sun god

Osiris, god of the Underworld

Hathor, the cow goddess

Horus, falcon god of the sky

Seth, the god of storm, war and violence

Ianna, goddess of wisdom and war and all growing things

Before Reading

The maps

Study the maps at the front of the book and discuss the differences between the two. In the first map from Narmer's time, note the locations and relevant attributes such as proximity to water for each kingdom described in the book. Then compare this map with the second and note the changes that occurred in the land formations or settlements over time.

Notes at the back of the book

Ask the children to read the four sections including Author's Note, Notes on the Text, Life in Narmer's Egypt and A Very Quick History of the Middle East. Alternatively, these could be read together as a class. After reading, discuss the points that are relevant to the story such as the accuracy of the historical information as well as the definitions of people, places and lifestyle issues such as medicines and food.

After Reading

Activities for Students

1. Summarise the main points of the story.
Ask the class to work in small groups to create a timeline of the events in the story. Their method of presentation might include a pictorial map, a written timeline or a PowerPoint presentation. They could present their summary to the rest of the class.
2. To reinforce the order of events, the following list could be photocopied, cut into strips and placed in an envelope. Students could then work in teams of about 4 to place the events in the correct order. **Please note:** Numbering is for teacher use only and should be removed prior to distributing to the class.

1) We meet Narmer in his kingdom and learn that despite being the youngest of the king's sons, he has been chosen as heir.
2) Namer meets the Oracle and hears some predictions for his future.
3) Narmer meets the Trader and his translator.
4) The Oracle is revealed as the disfigured female translator of the Trader and she tells her story of survival.
5) Late one night, Hawk directs his brother Narmer to a possible hippopotamus intrusion, but instead is attacked by a crocodile and suffers horrendous injuries. His chances of being King are destroyed.
6) The Trader and Nitho return to help heal Narmer's wounds.
7) Narmer realises that his brother Hawk has orchestrated his accident in order to depose him.
8) The King accepts Narmer's decision to forfeit his place as heir.
9) Berenib marries Hawk, the new heir to the throne.
10) Narmer feels depressed about his future, but once he makes the decision to leave his home and travel with the Trader, it leads to a sense of freedom, of no longer being tied to Thisis.
11) The Trader agrees to let Narmer accompany him.
12) The trading party head towards Punt for myrrh.
13) The traders meet the People of the Sand and Narmer tests his trading skills – he successfully trades some of the ointment

used to cure his wounds for water.
14) A sand storm engulfs the traders.
15) During the storm the trader's gold disappears, perhaps buried in the sand; but all is not lost for as a friend of the Queen of Punt, the Trader will be able to borrow myrrh with which to trade.
16) The Trader's hopes of borrowing goods from the Queen are dashed when they arrive in Punt and find that she is dying.
17) The Trader realises that if the Queen dies or is replaced, he will be unlikely to receive the riches he hoped to borrow.
18) The Trader offers to remove the Queen's growth. If he fails and the Queen dies, he and his companions will be killed.
19) In return for saving the Queen's life, the Trader is showered with riches and Nitho and Narmer receive amulets as gifts.
20) The Trader's party travel to Sumer under the protection of the Queen's guards.
21) Arrival in Sumer. The travellers take their riches to the Temple of Nanna for safe-keeping. For the first time, Narmer feels really alone in this new land, but he is soon introduced by the Trader as his son.
22) Narmer learns from a trader that there is warring amongst the river folk. He suddenly realises that he cannot forget his past and as Prince of Thisis, must return home.
23) Narmer, Nitho and two of the porters leave Ur and travel towards Narmer's homeland.
24) On his approach to Thisis, Narmer is shocked to discover the town in ruins and almost deserted.
25) Narmer learns that his father has died in battle.
26) Hawk is alive but destitute. He reveals that his wife betrayed him by alerting her own people to the partial collapse of Thisis's walls after a flood.
27) Narmer resolves to rescue his people from Yebu and rebuild the kingdom of Thisis.
28) Once in Min, Narmer offers the King the chance of peace and riches in exchange for an army. The King reluctantly agrees.
29) Hawk saves Narmer from a potential crocodile attack.
30) A kind of truce is reached between Hawk and Narmer.
31) During the battle, Hawk saves Narmer.
32) The battle ends when Narmer forces the King of Min into an alliance under Thisis.
33) Hawk dies during battle.
34) Narmer's vision is to see the entire river united, trading and working as one country, a land of peace and prosperity. Each town will have its own King and Narmer will be Pharaoh, with Nitho as his Queen.

3. Write a book review to share your interpretations of the novel. Share your views on the characters and character development, plot and resolution.
4. Imagine you are one of the characters in the novel – write and give a short speech describing who you are, where you live and the characteristics of a typical day in your life.

5. Dramatise a scene from the novel such as the one in which Nitho pretends to be an Oracle and speaks to the young Prince Narmer.
6. Choose one of the following topics to research and present in project form to the class. It might take the form of a large poster or booklet. Topics include: Life in the year 3000 BCE - farming, trade, food, clothing, medicines, or crafts.
7. Create an artistic interpretation of Narmer's palace and kingdom or the palace and kingdom of Punt. You might paint, collage or draw your interpretation or make a 3 dimensional structure depicting one of the palaces. Possible medium include some form of modelling material such as clay, polystyrene, cardboard boxes and etc. (Refer to the palace descriptions in Chapters 2, 17)
8. Create and share an Egyptian feast including the foods enjoyed by Royalty in Narmer's time. Include the recipes on pp 256-258. Students might also like to dress in traditional costumes for the feast.
9. Create a project on another period of Egyptian history and compare it with Narmer's time.
10. Design and make an outfit similar to those worn by one of the characters in the novel. For some great creative classroom art activities including instructions on how to make an Egyptian headband, collar, costume, amulets, bracelets and more, please refer to the following websites.
http://www.daniellesplace.com/html/egyptian_crafts.html
<http://www.dragonstrike.com/egypt/cloth.htm>
http://www.eternalegypt.org/EternalEgyptWebsiteWeb/HomeServlet?ee_website_action_key=action.display.module&story_id=&module_id=220&language_id=1
11. Re-read the section on the clay tablet used to record the details of the goods left with the priests for safe-keeping by the Trader. (Refer p. 162) Make a clay tablet and after reference to the following website, create some marks indicating a tally of some items of value such as gold and myrrh.
<http://www.cdli.ucla.edu/index.html>
12. Visit the National Gallery or Museum in your state and view some of the ancient Egyptian relics on display. It might also be possible to go on a guided school tour allowing students to explore the civilizations of ancient Egypt.
13. Gods and amulets - Find out about the Egyptian gods, what they signified and their different attributes. Make an item of ancient Egyptian jewellery that can be worn by both men and women. Design an amulet to wear around the neck which would do one of the following things: Give strength and protection to a trader, protect and bring luck to a hunter on a hunting trip, stop a King or Queen from dying young, or produce a good harvest.
14. Use an overhead projector to cast pupils' profiles onto the bottom of a sheet of paper, and get a friend to draw around the shadow. Ask pupils to draw an ancient Egyptian headpiece or crown on the head. Draw round the silhouette on black paper, and then cut out and decorate with metallic paints, paper and crayons. Don't forget to add make-up!
15. Everyday life - Decide what job you would have liked to do in Narmer's time – describe it and explain your choice.
16. How relevant are the issues and challenges that Narmer and his people faced to our life today? (Issues include the need for resources such as food and water, land ownership and political power.)
17. Art and writing - Make a relief for the classroom wall. Roll out some clay and cut out tile shapes. Impress or carve images onto the clay. Alternatively the class could work together to draw or paint a frieze (picture story) depicting scenes from Narmer's time.

18. Draw up a table to compare the main differences between Thinis and Punt and then discuss the implications of these differences on the way of life of each kingdom. (See below for example.)

THINIS	PUNT
Ruled by a King	Ruled by a Queen
River kingdom	Seaside kingdom
Run by men	Run by women
Wealth is gold	Wealth is myrrh

Suggested discussion points

Historical Fiction

- What role can historical fiction play in revealing the life of ancient civilizations?
- How does historical fiction differ from the true facts of history?
- Is it always possible for an author to present the true facts of history when writing fiction? (Please refer to the author's notes at the back of the novel.)
- What differences are there in our understanding of history after reading factual and fictional accounts?
- Choose and discuss the effectiveness of other works of historical fiction written by Jackie French and other authors of this genre.

Historical research

- The 'ancient Egypt' most of us think about is the Egypt of the pyramids or Cleopatra - and with 'Pharaoh' Jackie French is writing about 5,000 years ago, a time that was 'ancient' even to Ramses or Imhotep. No popular history books give much information about this time. Below are some of the sources of information that Jackie used. See if your students can suggest others.
- Tomb inscriptions, like the Narmer Palette
- Articles in New Scientist magazine that cover new scientific discoveries, like the recent satellite surveys, that stunned the archaeological world by showing traces of the ancient highways between Egypt and Ur in what's now Iraq, and the images carved into cliffs in the deserts near Egypt that give clues about how middle east became drier 5,000 years ago, and how nomads moved to the villages along the great rivers like the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates. In your search of the New Scientist index you will also find articles in the secrets revealed in the DNA of wheat, goats, cats, camels and other animals and plants domesticated by humans that give us a glimpse of possibly the most fascinating time in history, as humans learned to farm, to build cities and complex societies
- Search 'ancient Egypt, Ur and Mesopotamia' on the ABC web site.
- 'google' for information on any of the topics above, but be wary - much of the information that will come up is out of date, or just wrong. Only accept information from sources that you can trust, like universities and archeological reports, though most of these may not be easy reading!

Character questions

Discuss and create a brief overview of one of the following characters and then discuss the relationship between any two listed below.

- Narmer and his father the King
- Narmer and his brother Hawk
- Narmer and Nitho

- Nitho and the Trader
- The Trader and Narmer
- Narmer and the people of Thinis

Narmer

- How is the reader positioned to respond to Narmer at the beginning, middle and end of the novel? How does he develop and change throughout? Which experiences and relationships influence these changes?
- Describe the circumstances surrounding Narmer's accident and write about its many repercussions for him and his family, his acquaintances and his kingdom?
- Why did Narmer forfeit his position as heir? How difficult might this decision have been to make? How did his father respond?
- Compare and contrast Narmer's lifestyle and future prospects before and soon after his accident. Make a list of all the ways in which his life was different afterwards? Discuss whether his life was better or worse as a result of the accident.
- What were some of the ingredients in Narmer's treatment? How do these compare with the kind of treatments used today? (refer Chapter 9)
- What characteristics are necessary to be a great ruler? Do you think Narmer demonstrated these attributes throughout the story? If so, how and in what ways? Give examples.
- How did Narmer's experiences after his accident prepare him to be a king and rule the people of Thinis or a larger united kingdom?

Hawk

- What sort of person was Hawk? Did he have reason to be jealous of his younger brother? Explain.
- Despite the fact that his own choices have had catastrophic results for many people, Hawk believes that he was deposed by his brother. How did this belief affect his relationship with his brother, his actions and his reign as king?
- How did Hawk change after Narmer found him in hiding upon his return to the ruined Thinis?
- Before his death in the battle of Yebu, did Hawk redeem himself in any way? Give reasons for your answers.

Nitho

- How did Narmer and Nitho meet?
- Describe the way in which she originally tricked him.
- How effective was Nitho's pretence to be the oracle?
- Discuss Nitho's need to dress and present herself as a boy for much of the novel. How did this alter Narmer's perception of her once he realised that she was a girl?
- Describe Narmer and Nitho's friendship. How might their like circumstances have led them to an understanding or empathy for one another?
- Describe or illustrate the scene in which Nitho takes a very active role in the battle at Yebu near the end of the novel.
- Refer back to the scenes in which Nitho pretends to be the oracle. Which of her predictions for Narmer's future are realised during the novel?
- Discuss the development of Narmer and Nitho's relationship through from their initial meeting to their eventual decision to marry.

The Trader

- What do we learn about the Trader when we are first introduced to him?
- What sort of person is he?
- How did he influence the lives of Nitho and Narmer and what sort of role model was he?
- In what ways did he behave like a father to both Nitho and Narmer before declaring them to be his children near the end of the novel?

For Teachers

Chapter summaries

The information in this section may be used by teachers as discussion starters or simply for reference purposes.

Chapter 1

The Season of Flood (Early Autumn)

- Narmer is his father's heir – he and the king are responsible for the land's Ma'at or wellbeing.
- An oracle brings Narmer advice from the gods. The Oracle predicts Narmer's future.

Chapter 2

- Narmer returns home to meet the Trader from across the Endless Desert.

Chapter 3

- Narmer reflects on the fact that if he were in Hawks' position, he would find it hard to accept the King's decision to make him heir.
- The Trader tells a strange tale and reveals his purpose for travelling.

Chapter 4

- Narmer meets the oracle again.

Chapter 5

- Narmer meets Nithotep or Nitho, the Trader's female translator and servant. He learns the story of her past.
- Narmer is introduced to Bast the wildcat, Nitho's loyal companion.
- Nitho explains why she pretended to be the oracle.

Chapter 6

- The King commands Narmer not to hunt alone.
- The King explains the importance of his role as King and how he is like a bridge between the people and the gods.

Chapter 7

- The Trader presents his goods to the King and Nitho reveals her knowledge of the King's goldmine.
- Narmer strikes a hard and clever bargain with the Trader.
- Narmer ponders the fact that he won't see Nitho again after tomorrow.

Chapter 8

- Hawk appears somehow different to Narmer when he comes to tell him about a hippopotamus during the night.

- Narmer is attacked by the crocodile. The last thing he remembers is a strange smile on his brother's face.

Chapter 9

- The Trader and Nitho return to attend to Narmer's horrific wounds.

Chapter 10

- Narmer realises that Hawk tried to kill him and he vows to get even with his brother.
- The King asks Narmer to forfeit his position as heir.
- Narmer resigns all claims to the kingship.
- Now that Hawk is the new heir, he and Berenib marry.
- Narmer tells Hawk he will keep quiet about his brother's role in the accident for the sake of Thisis – so that the people of the kingdom can trust their new king.
- Nitho offers to kill Hawk.
- Narmer's depression leads to a resolution.

Chapter 11

The Season of Emergence (Late Winter)

- Narmer plans to accompany the Trader and Nitho on their travels.
- The Trader agrees but says that they will leave him to the jackals if he becomes a burden.
- Narmer accepts that it's better for him to leave the kingdom to avoid being a threat to his brother's rule.
- Narmer realises that he may not see his father again.

Chapter 12

- The trading party are heading to Punt for myrrh.
- The Trader forces Narmer to walk part of the way despite his painful injuries – Narmer succeeds and feels triumphant.

Chapter 13

- The adventure and the friendship that Nitho provides help to dull some of Narmer's pain – both physical and emotional.
- The traders meet the People of the Sand and Narmer tests his trading skills – he successfully trades some of the ointment used to cure his wounds for water.
- Comparison between lifestyle of People of the Sand and Narmer's people highlights the impact of the environmental differences.

Chapter 14

- Narmer is feeling good, closer to the Trader and proud of his first trade.
- Sand storm engulfs the traders.

Chapter 15

- During the storm the trader's gold disappears, perhaps buried in the sand; but all is not lost for as a friend of the Queen of Punt, the Trader will be able to borrow myrrh for future trade deals.

Chapter 16

- Bast demonstrates some unusual behaviour towards Narmer that signifies her understanding of his growing status in the group.

- The Trader's hopes of borrowing goods from the Queen are dashed when they arrive in Punt and find that she is dying.

Chapter 17

The Season of Harvest (Summer)

- The travellers approach Punt and the first thing they notice is the splendour of the Queen's palace. Narmer notices the enormous difference between the palaces and kingdoms of Thinis and Punt.
- There is a strangeness about the place that makes the travellers uneasy.
- Narmer is also uneasy about his relationship with the Trader and what his future holds.
- The Trader realises that if the Queen dies or is replaced, he will be unlikely to receive the riches he hoped to borrow in order to continue trading.
- Trader believes he might remove the Queen's growth successfully, but if he fails, he and his companions will be killed.

Chapter 18

- The Trader successfully removes the Queen's growth.

Chapter 19

- It is revealed that the Queen will live and the people of Punt rejoice.
- Narmer notices the transformation of Nitho from a girl to a woman.

Chapter 20

- In return for saving the Queen's life, the Trader is showered with riches and Nitho and Narmer receive amulets as gifts.
- The Queen also prophesises their futures.

Chapter 21

Season of Flood (Summer to Autumn)

- The Trader's party travel to Sumer under the protection of the Queen's guards.
- Narmer learns from Nitho that the Trader can draw marks to record his trading deals and routes and that he hopes to teach Narmer these skills.

Chapter 22

Sumerian season of ploughing (Autumn)

- Arrival in Sumer.
- Narmer feels as ignorant as the People of the Sand – he is overwhelmed by the richness and the great development of this land.
- The travellers take their riches to the Temple of Nanna for safe-keeping.
- Narmer feels really alone in this new land, but these feelings soon change when he is introduced by the Trader as his son.

Chapter 23

- Narmer develops his confidence as the son of a rich merchant in the greatest city in the world. His happiness is tinged with sadness, though, for what he's left behind.
- Narmer has a new purpose – to hire and direct engineers and workers to build canals to Father Nammu's house.
- Nitho goes to the temple to make her offering, something Narmer is at first bewildered about. Once he realises why she is there, however, he goes to

bring her home. This leads to some confusion and a new kind of tension between them.

Chapter 24

- Narmer learns from a trader that there is warring amongst the river folk.
- He suddenly realises that he cannot forget his past and as Prince of Thisis, he must return home for all of the following reasons: to see that his town is safe, to show Hawk that he survived and prospered, to assure his father that he is well and happy, and to give Seknut a gift.
- Narmer, Nitho and two of the porter's leave Ur and travel towards Narmer's homeland.

Chapter 25

- The earlier tension between Narmer and Nitho begins to vanish as they travel together.
- Narmer experiences some very mixed emotions about returning home.

Chapter 26

The Season of Emergence (Autumn)

- Upon nearing Thisis, Narmer and Nitho dress appropriately to present themselves to the King.
- Narmer begins to recognise Nitho's true beauty.
- On his approach to the town, Narmer is shocked to discover Thisis is in ruins and almost deserted.

Chapter 27

- Narmer finds his home town in ruins and learns that his father has died in battle.
- Hawk remains in Thisis but is living in squalor – he reveals that his wife has betrayed him by alerting her own people to the partial collapse of Thisis's walls after a flood; this paved the way for an attack.
- Narmer resolves to rescue his people from Yebu and rebuild the kingdom of Thisis.

Chapter 28

- Narmer makes a promise to his people that they will be free before the next flood.

Chapter 29

- The first part of his plan involves travelling to Min and bargaining for an army. Before departing, Narmer defends Hawk's right to be King.
- Once in Min, Narmer offers the King the chance of peace and riches in exchange for an army. The King reluctantly agrees.

Chapter 30

- Nitho intervenes in Narmer's plan to attack Yebu and offers to travel ahead of his army and warn the people of Thisis who are being held prisoner there.
- Hawk saves Narmer from a potential crocodile attack.
- Hawk explains his reasons for his earlier resentment towards Narmer; he also admits that their father was right in making Narmer his heir as he would make a better King than Hawk ever would. A kind of truce is reached between the brothers.
- Narmer tells Hawk that he will return to Ur once Thisis is rebuilt.

Chapter 31

- During the battle, Hawk saves Narmer.
- Nitho adopts a very active role in the battle.
- The battle ends when Narmer forces the King of Min into an alliance under Thisis.

Chapter 32

- Hawk has died during battle.
- Narmer's vision is to see the entire river united, trading and working as one country, a land of peace and prosperity. Each town will have its own King and Narmer will be Pharaoh, with Nitho as his Queen.

Web references

- **Narmer and the Narmer Palette**

<http://www.virtual-egypt.com/newhtml/pharaohs/narmer.html>

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/egypt/history/people/menes.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narmer_Palette

<http://www.ancient-egypt.org/index.html>

[\[archaeology.umd.edu/courses/ARTH275/SP06/SlideImages/022006egyptnubia.htm#palette\]\(http://www.arthistory-archaeology.umd.edu/courses/ARTH275/SP06/SlideImages/022006egyptnubia.htm#palette\)](http://www.arthistory-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

http://www.geocities.com/per_medjat/narmer_egyptian_state.html

- **Ancient Egypt**

<http://www.touregypt.net/ebph5.htm>

<http://www2.sptimes.com/egypt/>

<http://www.albanyinstitute.org/resources/egypt/egypt.history.htm>

Further reading

Fiction

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Non-fiction

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- Hart, George 2002, *Ancient Egypt*, Dorling Kindersley
- Jay, David 2000, *Ancient Egyptians*, Aladdin/Watts

Film

The Prince of Egypt, animated feature from Dreamworks