



WHERE the WORLD ENDS

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TEACHERS' NOTES

SYNOPSIS

Every summer a group of fowlers are put ashore on a remote sea stac to hunt for birds, and every summer they return back to Hirta, rich with the jewels that they have collected.

Except one year the boat doesn't come to collect them, and as the days crawl by, and the weather conditions get harsher, the men and boys begin to question whether they will ever return to Hirta.

Being stranded on a remote sea stac is not without challenges, and as time continues to pass, the cracks between the stranded grow.

Whilst older boy Quill tries to comfort the younger boys with stories, Hirta's gravedigger Col Cane appoints himself as the "Minister" of the stac, and tries to use religion to control the boys who have been devoutly raised. With the other two adults almost giving up, the close-knit group that went to the stac begins to fall apart.

After a clever trick by one of the boys, Col Cane is dispatched to a nearby island, and peace resumes once more among the fowlers. But as the birds run out, and winter arrives, tension increases again.

When a deadly storm hits the tiny sea stac, tragedy strikes, leaving the fowlers questioning what they can believe in anymore. As a people who have always relied so heavily on omens, they are left believing that the world is ended, and that there are no omens worth looking for anymore.

A poignant end brings the fowlers back to Hirta, and to the end of the world as they knew it before. Yet some hope remains for their future, and the relationships of those that survived.

THEMES

One of the key themes in the novel is religion and belief. Each of the characters are led to question everything they have grown up believing in, whilst religion is used as a weapon by Col Cane to manipulate and divide the younger fowlers. Omens are also a key feature, as an ingrained part of their lives, the fowlers can't understand how there was seemingly no warning for their abandonment on the stac, and why there are no signs of when their imprisonment may end. Another key theme is identity and status. Each boy is desperate to have a clear role and title on the island, and ultimately, this belief in the title they have been given leads to tragedy. Finally friendship and community is also explored. The fowlers learned that to survive they must stick together, and even though friendships may strain and fray, ultimately being connected to others is a key part of maintaining your humanity in the most extreme of circumstances.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES

FAITH AND RELIGION

- Quilliam is told by his mother at the start of the novel that: "God will keep you safe, Quilliam, but he'll not keep you clean. You must do that for yourself." p9 How does this belief in God shape the actions of the characters from the very start?
- 'the older boys sat at a distance, not convinced that Col Cane had any real magic to offer.' p37 Are the boys doubting religion or Col Cane's portrayal of it? Why is religion compared to 'magic'?
- When his faith is questioned, Quill turns to Murdina for the answers that he can't find from God. What does she represent for him? Why do you think he believes in her over all else?
- After Quilliam tells a story to comfort the boys, Col Cane says "In the name of God, I forbid anyone to speak to this pagan boy for a week," proclaimed Cane, "lest his unclean words creep in at your ears!" p81 Why does Col Cane want to ostracise Quilliam? Why is he suggesting his words are unclean? Why do you think his speech is written in italics?
- 'The old ways are powerful. Beliefs lingered on Hirta that were a thousand years old.' P86 – Why do you think this is? Why are the residents of Hirta so reliant on old beliefs?
- On page 159, Euan finally realises that "The Minister" is not the religious authority he thought he was. Find a quotation that show this realisation and explain what it shows about Euan's feelings.
- After Euan is seen to banish the ghost of Fearnach Mor, his faith is restored and he is described as 'a shining light, not to be snuffed out.' p194 Why do the other boys want to believe in the power of Euan's faith, how does it help them?
- 'They were turning into angels; still patiently devout in their strange, half-pagan religion, they went on waiting for the white ship or angel chariot, Amazon Queen or the drying up of the sea to release them from the Stac.' p282 What does religion mean to the boys? How have they adapted it to suit their needs?

OMENS AND SUPERSTITION

- At the start of the novel it says that 'there were no omens hinting at trouble ahead. Hirta people notice such things.' p10 How does this belief in omens shape the actions of the characters? How does this line foreshadow what will happen in the novel?
- 'Mr Cane (a reliable killjoy) told them to stop their noise or they would "wake every dead sailor from his resting place". The clatter died away, and Quill saw the youngest boys cast little superstitious glances over the side, in case dead sailors were a serious possibility.' p12 – How is superstition used to control behaviour? Why do you think the boys are so superstitious?
- When no-one comes to collect them, Quilliam questions the lack of forewarning and says 'Where were the omens that would have foretold the end of all things? [...] Where were the signs promised in the Bible: the blood-red moon, the beast with numbers on its forehead, the sea drying up? There would have been signs surely?' p56 Why are the St Kilda residents so reliant on omens to explain the world to them? Why are they unable to come up with clear reasons without them? Consider the time period that the novel is set in and how it might link to this.
- 'Parliament studied the weather and made seasoned judgements according to the colour of the sky, the direction of the wind, the lambs due, the fullness of the cleits and, above all, any omens witnessed, good or bad.' p179 Do you think this is a good way to make decisions? Why? Why not?
- 'Omens seemed even more important here on Warrior Stac than they had on Hirta.' p179 Why do you think this is?
- In chapter 15, the boys realise they have stopped looking for omens. Why do you think this is? When the boys then suggest they start looking for them again, the adults are more concerned about looking for food – why is there a difference in their focuses?
- 'A light at sea. A spark. A bonfire spiralling into the sky. And now storm petrels sent like a gift out of the heart of the sea! It was as if omens were falling as heavily as the rain, filling the boys' eye-sockets and shouting in at their ears: All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well...!' p225 Why can omens be dangerous to believe in?
- After Davie's death, Quill remains with him as the waves take him. He says that 'A white soul bird hovers over the body of a good man, so they say. [...] Quill would not deceive himself. The birds were gone from the Stac, and Quill did not believe in any more omens.' p250 Why does Quill no longer believe in omens? Why does he not seek to find a bird to show that Davie was good?
- 'Murdina had had no patience with omens or signs either. She had said that people, with God's help, made their own luck.' p250 Do you agree with Murdina? Why do you think her views are different to those of the people from Hirta?

GROWING UP

- It was little Davie's first time out, and Quill could see the seasickness rising in him, as well as the fear. One day, if the years made him cruel, Quill might feel inclined to make fun of a first-timer and elbow him in the chest, as the bully Kenneth was doing now. But Quill remembered all too well his own voyage – how he had expected every upward lurch of the bow to tumble the boat over, every trough between the waves to take them to the bottom.' p11 Why do you think Davie is fearful where Quill is calm? How is Quill's maturity shown here?
- 'Davie looked too green – in every sense of the word – to stand up to Kenneth and his bullying.' p12 What does Quill mean by 'in every sense of the word'? What are his fears for Davie?
- 'Could it be that a boy reached an age when he had to start being someone different – someone people could apply to for help, for answers? The thought petrified him.'p93 Why does the thought of growing up petrify Quill? What does being an adult mean in his world?
- 'The littler boys had to do the dancing. The others were too tall to stand upright in the Bothy. Some whose heads had not reached the ceiling when they arrived now had to bend their knees to avoid cracking their skulls.' p211 How have the boys changed physically and mentally since arriving at the Warrior Stac?

LITERARY DEVICES

- Read the description of Warrior Stac from page 12/13 starting with 'Warrior Stac grows bigger the closer you get.' Label each of the devices used in the description of it, and explain what each suggests about Warrior Stac.
- How is the weather personified throughout the novel? Find five examples of personification, and explain why you think McCaughrean uses it.
- At the end of the novel we discover that the story is told by Murdina Galloway. Why do you think McCaughrean uses this device? Why is Murdina significant to the story?
- How is the Warrior Stac personified throughout the novel? Find five examples of this. Why do you think McCaughrean has created the Warrior Stac as another character?

BIRD IMAGERY

- Throughout the novel, McCaughrean uses bird imagery. Explain what you think each example of imagery suggests about the fowlers.
- 'Poor little Davie: not the biggest birdie in the nest.' p12
- 'Davie scrambled away up the rock face, new socks all wet and flapping like a duck's flippers.' p15

- 'Once the fowling party reached Lower Bothy, they stood about, drying in the wind, like cormorants' p16
- 'Kilda men are bird-men – thick-ankled with toes that splay out as birds' do.' p88
- 'Every Kilda man is part bird, because he knows how it feels to plummet out of the sky towards the brightness of the sea.' p203
- 'Apparently, for all they resemble birds, they cannot fly. And why is that? Because of the sheer weight of the souls they have to lug about.' p316

EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

- 'After the Reverend Buchan had brought a library to Hirta, Farriss had been the first to use it. Now, he was the closest thing Hirta had to a schoolmaster, and fed the girls and boys of Hirta crumbs of book-knowledge whenever they were not needed to dig the rigs or climb the rocks.' p19. What does this quotation suggest to you about the value of education on Hirta? Why do you think McCaughrean uses the metaphor of food?
- 'Mr Farriss's reading classes were anxious, troubling times for the children of the island, who strained and struggled to read down a page of words, like trapped sheep trying to get down a cliff. But then Murdina started helping out Mr Farriss with the lessons, and everything changed. Letters slotted together. Words came to life.' p31 How is Murdina able to change the view of education on the island? Why is this important?
- As the doubt of rescue increases on the Stac, the boys turn to Quill for answers 'Why did they keep asking him these unanswerable questions? Why should he know?' p87 Why do you think the boys turn to Quill? Why do they believe he will have the answers?
- When asked by Farriss whether he thinks the world has ended, Quill replies "'What y'asking me for? I'm the boy. You're the one meant to be giving out with the knowledge.'" p202 Do you agree with him? Do you think Quill is knowledgeable?
- You could argue that Farriss and Quill lose themselves more than any of the other fowlers whilst on the Warrior Stac. How might this link to their level of education?

KING GANNET

- When Quill gets the opportunity to be King Gannet, 'Twin jets of joy and fear went through him: joy because now he might be able to tell his parents (casually, after a day or two at home), "Did I say? On the Stac, I was King Gannet." Fear, in case he failed.' p20 What do you notice about Quill's emotions around this title? What are his reasons for wanting to be King Gannet?
- 'But high above any such colony perches a lookout bird: King Gannet. The crag he sits on is his watchtower; he is guarding the colony below. At the first sign of danger – blackbacks, eagles, fowlers – King Gannet sounds the alarm, and into the sky rises a blizzard of birds, shrieking and wheeling. Take out King Gannet and the way is open to wade in among the beaks and beating wings and reap a harvest of bird-meat.' p20 What is the significance of King Gannet? How could this be a metaphor for the fowlers?

- 'A quick twist. A silent death. The gannets below noticed nothing.' p25 What does this suggest about the importance of King Gannet? What could this be a metaphor for?
- After becoming King Gannet, Quill 'felt invulnerable, clad in warm sunshine and the knowledge that he was a king.' p26 How is this change in status already changing him?
- After Quill is pronounced King Gannet, Mr Cane says "'The Lord smiteth the proud and bringeth down the might. Think on that, laddie.'" p26 What is he predicting about future events in the novel? Do you think he's right?
- 'He seemed to have been given some fearful new role to play: "the one blessed with Good Ideas" – and he could not quite think why. Was this what it was to be King Gannet?' p93 What does Quilliam think of his role? How is his view of power different to Col Cane's?
- Do you think that Quill's experience on the Warrior Stac would have been easier if he had not been King Gannet? Why? Why not?

FRIENDSHIP

- 'But having honoured their friendship, nothing seemed to have been solved.' p19 How is friendship represented in this quote? Why might the issue of who is King Gannet divide Quill and Murdo?
- 'Murdo and Quilliam made a competition of the work, vying each day to see who could catch the most.' p39. There seems to be a competitive edge to the boys' friendship. Is this helpful to them?
- 'Lately, there was a frenzy in Murdo that scared Quill. It is an awful things when a friend alters from how you like them to be.' p95 Why is the change in Murdo unsettling for Quill?
- 'The friendship which had united the two men against Col Cane had become less while Quill was gone.' p152. Why do you think Domhnall Don and Mr Farriss's friendship is struggling as time goes on?
- 'Even without friends, life went on. The men still spoke to Quill, but no one else did – not since he had told them they were witch-cursed. They did not stone him or turn him out of the cave, but they avoided him as if he had somehow inherited witchery from his beloved garefowl.' p291 How has Quill's position among the boys changed since the start of the novel? How is he coping without friends?
- Is friendship an important theme in the novel? How does it shape the actions of the characters?

IDENTITY

- "'I pronounce you 'Keeper of Faces,'" Quill joked, remembering Cane's grandiose claim to be Keeper of the Tinderbox. But Niall started, and stared at him as if Quill had just made him Steward of some castellated mansion, its hall's walls covered floor to ceiling with portraits. "Keeper of Faces?" he said, his own thin face memorable for its beaming smile. "Keeper of

Faces!" p131 Why is a title so important to Niall? Why was it important for Quill when he was King Gannet?

- 'Apparently the "Minister" now called the boys his "flock". But sheep are all the same: there is no telling them apart. Also, sheep are stupid: will jump off a cliff into the sea sooner than let dogs like Nettle chase them home.' p132 How is the way the "Minister" treats the boys different to how Quill treats them? What does this suggest about their identity?
- 'So, Calum he made "Keeper of Music" [...] Calum was embarrassed to use his new voice. But enthroned on the sack of down – now the "Keepers' Throne" – wearing the title Keeper of Music, and fed with snatches of half-remembered hymns and laments, he swallowed them down then produced a rich, full rendering of each song. Soon it either had the boys in tears or dancing.' p133
- 'John was declared "Keeper of Needles".' p133 How could this title be considered to be controversial? What on page 134 suggests to you that this might not be the best title for John?
- 'And Kenneth turned on Quilliam a smile so ferocious that it showed his bottom teeth. They were gleaming white from chewing on tough, dry bird meat. "I'm Keeper of Days', then?" he asked.' p137 What does this title mean to Kenneth? Why does Quill include him?
- 'He promoted Niall to "Keeper of Memories" so that Niall would sit enthroned on the sack of feathers, asking what memories they had for him to store in his head.' p140 Why are memories important for the boys? Why are they struggling to recall them?
- Read the paragraph that starts with 'Quill thought Murdo would be far too old to...' on pages 140/141. Why do you think Murdo wants a role? Why do you think Quill assumes that he doesn't need one?
- Davie is last to become the keeper of something. What does being the 'Keeper of the Iron Finger' mean to him?
- 'Lachlan was the only man for the job: "He is 'Keeper of the Flame' now," murmured Mr Farriss, and glanced in Quill's direction. It was a look that said nothing remained secret on Warrior Stac.' p151 Why do you think Mr Farriss names Lachlan? What is the significance of this title?
- "'I say Quill should be 'Keeper of Stories'." It was the first thing Kenneth had said since the Outcast had returned to Midway Bothy. And it pleased Quill more than he could quite understand.' p155 Why is it significant that Kenneth has given Quill this role? Why does it mean so much to Quill?
- Re-read Chapter 16. Do you think Davie's title is to blame for his death? Why? Why not? Use quotations to support your answer.

STORIES

Throughout the novel, Quill uses stories to comfort the other fowlers. What is the significance of each of the stories below?

- 'Odysseus climbing out of the Wooden Horse to capture the city of Troy.' p22
- The story of Fearnach Mor p69
- The story of Warrior Stac p78
- 'Anything concerning the sea interested the people of St Kilda, so the story of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee was a particular favourite at the kirk.' p103
- The story of the Spanish galleon p128
- The story of St Kilda p129
- The story of the Owner's Steward p238
- 'Up in Midway Bothy, hearing Davie's garbled retelling of the Armada story, Niall guessed where it had come from and turned up at Lower Bothy, wanting a story of his own. He too had brought a puffin by way of payment.' p129 What do Quill's stories mean to the boys? How are they shown to be valuable from this quotation?
- 'Quill shifted the battered, moulting Keepers' Throne into the centre of the room. Let it serve its purpose one last time. Let Story come to the rescue one last time. Let Story rescue Euan from the pointless treadmill of self-loathing.' p153 What is the function of stories in the novel? Why do you think McCaughrean has given 'Story' a capital letter?
- When Niall goes missing, the fowlers despair. 'There were no stories left in Quill's head – none that would solace Kenneth, none to explain what had become of Niall. Perhaps the lung fever had melted them or they had blown away as steam.' p268 Why do you think Quill has lost his stories? Why have they lost their meaning for him?
- 'He had fed his friends with stories, and what good were stories to anyone? It had been like feeding glass to dogs.' p291 What does Quill mean by this? Why do you think McCaughrean has used this simile?

MURDINA

- 'He had barely understood her talk of city walls and sandals and Greeks and Trojans: those were part of her mainland, educated world. But he had liked the story precisely because, like Murdina, it was strange and exciting.' p22 Why does Murdina's 'foreignness' intrigue Quilliam?
- 'Suppose he could go home and tell her that he had conquered Birdy Troy? What would she say? What would be the expression on her face?' p23 – Why does Quill want to impress Murdina? Why does he think this story will impress her?
- 'Murdina disturbed Quilliam, and he did not generally welcome being disturbed.' p30 What impact has Murdina had on Quill? What impact does she continue to have on him?

- 'Her laughter struck him like the clapper hitting a bell, and the reverberations shook their way through him. He was not sure what to do with the clamour.' p32 Why is Quilliam unable to understand his feelings for Murdina. Why is she so different to everyone else he knows?
- Murdina is not physically present for the majority of the novel, but is always in Quill's mind. What is her function in the novel?
- Throughout the novel, Murdina helps Quill to overcome all the obstacles that he faces. Find three examples of this, and explain why Murdina is significant in each occasion.

SYMBOLS

Explain what you think each of these symbolises in the novel:

- Quill's father's jacket
- Trees
- Murdo's father's rope
- The tinderbox
- The garefowl
- The pages of Col Cane's bible
- A pair of boots

TIME

- 'Hard work plucked the hours and minutes out of the days, and the wind just blew them away. Soon they would be home on Hirta.' p42 How is time presented at the start of the novel?
- 'Days of the week seemed important, and not just for the sake of knowing when Sunday came round yet again or the right day for Confession [...] The days of the week are like when you are going down a cliff, feeling about with one foot and needing to find the next foothold. If they're not there when you feel for them, it can be unnerving.' p98 Why are the days of the week important for the fowlers? What do they represent for them?
- 'The chief reason Quill recoiled from the thought of workless days stuffed with worship was the prospect of idleness. [...] They needed to pass the time, so that Time did pass.' p112 Why is it important to Quill to keep busy?
- 'As he lay down to sleep that night, he realized that he had no notion what day of the week it was, nor any way of finding out.'
- "'Well, let it be Thursday," he said out loud.'
- 'And lo, it was Thursday! Who was to say otherwise? The boy who lives all by himself in the world is king of all he surveys. The thought made him smile.' p125 How is time losing all meaning for Quill?
- 'An uncanny silence fell, every sound muffled by the fog: it was as if Time itself had stopped.'

COMMUNITY AND ISOLATION

- 'generally Hirta mouths stayed closed. A wrong word can give offence.' p31 How do you think a lack of talking shapes the direction of the novel? Does it prevent a sense of community or are words not needed?
- 'It was not clever to be out alone on the Stac.' p67 Why is a sense of community important for the survival of the men and boys on the Stac?
- When Kenneth suggests that they should tell the "Minister" about the other boys' sins, Col Cane jumps on the suggestion saying "Yes! That shall be the way of it, Kenneth. Good lad. Each boy may either confess his own faults, or tell me the sins of another boy. Then all shall be known." p94 Why does Col Cane like this idea so much? Why would he want a division between the boys?
- 'Quill knew now how Fearnach Mor, the sheep-stealer, had felt, condemned to marooning; carried out by boat to live till he died, alone on the Stac. Now Quill knew what had made the thief hurl himself into the sea and swim after the boat, pleading for mercy.' p119 How is his separation from the group already affecting Quill? Why is it affecting him so severely?
- When Quill finds Farriss ready to end his own life, he is desperate to save him. Farriss tells him that 'Fearnach Mor comes to me. It was me he came to in the Bothy. Says to me that being Nowhere is better than this place. To be Nothing. To be Nowhere. Better than this.' p200 What is the significance of Fearnach Mor. Why do you think Farriss feels he can no longer live?
- How does the celebration of "All Saints" in chapter 15 bring the fowlers together? How do they manage to celebrate it in spite of their situation?
- 'When someone dies on Hirta, the cry goes out throughout the island, and work stops and play stops and all stops, as each person returns home. Everyone is less for the loss.' p240 How do the fowlers react to the death of Davie? How does it change them?
- At the end of the novel, when the fowlers return, they discover that most of their relatives have died of the smallpox. The Owner says that he will re-people the island with good workers. 'The survivors were supposed to be relieved by the news. Re-people Hirta? Like replacing lost chesspieces so that the Owner could go on playing chess?' p307 Why do you think McCaughrean has used the chess metaphor? Why does repopulating the island not matter to the fowlers?

POWER

- 'In the village Parliament, Farriss's and Don's votes would have outweighed Col Cane's. But here on the Stac, Cane had formed an unbeatable alliance – with God and with Fear and with Weariness.' p83 How does Col Cane manipulate the fowlers to increase his own sense of power?
- 'Quilliam told no one about Mr Cane hitting him, but someone must have done, because suddenly the boys were terrified. Like Murdo and Quill, they had joked about what they would confess to, or who they would accuse, and say, He picked his teeth. He snored in my

ear. Now, they were threatened with violence. There was no more laughter.' p97 How does Col Cane use fear to control the boys? Why does it work?

- As the novel continues, the power that Col Cane has over the boys increases 'Col Cane had told them that every day was now the Sabbath on Warrior Stac, and if they worked on the Sabbath, it would be "on pain of eternal damnation". The words were fearful enough to hold them in thrall to a pompous ignorant man they neither liked nor respected.' p113 Why does Col Cane have so much power over the boys? How does he maintain it when they neither like nor respect him?
- 'With Col Cane no longer controlling their waking day, it felt only right to restore Parliament. The older boys were allowed to have their say. No sheep, babies, dogs or ponies disrupted proceedings. They tried to exclude John, on the grounds she was a woman, but she was having none of it.' p179 How is power distributed now Col Cane has gone. Do you think that John has the right to be part of Parliament?

GENDER

- 'Looking back down at the boat, he could see the row of boys still aboard, left hands clenched white round their bundles, right hands just clenched, jaws set, all hoping to get ashore with their pride intact and without breaking any bones.' p15 Why is it so important to the boys to maintain their pride. What have they got to prove?
- 'And every time a lad came fowling on the stacs, he went home less of a boy and more of a man.' p17 How is masculinity dependent on the stacs – how is surviving it a mark of adulthood?
- When the boat continues to fail to come, Quill says 'no one wanted to be the first to gripe – make himself sound puny.' p44 What does he mean by this? How does this need to be masculine restrict the characters?
- On page 89, John tells Quill the truth about her identity. Why do you think her mother kept her gender a secret? Why were boys seen to be more valuable than girls at that time?
- 'I thought I was born wrong – a useless piece o' sheepshite – an' I sank into a gloom.' p89 How does being brought up as a boy impact John's sense of self? Can you understand why her mother made this choice?
- 'The girls went fowling together. The boys went fowling together. But mix the two and it would be like putting candles into a sack of feathers.' p90 – Why are the genders kept separate? What are the implications of John being on the Stac with the boys?
- When John goes to Upper Bothy with Col Cane, Murdo goes into a frenzy. He tells Quill that 'I built a wall round her. So she's mine now. And I mean to have her back.' p148 Does he seem more concerned that she is missing, or more concerned that she is with another man. How does John's gender define her in this instance?
- On page 164, Col Cane discovers that John is a girl. How does his opinion of her change as a result? Find a quotation to support your point.

- 'the repulsive news of Cane and John sleeping on the same bed had overturned Murdo's shyness utterly. He was atwitch with battle frenzy. He was a stag bellowing for his stolen hind. He would mount watch on Upper Bothy, he told Quill, and when the chance presented itself, rescue his damsel from her high tower.' p166 How are Murdo's actions a reflection of stereotyped masculinity? Do you think John is a damsel?
- 'So siren temptress John had seduced the Minister into making the crossing – a thing he would probably never have dared to do on his own – with the promise of becoming his willing wife.' p174 Is 'siren temptress' a fair description of John? How has the way she is viewed changed as a result of finding out her gender?
- 'By the time she had finished her explanation, she had won the admiration of every lad who heard it. Her achievement was more than equal to being King Gannet, and surely gave her a status among the boys that she had never dared hope for. What she did not realize was that their admiration had little to do with her heroic daring, her clever ruse.' p175 How is John objectified by the other boys? Why are her achievements not more recognised for what they are? Why do you think she now has 'a status among the boys'?
- 'Davie looked like a girl, his hair had grown so far below his cap. Quill supposed he looked much the same himself. (Only John had taken the sharp knife to hers, and chopped it short, sooner than encourage Kenneth, Murdo or Calum.)' p217 Why does John feel the need to cut her hair? How is hair a signifier of gender?
- 'Better, anyway, to keep busy and look unconcerned than to squat by Davie like a girl, cooing comforts and praying and stroking his hair. That's not what a boy in trouble wants, is it? Not a boy who's wanting to be brave?' p234 How do gender stereotypes affect the way Quilliam deals with Davie's death? How do they restrict him?
- 'Back at Midway, John was asked to supply the customary weeping and wailing required, women being so much better than men at that particular rite. But John had spent so much of her life suppressing a girl's instincts that keening did not come easily to her.' p243 Do you think gender roles are more as a result of nature or nurture?
- 'the very competitive nature of boys made each of them determined to cling on to life for as long as any of the others: not to be the first to give in.' p256 How could living up to gender stereotypes have ensured the boys' survival?
- 'at fourteen, John was of marrying age and the question could not be ignored for ever.' p258 What does this quotation mean? Do you think this is fair on John?

HUMANITY

- 'They had begun to look like survivors of war or shipwreck, haggard and hollow eyed.' p111 The Stac has clearly changed the boys physically, but how has it changed them mentally?
- 'Every sowing season, after the barley had been sown, the boys and girls on Hirta guarded the rigs against gulls who came looking to steal the grain out of the soil. The stones they threw rarely hit the birds, but even so, what were the gulls doing after all that warranted such unkindness? It was the first time Quill had ever thought of things from a bird's point of view. Perhaps, with living among them, he had turned part bird. Fit for stoning.' p126 How is

Quill reflecting on the world around him? How are his opinions changing?

- When the boys kill the garefowl, Quill is devastated, and even Don questions the nature of their actions 'A "murderous zeal" was the only way Don found to describe the boys' barbarous hysteria and the way they set about the poor beast, in a frenzy of violence.' p288 How have the boys lost a part of their humanity from being on the Stac?
- Quill then says 'Something, if not the world, had ended.' p288 What does he mean by this? What does the killing of the garefowl represent for Quill?

CREATIVE TASKS

STEP INTO THE SHOES OF A CHARACTER

- Imagine you are Quill and you have just become King Gannet. Write your diary entry for that night describing your victory, and what you hope your new status will mean for you.
- Re-read the section where Quill gets cast out from the group (p116) and re-tell it from one of the characters' perspectives: Kenneth, Davie, Murdo, Col Cane.

CHARACTER PROFILES

- Based on their titles 'Keeper of' create a character profile for each of the fowlers. Include a drawing of the character, their title, three quotes about them and three key facts about them.

YOUR OWN ISLAND

- On page 29, Quill talks about "The "Parliament" of village elders' who make the decisions on the island. Imagine you are living on a small island, with few inhabitants. How would you govern it? Create a manifesto for how you think the island should be run.
- Each of the boys is given a role in the novel and becomes a 'Keeper of'. Imagine you and eight of your class are marooned just as the fowlers were. Which roles would you give yourselves and why?

WRITING TO PERSUADE

- On page 124, Quilliam is reminded of a saying "Keep a thing seven year," his mother had said, "and you shall find a use for it." Think about how life in St Kilda is different to your life. Write a persuasive speech about why you should value the things you have.
- 'Every sowing season, after the barley had been sown, the boys and girls on Hirta guarded the rigs against gulls who came looking to steal the grain out of the soil. The stones they threw rarely hit the birds, but even so, what were the gulls doing after all that warranted such unkindness? It was the first time Quill had ever thought of things from a bird's point of view. Perhaps, with living among them, he had turned part bird. Fit for stoning.' p126 Write a persuasive speech explaining why we need to be more respectful of all living things.
- Imagine you are John and have been told that now you are 14, you have to get married. Write a speech explaining why you don't want to get married, and the reasons for why you think you shouldn't have to.

RESEARCH TASKS

- Using Usborne Quicklinks to help you, create a historian's guide to St Kilda and the surrounding islands.
- Pick one of the stories that Quill references in the novel, and research the myths behind the story.
- Drawing of the character, their title, three quotes about them and three key facts about them.

THE WARRIOR STAC

- Read the description of Warrior Stac from page 12/13 starting with 'Warrior Stac grows bigger the closer you get.'
- Draw a picture of Warrior Stac based on the description and label each part of your picture with quotations from the text.