

A watercolor illustration of a diver in a dark, textured suit, holding a long, thin object (possibly a spear or tool) in their right hand. The diver is positioned on the left side of the frame, looking towards the right. The background is a soft, light blue wash, suggesting an underwater environment. The overall style is painterly and expressive.

The Pearl Diver

Teacher's Pack

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS STORY?

QUESTIONS

This was the Chevron Readers' Cup quiz from the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature 2012

1. When did the "Big Dive" start?
2. What is the Nakhuda?
3. Why was the relationship between the diver and his hauler an important one?
4. What dangers faced the pearl divers?
5. What did the divers put on to protect themselves before diving?
6. How do pearls form inside oysters?
7. What jobs did Saeed do on the boat?
8. What helped the men work together when they were opening the oysters?
9. How were the pearls collected from the crew?
10. What happened to Saeed's family while the boats were away?
11. Why were they lucky to have that particular Nakhuda?
12. When the boat had to shelter from the storm and they couldn't dive, what work was there for the crew to do?
13. How did the tawwash, or merchant, decide which pearls he wanted to buy, and how did he agree a price with the Nakhuda?
14. How did Abdullah escape from the shark?
15. Abdullah was very lucky to be given the first pearl from the tabreh. The pearl divers were poor but could make a reasonable living provided they found plenty of pearls. However, the way they were paid made life very difficult for them if they did not have a good season. Why was that?

ANSWERS

1. Middle of May (p.8)
2. The captain of the sambuq or ship.
3. The diver depended on him to pull him from the sea as fast as possible when he tugged on the rope to let him know he was ready to surface. His life could depend on him (p. 11)

4. Devilfish (jellyfish) which “wrapped their burning arms around you”, sharks, barracudas, pirates in the old days, drowning because they surfaced too slowly, disease, dehydration, shamals (p. 14)
5. Beeswax in their ears and a goat horn clip on their noses. Leather sheaths on fingers and big toes to protect them from rocks and shells and sea urchins.
6. An oyster made its pearl around an intruder, a tiny worm or a speck of grit (p. 23)
7. Made coffee, emptied the big domed wire fish traps which had been put down the night before, cooked fish for the men’s supper (p. 25) and swept the deck after a shamal (p. 37)
8. They worked to the rhythm of the nahhaam, or singer (p. 29)
9. They placed the pearls between their toes and the Nakhuda collected them and wrapped them in a red cloth and locked them in a wooden chest on the deck for safe keeping (p. 30)
10. His mother took them back to her parents’ home in the oasis where it was less humid. A Bedouin brought camels for their journey and they travelled with other women and children and old men in a caravan. They returned to the coast at the end of the pearling season (p. 33)
11. He had the reputation for being a religious man, had many years’ experience, was fair and just, did not take unnecessary risks (p. 14), could read the sea for signs without the need for a map or compass. He knew the shamal was coming so took shelter, unlike the other sambuq which lost men in the storm (p. 39)
12. Sails and fish traps to repair and barnacles to scrape off the underside of the boat (p. 37)
13. He had little copper sieves, 24 of them, with holes of different sizes to grade the pearls. Then he weighed them in tiny scales against agate weights if they were sizeable, against thin metal weights if small. If he liked the look of any, they would bargain then reach an agreement through a special secret sign language by touching fingers under cover of the red cloth (p. 45)
14. Tried sinking to the seabed and lying on the bottom to show he was no threat, prayed to Allah that he had enough breath not to drown. But when it attacked again he plunged his hands into its gills so that it could not breathe and it rose to the surface, taking him with it (p. 52)
15. The Nakhuda paid them advances against their earnings, so they started the trip owing him money. They could only repay him if they had a good season and profits were good. If they were not, by the next season they would be given another advance and owe him even more money, making it difficult to ever get out of debt (p. 30)

THE AUTHOR'S AIMS

What do you think my aims might have been in writing this story?

When you finished reading the story did you have any questions?

What else would you like to know?

Make a list.

Where might you go for the answers? Who could you ask?

REMINISCENCE GROUPS

Most Arabian Gulf families have some connection with pearl diving.

Invite some elderly local grandparents into school.

Before they arrive have your students think about and write down questions they would like to ask them to find out about their childhoods.

The grandparents will undoubtedly know stories about the sea, about pearl diving too, which may have been told to them by their own grandparents.

How many pearl diving-related stories can you gather?

REVIEWS

Write a review of *The Pearl Diver* and describe the parts you liked best.

THE READER AS DETECTIVE

The little boy in the story is called Saeed, and he is 6 years old.

What else do you know about him?

How do you know these things?

Make a list of words to describe Saeed.

SEQUENCING

Imagine you are Saeed and retell the events of the story as they happened.

Ships often have a log which is like a diary. Imagine you are Saeed, and describe a typical day on the sambuq as if you are writing in the ship's log.

Now write the log as if you are Abdullah/Ahmed/the Nakhuda.

THEMES IN THE STORY

TREASURE

Treasure is one of the themes in the story. But what do we mean by ‘treasure’?

Of course the obvious treasure is the pearls contained in the oysters which the divers collect.

READ the extract with your students.

“Saeed looked down into the water’s green depths and thought of the treasures waiting there to be discovered. The men on board were excited: the day before the diving began was full of expectation. Would this year’s catch be better than last year’s? Would the pearls fetch a higher price?”

DISCUSSION

Have pearls always been prized?

Who wears pearls? Look at pictures of historical figures who wore pearls – for instance, Queen Elizabeth 1st of England. The present Queen (Elizabeth 2nd) also has a crown set with Gulf pearls. Indian maharajahs love pearls. Seed pearls are still frequently used for adornments in Hindu weddings.

What do you think makes a pearl valuable? Are pearls still valued today?

Mother-of-Pearl is also precious – look at some pictures of articles made from Mother-of-Pearl, knife handles for instance, and inlaid boxes, buttons as well.

The Japanese introduced cultured pearls in the 1930s. Find out how this affected the Gulf pearl trade. Fortunately a few years later another source of wealth was discovered under the sea – oil!

NAMES

Lulu is the Arabic word for pearl. A Dana is a particularly magnificent pearl. Both these words are used as girls’ names. Think of other names which reflect our fascination with jewels. Why do you think we name girls after jewels?

One of the finest pearls on record was found in 1867 and sold in Paris for 8,000 pounds. I wonder how much it would be worth today! Eventually it was taken to India to become the eye of an idol!

IMAGINING + WRITING

Ask your students to imagine they are walking along the beach one day when they find an oyster. When they prise it open they discover a magnificent pearl inside! Think of all the different things you might do with it – make a list – and choose the idea you like best round which to build a story.

READ the extract with your students:

“Early the next morning the crew sat round the large heap of oysters gathered during the previous day, and set to work on them with crooked knives, under the watchful eye of the Nakhuda. The voice of the “Nahhaam”, the singer, was strong, and soon the men were working to his rhythm. They tossed the discarded shells back into the sea, and the gulls flew down, screeching and fighting over the soft, tasty flesh of the oysters. Most of the shells contained nothing of worth, but a few held small seed pearls, and one or two gave up more valuable treasures. The men placed the pearls between their toes, and the Nakhuda collected them and wrapped them in a red cloth and locked them in a wooden chest on the deck for safe keeping.”

IMAGINE THE SCENE

What can you hear?

What can you smell?

What can you see?

What can you touch?

Why do you think the crew usually took someone to sing to them? What might you have today instead?

Listen to some pearling songs. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwKm17qIoUQ>

In groups create one of your own – you could use a drum to beat out a rhythm. The subject of your song might be the families left behind.

The pearls didn't belong to the divers. The Nakhuda would sell them to a merchant.

READ the extract with your students:

“Saeed watched the Nakhuda unlock the wooden chest and take out the knotted red cloth containing the pearls. Carefully he would open it and spread it out before the merchant, inviting him to examine them. The merchant would take out his little copper sieves, twenty-four of them, with holes of different sizes, to grade the pearls. Then he would weigh them in tiny scales, against agate weights if the pearls were sizeable, against thin metal weights if the pearls were small. If he liked the look of any of them, much bargaining would take place. Eventually he and the Nakhuda would reach an agreement through a special secret sign language by touching fingers under cover of the red cloth.”

DISCUSSION

I wonder why the Nakhuda and the merchant reached an agreement on the price through a secret sign language?

What do you think the Nakhuda might have said to the merchant to encourage him to buy the pearls?

DRAMA

In 2s, one is the Nakhuda, the other the merchant, enact the scene. You can invent your own secret sign language using your fingers – remember both of you have to understand it! Perhaps you can make some props to use in your scene – look at pictures of the merchant’s sieves and scales and weights – you could certainly have some pearls and a piece of red cloth.

Do you think that treasure always has to be worth a lot of money?



READ the extract with your students:

“You have done well, my son,” Abdullah said, “See I have something for you,” and he gave Saeed a beautiful shell. Saeed stroked it; he liked its spines, there were six of them like six fingers, and when he turned the shell over its opening was smooth and pink. “Put it to your ear,” said Abdullah, and when he did so Saeed could hear the sound of the sea. This must be one of the sea’s secrets, he thought. He decided he would give it to his little brother when he returned home, and he held it close to him when he lay down to sleep by his father’s side.”

DISCUSSION

Do you think the shell is a good gift? It isn’t worth anything in terms of money, but it is a gift from father to son, and has an emotional value.

What significance does it have in the story? What does it show us as modern readers?

It is a symbol – in this case, it symbolizes a simple life – and a symbol can often say more than a whole paragraph. Would you agree?

Can you find any other moments in the story which suggest that Saeed’s life is very simple?

SPEAKING, LISTENING + WRITING

Do you have a possession which you treasure?

Why is it important to you, and what memories does it bring back when you look at it and touch it?

Take it in turns to describe your precious object or write a short description of it.

READ the final paragraph with your students:

“But the tale was not finished. “You forget, Abdullah,” said the Nakhuda, “You have not yet opened the tabreh. In view of your bravery the first pearl in the clutch of shells shall be yours.” And so it was that when the flag of departure was hoisted, Saeed sailed home, his father at his side, with riches in his hand and riches in his heart.”

TALK ABOUT

What do you think are the “riches in his hand” and the “riches in his heart”?

Which one do you think is the most important?

Do we know anything about the “first pearl in the clutch of shells” which Abdullah was allowed to keep?

Does it matter?

SECRETS

Another theme in the story is Secrets. We have already talked about the secret sign language.

When Saeed asks his father if he is ever afraid, Abdullah replies, “You must learn the ways of the sea, my son, and know its secrets.”

What do you think he means by that? Can you think of another word you might use instead of “secret” here?

When Saeed put the shell to his ear he could hear the sound of the sea. “This must be one of the sea’s secrets, he thought.”

Does the sea really hold secrets? Can you think of other things which we might think of as the sea’s secrets?

How does Abdullah’s knowledge of the sea serve him well?

How is the Nakhuda able to navigate without a map or a compass?

Do Abdullah and the Nakhuda know some of the sea’s secrets?

DISCUSSION

Why do people have secrets?

WRITING

Use “secrets’ as a topic for writing. You could give your students an opening line to start them off:

“Only I knew the secret....”

“Why was it such a big secret?”

“She had always wanted to know the secret behind the”

“Brother and sister were good at keeping secrets.”

“The secret was out!”

SIGNS + OMENS

Which things in the story are said to be signs of good luck?

Do you believe in luck?

Have you ever been given a lucky sign? And did something lucky happen to you after you received it?

TRUST

Trust is another theme in the story.

SPEAKING + LISTENING

How important do you think the trust between diver and hauler was?

Abdullah says he trusts Ahmed “as if he were my brother.” Is this a good comparison?

READ the extract with your students:

“Every diver had a hauler, and Saeed knew that the relationship between them was a very close one. The diver depended on his hauler to pull him from the sea as fast as possible when he tugged on the rope to let him know that he was ready to surface.”

TALK about the relationship.

If you were a diver what kind of a person would you want your hauler to be?

Can you think of other occasions when you would need to trust someone as much?

BUILDING TRUST EXERCISES

Work in pairs, A and B. B closes his eyes. A takes B by the arm and slowly leads him around, talking quietly, drawing attention to potential difficulties and interesting features. Change over.

Set up a simple obstacle course. A talks B through the course, eyes closed, without leading him by the arm.

READ the extract

“Doesn’t anyone ever try to hide a pearl to keep for himself?” Saeed asked his father. “It is important to be able to trust one another,” Abdullah replied, “And only once have I known a man try to smuggle a pearl. It was a particularly beautiful one, a rose pearl, and he hid it under his tongue. But he was found out, and severely punished. It was not the will of Allah to make him a rich man through dishonesty. But luck may come to the man who works hard.”

DISCUSSION

The divers and haulers were very poor - do you think that sometimes they might have been tempted to steal?

What kind of punishment do you think a man might receive for stealing a pearl?

How would his fellow crew members regard him?

How would his family feel, do you think, when they learnt of his disgrace?

Is disgrace as much of a punishment as a beating?

Why do you think honesty and trust were so important?

Do we value these qualities as much today?

DRAMA ACTIVITY

A valuable pearl goes missing!

Tell your students that you will participate in the drama, and it will begin at a given signal, such as clapping your hands. When you clap them again it will be a sign to pause.

Enrol a student as the thief. Ask the students to close their eyes and hold out their hands. You are going to give each of them a small slip of paper, which is for their eyes only. Don't let anyone else see it! One is marked with a X. The student who receives this slip is the thief.

NB this does not need to be a random selection, although the students should think it is – teachers will know who amongst their students will be prepared to take on the role and rise to the situation. The student should think about why he has stolen the pearl.

Students find a partner - one is a diver, the other a hauler.

It is evening. The crew is relaxing after a hard day's work, perhaps drinking coffee and talking about the things which happened today.

Play some pearl divers' songs in the background to help create the atmosphere.

Clap your hands to signal the start. Allow a few minutes for the students to become comfortable in their roles.

The teacher in role as a messenger figure, perhaps as one of the divers or haulers, tells the crew that the exceptionally fine pearl which was discovered a few days ago is missing, and that the Nakhuda has threatened to punish everyone if the pearl isn't returned by morning.

Encourage the crew to talk about the situation.

The messenger role provides a framework for the teacher to inject some ideas into the improvisation should the students fail to do so. For instance, he/she might say, "I don't think that's fair at all, do you?" Or "We'd better find out which one of us is the thief or we're all in trouble!"

And later, pointing at one member of the crew, "You've had a smile on your face for a while, is that because you are the thief?" And pointing to another, "Or is it you? You're looking uncomfortable."

Allow the improvisation to develop.

Clap your hands to signal a pause.

TALK about the effect the news has had on the crew.

How do you feel about each other?

Do you look at your friends differently now, wondering which one is the thief?

Did you decide which person you think is the thief?

What would you like to say to him?

I wonder how he is feeling?

Can you imagine what kind of punishment the Nakhuda is planning? Discuss.

Tell the students that the diver who has stolen the pearl is feeling bad about what he has done. He doesn't want everyone to be punished for his dishonesty, but he is afraid of admitting his guilt.

What would you like to say to him now?

CONSCIENCE ALLEY

Tell your students to imagine that they are his conscience. Think of one thing you would like to say to him. Make 2 lines facing each other with a space between them. Tell the thief to walk slowly down the alley. As he passes students whisper their messages as if they are his conscience talking to him.

Now we know who the thief is, although he hasn't yet admitted his guilt. Let's ask him to sit in the "hot seat" so that we can ask him questions to find out how he's feeling.

Alternatively you might like to suggest that the thief confides in his partner, the hauler, and put him in the "hot seat". Can you help him decide what to do. Should he betray his friend of many years? Should others be made to suffer for one person's wrong-doing? We call this a 'moral dilemma'.

Now divide your students into groups. Ask them to decide how they think the situation should end, and create a still image. Groups can then interpret each other's images and discuss.

FINDING THINGS OUT

Share this background information with your students:

Pearl diving and fishing were the main sources of income in the Arabian Gulf for hundreds of years. The story celebrates the lives of the Gulf pearl divers, and I wanted it to be true to life, so I had to find out lots of things before I could begin to write. This is called **research**.

Back in 2001 when I was doing my research there was very little information available through the internet about pearl diving in the Arabian Gulf, although there is plenty now, so you might want to take a look! Luckily for me there were some far more exciting sources of information, as I was soon to discover.

EXHIBITIONS

Exhibitions are a very good starting point and a wonderful source of information, and there are lots around the Gulf.

Visit an exhibition with your class. There is an excellent one devoted entirely to pearl diving at Emirates NBD headquarters on Dubai Creek. <http://www.pearlmuseum.ae>
Another very good one is at the Dubai Museum in Al Fahidi Fort.

You may also like to visit a dhow building yard. At Al Jaddaf on Dubai Creek you can watch boats being built and repaired using traditional tools.

QUESTIONS

How would you set about researching the facts for this story without using the internet? Where would you go?

Who would you like to meet?

WRITING

Make a list of the questions you would ask.

INFORMATION

Talking to people is fun, and often results in my discovering something different and unique. I actually met a very old man called Iqbal, who had been a pearl diver in his youth. He was living in a nursing home and I read about him in the newspaper. Journalists would call this my “lucky break”, and indeed it was, because he told me some fascinating things!

I met a librarian who lent me some fat volumes of letters, some of them dating back to 1850, written between British diplomats living in and around the Arabian Gulf, and they were all about pearl diving! Of course I couldn't include all my discoveries in my story, too many facts would weigh the story down and make it boring. It is as important to know what to leave out as knowing what to put in! So I chose the facts which I thought would most fascinate and excite the reader.

QUESTIONS

What were the most surprising/memorable moments in the story for you?

What Did you discover which fascinated/interested/excited you?

Read some of the extracts below from the letters with your class.

“The pearl fishers, who till recently had neither charts nor compasses but are now generally provided with the latter, are extremely expert in finding their way to any bank they may desire to reach, and are generally able to make a direct voyage thither; they are guided, not only by the sun and stars and by bearings from the land when in sight, but also by the colour and depth of the sea and by the nature of the bottom.”

“In the choice of a bank the Nakhuda is limited by the powers of his divers; 8 fathoms is an ordinary depth, and 12 is perhaps the greatest at which work can be carried on without discomfort; boats with good divers, however, will work on banks carrying 14 fathoms. There are men who can negotiate 16 fathoms of water, but the strain at this depth is too great to be endured long, even by the strongest, and fatal accidents sometimes occur in working at such a level.”

“They say that all the purest, largest, and best pearls come from the deeps, whilst the shallows, though far more pregnant, yield a lighter pearl, and invariably with a stain of colour which depreciates its value. Where the sun can reach, colour is invariably found in a greater or less degree.”

Now look at the story again and talk about how I adapted some of this information.

LIFE AS A PEARL DIVER

The Nakhuda gave the crew advances on their earnings so that they could buy food for their families before they set out to sea. If the oyster beds produced a good harvest, they would have enough money to repay their debts and feed themselves for the rest of the year. A bad season led to the debts being carried forward. In fact, one bad season could lead to a lifetime of debt, and debts were even passed from father to son.

What kind of things do you think might contribute to a poor season? Think about the weather, sickness, the divers' abilities, the conditions of the sea bed and so on.

IMAGINE + WRITE

Imagine you are a pearl diver who has inherited his father's debts. You could begin:

“I had no choice but to become a pearl diver. It wasn't something I wanted to do, but my father drowned at sea, and as the eldest son it fell to me to repay the money he owed. Until then I had other ideas about what I was going to do with my life, but I have many brothers and sisters and they all depended on me.....”

Continue the story. Perhaps something happens to change your fortunes.

Talk about the kind of skills a good Nakhuda or Captain should have.

If you were the Nakhuda of a pearling sambuq what kind of rules would you make to ensure safety and co-operation on board?

Make a list.

How would you punish wrong-doers?

Very often in the past sickness was treated by cauterising the patient with a hot iron.

Sometimes water was blessed in the name of Allah and sprinkled over the sick man.

Could you make any rules which might help prevent the spread of sickness and disease?

What sort of things might you do to improve conditions for the divers and haulers if you were in charge?

You might like to think about working hours, wages, rest time etc.

EMPATHISING WITH CHARACTERS

It is important to be able to empathise with characters in a story and understand how they are feeling.

READ the opening paragraph to the story with your students:

“Saeed looked at the strong black arms of the two oarsmen as they rowed the boat clear of the harbour. He listened to their song, the song of the pearlers, which they sang as they rowed. He could still see his little brother standing on the shoreline with his sisters. It would be the end of September before he saw them again, at the close of the pearling season. He hastily wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. His mother had called him “her little man”, and he was determined to behave like one.”

DISCUSSION

How is Saeed feeling?

What are the clues?

Think of some words to describe his emotions.

What do you think about a little boy as young as Saeed – he is 6 – being taken on as a deckhand and going to sea for 4 months?

What would you have been doing at his age?

DRAMA

I wonder how his mother felt when she found out that Abdullah planned to take Saeed with him. Think about the discussion his parents might have had. In 2's recreate the scene.

Share your different scenarios.

THE HOT SEAT

Place a chair at the front and invite a volunteer to take on the role of one of the characters – mother/father/Saeed – and come and sit in the “hot seat”.

The rest of the class now have the opportunity to ask the character questions about the situation. Encourage the students to ask open-ended questions, so that they are not projecting their own feelings onto the character in the hot seat. For instance, asking the person in role as the mother, “How would you feel if something bad happens to your son?” is preferable to asking, “Wouldn't you feel guilty if something awful happens to your son?”

This is an excellent method of encouraging students to put themselves in someone else's shoes, of finding out more about a character and of deepening understanding.

SAEED'S FIRST DIVE

READ the extract with your class:

“One morning Abdullah announced that it was time for Saeed to come diving with him. Saeed had been so busy he had almost forgotten that he wanted to learn to dive. Now Abdullah gave him a clip to put on his nose, and together they jumped into the water. The sea was warm, but Saeed shivered and his heart seemed to beat very fast. Abdullah told him to hold onto a rope dangling from the sambuk’s side. “We won’t go very deep,” he said, “We’ll just look around under the surface of the water for as long as you can hold your breath.” He took Saeed’s hand in his and told him to take a big deep breath. Then they dived, and suddenly a whole new world opened up before Saeed’s eyes. The vague blurred shapes he’d seen from the boat became brightly coloured fish. He could see beautiful corals and weeds swaying in the current. In his wonder he forgot his fear. After what seemed a very short time they surfaced. “Well done!” said Abdullah. Saeed grinned, “Can we do it again?” he asked.”

DISCUSSION

How did Saeed feel before his first dive?

How did he feel afterwards?

Have you ever been in a different situation and experienced the same feelings?

Can you remember doing something for the first time which made you feel a bit scared?

What was your heart doing?

How did your hands feel? And your legs?

What about your breathing?

In 2’s take it in turns to tell your partner about your experience.

How did you feel afterwards?

Make a list of words to describe the emotions you felt.

DIVING FOR PEARLS

The method of diving for pearls in the Gulf did not change for hundreds of years.

TO DO

Ask your students to think about the equipment a diver would use today. If possible bring some diving gear into the classroom – a mask, a snorkel and fins for instance – for the students to look at and handle. Better still, invite a diver in to show and talk about the equipment he uses.

Before he visits, ask your students to think about the questions they would like to ask him. Look at a wetsuit – what is its purpose? Compare it to the cotton suit which the pearl divers of old sometimes wore to protect themselves from stings during the jellyfish season.

Look at pictures/film clips: <http://fqc-bf.com/portfolio/pearl-diving>

‘Ali’s film’ is also worth looking at for the contrast between old Dubai of pearl diving days, and new Dubai with its iconic buildings : http://expo2020dubai.ae/en/multimedia/video/alis_film

READ the extract with your students:

“He watched his father strip off his clothes, and put beeswax in his ears and a goat horn clip on his nose. He helped him slip the leather sheaths onto his fingers and big toes to protect them from sharp rocks and shells and the spines of sea urchins. Then Abdullah slung a string bag round his neck and let himself down into the sea. Round his waist was a rope by which Ahmed could haul him up, and another over his foot, heavily weighted with a “sinking stone” to help him descend quickly. He was ready for his first dive of the season!”

DISCUSSION

Why do you think the pearl divers wore nose clips, and used heavy weights to take them to the bottom as fast as possible?

What **qualities** do you think you would need to become an **exceptional** pearl diver?

It must have been difficult identifying the oyster shells without a mask to help you see them. The salt water would irritate your eyes, so you would have probably depended more on your sense of touch to find them.

TO DO

Create a series of “feely” bags. Use brown paper bags (or certainly those you can’t see through) and number each one. Collect seashore debris, such as pebbles, weed, driftwood, bones, assorted shells, sponge, a feather, frayed rope etc. Put one item in each bag. Tell your students not to peep in the bags, but to use their fingers instead of their eyes, and describe what they feel without naming the objects. Can others guess from their descriptions what they are touching? Make a collection of particularly good words.

Now look at some oyster shells with your students. This could involve a walk on the beach – there are usually plenty of oyster shells scattered about. Alternatively bring some into the classroom for the students to handle and examine. You could bring in some pearls as well – fake ones will do! – tied up in a knotted red cloth.



WRITING + LISTENING

In the past people created stories to explain things they didn't understand. We call this sort of story a myth. Read a myth to your students. Then ask them to write their own myths which describe how a pearl was first created. Share some of the ideas, and listen to each other's stories.

Now talk about the scientific way a pearl is formed, and read the extract with your class:

"Saeed picked up one of the shells and felt its roughness. The outside was really quite ordinary, he thought; if you didn't know, you would never imagine it could hold such surprises. He supposed people were a bit like that too. He wondered if this oyster contained a pearl. A few did, many did not. There was a belief that a pearl was a drop of dew or rain, which the oyster had caught by rising to the surface at night or during a shower of rain. Saeed liked the story but he knew it was not true. An oyster made its pearl around an intruder, perhaps a tiny worm, or a speck of grit which was irritating it. He thought it very clever that something so small could make something so beautiful."

DISCUSSION

What do you think Saeed is thinking when he supposes people can be like oysters? Do you agree?

Talk about the saying, 'appearances can be deceptive'. Do you think we should judge by appearance? Can you think of any occasions when you have misjudged something by its appearance?



ATMOSPHERE

LANGUAGE

What new words have you learnt from the story?

Look for all the “old” or unfamiliar words in the story. Why do you think words such as “**devil fish**” and “**fathoms**” have been used instead of “jelly fish” and “metres”?

The author has included a **glossary**. Do you think this is important?

Language can create the feel of a bygone age. The way a phrase or sentence is constructed can give the impression that it has been written long ago.

For instance, on page 14, describing the **Nakhuda**, it says

“Few accidents befell the men who dived for him, as he did not take unnecessary risks”

How might you have written that sentence if the story happened today?

Perhaps you might have said,

“It was unusual for the men who dived for him to have accidents because he was careful not to put them in danger.”

Both sentences have much the same meaning, but the first helps us to feel that the story took place long ago. It builds **atmosphere**.

Look for other phrases which do the same.

VISUALISATION

Are you able to **visualize** moments in the story? Sometimes the author uses **imagery** to help you see pictures in your head.

For instance, on page 11, it says

“Saeed turned now to see the men raising the huge white sails. The wind filled them, and the sambuk gathered speed. All around him other boats flew over the sea. Saeed thought they looked like a great flock of big white birds. And in their wake dolphins leapt and dived. This was a sign of good fortune. Saeed felt happy.”

What pictures did the words paint for you? What could you hear?

Look for other moments in the story which create **visual images** for you. Try to describe what you see and what you hear. How does the author help you to **imagine** the scene?

ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations also help to build atmosphere. Which of the illustrations do you like best? Can you explain why?

Do the illustrations add anything extra to the story? Do they show us anything which the words can't tell us?

Look at the picture of the storm on pages 36 + 37.

What can you see?

What colour is the sky? What is the sea doing? What is happening to the boats?

Imagine the sounds made by the wind, the sea, the thunder, the ships, and the people on board.

ACTIVITIES

In small groups write down the best words you can think of to describe the storm. Use large sheets of paper and coloured felt tip pens. You can make the words look like a storm.

Create the storm using words and sounds. You can use percussion instruments such as drums and rainsticks as well.

Describe the storm as if you are on board one of the boats.

What do you think is going to happen next? Write a newspaper headline which might accompany the picture.

Do you think the **Nakhudas** on these 2 boats may have taken unnecessary risks? A volunteer could take on the role of a **Nakhuda**, and sit in the "**hot seat**" to answer questions.

Certainly captains taking unnecessary risks have been blamed for the South Korea ferry disaster, and the sinking of the Italian ferry, the Costa Concordia. Look at newspaper headlines announcing the tragedies.

Talk about the kind of skills a good **Nakhuda** or Captain might have.

BEFORE THE VOYAGE

MAKING MAPS

If possible look at facsimiles of old pearling maps, and then encourage your students to create their own maps in small groups on large pieces of paper. The maps could be used as the starting point for a piece of drama.

A DRAMA ACTIVITY

Ask the students to sit in a large circle.

Talk about all the different jobs which would need doing before the pearling dhow could set sail.

There would be sacks of supplies to load onboard, sails and nets to mend, the underside of the boat would need rubbing with fat to protect it from the salty water, and so on.

Tell the students that the central space is the pearling dhow. Alternatively use rostra blocks or tables to build the boat.

Invite the students one by one to come aboard and get to work. It may involve helping another person – for instance, the sacks would have to be hauled from one person to the next.

There were no such things as radios or iplayers back then. An important member of the crew was the **Nahhaam** or singer, who sang, clapped and beat out a rhythm on a drum to cheer the men while they were working.

Encourage the students to work to a rhythm. A repetitive word or phrase or chant might help the rhythm - e.g. to and fro, up and down, bang! bang! bang! - until everyone is working together.

FROZEN PICTURES

Divide your students into small groups, and give each group a key moment from the story, such as Departure, Arrival at the Pearling Banks, The First Dive of the Season and so on.

Ask the students to create a **frozen picture** of that moment.

Invite students to **interpret** each other's pictures. They can also suggest the characters' thoughts.

Ask the students to think of a line their character would say. The teacher in role as the film director brings each frozen picture to life with a clap of her hands.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

A story needs a **beginning**, a **middle** and an **end**. It needs to reach a climax where something goes wrong/there's a problem, and tension builds.

Read the story up to the climax, where the shark is about to attack Abdullah, to end on a cliff-hanger.

Ask the students in groups to decide what might happen next and **improvise** the scene.

Each group chooses 3 **key moments** from the improvisation to turn into frozen pictures. When you clap your hands students hold the first image; clap again and they move into the second image, and on the third clap they create the final image.

Let each group interpret other group's pictures.

Ask the groups to create a **headline** for their story.