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197 New Market Ctr. #135
Boone, NC 28607
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TEACHER'S GUIDE



GETORIX: THE EAGLE AND THE BULL A Celtic adventure in ancient Rome

by Judith Geary

ISBN: 193215874X
hardcover: 24.95

ISBN: 9781932158731
trade paperback: \$15.95

ABOUT THE BOOK - Summary

Getorix ("almost 15 winters old") has one last opportunity to gain his father's regard and earn welcome into the Celtic Otherworld as a man. He marches beside his father, a defeated Celtic leader, in the Roman triumph parade. Instead of becoming an honored sacrifice at the Temple of Jupiter, as Getorix expects from his Celtic experience of honoring defeated enemies, the Roman guards take them to a dark underground cell. There, Getorix's father is executed after charging Getorix to face his own death bravely before the Romans. Instead, Getorix is taken to the home of one of the Roman generals where he confronts Lucius, the general's son who has spared his life.

Lucius expects Getorix to be grateful and is puzzled by his continued rebellion. The slave put in charge of Getorix's "education" is Keltus, a captive from a battle 20 years earlier who is loyal to his Roman master.

Getorix and Lucius are both misfits in their respective societies. Getorix is undersized and unable to recite perfectly the tales so important in Celtic culture; he reveres the stories of the Odyssey because he learned to read from a Greek captive in the druid's house. Lucius is asthmatic and spoiled and lives for hero stories like the Odyssey. They are thrown together and – through their debates and conflicts as well as their common interests – develop a grudging understanding and regard for each other. Getorix continues to seek a way to fulfill his father's charge and to pray for guidance, but the gods and his father's spirit are silent.

An accidental injury to Lucius forces Getorix to flee for his life into the streets of Rome. The Roman new year is coming and Getorix hopes that his father's spirit will give him guidance

as the doors between the worlds are said to be open at the new year in Celtic myth. Lucius and Getorix meet again on the Campus Martius, where Lucius is taken to train for combat, and Getorix defends him from bullies. Getorix escapes again and "captures" his father's signet cloak brooch from the general Marius' office in the Principia.

Lucius and Getorix meet again at the New Year's celebration at the Capitoline Temple. Getorix saves Lucius from being trampled by an escaped sacrificial bull. Lucius finally realizes that friendship requires equality, but has difficulty assuming it. Getorix finds a way to honor his father's spirit and his charge to show courage before the Romans and, at the same time, to embrace his life and his fate.

Compelling points: Honor; respect; friendship; people from opposing cultures reconciling differing value systems, religious beliefs and experience; political power

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This teacher's guide is intended as one body of information to support the teacher in using this novel in the classroom. This guide was formulated with particular attention to the Courses of Study provided by the **Alabama Board of Education**, but will certainly fit into other curricula as well. A glossary, maps and author's notes including biographical notes of the historical characters are in the back of the novel.

A more complete curriculum that encompasses other aspects of the **Roman Republic** is available for order and is included with a class set of the novel. Multiple choice questions that may be added to an **Accelerated Reader** database as a Teacher-Made Test are available in that curriculum or by e-mailing the author.

Please e-mail the author with questions or comments about this guide or other materials: judithgeary@msn.com

Discussion Questions:

1. In the opening of Chapter I, Getorix and his father are war captives of the victorious Roman legions. Their cultural experience leads them to expect to die as a sacrifice to the Roman gods, and both struggle to accept (to put the best face upon) this inevitability. The end of the triumph parade differs from their expectations in important ways. Instead of being sacrificed to the Roman gods, what happens to Claodicos and to Getorix? How do each of them respond?
2. Keltus and Brosch have acclimated to their Roman life as slaves. How do each of them view their situation? What about Getorix makes such adjustment so difficult for him? Why can he not be "grateful to the one who spared his life?"
3. Lucius finds Brosch alone in his mother's sitting room and comes in to talk to her. (Ch. 10) When she starts to cry, he "raised his hand to touch her face and stopped. She was a slave. He could touch her as freely as he did his cat. But he didn't." The author never explains why Lucius reacted in this way; what do you think is the reason?

4. Brosch holds a very different attitude toward Getorix than Lucius expects. Why does she resent his “intrusion” into the household? (There are several reasons.) Find examples in the novel to support your reasons.
5. In the novel, two very different holidays are celebrated, the Bona Dea and Saturnalia. Another, Samhain, or the Celtic new year is described. What are some of the customs that set these three holidays apart from each others and from holidays we celebrate in the month of December? What significance do each of the main characters – Getorix, Lucius and Keltus – seem to place on each of these holidays.
6. Lucius suffers an asthma attack when he and Getorix are roaming the house together. (Ch. 15) What triggers it, and how does Getorix respond? What change does this signal in their relationship and how do future events relate to this incident?
7. In the novel’s beginning, Claodicos charges Getorix to face his own death bravely before the Romans, laying a charge or *geis* upon his son’s shoulders. Through most of the novel, Getorix interprets his father’s charge to mean he must seek death in order to demonstrate his courage. Keltus and Lucius present him with other interpretations. How do Getorix’s, Keltus’ and Lucius’ beliefs about the way the world works (their “worldview” or “cultural constructs”) affect the way they interpret statements? How do our own beliefs affect our interpretations? Find examples in the novel to support your points.
8. By the end of the novel, Getorix and Lucius have developed a relationship. How would you describe this relationship? Are they friends? What about each of them is attractive to the other? The differences in their ethnic backgrounds and personalities are obvious; what commonalities do they share?
9. The author has stated in programs and interviews that the novel did not end the way she had originally planned. “The characters determined the ending.” If you were writing the story, how would you end it? What would happen next?

ACTIVITIES:

These activities are formulated with particular attention to the **Alabama Courses of Study**. The downloads from this site contain notes about the relationship of the novel to particular points. The goals given for each exercise are intended merely as one example of the way the novel can be applied to the curriculum. and should not in any way limit the teacher’s creativity in finding other applications.

English/Language Arts:

Powerful Passages: Find examples in the novel of passages that evoke emotion; expand thinking; and influence problem solving, decision making, and action. Explain how each applies. A few examples include:

- “Let me die as a prince of the Cimmeri,’ Getorix prayed softly. “Let me not flinch from the headsman’s ax nor from the hand of the priest. If it cannot be in battle, better this than the old man’s death before the hearth.” Those had been his father’s words, and now he clung to them as his own. (p. 16)
- “I will learn nothing from that Roman toad!”
- “Then you will be the poorer for it. The man who refuses to learn from his enemy remains a fool.” (Keltus and Getorix, p. 109)
- “ ... my father says the victors write the histories.”
- “I say it’s the other way around. Those who write histories give themselves the victories” (Lucius and Getorix, p.152)
- “ ... another voice that must be heard, people of Rome. It is the voice of Roma, the spirit of our mother herself. ...” (Catulus’ speech, p.238)
- Find your own “powerful passages” and explain what makes them powerful for you.

(Ala. COS, ELA, 6th, goal 11 and others)

(Ala. COS, ELA, 7th, goal 19 and others)

(Ala. COS, ELA, 8th, goal 10 and others)

*See also the complete curriculum *Getorix’s World*, “Powerful Passages – A View from the Pages.”

Being a Bard: In the novel, Getorix recites the Nordic story of Fafnir in response to Lucius’ demand for a story. (p. 158) Celtic literature of the time was memorized and performed by a class of druids sometimes called *bards*. The stories were in the form of poetry and often sung or chanted. **Select** an epic poem, ancient or modern, a ballad or song that tells a story, or write your own poem or song telling a story and perform it for the class.

(Ala. COS, ELA, 7th, goal 27 and others)

(Ala. COS, ELA, 8th, goals 25 & 26 and others)

*See also the complete curriculum *Getorix’s World*, “Roman Education Literature and Poetry” for activities involving the writing and performing of persuasive speeches based on *Controversia* and *Sausoria*, plus activities using poetry and *epigrams*.

* **Resources in the novel** include author’s notes and a glossary.

Discussion questions

(Ala. COS, ELA, 6th, goal 11 and others)

Social Studies:

Become an Expert: Using the specific goals enumerated in the *Alabama Courses of Study*, students choose a topic introduced in the novel, research it using available resources and present to the class using appropriate technology. For added interest, the students may present in groups or in character – as an archaeologist or an ancient locksmith, cobbler or engineer – for example. Possible topics include: (Ala. COS, ELA, 8th, goal 14)

- Roman pottery (Ala. COS, SS, 8th, goal 1 & 2)
- Calendars: Roman 1c. B.C.E., Celtic, Julian & Gregorian (Ala. COS, SS, 8th, goal 1 & 2)
- Roman political structure (the “cursus honorum” (Ala. COS, SS, 8th, goal 1 & 2)
- Roman infrastructure and technology, including the arch, aqueducts and the sewer system, roads and time (Ala. COS, SS, 8th, goal 2)
- Roman, Greek and Celtic Gods (Ala. COS, SS, 8th, goal 3)
- The Roman World at various periods and the peoples included in it (Ala. COS, SS, 8th, goal 6 & 7)

*See also the complete curriculum *Getorix’s World*, “Become an Expert.”

Math

The Romans were obsessive about keeping records and measuring (and they did it all with the awkward "Roman numeral" system of notation.) Applications include learning Roman numerals, converting distances in "Roman measurements" (The foot was equal to 29.6 centimeters, or 11.62 inches and the mile to approximately 5000 feet -- 1000 "paces." Exact lengths varied slightly during the thousand years of the Roman civilization -- which is an issue to discuss in our age of absolute precision.) The technology used for computation included the abacus.

The Arts

Drama of this period included the classical Greek drama and pantomime.

Visual Arts included frescos and murals, encaustic (pigments in wax), sculpture in the round and in relief and mosaics.

Physical Education

When we hear "Roman games" we think of barbaric spectacles like gladiators, beast fights and chariot races. Indeed, these were a part of Roman culture. However, they also competed in foot races and wrestling (though not in the organized way of the Greeks) and played ball games including a form of tennis.