

The Darkening Path series by Philip Womack

Teachers' Notes

These teaching resources, with ideas for discussion and activities, feature themes from the book and offer suggestions for further reading.

Book One: The Broken King

When Simon's little sister is mysteriously snatched away to a dark other world, he is sent by a golden messenger on a dizzying quest to get her back. With him is Flora, whose brother has also vanished, and a strange boy who rescues them from a violent attack.

To enter the land of the Broken King they must complete three tasks: 'Eat the Shadow. Steal the Sun. Break the Air.' But how do they even begin? And what lies in wait for them, in the land of the Broken King?

Book Two: The King's Shadow

'You are the chosen ones from the other land who will come to seek their siblings and with the hunting horn and the sunsword tear the king's shadow and overthrow the Broken King.' Simon and Flora have reached the land of the Broken King in search of their siblings.

But here, nothing is quite what it seems. Who can Simon and Flora trust? What does Pike, their mysterious companion, stand to gain? As rumours of war and revolution swirl around them, and as the sinister Knight of the Swan dogs their every move, the pair must confront their terrifying final task. And if they can free their siblings, will they then be able to open the way between the worlds, and return home?

Book Three: The King's Revenge - coming in 2016!

The Broken King's trap has been sprung; nobody can pass between the worlds, and everything is beginning to decay. Simon and Flora, reunited with their siblings at last, now face their most dangerous journey yet: they must go to the home of the Threefold Goddess.

Lying outside normal space and time, it exists in the centre of the universe. Perils beset them on all sides: will they be able to reach her, find out what has gone wrong, and save all three worlds from dying?

From readers and reviewers

'Like Alan Garner, Philip Womack takes ancient fairy-tales about searching for a child kidnapped by dark magic, and turns it into a haunting adventure exploring love, courage, fear and friendship. Written with sensitivity, intelligence and conviction, it's the kind of classic story readers can't get enough of.'

'A cracking pace, enigmatic characters and terrifying adversaries will have you clamouring for the next in the series'

'This is a really good bit of fantasy writing for young readers (10+) - exciting, well written, original while firmly rooted in traditional stories and myths... Great to read aloud too.'

'This is a gripping story told at a fast pace. The main characters - Simon, Flora and Pike - are convincingly drawn and it's easy to identify with them. The 'baddies' are vivid, and the interlacing of reality and fantasy is very effective. This book will have a strong appeal for young readers of both genders...'

Philip Womack was educated at Lancing College and Oxford University, where he read Classics and English at Oriel College. He has also written *The Other Book* and *The Liberators* and is currently literary critic for the *Telegraph*, contributing editor to the *Literary Review* and a judge of the Costa Children's Book Award. He is also a Fellow at First Story, currently being Writer in Residence at St Augustine's in Kilburn. He lives in London.

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Thinking and talking about the books

Introducing and reading each book

- Look at the blurb, set the scene, and read Chapter One either together or individually. Talk about the people and settings being introduced in this chapter, to get people going on reading the whole book.
- Then read the book all the way through, letting everyone read and experience it for themselves.
- Try not to interrupt the flow of the story but you may want to stop every so often to gather people's responses, understanding, and questions, and talk about what has happened so far. At the end allow some time for people to reflect and think about their responses to the book.

Talking about the books: some book-talk questions

- Get everyone to share their first responses. This could be with the whole class – or students could discuss in small groups, and then share key feelings and questions with everyone.
- Ask lots of open questions to get people talking and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to the story, the characters, and the writing.
- Explain that there are no right or wrong answers – we will all have our own feelings and opinions about the book, and the things we like, or don't like.

Here are some questions you might use.

- How did you feel when reading each of these books? And when you'd finished ?
- Which parts of the story do you remember most?
- Did you skip any parts? Which ones?
- Was there anything that took you by surprise?
- Were there any parts you didn't make sense of?
- What was the thing you most liked finding out from the books?
- What kind of books did you think they were going to be?
- What would you say about this series if you were telling someone what you've just read?
- Does the story work for you? Could you follow it?
- Has reading these books changed or affected you? At the end of each one did you feel as if you'd shared a real experience?
- Did you stop and start, or did you want to read it all through in one go?
- Are there parts you want to read over again?

The Darkening Path: themes to explore and discuss

'Alice in Terrorland'

One reviewer has described 'The Broken King' as 'a kind of Alice in Terrorland'. What do people think of this description? Did they find the book frightening? Which parts were most terrifying? Why?

Love, courage, fear and friendship

Look at each of these themes in turn. Talk about them and collect examples of how they are explored in these books – for example Simon's love for Anna, Flora's for Johnny, and Selena for the king her father; and Simon and Flora's developing friendship, and their relationship with Pike.

Grabbing your reader's attention! First lines and last lines...

See what people think of the first lines of Books One and Two of this series – how do they make them feel – do the lines get them wanting to read more?

The Broken King: 'Simon watched his parents drive away, his head throbbing and his heart heavy as the fading light of the late evening summer sun filled the front garden of the cottage'

The King's Shadow: "'Quick!" Simon gasped, and pulled Flora down behind an outcrop of dark rocks that rose along the side of the road they'd tumbled on to. "Get down! Soldiers are coming!"'

Look at how the author ends chapters – sometimes emphasising the mood of the chapter, sometimes leading in to the next chapter, sometimes with a cliff-hanger. Talk about how this holds your attention; talk too about the final lines of each book and the feelings they leave you with.

Family feelings

'He wanted to be on the sea, in the desert, at the North Pole. Anywhere but here with his annoying little sister'. (p6)

'Spitefully, she'd stomped around the room, wishing and wishing that Johnny would be taken...that people would listen to her and not to him, that the whole problem of his life would be gone.' (p94)

Simon wishes his sister Anna out of the way because she is being so annoying, and Flora is weary of her brother Johnny's drug-taking and the attention he gets. But they love their siblings and are paying a terrible punishment for wishing to the Broken King to take them away.

Talk about brothers and sisters and how we sometimes treat badly the people we care about the most.

Who's your favourite character?

Have a go at the **Wordsearch**, and **Who's who?** Then talk about your favourite characters, your least favourite – and your favourite baddie!

Activity ideas

The Darkening Path: Wordsearch

Can you find these characters, creatures – and winds! – from *The Darkening Path*? Look up, down, across and backwards.

MAGEHAWK

BIRD-DEER

SWANS

MITHRAS

NOTUS

BOREAS

EURUS

ZEPHYRUS

BRUIN THE GIANT

DWARF MALEK

HOVER

MONKEY CREATURES

Answer at the end of the notes

M	A	G	E	H	A	W	K	B	U	A	K	I	N	N	A
O	A	L	X	O	Q	M	E	R	Z	N	S	F	Q	G	E
N	S	O	L	V	T	T	L	S	W	O	Y	I	V	P	G
K	D	D	B	E	O	S	A	R	H	T	I	M	X	K	A
E	F	A	D	R	M	R	M	E	L	U	O	N	C	H	T
Y	G	Y	E	F	M	W	F	T	I	S	Q	L	Z	K	F
C	H	T	A	H	Y	F	R	T	C	V	S	M	E	B	B
R	K	H	S	H	S	N	A	W	S	O	X	C	P	V	V
E	L	G	D	Y	G	T	W	R	X	V	B	M	H	V	R
A	B	I	G	M	H	N	D	G	C	Z	A	D	Y	G	E
T	V	M	J	D	O	Q	E	R	E	X	U	P	R	K	E
U	C	B	O	R	E	A	S	V	C	C	Q	H	U	J	D
R	X	E	M	I	T	N	S	E	E	U	R	U	S	G	D
E	E	Y	P	U	S	L	N	N	D	R	Z	C	A	V	R
S	C	P	U	B	Q	X	A	X	V	C	N	J	P	F	I
W	X	V	T	N	A	I	G	E	H	T	N	I	U	R	B
P	C	B	M	N	C	S	V	Q	E	S	T	U	R	M	V

Who's who?

There are lots of characters in this story, either helping Simon and Flora on their way, or threatening them with danger.

Here are descriptions of some of them – put the right name to each character:

- Princess Selena
- Pike
- Mark, Knight of the Swan
- Raven and the Flames
- Andaria
- Lavinia, Lady of the Stag
- The Broken King

Character description	Name
<i>...the rider turned and hissed, holding the sunsword at Flora's breast. She pulled her hood down, revealing her face, and there she stood, a tall girl of about twenty, with wild brown hair and eyes that glared hard.</i>	
<i>The swan...was now a man – tall, white-skinned and naked. His expression was fierce and cold, and his black hair hung around his pale face...</i>	
<i>He looked at the boy. He was about the same age as him, and was a little podgy, with black hair and very pale skin.</i>	
<i>It was a woman, her face gaunt and lined, her hair fine silver...she moved fluidly and quickly, like a deer, her eyes large and dark and liquid and wild.</i>	
<i>His eyes were gently glowing red, and he was fiddling with his left horn. His long face was white and elastic, his mouth opening to enunciate every syllable carefully, revealing his scarlet tongue.</i>	
<i>'One's my guitarist. That's Cat in the front. The other's my drummer. That's – well, you can guess. We're a band!'</i>	
<i>She looked about Flora's age, Simon thought, maybe a couple of years older. She was silvery and pale and calm. Extremely calm.</i>	

Rhymes and spells

*'I call the Broken King.
Walk backwards thrice in a ring.
He'll come in blinding light.
He'll wrap you in the night.
Before the start of day
The Broken King will take you away!'*

Simon and Flora call the Broken King with a rhyme from a story book, which proves to be a spell with frightening results.

Here are some more rhyming spells:

In Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* this is chanted by witches as they prepare a potion to cast a charm:

*Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
Cool it with a baboon's blood,
Then the charm is firm and good.*

This is a '*Spell of Household Chores*' made up by a 13 year old student

*Spick and Span
Morning dew
Make this room
as clean as new*

And here is a traditional rhyme for wishing on a star:

*Star Light Star bright,
The first star I see tonight,
I wish I may, I wish I might,
Have the wish I wish tonight.*

Collect more rhyming spells, wishes and sayings, and then ask people to have a go at writing one of their own.

Book 1: *The Broken King*

Things to talk about

Accepting yourself

'Every embarrassing and awkward moment of her life came rushing over her at once... 'It's me,' she thought, 'It's all me. Just take it, accept it, overcome it.' (p118)

When Flora has to 'Eat the Shadow' she realises that it's about accepting herself, the 'Shadow Flora' with all her faults and weaknesses.

Talk about what this means – how we might accept what we're like and what we've done, and learn and grow from this.

A deep sleep

'Your parents have been put into deep sleep. If you succeed and bring Anna back, they will not know that anything has happened at all.' (p37)

Think of more stories where this happens – eg. *Rip Van Winkle*, *Sleeping Beauty*. Talk about how you can use this device in stories – eg. to move between different times, or to protect a character.

In a dream

'He didn't have that feeling in dreams where you are both agent and watcher...' (p192)

What other feelings do people have in dreams? – e.g. losing something precious; falling from a great height; fear; great happiness

Objects – magic and useful

Here's a list of objects which Simon and Flora use on their travels. Where did they get each object and how does it prove useful for them?

- First aid kit
- Torch and batteries
- Sunglasses
- Porcupine spine
- Johnny's syringe
- Old button
- Pencil stub
- Skin-map
- Sunsword
- Hunting horn

Words Quiz

Here are some lines from *The Broken King*. What are the meanings of the highlighted words? (Answers at the end)

1. *The woman's expression was **inscrutable**.* (p21)
2. *...a different tree that seemed to have **sporadic** clusters of long white flowers hanging from its branches* (p47)
3. *'We're both mad. Mad with grief probably...I bet you can read about it in medical journals. Delusions. **Psychosis**.'* (p49)
4. *He slipped in through the automatic doors...and into the **anaemic**, cold atmosphere inside* (p92)
5. *The moon ... was high in the sky. It was large and **bulbous*** (p109)
6. *A pair of swans was gliding in circles, their huge **ungainly** feet powering away unseen under their elegant bodies.* (140)
7. *The knight's face was **impassive*** (p237)
8. *...they saw black towers made of glass and **roiling** streets of people...* (p259)

Book 2: *The King's Shadow*

Things to talk about

The Broken King

'She knew that the king her father could not be mended.' (p101)

Talk about what the king was once like and how he is now in the story. What might have broken him? Talk too about his daughter Selena's feelings for him.

Shapeshifting

'I've seen him turn into a swan,' said Simon. 'Yes, shapeshifting is his main talent.' (p117)

Collect more stories and myths where characters shapeshift – either of their own accord or where they are forced or charmed into different shapes: e.g. *Beauty and the Beast*; *The Frog Prince*; Sauron in *Lord of the Rings*; Zeus taking the shape of a swan

Portals

'But without a portal like that, it's harder. One way for us is through our animals, though not everyone can do it..' (p38)

In this story a portal here is an access point or access object between two worlds. Simon and Flora can use the shadow-spheres, and at the end of the story The Way is opened for them to go back home. Think of examples from other stories – e.g. portkeys, and the Diagon Alley fireplace, in the *Harry Potter* stories.

Back home

'We'll go back to our world, and it will be the same old stuff, school and exams and wet holidays...I'd love to be on the beach in the rain, though...' (p277)

This is what Simon says when he thinks that The Way back is open. If you were going back home after a long and difficult time away, what would you look forward to the most?!

Picture the palace square

On pages 43 and 44 there is a detailed description of the square in front of the Broken King's palace. Use this description to draw or paint a picture of the palace square.

In the dark

Then, if it was possible, the darkness became thicker, which Simon guessed signalled the passage being closed. (p177)

Imagine you are in a dark, enclosed space. Where is it? – a cave, a tunnel, a locked room, a cupboard? How did you get there? How can you get out?

Write a description of the darkness, your feelings – what are you going to do?

Be a researcher

Use this research sheet to find out more about these people and things referred to in *The King's Shadow*. Give at least two bullet points for each.

	Research findings
The walls of Jericho <i>The walls came tumbling down (p9)</i>	
Ectoplasm <i>It was almost see-through – not quite like smoke, more like gauze... (p54)</i>	
Buzz Aldrin <i>'Are we on the moon?'... '...Yeah, and Buzz bloody Aldrin's going to come and rescue us.' (p75)</i>	
Quantum physics <i>'I have read a bit about quantum physics and stuff, about the possibility of many alternate universes... (p135)</i>	
A hare's form <i>Pike was as still as a hare in its form. (p145)</i>	
Parseltongue <i>The snake now seemed to be having some kind of conversation with Pike... ... 'Speak Parseltongue do you?' said Flora (p213)</i>	

More reading

Author	Title	Publisher	ISBN
Philip Womack	<i>The Liberators</i>	Bloomsbury	978-0747595526
Philip Womack	<i>The Other Book</i>	Bloomsbury	978-0747590439
Fantasy, fairy tales & other worlds			
Susan Cooper	<i>The Dark is Rising</i>	Red Fox	978-1849412704
Cornelia Funke	<i>Inkheart</i>	Chicken House	978-1908435118
Sally Gardner & David Roberts	<i>Tinder</i>	Orion	978-1780621494
Alan Garner	<i>The Weirdstone of Brisingamen</i>	HarperCollins	978-0007355211
The Brothers Grimm	<i>The Complete Fairy Tales</i>	Vintage	978-0099511441
Diana Wynne Jones	<i>Howl's Moving Castle</i>	HarperCollins	978-0007299263
Ursula Le Guin	<i>A Wizard of Earthsea</i>	Puffin	978-0140304770
Madeleine L'Engle	<i>A Wrinkle in Time</i>	Puffin	978-0141354934
Garth Nix	<i>Sabriel, Lirael and Abhorsen</i>	HarperCollins	978-0007137312
Tamora Pierce	<i>The Song of the Lioness</i>	Scholastic	978-0375825644
Philip Pullman	<i>His Dark Materials Trilogy (The Northern Lights, The Subtle Knife and The Amber Spyglass)</i>	Everyman	978-1841593425
Ali Sparkes	<i>The Shapeshifter 1: Finding the Fox</i>	Oxford University Press	978-0192754653
Jonathan Stroud	<i>The Amulet of Samarkand</i>	Corgi	978-0552562799

Answers: Wordsearch

M	A	G	E	H	A	W	K	B	U	A	K	I	N	N	A
O	A	L	X	O	Q	M	E	R	Z	N	S	F	Q	G	E
N	S	O	L	V	T	T	L	S	W	O	Y	I	V	P	G
K	D	D	B	E	O	S	A	R	H	T	I	M	X	K	A
E	F	A	D	R	M	R	M	E	L	U	O	N	C	H	T
Y	G	Y	E	F	M	W	F	T	I	S	Q	L	Z	K	F
C	H	T	A	H	Y	F	R	T	C	V	S	M	E	B	B
R	K	H	S	H	S	N	A	W	S	O	X	C	P	V	V
E	L	G	D	Y	G	T	W	R	X	V	B	M	H	V	R
A	B	I	G	M	H	N	D	G	C	Z	A	D	Y	G	E
T	V	M	J	D	O	Q	E	R	E	X	U	P	R	K	E
U	C	B	O	R	E	A	S	V	C	C	Q	H	U	J	D
R	X	E	M	I	T	N	S	E	E	U	R	U	S	G	D
E	E	Y	P	U	S	L	N	N	D	R	Z	C	A	V	R
S	C	P	U	B	Q	X	A	X	V	C	N	J	P	F	I
W	X	V	T	N	A	I	G	E	H	T	N	I	U	R	B
P	C	B	M	N	C	S	V	Q	E	S	T	U	R	M	V

Answers: Words Quiz

1. inscrutable – mysterious, hard to understand
2. sporadic – every so often
3. psychosis – loss of contact with reality
4. anaemic – pale, without energy
5. bulbous – round and swollen, like a bulb
6. ungainly - clumsy
7. impassive – showing no emotion
8. roiling – chaotic