

GITA RALLEIGH

The Voyage of Sam Singh

Teaching Resources

Opening

'Sam felt the sharp dig of claws almost tug the hair from his scalp, startling him awake.' (Page 7)

Discuss: What do you make of this first line? What are your first impressions of Sam Singh?

Read the first chapter.

Activity: Make a spidergram with all the first pieces of information Ralleigh gives about Sam.

'Moon was Sam's older brother. Their father had died when Sam was small, and Moon provided for the family. Like all land-pirates, he could swarm over roofs, scale walls like a monkey and contort himself through the tiniest spaces.' (Page 9)

Discuss: How significant will Moon be to the story? What's a land-pirate? Why does Ralleigh use this phrase?

Activity: Create a mission statement for Sam based on the first chapter. What is his goal?

Discuss: Do all protagonists need a goal at the beginning of a book?

Activity: Compare to other books you have read – make a list of protagonists and their goals.

'He glanced down at the scorpion tattooed on his arm, a mark that identified the boys and men of his tribe, dead or alive.

We are kings of the forest.

Let them tame us if they can!

Moon had taught him those words: the land-pirates' greeting.' (Page 11)

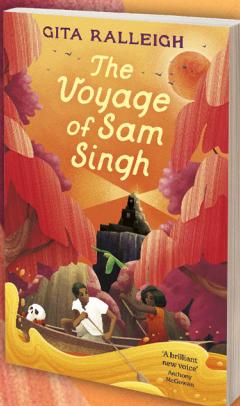
Discuss: What tribe does Sam belong to? Why do people separate themselves into tribes? What is the meaning of the scorpion symbol? Why do land-pirates have a special greeting?

Activity: Do you belong to a tribe? Does it have a symbol or greeting/saying? What do we think of as tribes today – a group of friends, football fans, religious groups? What is the importance of your tribe for you? Outline your answers on a poster, which should represent your tribe in terms of its colours and images.

'Which meant the worst had happened. Transportation. And if Moon really was locked up in the Octopus, Sam did not intend to leave the Isle without him.' (Page 12)

Discuss: How does the end of the first chapter set up the story?

Activity: Write a synopsis for the rest of the novel, based on the material given in the first chapter.



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Writing Style

'With a flurry of emerald wings, the parrot settled on his chest, tilting his head hopefully. 'Breakfast, Sam Singh!' (Page 7)

Discuss: How does Ralleigh use colour in her opening chapter? Why is there such an emphasis on colour? What impression does it give?

Activity: Write a descriptive passage of your view out the window using as much colour as possible.

Activity: Paint a scene of the first chapter's setting. Which colours do you need to use?

'In the blue moonlight, all he'd seen of his helper was a yellow turban and the glint of a diamond earring.' (Page 15)

'Through the glass rooflight above, he watched the amber sky become sea; the cabin around him bathed with watery green light. A shoal of black-striped grouper drifted overhead.' (Page 199)

Discuss: How does colour continue to be important in the rest of the novel? Do different colours represent different things, such as an indication of colonialism, emotion, landscape?

Activity: Create a colour graph inspired by the novel matching emotions or themes to colours. Compare with others to see if the colours represent the same things to them.

'Sam felt the sharp dig of claws' (Page 7)

'As the sound of the horn faded,' (Page 16)

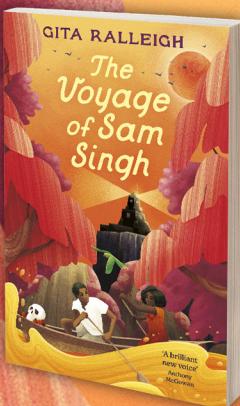
'the air heavy with the scent of jasmine,' (Page 20)

'He sniffed the salty breeze and listened to the sounds it carried: stirring leaves, cicadas rasping and the hooting of wood pigeons.' (Page 46)

Discuss: How does Ralleigh use the senses to create a sense of place in the novel? How important are Sam's sensations in guiding him through the action?

Activity: Take one scene from the novel and make a list of the different ways in which the senses are evoked. How do they help you to build a picture of what's happening?

Activity: During the course of an hour, pay special attention to what your senses are picking up. What do you hear, see, touch, sense and smell. Which actions or objects cause more than one sense to be stimulated? Write about your experience.



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Setting

'Moon was the reason Sam had taken the Collector's job and with it, free passage across the Kalinga Sea to the Isle of Lost Voices.' (Page 10)

Discuss: From reading the opening chapter, when and where do you think the novel is set?

Activity: Write a list of everything you learn about the setting in this first chapter. What do the trades, people, objects and transport tell you about the historical and geographical setting?

Activity: Research the Kalinga Sea. What is it called now? Find a map of India and try to work out where the story is set.

Discuss: Why does Ralleigh use the name Kalinga Sea?

'The inspiration for this book comes from real Indian history recorded in 19th and 20th century colonial texts. The Isle of Lost Voices is based on the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean, now part of India. These tropical islands were used by the British as a penal colony for prisoners from the subcontinent and housed a notorious jail. The Andamans appear most famously in Arthur Conan Doyle's The Sign of Four, still on the GCSE syllabus today.' (Author Note, Page 269)

Activity: Create a factfile or leaflet about the Andaman Islands. You may wish to concentrate on one aspect, such as history and colonialism, flora and fauna, allusions in literature.

Discuss: Once you have made your factfile, think about why Ralleigh has chosen it as an inspiration for the Isle of Lost Voices. What do the real and fictional islands have in common?

'Sam shook his head. 'I haven't eaten since we left Indica,' (Page 14)

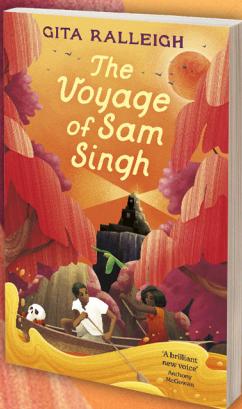
Discuss: Why has Ralleigh adapted the name India to Indica? What does it enable her to do?

'The turtle-shaped Isle grew rapidly closer. Sam saw its shiny black stone cliffs and silvery volcanic sand without the huddled houses of the Port or the hulking Octopus. From here, the Isle appeared as it always had done: a green and jet jewel sparkling in blue seas.' (Page 215)

Activity: Can you draw a bird's eye view of the island? Where is the Octopus and the port? Where does Lola's tribe reside? Where do pirates operate?

Activity: Now create your own made-up island. You could use a real island for inspiration as Ralleigh does. Which ecosystems exist on your island? What has been developed or built on? Do you have beaches or cliff-edges? Is it home to wildlife? Draw a map of it.

'And then he saw it – a tower made from the Isle's black stone and polished so that it glittered darkly in the sun.' (Page 8)



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'Don't you know anything about the Isle of Lost Voices? Plenty of ghosts, especially at the Port. Clanking chains, howls, screams, the lot.' (Page 23)

'Terrible things happen there, Sam Singh. There's a reason this is known as the Isle of Lost Voices.' (Page 54)

'The four of them were going over the escape plan, using a teapot for the Octopus, forks for its eight wings and a salt cellar on its side for the Dugong.' (Page 146)

Discuss: Why do you think people believed the Isle was haunted?

Activity: Draw a picture of how you imagine the 'Octopus' to look. Are you drawing it from Sam's point of view, or from Suka's? How would the perception differ? Or make a collage to represent the Octopus. What materials and graphics will you use?

'It was painted white, with a green-tiled roof, rising three storeys high. Sam started counting the windows, but soon gave up – they went on forever. A whole town could live in that house, never mind his own tribe.' (Page 19)

'Glass shelves lined the hallway, filled with fragile-looking statues, vases and china plates.' (Page 28)

'They were led through the grand house, with its silk rugs, china vases and oil paintings.' (Page 124)

'Despite his new clothes, Sam felt as out of place as a fly on a white tablecloth. He much preferred Sparrow's comfortable bungalow.' (Page 124)

'It was lit up like a bride's house on her wedding day, every window gleaming gold.' (Page 130)

Activity: Write a comparison piece between the Octopus and the Governor's House.

Discuss: Why do you think that Ralleigh has drawn such a stark difference between where Lola's tribe lives, or Sparrow's bungalow or the Octopus and the Governor's House? What do the dwellings represent – are they part of the character's character or social status? Think about housing today. Does the type of building and place make a difference to how you view the person?

Activity: Make a collage from magazine cuttings or online photography and scrap fabric to represent the Governor's House. How is it different from the one you made about the Octopus?

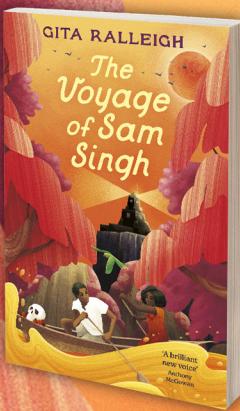
'The river was shadowed by huge trees and light through the canopy glowed green in the afternoon sun. The air hummed with insects and the cries of strange birds.' (Page 42)

'Sticky yellow mud caked his sandals, not like the dusty red earth of Indica, and the undergrowth's ferns and grasses brushed his knees.' (Page 46)

'As they descended, the skies flooded red and the jungle birds began their raucous dawn chorus.' (Page 87)

'Yellow mud squelched under their feet, while green geckos skittered and red frogs hopped across the slick path.' (Page 89)

Discuss: How important are the natural features of flora and fauna to the novel?



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Activity: Try and find five paintings or stills from movies that would conjure this sort of landscape, with the canopy glowing green, yellow mud, red skies, and wildlife. You may wish to see if an AI picture generator can create something. What instructions would you give it?

Characters

Sam Singh

Re-read the first chapter.

'Sam, like Suka, spoke five and had translated the land-pirate's lingo for him. When the Collector needed a servant for his trip to the Isle, Sam offered himself for hire.' (Page 9-10)

Discuss: How does Ralleigh show the reader that Sam is the underdog in the story – how is the balance of power set up in the first chapter?

Activity: Write down all the things that surprise you about Sam in the first chapter. Are any contradictions between his status and his characteristics?

'He was good at breaking up fights – usually between his mother and stepfather.' (Page 41)

Discuss: How do Sam's actions show the kind of person he is?

Activity: Write the adjective that describes Sam from an action he performs. For example, the following quote shows that he is 'polite' or 'grateful'. How many can you find?

'Sneaking away without saying goodbye seemed wrong. They ought to thank the villagers for their kindness, the food they'd shared and their hospitality in giving up Tuke's hut.' (Page 86)

'I can tell by your walk. Knees bent, feet apart, looking down to check for tree roots and snakes.'

'Not striding along, staring at the sky like –' (Page 47)

'He was just another stranger, disrupting the peace of her tribe.' (Page 106)

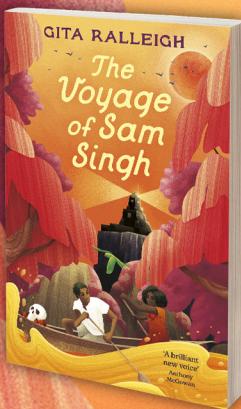
Discuss: These two quotes seem to contradict each other. Does Sam respect and understand Lola's tribe, or is his presence disruptive to the indigenous people on the Isle?

Activity: Draw two columns and set out your arguments for each. Now hold a debate to see whether Sam's presence is disruptive or constructive?

'The two of them had laughed together all the time.' (Page 49)

'As they talked, Sam found himself opening up, as if their laughter had cracked the hard carapace he'd grown since Moon left.' (Page 50)

'In the three years since his brother had disappeared, this was the first time he trusted anyone enough to ask for it.' (Page 69)



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Discuss: How important to Sam is his relationship with his brother?

Activity: Think about your own sibling relationship. Construct a pie chart of how much time you spend with your sibling and what you do with them. Is it quality time? Is it alone or with other family members? Could you increase your time together? Do they live with you? Write a list of positive things about your sibling. [If you do not have a sibling, choose a close friend instead]

Activity: Imagine you are Sam at the beginning of the story. Write a letter to Moon in the Octopus prison. What would you say about your plans, your feelings about him?

'He didn't like the Collector, but he owed him.' (Page 120)

'Thank you,' he remembered to say this time. 'Thank you for saving us.' (Page 199)

Discuss: How often does Sam do the right thing instead of the thing he wants to do?

Discuss: How do Sam's integrity and courage turn events in his favour? Do his integrity and courage ever cause him problems?

Activity: Choose a scene in the novel in which Sam does the right thing instead of what he wants to do, or instead of what's safe and easy. Now rewrite the scene as if Sam does the opposite. What effect does it have on the story?

'The longer you lived, the more people you came to care for and feel afraid for.' (Page 184)

Discuss: Do you agree with this statement? Is it a negative or positive thing to feel afraid for other people?

Activity: Draw a series of ever-increasing circles on a page, with your name in the middle. On each ring, write the names of people you care for, with the most important on the inner rings. Does it feel good to have so many people to care for, and who care for you?

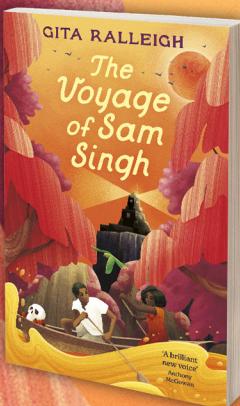
'Sam's job was to ask questions. What if the cook wakes up? What if the cowshed roof gives way? It was how he was made.' (Page 126)

Discuss: Is it a good or bad character trait to ask questions? When do you ask questions?

'Sam Singh, you're a hero – you jumped in to save your friend!' Sparrow cried.' (Page 205)

Discuss: Is Sam a hero? What makes a hero?

Activity: Create a job advert for a hero. Which qualities would your applicant need?



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Discuss: Which characteristics make Sam a good friend to Lola? Choose the most important and write an acrostic poem using that word as your main word.

'By then, he was known for being a good leader and a good man, qualities that are rarely found in a person.' (Page 247)

Activity: Think of a role model or famous person who is both a good leader and a good person. Write a profile of that person.

Activity: Make a list of everyday heroes around you. What is their heroic quality? Who do they help?

Suka

'You don't have to teach that clever bird! He picks it up himself.' (Page 23)

'Sam Singh sad!' Suka cried as he flew above them. 'Il est triste! Dukh! Varuttam!' (Page 38)

Discuss: Which four languages is Suka speaking here? How does he read Sam's emotions?

Activity: Can you read your friends' emotions by what they do instead of what they say? In pairs, express a feeling solely through facial expressions and body language and see if your partner can guess the emotion. Do this for seven emotions and then swap.

Activity: Learn some words of a new language. Write down emotions in English and then pick a language to translate them into. Do any of your friends speak more than one language?

'Suka was a friend, not a pet. He was free to fly anywhere he wanted. But he couldn't help feeling hurt at how quickly the parrot had taken to Lola.' (Page 40)

'What if he was happier in the wild, here among his own kind? Sam would miss him, but Suka was his friend, and free to choose for himself.' (Page 107)

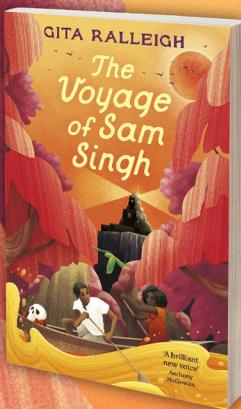
'Suka swooped down, crying 'Jam, Confit, Chutney!' tailed by a troop of jungle crows, cawing jam.' (Page 142)

Discuss: Is Suka in the story just for comic effect or does Suka represent something else? How important is he to the story?

Lola

'A round-faced, curly-haired girl in a faded dress was glaring at him through its glossy leaves. She was holding a long bamboo tube.' (Page 21)

Discuss: What impression do you get of Lola from her first appearance?



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Activity: Draw a picture of how you imagine Lola to look, using evidence from the text.

'Lola, sandals strung around her neck, was hopping impatiently from one bare foot to another.' (Page 37)

'I have my own name for them, actually. I call them farty puddles!' Lola announced as the mud volcano emitted a wet, popping noise.' (Page 48)

'as she began scaling a tree, limber as an acrobat,' (Page 101)

Discuss: How does Ralleigh make Lola likeable throughout the novel?

Activity: Take one scene and make a list of all the verbs (action words) that Ralleigh attributes to Lola. How does this help to paint a picture of her?

'I only visit when the Governor needs an interpreter.' (Page 24)

'I hated school,' Lola told him. 'The Governor hired a tutor for me instead.' (Page 26)

'I'm betting on you, Lola dear. Cleverest young lady on the Isle.' (Page 29)

Discuss: How does Lola's background inform her character?

Activity: Where do you grow up and go to school? Who is raising you? Create a flowchart with cause and effect about where and how you grow up and what impact you feel that has on who you are? E.g. growing up in the city or country, speaking a different language at home, living near relatives etc.

'Two men stood there, who looked like Lola, with her dark, gleaming skin and clouds of curly hair. Their faces were decorated with intricate yellow patterns of swirling circles and lines.' (Page 39)

'wore only a short cloth around their middle.' (Page 41)

Discuss: What does the reader learn about Lola's tribe during the course of the novel? Would you prefer to be in Lola's or Sam's tribe? Explain your reasons.

Princess/Moonlally

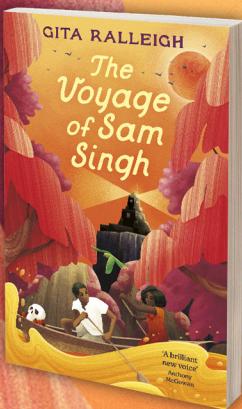
'Not what I'd call a real Princess. They're hardly proper royalty – she's from one of those tiny states. Moonlally, I think it's called.' (Page 15)

Discuss: Why does the Collector's disdainful view immediately make the reader think kindly about the Princess. How else does Ralleigh indicate the reader is to think well of her?

'You do look alike!' he said wonderingly. 'Are you both princesses?' (Page 117)

'He hadn't thought a princess would do the cooking herself.' (Page 139)

Discuss: Why does the real princess pretend to be a servant? And why does she sometimes dress like a man? What does this tell you about the society in which they live?



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Discuss: What are your society's preconceptions about royalty?

Activity: Write a list of things you would expect a princess to do, and things you wouldn't. Now compare Moonlally's actions in the novel. How often does she defy expectations?

Discuss: For what purpose do people wear disguises today?

Activity: If you could wear a disguise for a day, what would you be and why? Write about your disguise. You may even wish to make your disguise from scrap material and recycling at home.

The Collector

'A professor – known to Sam's people as the Collector – had paid his passage on the Yellow Pearl. The Collector travelled the world, gathering languages.' (Page 9)

Discuss: What effect does not naming the Collector have? Why does Ralleigh describe the Collector as 'gathering languages' rather than learning them?

'For a start, the Collector, with his big head, only spoke one language, while Suka the parrot spoke five.' (Page 39)

'Sam marvelled at how little the Collector understood the world. No one would invite a guest into their home and then rob them!' (Page 59)

Discuss: Do you think the professor is knowledgeable or ignorant? Give evidence to support your answer.

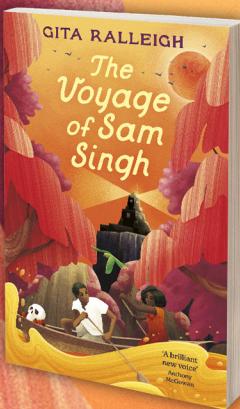
Discuss: Do you think the Collector misunderstands the world? Where might he have obtained his preconceptions? Does he represent the 'colonialists'?

Research: If you are unsure, research the word 'colonialism'. What does it mean? Where did it come from? What is the history of colonialism? When was India a colony? Investigate how it became a colony, and when it gained independence.

'Stole a Tjurunga from the Arrernte and got chased into the desert in Australis – nearly died of sunstroke. Smuggled a totem out of the Haisla in New France and almost got scalped...' (Page 176)

Discuss: The Professor's past escapades speak of him 'collecting' artefacts and items from other cultures. Is this a good or bad thing to do?

Activity: Research the recent debates over whether items in the British Museum such as the Benin Bronzes should be returned to the original place in which they were made, and to which culture they belong.



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Activity: Hold a debate as if you are the British Museum. Should you give back the Elgin Marbles, the Benin Bronzes etc.

Moon

'He'd taken all the risks of land-pirate ways so his younger brother could stay in school.' (Page 16)
'- but he was different. Everything was different. Moon's face was scarred and thin and older.'
(Page 234-235)

Activity: Once you have read the entire novel, write a short story of Moon's adventures from escaping the Octopus to becoming the leader of the sea-pirates. Think about whether you want to write it in first person from his point of view, or third person. Remember to show his character through his actions and speech.

Themes

Colonialism

'The inspiration for this book comes from real Indian history recorded in 19th and 20th century colonial texts.' (Author Note, page 269)

Discuss: What is colonialism?

'crates of spices, tea and grain.' (Page 17)

Discuss: What was the importance of goods such as spices, tea and grain to India and the colonialists in the 18th and 19th centuries? You may wish to research the role of the East India Company in British colonial history.

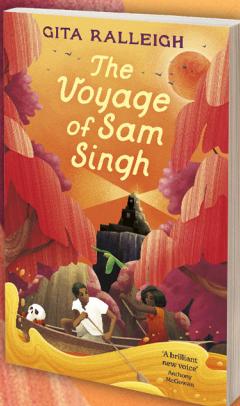
'What do those callipers tell you? Professor Bogusz,' he addressed the table, 'claims he can predict who might commit crime from the shape of the skull in childhood.' (Page 29)
'The Collector's case was neatly packed with row upon row of human skulls, a number in black ink scrawled upon each ivory vault.' (Page 36)

Re-read chapter 4 on page 25.

Discuss: How do Sam and Lola feel about having their heads measured? What conclusions does the Collector make about the children following measuring their heads?

Research: What was the practice of phrenology?

Discuss: Why might Ralleigh have introduced the Collector's interest in phrenology at this point? How does phrenology relate to racism or hierarchism and colonialism?



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Activity: What other stereotypes can you think of that are now viewed as racism? Why do you think there was racism in the 18th and 19th centuries? Brainstorm all the ways in which humans have learned about diversity, equality and inclusion. What does your school do to promote equality and diversity?

'The skull of an ancestor! This is a tribe of head-hunters! They only hold onto the most revered of their forebears. They believe it protects them.' (Page 58)

'To give the skull of an ancestor fresh flowers and pay it respect was one thing, but to take skulls belonging to other people was another.' (Page 58)

Discuss: How does the Collector's interest in phrenology conflict with the beliefs of the indigenous people he meets?

Activity: How do we show our respect for other people's religious beliefs today? Create a poster of tolerance showing examples of mutual respect among religious beliefs and practices.

'The Governor was squeezed into a tight-fitting red tailcoat and a starched, ruffled shirt tied with a floppy bow. His great belly bulged over black breeches, which ended in white stockings, held up with red satin garters. Exactly the same outfit Colonel Mayo wore in the painting.' (Page 126)

Discuss: Why does the Governor dress as Colonel Mayo?

Activity: Research the uniform worn by the British Colonial Auxiliary Forces and the British Indian Army during the 18th and 19th centuries.

[Raja of Tanjore in procession. Tanjavore, India, 1825-1830 | V&A Images \(vandaimages.com\)](#)

Have a look at this image from the V&A Museum of the Raja of Tanjore in procession.

[Compare with this painting Group Portrait of Sir Elijah and Lady Impey - Zoffany, Johann. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza \(museothyssen.org\)](#)

Activity: Compare the two paintings and write your thoughts on their portrayal of colonialism in India.

'We're different from the rest of Indica – the mainland,' she added for Lola's benefit.

'We're a queendom, for one thing,' Sparrow put in. 'Much of Indica is colonised by people from Europa, like the Isle. Moonlally's altogether different – it's an independent state.'

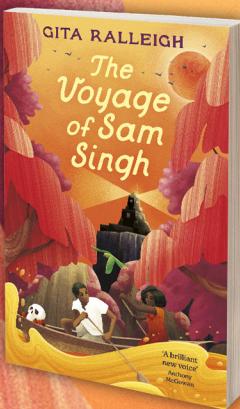
'With a free press,' Ophelia continued. 'And voting rights for all.' (Page 143)

'Jay's a hothead. His newspaper, The Revolutionary Rag, spreads rebellion to all Indica.' (Page 144)

Discuss: How important is a free press and voting rights? Do you have these things where you live?

Activity: Draw a spidergraph to depict all the rights and freedoms you have where you live.

Activity: Write a manifesto or constitution for your ideal society. Which rights and freedoms would you put into a constitution?



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'Not unless there's an amnesty for political prisoners. And that's a way off...if it ever comes. I'm heading East – far from Indica.' (Page 204)

Discuss: What's an amnesty? What's a political prisoner? Are there any political prisoners held in the world today? Where and why?

On page 170, Sam says he hears Mayo's cry as 'Freedom' but Lola says it's 'Treason'.

Discuss: Define these two words. Could the two words ever be the same thing?

Activity: Hold a debate to discuss whether it's ever right to hold a political prisoner? Try to give researched specific examples to back up your argument.

Colonialism and Environment

'They ate the grubs for lunch, wrapped in leaves and roasted over the glowing embers of the fire. Sam had not tried grubs before, but when times were hard, his tribe ate whatever they could hunt or trap, including rats, snakes and jackals, so he wasn't fussy.' (Page 64)

Discuss: Ralleigh explains how Sam's tribe had to eat whatever they could find when times were hard. What's the strangest thing that you have eaten? Where does your food come from? Have you ever had to hunt for your food?

Activity: Research and draw a flowchart exploring where one food product that you regularly eat comes from. How many different countries or processes does it go through between field/nature and your plate? Think about how this relates to your research on the East India Company and the trade in natural food-stuffs.

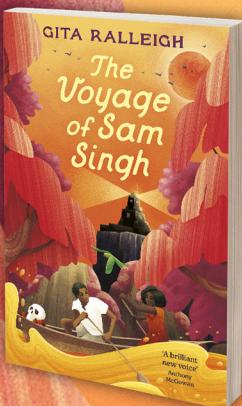
'That's a mud volcano,' Lola told him. 'You get lots here. The mud's meant to be good for your skin!' (Page 48)

'They pick the right trees to dig out so that the boat stays stable in rough water. And they use a special mix of pine resin and charcoal to waterproof it.' (Page 109)

'Sam sat in the warm sun helping Tuke and Lola to bind the huge bamboo canes with rope. He was surprised at how sturdy the raft seemed.'

'Strong enough to carry two grown men!' Tuke told him, through Lola. 'In the forest we use vines, but ropes are easier.' (Page 183)

Discuss: How important is the natural environment in the novel? In which ways do Lola's tribe use the natural resources around them?



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Activity: In which ways do humans benefit from nature today? List the ways that the tribes and the Collector and Governor use natural resources in the book. Then expand your list with modern examples of how you benefit from natural resources.

'Sam felt happier on dry land – he was a land-pirate, after all and his nomadic tribe were once hunters, whose forest homeland had mostly been cut down.' (Page 46)

'Sam talked of hunting in his homeland, sparse now that logging had destroyed the forest. He'd spend days and nights tracking a single deer or wild pig under the full moon.' (Page 51)

Discuss: What does 'nomadic' mean? What is 'logging'?

Activity: Research a nomadic tribe. Why is their connection to the environment so important? How might it conflict with settled societies? How do nomadic tribes connect us to ancestral cultures and traditions?

Activity: Create a project on logging and deforestation. When might logging be necessary? What is deforestation? Has it happened in India? Where and why?

'My parents caught a sickness from strangers visiting the village. The Governor was one of them, though he didn't know he'd brought it.' (Page 109)

'Tuke hates electric lights,' she told Sam. 'None of our people like them. In the forest, after sunset, there's only the moon and stars, fireflies and the cooking fire. This blinding brightness feels wrong to us at night.' (Page 186)

'Some said thousands of their people died, just like my parents. Some were massacred by invaders. Their lands were taken, forests and rivers – all taken, Sam!' (Page 217)

'But now the trees were felled, the animals frightened away and his people were left to wander the cities, selling trinkets, stealing stray hens and picking the odd pocket.' (Page 217)

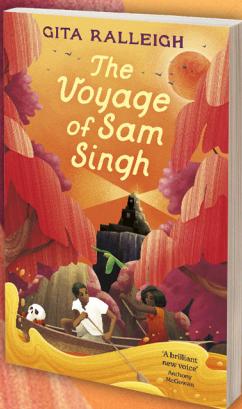
Discuss: Why were indigenous people so susceptible to disease brought in by explorers and settlers from Europe? How did the colonialists take the land? Why did indigenous people turn to crime?

Discuss: In the novel, what has the development of the island by visiting humans changed for the indigenous tribes who live there? What is happening to the natural resources?

Activity: Research an indigenous people and see if how they lived has changed or been destroyed by explorers who came and colonised the land. Create a Power Point to show your answers.

Activity: What is globalisation? Take one natural resource and investigate the human impact of using that resource, e.g. wood, oil, gas, naturally-occurring metals. Create a project showing the impact in one region. Are there any good long-term solutions?

'He learned that the earth does not belong to us, but like all living creatures, we belong to the earth.' (Page 247)



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Discuss: What does this sentence mean?

Activity: Write a poem exploring your thoughts about how humans 'belong to the earth'.

Colonialism and Hierarchy of Society/Racism

'I know your people are work shy, but I'm not having this! The Collector did not sound happy.' (Page 13)

'Tough people, his tribe of land-pirates. Hunters, craftsmen and petty thieves, but spirited with it.' (Page 14)

'They don't call you land-pirates for nothing – wily bunch of thieves and scoundrels.' (Page 16)
[Forest people] *'Their tribe's as unreliable as you land-pirates, I hear.'* (Page 16)

Discuss: What is the Collector's opinion of the land-pirates and forest tribe? Is it drawn from experience or evidence? Is it correct?

'Land pirates were honourable thieves who took only what they needed and robbed from those too rich to notice. But he wasn't silly enough to tell the Collector – outsiders had their own opinions of right and wrong.' (Page 16)

Discuss: Is there such a thing as an 'honourable thief'? Who else in literature robs from the rich to give to those who need? Can there be differences in right and wrong depending on who you are and where you come from?

'Give these people hooch and baccy, and they'll do anything. Savages! They're all the same.' (Page 44)

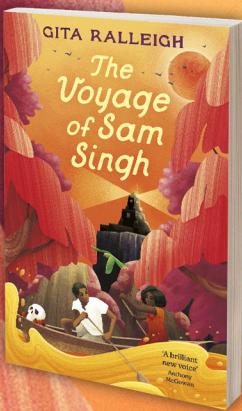
Discuss: How do Lola's tribe use tobacco and alcohol? Why does the Collector make the assumption that they consume them for entertainment?

'I shall be the first man to penetrate this far into the Isle's interior. Ought to make the Times,' the Collector went on.

'Sam looked at the Johns, confused. Did the Collector not think they were men?' (Page 44)

Discuss: Explain what Sam is confused about.

Activity: Write a diary entry for the Collector at this point in the story. What does he make of his journey so far and the people he has met?



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Jalai Rajah, king of the sea pirates is described as being ‘as cut-throat and fearsome as pirates in stories,’ (Page 118)

Activity: Create a top trumps card for Jalai Rajah. How villainous does he sound? What stereotypical features of pirates from stories can you put on his profile?

Activity: Draw a picture of the Jalai Rajah. How do you imagine him to look?

Tribes and Culture

‘My people are tattooed as babies. Boys with a scorpion, girls a fish. With thorns and an ink, made from special leaves. It’s meant to protect us.’ (Page 50)

‘Lola nodded. ‘We have tribal marks to protect us, too. But they don’t stay forever, they’re made fresh each morning with clay.’ (Page 50)

Discuss: Why do you think the forest people have temporary tattoos?

Activity: If you were creating your own tribe from your friendship group, which symbol would you choose to represent you and why? Design a poster showing your ideas.

‘Their faces were painted with yellow clay and woven grass skirts hung around their waists.’ (Page 55)

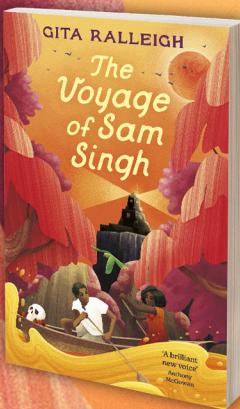
‘He wore a fringed head-dress of palm leaves that gave him the air of a lion. Ochre lines spanned his face, radiating like the rays of the sun. Red string circled his waist and upper arms and a necklace of white bones hung around his neck.’ (Page 56)

Discuss: Why do you think the tribe dress in this way? Can you think of other tribes who dress differently from you? Think about your ‘tribe’ from earlier in the Readers’ Notes. Do they have a certain way of dressing?

Activity: Choose a ‘uniform’ that you wear as part of your tribe. Is it a football top? Is it a certain type of trainers? Is it school uniform? Draw a picture of the outfit and add captions and labels. Does it have advertising logos or school colours etc. Why is this?

‘The two Johns stopped. Each man placed his hands on Lola’s grandfather’s shoulders in turn. They bumped foreheads and murmured greetings.’ (Page 56)

Discuss: Lola’s grandfather is the village chief and there is a special way of greeting him. Why doesn’t the Collector stand and greet him? Which other non-verbal ways do we have of communicating a greeting?



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Activity: Investigate other cultures' greetings. Make a list of 'body language greetings' and where they come from, and where they are used. For example, handshake, head bow etc.

'Each tribe had customs, which might seem strange to outsiders. In his own tribe, the tradition was for a father to give the dried pelt of his first kill to his eldest son, to keep him safe when hunting.'
(Page 58)

Discuss: What is the importance of tradition? Is tradition linked to belief and religion or to culture and background?

Activity: Create a PowerPoint presentation about a tradition or set of traditions in your culture.

'Last month he'd almost speared a pig when a snake crossed his path, which meant bad luck.'
(Page 51)

Discuss: Do you have superstitions for good or bad luck?

Activity: Create a comic strip showing one of these superstitions.

Discuss: Does the supernatural sway the balance of power in the book?

'In the village, everyone helps hunt or gather food. We all eat together.' (Page 63)

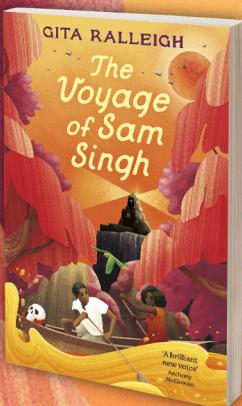
Discuss: What might be the benefits of eating as a tribe all together?

Activity: Brainstorm how eating together might help the tribe to stay unified. What benefits do you gain from eating as a group – friends or family?

The Dead

'Lola told him how her people believed fireflies guided the spirits of the dead. The dead did not leave the world altogether, but lived above it, in a realm of light and air.' (Page 53)
'All spirits see is light. They're attracted to it, like moths. That's why the Port is full of ghosts,' she said. *'Those electric lamps in the Governor's House – spirits love them!'* (Page 54)
'They lock them in a wooden box underground with a stone slab to stop them escaping. The Governor's wife died ages ago, and he offers flowers every week to keep her spirit happy.' (Page 103)

Discuss: What do you believe happens after death? Why might Lola's people believe that the dead don't leave the world altogether? What does Lola think about the Governor's beliefs about the afterlife? Why does it seem strange to her? Does it seem more familiar to you?



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'His own people buried their dead in a forest clearing, far from any villages or settlements, with a handful of rice scattered over them and a coin in each hand.' (Page 192)

Discuss: Why might Sam's tribe bury their people with a scattering of rice and a coin in each hand? Is there another culture that buries their dead with objects – who are they and why?

Activity: Create a spidergram to portray different cultural beliefs about the afterlife. Which one is most compelling to you?

'Tuke returned from the forest at twilight, his face and body freshly painted with ochre clay.' (Page 78)

Read Tuke's spirit journey from Page 78-80.

'She placed Uncle Onay gently beside her, chanting softly in her own language, and took up the rattle, made from pierced shells on a wooden stick.' (Page 132)

Now read the rest of the scene until Lola wakes up on page 133.

Discuss: Compare the two scenes.

Activity: Choose one of the above scenes and create a screenplay or director's instructions as if you are making a play or movie. What sounds or music would you have?

'Uncle Onay visited me in my dreams again and told me to get them out. Tuke's on his way – he'll do a ceremony to set their spirits free – or else, they'll curse the Isle for evermore – like old Mayo!' (Page 125)

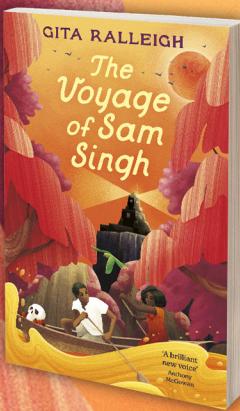
'Tuke must release their spirits over water, so they're free to travel home. Or they'll curse the Isle forever.' (Page 140)

Discuss: How does Ralleigh show that people must be respected both in life and in death during the course of the novel?

Activity: Rank the characters of the novel in terms of their respectfulness. Give evidence to support your answers.

Steampunk

'A great curved shape, its skin shining with a metallic gleam. He heard a dreadful whirring groan, followed by a clanking sound...Sam stared in wonder as a hole – or a window, like the glass port holes on the Yellow Pearl, slid open at the crest of its back.' (Page 90-91)



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'Close up, the Dugong was huge. A curved ovoid, like a gigantic fish. In the pale dawn light, the skin of the vessel gleamed, its metallic tiles overlapping like scales. As well as the glass roof, there was a round amber window, a giant eye. Someone was in there, pulling levers and peering at dials.' (Page 198)

'The outer hull is clad in an aluminium bronze alloy. We run on a system of compressed air. The Dugong's pipes suck in fresh air when we breach – much like a real dugong – and the stale air's compressed and expelled to drive us forward. There are ballast tanks of water, to make the submersible move up and down in the sea.' (Page 209)

Discuss: Why has Ralleigh chosen a dugong as her inspiration for her steampunk ship, rather than a normal submarine?

Activity: Draw a labelled image of the *Dugong*, showing what it looks like as well as how it works, using evidence drawn from the text.

'There are three problems with underwater travel: air to breathe, how to resist water pressure and the force needed to propel the vehicle forwards. The Dugong sucks in fresh air and equalises pressure by expelling stale air, which drives the ship onwards.' (Page 164)

Discuss: How does the breathing motion of the Dugong behave like a real dugong? How do other sea creatures breathe and survive underwater?

Activity: Create a factfile about dugongs.

Discuss: Which other plant or animal behaviours have humans harnessed to create new technologies?

Language/Voice

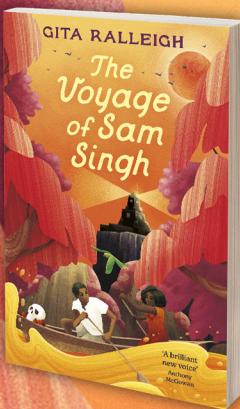
'How do your people have so many words for sea?' (Page 65-66)

Discuss: Why do you think the forest tribe have so many words for sea? Which other languages have more than one word for the same thing? Think of examples.

*'I know the difference, but how do your people know if someone is saying stick or spear?' Lola rolled her eyes. 'We just do! At hunting time, you fetch a *gange*. Spear. But if a snake gets in the hut, Tuke brings a *gange* – a big stick – to kill it.'* (Page 66)

Discuss: Can you think of an English word that has two meanings?

Activity: Make a list of examples. How do you know which meaning is being referred to?



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Discuss: How important is language in the novel?

Discuss: Why is the island called the Isle of Lost Voices?

'When our people are out fishing, they sometimes find messages from the prisoners.' (Page 54)

Read Moon's message to his mother on pages 71-72.

Activity: Imagine you are Moon's mother. Write a letter back to your son. Will you be reassuring/scolding/forgiving?

'Words have power. Tuke's worried they might hurt me.' (Page 73)

Discuss: What does Lola mean by this? How can words hurt?

'As if we would give our words to him. Words have power. That's why the Johns are the Johns. They don't tell strangers their real names.' (Page 255)

'Land-pirates named their children for the city where they were born.' (Page 15)

'Her new name, Samudra Raksa, painted in looping gold letters on the port side of the bow. Sam swallowed. It meant everything to know that wherever his brother sailed, out on the vast and endless sea, his own name would travel with him.' (Page 252)

Discuss: How important are names in the novel? Why don't we know the real name of the Johns, Lola and Tuke? Why does it matter so much to Sam how Moon renamed the ship?

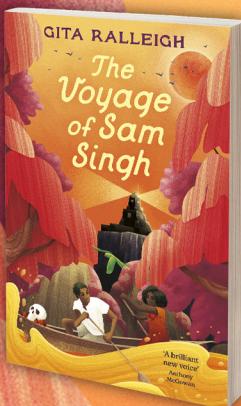
Activity: Where does your name come from? Does it have special meaning? Investigate the names of your close family members. Are there reasons behind people's names? Are there patterns? Does your name relate to your culture or heritage?

'Sam told of their journey to Lola's village, fumbling for the right words and jumbling parts up.' (Page 118)

Discuss: Why does Sam find it hard to describe his journey? To whom is he telling his story? Do we tell different stories depending on who is listening?

'And the Collector's version of events sounded very different from what he recalled.' (Page 261)

Discuss: Do we always tell the story of what has happened to us from our own point of view? Can storytelling ever be impartial?



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Activity: Continue the Collector's version of events from '*The lad smiled gratefully up at his benefactor*' on page 261. How different is his story from that which Sam has told?

'He'd tell the truth as he remembered it and when he did, he knew exactly what to call his story.'
(Page 263)

Discuss: Do you believe Sam's version of events? Why has Ralleigh chosen to end her novel like this, as if it is Sam's telling, even though it is written in the third person?

Activity: Pick a scene from the novel and write it from Lola's point of view. How does it differ from Sam's?

'Lola had promised to write and so had his brother.' (Page 252)
'Beside each number was the name of the tribe and the part of the world where they lived. Sam intended to find their addresses and write, explaining what had happened to their kin.' (Page 262)

Discuss: Why was letter-writing so important when this novel is set?

Activity: Write a letter from Lola or Moon in the future to Sam, or from Sam to the skulls' next of kin, explaining what has happened.

*'For you I'd burrow like a hare.
Like a deer, for you I'd flee.
From citadel to boundless sea,
where I'd take the air with thee.'* (Page 150)

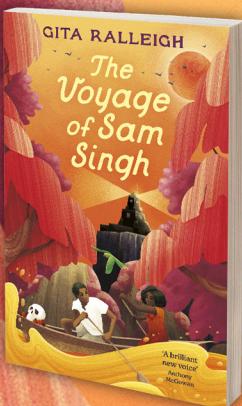
Discuss: What is the message that Jay conceals in his poetry from the prison?

Activity: Can you write in code? Compose a poem of your own that conveys a message in code.

Ending

'Ships are always being made new. Just like people. Sometimes it's hard to recognise them when they've changed. But their old self is in there. Even if you don't see it at first.' (Page 250)

Discuss: How have the characters changed over the course of the novel? Did they all change? And was it for the better?



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Further Reading

The Destiny of Minou Moonshine by Gita Ralleigh

The Kingdom over the Sea by Zohra Nabi

City of Stolen Magic by Nazneen Ahmed Pathak

Ajay and the Mumbai Sun by Varsha Shah

Ash Mistry and the Savage Fortress by Sarwat Chadda

Dream Hunters by Nazima Pathan (Aug 2024)

Non-fiction

Stolen History: The Truth about the British Empire and How it Shaped Us by Sathnam Sanghera

Lands of Belonging: A History of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Britain by Donna Amey Bhatt