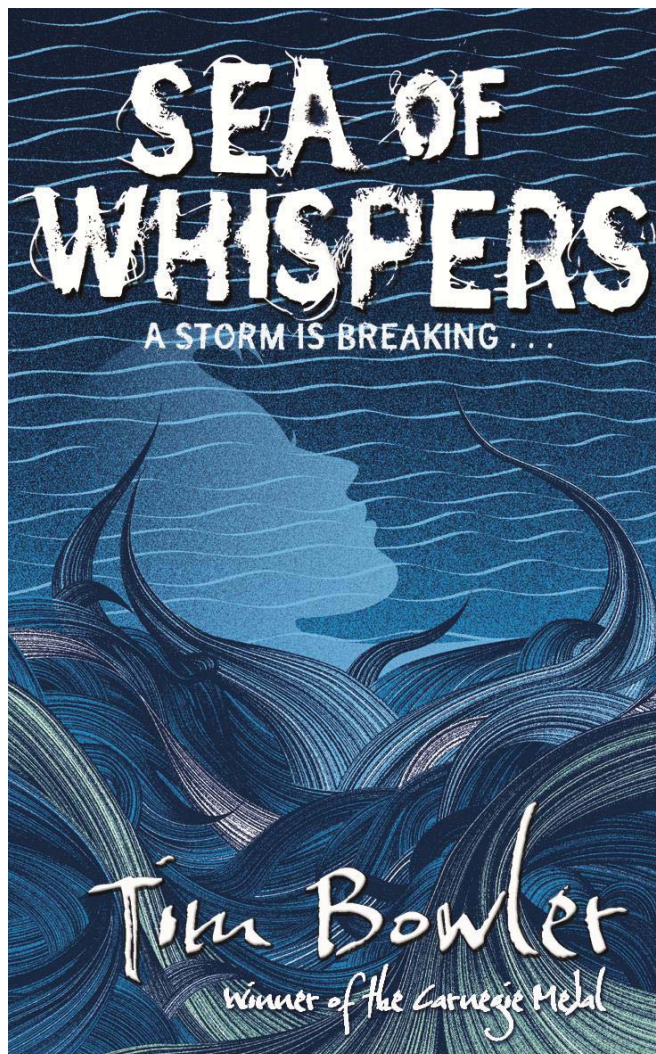


The World of *Sea of Whispers*

**Ideas for exploring Tim Bowler's novel with
pupils in Years 6, 7 and 8 (P6, P7 and S1)**



Introduction

Sea of Whispers is a seafaring adventure and mystery story with an evocative island setting. It introduces a young woman whose affinity with things that cannot be explained set her apart from her community and encourages readers to explore questions such as:

- How an isolated community can dwell on its past to a dangerous extent and be influenced by a few powerful individuals.
- The effects of being cut off from outside influences.
- How the arrival of an outsider can reveal all the prejudices and weaknesses of a community.
- How the enduring power of love and the courage to follow one's instincts can overcome even deeply engrained prejudice.



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Synopsis

Hetty, aged 15 when the story opens, lost her parents in a storm at sea as a child and lives with her grandmother on Mora, the most remote island in an archipelago and about 50 miles from the mainland. Hetty's gift of seeing faces in pieces of sea glass (polished by the sea to a mirror quality) leads her to be feared and ridiculed by some of the islanders.

The community's only contact with the outside world is through its ship, *The Pride of Mora*, which enables it to trade with neighbouring islands. The island holds a celebration for the 50th birthday of *The Pride* and the centenary of Per, the oldest islander.

In his birthday speech, Per claims that evil is coming to Mora and hints that Hetty knows the source of it. That night, a violent storm destroys *The Pride* and Hetty and her friend Tam see a dinghy containing a passenger adrift off the coast. The broken boat is washed ashore but the passenger has vanished. Later, a strange old woman is spotted wandering the island and Per blames her for the wrecking of *The Pride*.

A search party finds the woman almost dead from exposure. Hetty recognizes her from her sea glass visions and feels that they have been searching for one another.

When Per wants to leave the newcomer to perish on the rocks, Hetty challenges him and he has a heart attack and dies soon after. Hetty and her grandmother care for the woman, who is unconscious, despite some of the islanders' objections. Hetty makes more enemies when she refuses to attend Per's funeral.

Tam's father Mackie leads efforts to build a new trading vessel but some of the island's precious timber stock turns out to be rotten, leaving the islanders' livelihood in jeopardy. Meanwhile the nameplate from the woman's dinghy has revealed that she comes from Haga, the nearest town on the mainland. Hetty's bond with her deepens as she coaxes her back to consciousness.

Per's friend Gregor blames the woman from the sea for Mora's troubles and turns more islanders against Hetty and her new friend. While urging the islanders to take his side, he falls from his perch above the island boatyard and later dies. Gregor's allies point out the physical resemblance between Hetty and the woman and hint that they are both witches. Hetty realizes that her island is no longer a safe place for her.

Hetty coaxes the woman to eat and keeps her alive, then resolves to take her to the next island, Brinda, and find a ship to take her home to Haga. They set sail secretly in Hetty's tiny dinghy, *Baby Dolphin*, while the islanders are at Gregor's funeral.



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Caught in a storm, they spend several days at sea and are blown off course. With the dinghy's mast broken, they barely make it into the harbour at Haga, having bypassed the archipelago.

The woman's husband, Tor, greets them. Hetty learns that the woman's name is Marita, and she had sailed off to search for her daughter Rosa, who had drowned many years before at Hetty's age, and looked very like Hetty. Hetty realizes that she has seen Marita, Tor, and Rosa in her sea glass. Marita dies, finally at peace, believing she has brought her lost daughter home to Haga.

A search party from Mora led by Mackie arrives. They had sailed to Brinda in a leaky dinghy and joined Mackie's friend's ship, the *Northern Star*. Hetty realizes that the Mora community had risked their lives to find her and that Per and Gregor's hate campaign had not taken hold. She decides not to return to Mora. Her grandmother, who has travelled with the search party, stays with her on the mainland, where they live with Marita's family.



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When?

- What tells us that *Sea of Whispers* is set some time ago?
- How long ago might it be set?
- If it was set in the present day, how might the islanders' lives be different? What would be easier about their existence, and what would be harder?

Where?

What clues do we have about where the island of Mora is? What do we learn from:

- The islanders' names and those of the inhabitants in the mainland town, Haga?
- The goods that the Mora islanders trade with for a living?
- The climate that they deal with?
- The name of the boat that comes to rescue Hetty?

Use reference books and the internet to research the history of island communities off the coast of Britain and beyond and collect images of island life that reflect life on Mora.

On the map

Tim Bowler gives us a lot of information about the topography of Mora (its physical shape and land forms) and introduces many specific place names.

- Draw a map of the island marking all the places that are mentioned including structures such as Hetty's home at Moon Cottage, other islanders' homes, the boatyard, the chapel, and so on, and natural features such as Eel Point, High Crag, and Hermit's Grotto.
- Draw a map of the archipelago of which Mora is the outermost island, also showing the mainland and its town of Haga. Use the information Tim Bowler gives to plot the course of Hetty and Marita's journey to Haga.



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Divided souls

Per is the first islander in the book to show open hostility towards Hetty.

- Who is on Per's side at first?
- Who joins his supporters later?

List all the islanders who are named in the book and give them a number between one and ten, with ten being a strong supporter of Per's views against Hetty and the mysterious woman, and one being a close ally of Hetty such as Tam and Granty.

- Why is Per so angry when he makes his speech at his birthday celebration?
- Why does he blame Hetty for what he believes to be wrong on the island?
- Why is Per's point of view so powerful?

A place apart

Mora is relatively cut off from the outside world even before its trading vessel is damaged.

- What are the disadvantages of being such an isolated community in a time before technology made communication much easier?
- What are the advantages?
- What does Mora's isolation explain about how the islanders behave towards one another?
- What does Hetty love about Mora when she is growing up?
- What troubles her about the island later?
- Why does she decide to stay on the mainland?



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Invisible bonds

- What are some of the things Hetty and the newcomer to the island (Marita) have in common?
- Why does Hetty succeed in bringing Marita back to consciousness when others have failed?
- How do they help each other survive their perilous journey to Haga?

Sea fever

Sea of Whispers introduces a lot of seafaring terms but can be enjoyed by readers who know nothing about the sea or boats.

- Read chapters 22-25 and write down all the words connected to sailing that you don't understand.
- Look at each strange word, read the sentence it appears in and write down what you think it might mean.
- Look the sailing terms up in a dictionary and find out if you were right.
- Explain what Hetty means by the expression "ghost water": not a technical sailing term but one that became important to her while growing up by the sea.



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About the author

Tim Bowler is one of the UK's most compelling and original writers for teenagers. He was born in Leigh-on-Sea and after studying Swedish at University he worked in forestry, the timber trade, teaching, and translating before becoming a full-time writer. He lives with his wife in a small village in Devon and his workroom is an old stone outhouse known to friends as 'Tim's Bolthole'.

Tim has written twenty books and won fifteen awards, including the prestigious Carnegie Medal for *River Boy*. He has been described by the *Sunday Telegraph* as 'the master of the psychological thriller' and by the *Independent* as 'one of the truly individual voices in British teenage fiction'.



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