

## **TEACHER'S NOTES FOR MILAD: THE VOYAGE TO OPHIR**

**Written by Nazam Anhar**

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**NAZAM ANHAR** was born in Sydney, though his parents came to Australia from Lebanon. Growing up, his family maintained strong ties with the Lebanese community.

Reading has always been one of Nazam's favourite pastimes. Those stories he enjoyed most as a child dealt with adventure, especially at sea. He loved *Tom Sawyer* (Mark Twain), *Robinson Crusoe* (Daniel Defoe) and *Treasure Island* (R L Stevenson).

Ancient history has always fascinated Nazam; his studies at the University of Sydney included archaeology. His background led to a particular interest in Phoenician history. After graduating with a BA, Nazam now works as a freelance copywriter.

*Milad: The Voyage to Ophir* is Nazam's first book. It brought together his interests in Phoenicia, the history of seafaring and exploration, and the natural world.

### **SYNOPSIS**

Milad has always wanted to go to sea. With the family facing starvation due to drought, his parents allow him to leave the farm and go to Tyre to try his luck as a sailor. There he joins a Phoenician crew who, with Israelite sailors sent by King Solomon, set out on a voyage to Ophir, on the Horn of Africa.

At the narrowest part of the Red Sea, pirates, led by the fearsome Kallabos, attack the fleet. The traders are lucky to escape. Reaching their destination, they meet the people of Ophir and trade pottery, mirrors and glassware for gold, ivory, wild animals and gems.

Now begins the return journey. Milad and Nazira, a Hittite princess who stowed away to escape being married to King Solomon, discover there are spies in their midst who will betray them to Kallabos once more. In warning the sailors about the spies, Nazira gives herself away, but fleet doesn't avoid being attacked.

Milad and the navigator Hakim flee to shore with a casket of sapphires. Pursued by Kallabos and his men, Milad and Hakim undertake a dangerous journey across volcanic wastelands, rugged mountains, and down the length of the Nile to Egypt. There, the pirates capture Hakim. Milad, however, escapes with the sapphires.

Helped by Reshef, a tomb-builder's son, Milad, learns that Hakim is being held in an unused tomb in Memphis. The boys confront the pirates and, although they come close to being buried alive, they succeed in rescuing the navigator.

Arriving in Jerusalem, Hakim and Milad deliver the sapphires to King Solomon, completing their mission. As a reward, the king offers Milad and Hakim anything he owns. They ask for the freedom of Nazira, and are granted their wish.

### ***WRITING MILAD: THE VOYAGE TO OPHIR***

Due to his heritage, Nazam Anhar has been interested in the Phoenicians from an early age. The modern nation of Lebanon is essentially the same land as that of ancient Phoenicia. The Phoenicians were pioneering seafarers, developed an alphabet from which our own grew, and were the first people to develop such arts as glassblowing and creating purple dyes. Nazam didn't know of any novels about the Phoenicians, but he knew they would provide rich material for adventure.

It seemed natural to Nazam for a story about the Phoenicians to focus on a young sailor. He decided to base the story on the voyage to Ophir, which involved King Solomon and was one of the most famous Phoenician voyages. Nazam spent much time deciding where Milad would go and what adventures he would have. He wrote several versions of the story before it reached its final form. Nazira, the Hittite princess who refuses to marry King Solomon, was a late addition, as were the pirate spies.

To create authentic settings for his story, Nazam conducted extensive research into the places Milad travelled to and the ways of life of the people there. He had to know what they ate, wore and traded. He also had to find out about landscapes, not as they are now but as they were in King Solomon's time. Ethiopia, for instance, is now largely cleared but was then covered in thick rainforest.

Many historical facts been woven into the story. For example, the portrayal of King Solomon is largely based on the description of him found in the Book of Kings in the Bible. Also, the tomb of Mahareb, where the pirates hold Hakim captive, is based on the tomb of a real Egyptian general named Horemheb who served under Tutankhamon. When he became pharaoh, Horemheb abandoned the tomb he was preparing for himself

and built a new one in the Valley of the Kings. The abandoned tomb, a complex, underground structure, was discovered and explored by archaeologists in 1975.

The author hopes that readers come away from *Milad* with an appreciation of the legacy of the Phoenicians and other cultures, of the contribution they have made to our own world. He feels that we need ‘to understand our connections with other cultures and nations, to see the important things we have in common, and to value others in spite of apparent differences. As Hakim says about the Ophirians, if you take the trouble to understand the ways of others, you will see that at heart people are all the same.’

### **DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES**

1. As students read the book in sections, discuss the events of the story, the characters and how their attitudes change as they face new situations.
2. Have students plot Milad’s journey on the map at the front of the book, from Tyre to the upper reaches of the Nile, and back to Jerusalem. How far is it? How does he travel?
3. Travel is said to broaden the mind. How has Milad’s view of the world changed by the time he returns to his homeland?
4. Discuss how life was different in Milad’s time. The class could draw up a table with two columns, one headed *Today* and the other, *Milad’s Time*. Look at topics such as education, transport, communication, clothing and entertainment.
5. Discuss how life was different for young people, perhaps starting with the fact that Milad leaves home at age 12 to support his family, and Nazira is sent off to be married.
7. Students could illustrate one of their favourite scenes in the book, such as a pirate attack, Milad and Hakim in their canoe, or Milad and Hakim before King Solomon.
8. Have students research one of the historical aspects of *Milad: The Voyage to Ophir*. They could look at topics like Phoenician ships, glassmaking, the history of the alphabet, Egyptian tombs, King Solomon, the Nile, or the wildlife of the African rainforest.
9. Find out about The Phoenician Ship Expedition, a re-enactment of a famous Phoenician voyage around Africa. Go to: [www.phoenicia.org.uk](http://www.phoenicia.org.uk)
10. Discuss how cultures pass their legacy on to the people that come after. What have the Phoenicians, the Israelites and the Egyptians passed on to us? What might be important things our culture passes on?