

READING AND REREADING ZAN-GAH **A guide for discussion and study**

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Reading and Rereading Zan-Gah provides a number of questions, and singles out vocabulary, for the benefit of a teacher or discussion leader. It is not intended to be exhaustive, nor is it designed as a workbook for students. Hopefully, it provides a selection of discussion questions and vocabulary from which the teacher or leader may choose, and to which she or he may add, depending on the age, maturity, and reading level of the student.

Chapter 1: The Lion

Discussion questions:

1. Do you ever listen to “the tiny noises of the night” (5)? On which occasions? What do they sound like?
2. Did Zan kill the lion by accident or luck? Did he deserve as much credit as he got?
3. What were the advantages of hunting in the winter? What were the disadvantages?
4. What does the mist contribute to the author’s description of the hunt?
5. “Ululation” (15) is an example of *onomatopoeia*, the use of a word whose sound suggests or parallels its meaning. Can you think of any other examples of *onomatopoeia*? Do you know how to ululate?
6. What role does sound play in this chapter? How do you respond to it? How many examples can you cite?
7. Zan did not tremble or falter when he faced the lion. Why did he tremble well after the danger had passed? Do you think less of him for it?
8. The editor advised the author to use “reenacted” instead of “re-enacted” on pages 17 and 18. How do we know which is correct? Which of the two do you prefer, hyphenated or non-hyphenated?

Vocabulary:

vantage (3), preoccupation (3), elder (3), strategy (3), desolate (4), harry (4), eerie (5), hone (5), steel (5), ruthless (6), wrench (6), flanking (7), pelt (8), covet (8), hazardous (8), extent (9), vibrant (11), appall (12), percussion (12), rude (12), unison (12), pulse (12), endure (12), converge (13), merge (13), rend (14), maw (14), writhe (14), hysteria (15), exultation (15), ululation (15), sinewy (16), regard (16), ecstasy (16) tremor (17), wield (18), gesture (18), throes (18), rude(18), convulsed (18), audibly (18)

Chapter 2: The Twins

Discussion questions:

1. “Zan was not handsome.” (19) Would you rather he were? How might that change your response to the story? Why didn’t the author make Zan good-looking?
2. Zan and his father “almost became friends.” (20) Does that seem like a strange statement? Why? Do you regard your parents as you regard your friends? Are there any differences? What is the basis of true friendship?
3. Do you think one feels differently about a twin than another sibling? In what ways?
4. Is Zan actually “watching for something on the horizon” (19)?
5. How are the twin brothers different? Which of them would you rather resemble?
6. The author stretches his imagination to invent Zan’s bad dreams. Do these dreams mean anything? Can you invent additional dreams about Zan, Dael, and the lion, using expressive adjectives and verbs?
7. Zan and his people talk about the river, Nobla, as if it were a person. Why? What happens in your imagination when they *personify* the river? Watch for other examples of *personification* in later chapters.
8. Wumna “became unhealthily protective” (23) of Zan. When does being protective of a child become unhealthy?
9. One brother wants to know where the river is going; the other where it comes from. What does that reveal of the difference in their natures?
10. How can you tell that Zan is growing up?

Vocabulary:

grimace (19), stalk (21), famished (22), marauding (22), enlist (22), listless (22), staunchly (23), smirk (24), disquieting (24), morsel (25), bleak (25), dissuade (26), credence (26), engender (26), enthrall (27), absurdity (28), thong (29), ingenious (29), dejected (29)

Chapter 3: The Sling

Discussion questions:

1. Chapter 3 begins with a description of Zan-Gah's burial place. Yet Zan is still alive in this and later chapters. What is the value of this sudden leap into the future? Does it have an effect on the reader?
2. Did Zan "fashion the swift weapon from a serpent's sting," (31), as the sages said? What causes a true story to become a myth, and how is the story changed? Do you feel that myths are the same as falsehoods?
3. What happens to a person physically when he receives a sudden fright? What happens when his life is in immediate mortal peril?
4. Snakes will sometimes eat birds, but they usually eat small mammals such as mice. Why do you think the author put a bird in the mouth of the snake instead of a mouse? What's the difference?
5. How do you feel about eating snake meat? Is anything wrong with it? Is a drumstick, pork chop, hot dog, egg, or a glass of cow's milk more appetizing? Why?

Vocabulary:

borne (31), delirious (32), antique (32), rebuff (33), constitution (34), flexible (35), sought (36), serendipity (36), surplus (36), embedded (37), proficient (38), multitude (38), void (38)

Chapter 4: The Hru

Discussion questions:

1. Have you ever mastered something by practice that you thought you might never succeed at? How about learning to ride a bike? Playing a musical instrument? Ice skating? How is Zan's mastery of the sling different?
2. Zan's confidence is growing. Why?
3. Why do the two Hru boys attack Zan? Why doesn't Zan use his powerful sling against them? What does he reveal about his character in refraining from using this power?
4. The Hru reveal their character in several ways. How do they show what they are like?
5. Why were the Hru starving? What effect might Zan's gift have on them?
6. "Safety was comfort..." (45). Why?

Vocabulary:

assess (40), glower (42), retaliate (42), listless (43), weakly (43), despitefully (44), frail (44), forage (44), peer (45), belligerent (45), hostility (46), commotion (46)

Chapter 5: Aniah

Discussion questions:

1. What is Aniah like? Do you like him? Why? Why does Zan especially want to speak to him?
2. What forms of courtesy are observed in this chapter? Would they be considered politeness today?
3. The belief in a kinship or relationship with animals is called *totemism*. What might cause such a belief, and how are the wasp people affected by it? Can you think of any other examples of totemism? Does totemism affect us nowadays (as when the Hawks play against the Panthers)? How many of you were Campfire Girls or Cub Scouts?
4. Can Zan hope to be friends with a leader who has fought against his kin? How does he “smooth things over” with Aniah?
5. Why does Aniah detest the Hru?
6. What started the feud? What kept it going for so many years?
7. What reasons does Aniah give to show that Dael probably was not killed for revenge? Do they make sense?

Vocabulary:

nimble (47), sinewy (47), venison (48), obeisance (49), abyss (49), bulbous (50), rueful (52), drought (52), purge (53), guile (56), trek (56)

Chapter 6: The Land of Red Rocks

Discussion questions:

1. Why mention the “featureless” plain (59)? Do plains, like people, have a face? Can you find other examples of *personification*?
2. Why would the ground “whisper” (59)? Is Zan hearing things? What literary device is the author using?
3. “Late as it was, it was a ghostly sight.” (60) Words are important, and each has its own *nuance*. Why didn’t the author say “...a *ghastly* sight”? What other words might he have used?
4. Why would languages be “related” and yet different? Can you think of modern languages which would permit some intercommunication because they are closely related?
5. How did Zan win Rydl’s confidence? What actions brought it about?
6. The personalities of Zan and Rydl are deliberately contrasted. How are these characters different, and what is the effect of the contrast?
7. What signs of danger do Zan and Rydl find in the land of red rocks?
8. How does rainfall effect the land of red rocks?

Vocabulary:

persistent (58), exposure (58), wane (59), sparse (59), approximate (59), embedded (60), sanctuary (61), profound (61), waif (61), reluctant (62), terrain (63), gulch (64), traverse (64), chasm (64), surmised (64), crevice (66), indentation (67), encounter (67), contemplate (68), transfixed (68), reverie (68), drama (69), fixity (69), stealth (69), outfaced (70), obstruct (71), paltry (71), aghast (71), transformation (71), ardent (71), ascent (72), vista (72)

Chapter 7: The Wasp People

Discussion questions:

1. “A mountain is always much farther away than it looks” (73). Do you agree? If so, how do you account for it?
2. Zan thinks he sees Dael when he sees a column of stone that looks like him. What is the author’s purpose? Might the stone figure be a *metaphor* for something? What? Could it *foreshadow* something? What?
3. Describe the most beautiful place you ever saw. What makes a place beautiful? Are there different kinds of natural beauty?
4. Contrast is an important principle in art and literature. How does the author use contrast in this and other chapters?
5. Why did Zan pretend to be stupid? What are the advantages of his being considered so?
6. Nowadays, soldiers march in unison. The wasp-men also moved in unison when going into battle. What is the advantage of this?
7. In prehistoric societies, there was apt to be a distinct separation of “men’s work” and “women’s work.” Why do you think this was so, and how do you feel about this separation. Is it any different today?
8. What advantage did Rydl gain by avoiding Zan during his captivity?

Vocabulary:

nectar (74), multiplicity (74), commotion (74), pummel (75), spume (75), submerge (75), haunt (76), excessively (76), garble (77), daubing (78), grotesque (79), emit (79), brandish (79), centipede (79), debasing (79), volatile (79), blaspheme (79), steely (80), supercilious (80), abject (80), uproariously (80), titter (80), afflict (80), incapacitate (82), bide (82), baleful (84), anathema

Chapter 8: The Land of Death

Discussion questions:

1. Zan has to defend himself against animals such as coyotes and snakes. Would Zan-Gah be a better book if it included a few dinosaurs? Why or why not?
2. Would you eat bugs and lizards under any circumstances? What might these circumstances be? Suppose all of your friends started eating chocolate-covered ants? Would you?
3. Zan would not have used words like “mile” and “hour”. Why not? Why does the author use these *anachronisms*?

Vocabulary:

meander (87), desolate (88), teem (88), succulent (89), brackish (90), hallucination (92), tepid (93), bereft (93)

Chapter 9: Chul

Discussion questions:

1. We are all different from each other, but most people do not wish to be described as “different”. In what ways is it good to be different? How is Chul “different”?
2. Chul is far from perfect. Do we like him? Why?
3. Why has the author chosen to tell Chul’s story here? Where might this chapter have fit in better?
4. Is Chul a comic character? Does he provide *comic relief*? Is this a good place for comedy?
5. How did the attack by the wasp people unify the feuding clans?
6. Do you think Chul would be a desirable husband? Why or why not? Are he and Siraka-Finaka suited to each other? Why or why not?

Vocabulary:

squalling (94), spit (94), lout (95), hodgepodge (95), preposterous (95), dominant (95), wrenched (95), carcass (95), bludgeon (96), wield (96), terrible (96), impervious (96), disposed (97), alien (97), feat (97)

Chapter 10: The Cave

Discussion questions:

1. Lissa-Na and her people are terrified of twins. Why do you think some societies are afraid of twins? What convinces Lissa that she has nothing to fear from Zan?
2. Why doesn't Lissa-Na turn her patient over to the men of Noi?
3. In slavery, Zan was willing to accept women's chores, but Dael was not. What does that tell you about the character of each?
4. Readers and movie-goers often like violence. Is the graphically described slaughter of Ab-Lunt artistically necessary or desirable? When is violence "gratuitous"? When is it not?
5. Dael is much changed when Zan finally finds him. How was that *foreshadowed*? How is their meeting different from what you expected?
6. Dael "had shut off the part of himself that feels pleasure, pain, or fear" (109). Why would anyone do that? What do you think has happened to Dael's mind?
7. There are animals painted on the walls of the cave. What do you think they are doing there?

Vocabulary:

redoubled (102), cynical (102), linger (103), pang (103), prospect (104), mused (104), disposition (104), liberation (105), order (105), surly (106), imbecile (106), scrutinize (106), leaden (106), alcove (106), confrontation (107), perplexing (107), transformation (107), presume (107), arrogant (107), captor (107), vacant (107), stupefy (109), defile (109), abundance (110), salamander (110), fabulous (110), configuration (110), fungi (110), geyser (110), cursive (110), incessant (111), sulfurous (111), rouse (111), agitation (111), glimmer (111)

Chapter 11: Dael

Discussion questions:

1. Lissa, Zan, and Dael save themselves by imitating an *apotropaic* image. Can you find any of these in your library? What do they look like? Are there really societies that fear twins?
2. How would you characterize Dael? Is he “dead,” as he says (118)? What do you think happened to Dael in the land of the Noi? Why isn’t the reader told in detail?
3. Why do you think Dael does not wish to go home?
4. Dael’s loud outbursts seem to occur when silence is most necessary. Why do you think he does this?
5. “Guffaw” (122) is an example of which literary device?
6. Is Naz so very different from Zan?
7. How is suspense created in this chapter?

Vocabulary:

lavish (112), simultaneous (114), brandish (114), luminous (114), ominous (114), maneuver (114), indifferent (115), potency (115), repulse (115), flank (115), edible (116), furrow (117), intermittent (117), incredulous (118), assuage (119), perch (120), survey (120), exceeding (120), subterfuge (121), guffaw (122), contemplate (122), imposing (123), opaque (123), dispatch (123), dispirited (123), cache (124), subsistence (124), deprivation (125), adept (125), clamor (126), regimented (126), inexorable (126), reverberation (126), tumult (127), agile (128), multitude (128), fissure (128), dauntless (128)

Chapter 12: The Council of Elders

Discussion questions:

1. What is “a leader’s woe” (132)?
2. Zan has been away from home for over two years. How have things changed during that time? How does Zan’s maturity show? Is he “a man now, and no longer a boy” (133)?
3. Why is Zan-Gah the only one who can hope to unify the clans against the wasp people?
4. Why is the presence of women important to the success of the council meeting? Why is there so much resistance to the idea? How does their new role change things?
5. The elders were not handsome, but they possessed another kind of beauty. What different kinds of physical beauty are there?
6. “Kragg’s scars told his story...” (136). What might that story be?
7. Why is honor important? When might a sense of honor mislead?
8. “Murmur” (137) is another example of which literary device?
9. Why is Chul’s brief apology so important? How does Aniah’s response show him different from Chul? In war, isn’t it desirable to kill your enemies? Why and why not?
10. How will new marriage rules unify the clans?

Vocabulary:

pillage (129), unnerved (129), inept (129), salve (129), dissension (130), plumage (130), exotic (130), somber (131), aggravate (131), rancor (132), aggrieved (132), truculent (134), prestige (134), moderation (134), vulnerable (134), treachery (134), haggard (135), haughty (135), mauled (135), defiance (136), gaunt (136), demeanor (136), integrity (136), indignation (137), administer (138)

Chapter 13: The Last Battle

Discussion questions:

1. Why does Zan conceal the recipe of the wasp men's red poison?
2. Is the sling a better weapon than a thrown spear? Why?
3. How might competition in sports become a substitute for lethal warfare? Has that ever actually happened?
4. How do preparations for war affect Dael? How does his activity in combat differ from his clansmen? Why does he suddenly retire from the battle?
5. How does the character of the wasp people contribute to their ultimate destruction?
6. Are Zan's people, the Ba-Coro, "primitive"? How so? How not? In what ways are we also primitive?

Vocabulary:

hubbub (139), anoint (139), reluctant (139), dramatic (140), wafted (140), diligent (140), fraught (140), formidable (140), sentinels (141), dire (142), fusillade (142), disarray (142), acclamation (144), solemnity (144), intone (144)

Chapter 14: The Healer

Discussion questions:

1. Why has Dael wished to die? What can cure him of this wish?
2. After a year or two, Dael seems better. How can we tell that he is not yet well?
3. Why does Dael marry Lissa-Na? Does he love her? How can you tell?
4. Why doesn't Zan seek to marry Lissa-Na? What does that show about his character?
5. Why is the new friendship of Aniah and Chul important?

Vocabulary:

succumb (145), prevail (145), ponder (146), despondency (146), melancholy (146), morose (146), indifference (147), albeit (147), enmity (147), disposition (147), subtlety (147)

Further questions:

1. Zan-Gah is not mainly about a lion. Why is a lion on the cover of the book? What is it a *metaphor* for? Is seeking one's twin also a metaphor? For what?
2. Zan-Gah was written by a professor of art history. How can you tell?
3. What are the best ways to learn new words?
4. Which character in Zan-Gah would you like to resemble? Choose a character and tell what qualities you might wish to emulate?
5. The author has striven to make this book exciting and enjoyable. Is that enough? What else do you want in a good book?
6. At the end of the book (149) there is a warning. Can you think of two reasons the publisher put it there? Does it affect the way you feel at the end of the story?