

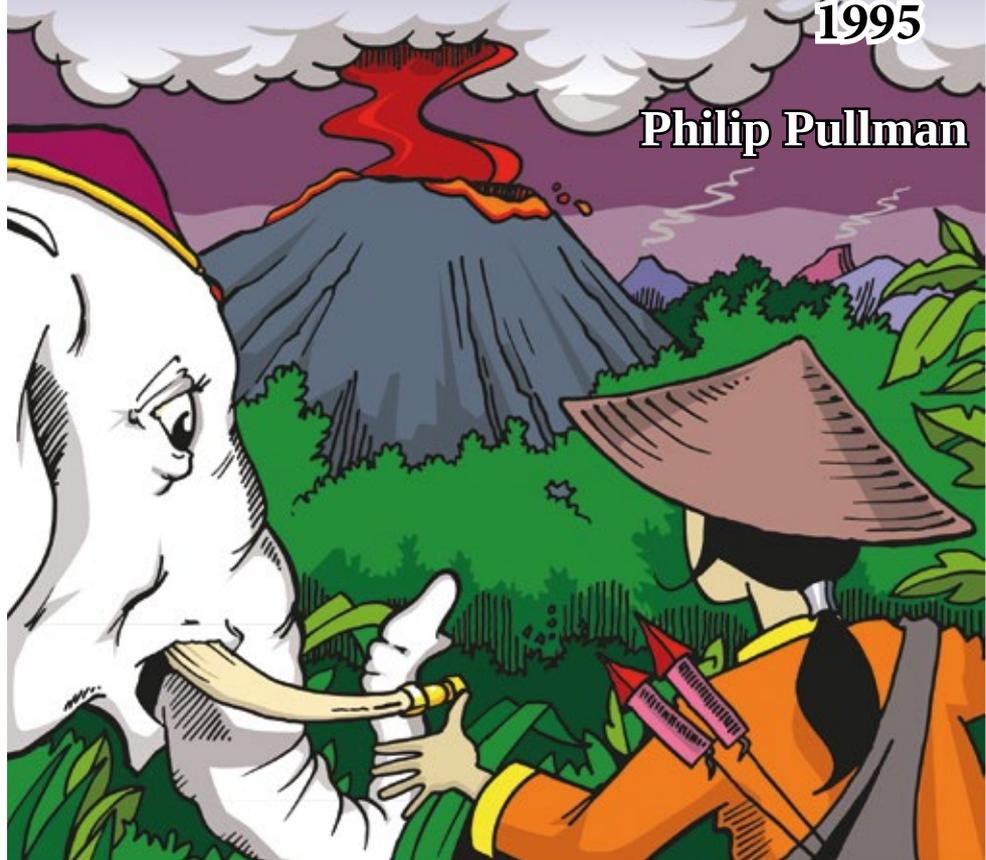
Love to Read



The Firework-Maker's DAUGHTER

1995

Philip Pullman



An 'all's well that ends well' modern fairy-tale with a spirited heroine, a talking elephant, a quick-thinking servant and an entrepreneurial lovable rogue...oh and not forgetting a volcanic fire demon. The book is an aural delight when read aloud or to yourself!



CONTENTS



Overview for teachers

Page

Context 2–3

- About the author
- What's the story about?
- Themes to look out for

Literary techniques 4–10

Characters

- Lila
- Lalchand
- Chulak
- Rambushi
- Hamlet
- Razvani

Setting

Narrative techniques

Structure

Language

Special feature

- The modern fairy tale



Activities for children

► **Before reading** 12–13

Ideas for getting started – Engaging with the world of the novel

- Social and historical context
- Facts
- Pictures and objects
- Debate

► **During reading** 14–19

Stopping places – Developing understanding of narrative and literary techniques

- 1 End of Chapter 1
- 2 End of Chapter 2
- 3 End of Chapter 3
- 4 The end of Chapter 5
- 5 The end of the story

► **After reading** 20–21

Create and imagine – Developing a personal response to the novel

- Firework recipe
- Soundtrack
- Ceremonial dance

A thousand miles ago, in a country east of the jungle and south of the mountains, there lived a Firework-Maker called Lalchand and his daughter Lila.



Overview for teachers

Context

About the author

“I’m in the ‘Once upon a time’ business...” Philip Pullman

A former schoolteacher and lecturer, Pullman was born in Norwich in 1946 and worked in Oxford. His father died when he was seven and his fondest memories from childhood were of his grandfather, a member of the Church of England clergy. But Pullman felt no religious impulse and, when he became the first pupil from his school to win a place at Oxford, concentrated his studies on the poet John Milton. Although he began writing for adults, it is his children’s books for which he is most famous. He won considerable success with his Sally Lockhart novels, set in Victorian London. His most well-known and (in)famous novels *The Dark Materials Trilogy: Northern Lights* (retitled *The Golden Compass* in the US, and subsequently filmed) was published in 1995, followed by *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), the latter winning the Whitbread Prize 2001, making Pullman the first children’s author to do so.

The Firework-Maker’s Daughter is one of his shorter stories ‘which for want of a better term, I call fairy tales.’ Published in 1995, it was a Gold Medal Smarties prize-winner. It has since been adapted into an opera!

What’s the story about?

Brought up amongst the ‘fizz’ and ‘crackle’ of gunpowder of her father’s firework-making workshop, it is no surprise when Lila discovers she has a talent for creating fireworks and longs to become a firework-maker herself. Seriously headstrong, she eschews her father’s more traditional idea of finding a husband and sets off instead to the volcanic Mount Merapi, to obtain Royal Sulphur from the fire fiend, Razvani; a perilous journey all would-be fire-makers must undertake.

The journey is indeed fraught with potential dangers including boarding a pirate-driven river taxi called ‘The Bloody Murderer’. Lucky for her they are a bunch of witless buffoons and, retaining a cool head and a fearless disposition, she manages to extricate herself very easily.

The next obstacle in her journey sees her climbing up the volcanic mountainside. It is evidently gruelling, but with grit and determination she succeeds. However, her quest nearly comes unstuck when she discovers she is not as prepared as she should have been.

Unprotected by the Fire Fiend’s flames and without a clue as to what the ‘The Three Gifts’ are that must be presented to Razvani, it all looks like she will fry in the flames as many others have done so. However, another bit of luck presents itself when her friends Hamlet, a talking white elephant, and Chulak, Hamlet’s groom, appear. Upon discovering he had only given Lila half the story behind ‘how to become a firework-maker’ and thus putting her in danger, Chulak immediately made it his purpose to find and help her. So, in the nick of time, he delivers the protective water from the Goddess of the Emerald Lake which allows Lila to walk into Razvani’s flames unharmed. Razvani congratulates Lila on her success but to her confusion informs her that the Royal Sulphur is an illusion and that whatever the three gifts are, she must have brought them.

The trio swiftly return home after Hamlet learns from the birds in the jungle that Lila’s father, Lalchand, has been imprisoned and threatened with death for his suspected involvement in Hamlet’s disappearance. To spare his life, the king declares that Lila and Lalchand must win an upcoming Firework Festival competition against three other world-leading amiable firework-makers: Dr Puffenflasz from Germany, the Italian Signor Scorcini and the American, Colonel Sparkington. With some self-doubt they work furiously together and, delivering a serene and ingenious performance, they are victorious. It is at this point that Lalchand explains that she possesses all of the three equally important gifts needed to become a firework maker: talent, determination and luck.

And the Royal Sulphur? Well that is wisdom, which Lila did bring back from the mount. She learnt that ‘to make good fireworks you had to love them’. And she did. ‘And so it was that Lila became a Firework-Maker.’

Themes to look out for

- Determination
- Courage
- Trust
- Friendship
- Not exploiting others



Literary techniques

Presentation of character is achieved through

- What the character says
- What the character does
- What other characters say about them
- How other characters react to them
- How they are described in the narrative



Characters

Lila

A talented, confident character, Lila is the antithesis of the traditional female fairy tale heroine. She fervently rejects the stereotypical role expected of her by her father in favour of entering the apparently male-dominated world of firework-makers. With a cool head, a smattering of impatience and a huge swag of guts, determination and resilience she manages to climb the formidable volcanic Mount Mesapi and face Razvani's fearsome flames. On the other side of the coin, Lila is also headstrong and restive. Though these are qualities that drive her on, they are also her undoing, almost. Impatient to become a firework maker, she forsakes further lessons from her father and endangers herself when she seeks out Razvani without fully investigating what exactly she needs to become a true firework-maker. She engenders love and loyalty from others and it is this quality that ultimately saves her. In the end, it is her tireless co-operation and innovative work with her father to help save his life that secures her ambition and changes her from a strident, testy girl into a wise and well-deserved firework-maker.

Lalchand

Lila's father loves his daughter very much but begins the story holding stereotypical views of women. His sole ambition for his daughter is that she should be wed and he refuses to reveal the secret of becoming a firework-maker to her even though he acknowledges she has talent. This all changes at the end of the story when he acknowledges he should have trusted her. After the two work together as equals to create a stunningly serene firework display to save his life, he has a different respect for his daughter and willingly explains to her what the Three Gifts and the Royal Sulphur are.



Chulak

A loyal friend to Lila, entrepreneurial and cheeky, Chulak is a clever servant who, along with his uncle Rambushi, provides much of the humour in the story. He means well, but his own restive spirit, lack of wisdom and pride in his own quick thinking abilities at the beginning of the story sees him exploiting his charge, Hamlet, and putting Lila in danger. He is quick to right his wrongs though and, chastised by both Lalchand and the Goddess of the Emerald Lake, he begins to think of others, thus beginning his own journey of self-discovery and contentment.

Rambushi

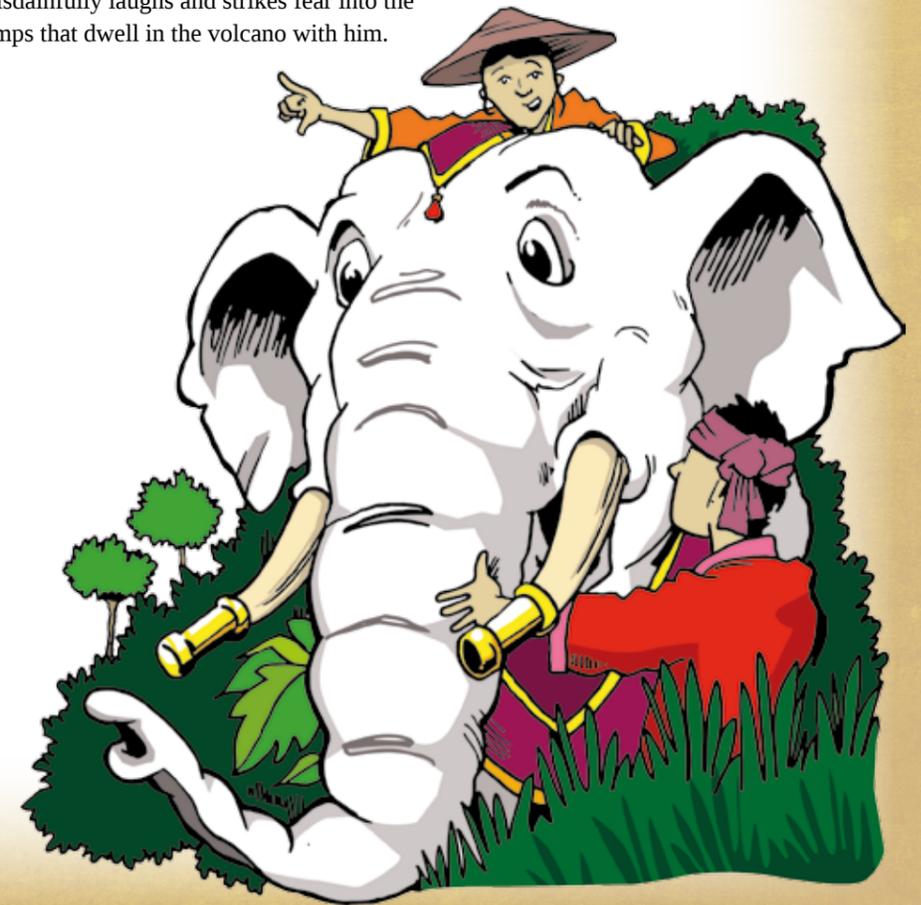
Chulak's uncle, Rambushi is a comic character who is also desperately seeking a fulfilling destiny. He shares his nephew's degree of ambition and entrepreneurial spirit, but lacks the business acumen and ruthlessness to execute them successfully. His heart never really being in it. However, he finally finds his destiny in something he does enjoy and has an aptitude for: singing!

Hamlet

This talking, white elephant is a noble, serene creature that provides the magical element to the story and saves the day on more than one occasion. He too has his own ambitions - he would like to be a free elephant and marry Frangipani. Alas, he only manages the latter, but this and the return of Chulak as his groom, brings him the contentment he needs to stoically endure ceremonial finery.

Razvani

A formidable, fearful flame god, Razvani adds another touch of magic and fantasy to the story. He blazes, roars, disdainfully laughs and strikes fear into the thousands of fire-imps that dwell in the volcano with him.



Setting

The setting can

- Be a backdrop to the action
- Reflect characters' experiences
- Symbolise ideas the author wishes to convey
- Have its own culture and values
- Cause conflict and distress



The action takes place in an unidentified fantasy kingdom, 'A thousand miles ago in a country east of the jungle and south of the mountains' where white elephants talk (but only to very selective people), fantasy figures exist and where great stall is placed in ceremony and procession.

The author uses descriptive set pieces to inspire fear, uncertainty, anxiety, awe and wonder. First of all, the story is book-ended by the awe and wonder of fireworks. The mischievous fizz and crackle of the sparks in the workshop begin the story and at the end the reader is treated to a fabulous, fantastical firework extravaganza, the likes of which we can only imagine from the deliciously descriptive names. This not only ensures the story goes out with a bang, but showcases Lila's immense talent and love for what she does.

In between, the daunting Mount Mesapi is presented, first in terms of size. It is 'great' and 'reaches halfway up the sky', suggesting the insurmountable nature of Lila's task. Not only does it take our fearless heroine's breath away, it seemingly has a mind of its own as it 'rumbled angrily underground and threw boiling rocks in the air'; the angry personification adding greater might to an already formidable description. And at its base is a jungle from which an unsettling cacophony of sound emerges. The setting is unwelcoming, dangerous and designed to agitate. Inside the volcanic Mount, the anxiety-inducing personification continues as it frighteningly shakes, groans, grates and crackles, like the ghosts that it holds. The clamorous noise and frenetic movements of the fire imps and fire spirits is a dizzying and overwhelming prelude to the appearance of Razvani and are a display of his power and might.

Narrative techniques

Told in the third person, the narrative is simple, non-judgemental yet arch, the latter particularly pertinent when presenting Rambashi and his men. The narrator mainly presents Lila's situation, though does leave her story at times to follow Chulak and Hamlet; two flawed yet highly likeable characters.



Structure

Structure is the order or pattern in which a novel is put together and should

- Maintain the interest of the reader
- Move the action from one episode to the next
- Arouse a reader's interest in character or situation
- Create a moment of crisis
- Create expectation or surprise



As Pullman himself says, 'fairytales . . . are ways of telling us true things without labouring the point. They begin in delight, and they end in wisdom'.

Fast paced, the story has a main plot and two sub-plots, with the main plot clearly grounded in the typical fairytale structure of conflict, separation, initiation and return. Lila has different ideas about her future from her father, leaves to become a firework-maker, overcomes obstacles and tests at Mount Mesapi and returns a wiser person finally attaining her goal. In the Chulak and Hamlet subplot, both the characters are unhappy with their lot, set out to right a wrong, and are rewarded as a result. As for the third sub-plot involving Rambashi, after striving but failing many times to find his role in the world, he finally succeeds. All three plots converge at the end of the story, tying events up beautifully. The movement between plots allows the time to pass without explanation thus maintaining a sense of drama in the story at all times. For example, while Chulak and Hamlet are hatching their plan of escape, Lila has already arrived at Mount Mesapi. It isn't necessary to know how Lila got there, but that she is there. The focus of the story can then be shone on key set pieces without letting go of the tight grip on pace.

Language

Resonating with the language of sound and spectacle, the reader has no trouble accessing the sensuous nature of Pullman's fantasy kingdom. The onomatopoeia, alliteration and personification of the fireworks listed one after the other is giddy. The 'fire flared and the sparks danced' in Lalchand's workshop and the reader is urged to 'listen to the fizz and crackle of the gunpowder' of perhaps the 'Crackle Dragons' and 'Leaping Monkeys'. Later the fireworks whizz, whoosh, fizz and sputter in the night sky as people ooh and aah in excitement making the atmosphere palpable.

As already mentioned in the 'Setting' section, Mount Mesapi is presented, first in terms of size. It is 'great' and 'reaches halfway up the sky', suggesting the insurmountable nature of Lila's task. Its formidable might is further emphasised by personification: it 'rumbled angrily underground and threw boiling rocks in the air', resembling a fearsome giant. Inside the volcano, the anxiety inducing personification continues as it frighteningly shakes, groans, grates and crackles. The verbs used to describe the fire imps is frenetic: they 'swarmed...dash...smash...clang and clash...toiled...blazed...swung...plunged' all in only two paragraphs! Its impact is dizzying and a fitting prelude to the appearance of the mighty Razvani.

The jungle too is presented through an unsettling cacophony of onomatopoeic verbs of sound where animals 'gibbered', 'screached', 'snapped' and roared. The animals cannot be seen only heard making the jungle appear unwelcoming, dangerous and unsettling.

Pullman uses a variety of sentence structures for particular purposes. For instance, short sentences in the story help to add dramatic pause and build up a sense of suspense. One example is when Lila enters Razvani's cavern inside Mount Mesapi and discovers that there was nothing there. In response, 'She sank to the floor' appears on a line of its own. Here, Pullman focusses our attention on her response of abject disappointment without having to elaborate too much. It also acts an anti-climax and a pause, pulling the reader back before the big spectacle begins. And when the spectacle does begin, the sentences get longer, listing the action without wanting to interrupt it.



Special feature

The modern fairy tale

Fairy tales are stories that typically feature fantasy figures, royalty, and a loyal friend and follow a clear structure where a character overcomes an obstacle and there is a happy ending.



The Firework-Maker's Daughter pays homage to these traditional roots and has all these ingredients, but, as a modern fairy tale, it adds a twist. In this case, it is the presentation of the female protagonist. Traditionally, females are either depicted as passive innocents or the embodiment of wickedness, but in a modern fairy tale they play a much stronger role. Lila, in this story, is a headstrong confident female who is not afraid to question her father and the traditional future he has mapped out for her. She is an active character who moulds her own future, showing determination and courage along the way. However, reverting to tradition, she gains something as all characters do in the end: wisdom and happiness.



Activities for children

Before reading

Ideas for getting started

Engaging with the world of the novel

Social and historical context

What do you know about fireworks? Find out about the history of fireworks and how they were made.

Find out what you can about Mount Merapi volcano in Indonesia.

Research the tradition and ceremony behind the celebration of the full moon. Which countries and cultures celebrate it and why?

Facts

Find five facts Philip Pullman.

What is a banyan tree?

What is a gourd?

What does a jasmine flower look like?

Where are they from?

Where is Mount Merapi?

Pictures and objects

Dismantle a firework. What's inside?

Show the children a picture of a white elephant and ask them to suggest how it might fit into the story. If it could speak, what kind of voice might it have and what might it say?

Explore a picture of Mount Merapi volcano in Java. What might it be like to climb? What kind of qualities must you have to succeed in climbing it?

Debate

What, in your opinion, are the three most important gifts a human can possess?

What are the ingredients for success?

How determined are you?

What is it about fireworks that make them so alluring?

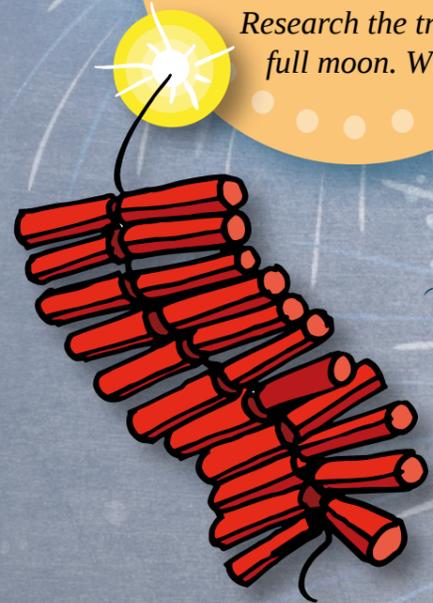
Have you ever taken advantage of someone's good nature?

How did that work out for you?

How can making mistakes in life be a good thing? What do you learn from them?

What mistakes have you made and what did you learn? Have you ever made the same mistake more than once? If so, why do you think that happened?

What is wisdom?



During reading

Stopping places

Developing understanding of narrative and literary techniques

1

Read to the end of Chapter 1

Focus on...

- Opening of the story



Things to discuss

Character: What are your initial impressions of Lila? How would you describe Lila and Lalchand's relationship?

What is your initial impression of Chulak? Is he as innocent as he seems? What suggests otherwise? What role might he play in the story?

How do you think Hamlet feels being used as a 'walking billboard'?

Setting: What strikes you about the opening sentence? From the description, which country do you imagine it might be set? Why do you think the author decided to make the setting an indistinct place? What might this suggest about the story you are about to continue reading?

How would you describe Lalchand's workshop? Is it a place you would have liked to have grown up in? Why or why not?

What kind of world has the author created? Do you like the world that has been created? Why do you say that?

Language: Look at the names of the fireworks. What do their names suggest about how each firework will look or work?

Look at the names for the firework ingredients. How might each ingredient affect the firework?

Story: What do you think will happen next?

You could...

Start collecting words and phrases that tell you something about Lila. What do you notice about the words and phrases and where they appear in the story? Are there any patterns or none?

2

Read to the end of Chapter 2

Focus on...

- Presentation of setting to add tension



Things to discuss

Character: How else is Lila presented in this chapter? Do you like her character? Why or why not? Look at the way Chulak speaks in this section. What does it suggest about him?

What do you think of Rambashi and his men? Is there anything about their presentation that suggests Lila is in no real danger?

Language and setting: Look at the verbs used to describe the streets as Lalchand runs through them to find Lila. What do they suggest about the streets? How do they add drama and how do they reflect Lalchand's feelings?

How is Mount Merapi presented? Look at the verbs, adverbs, adjectives and Lila's reaction to it to help you form your decision.

How is the jungle presented?

What does the setting add to the story?

How does the setting make you feel about Lila's task ahead?

Structure: At what points in this section did you feel yourself getting tense or full of suspense? What did the author do to make you feel this way? How does the author begin to build up tension in this section? Look at dialogue, action and the impact of the setting. How long does the tension and danger last?

Lila doesn't know about the rest of the secret behind becoming a firework-maker, but the reader now does. How does impact upon the way you feel about her situation?

Tone: How would you describe the tone of the story?



3

Read to the end of Chapter 3

Focus on...

- Presentation of *The Ceremony of the Full Moon*
- Inclusion of obstacles to create tension and frustration



Things to discuss

Character: How far are Rambashi and his men everything you thought they might be? What more do you learn about Lila in this chapter?

It turns out Rambashi and Chulak are related. How are the two characters similar? And how are they different?

How is Rambashi presented in this chapter? What does his dialogue suggest about him?

Setting: Explore the ways the Ceremony of the Full Moon is presented. What could you imagine most?

Structure: What obstacles or problems are there in the story so far? What effect do these obstacles have on you as a reader?

Story: What did you find funny in this chapter?
What was your favourite moment in this chapter?
What would you ask the Goddess from the lake for if you could?



4

Read to the end of Chapter 5

Focus on...

- Presentation of *Lila*
- Presentation of *Mount Merapi* and *Razvani*



Things to discuss

Character: In Chapter 4, Chulak asks the goddess from the lake a favour for someone else rather than himself. What does this suggest about him?

Why do you think Chulak felt ashamed when the goddess rebuked him for writing on Hamlet?

Look at the language used to describe Lila's ascent of the Mount. What does it suggest about her?

What do you think of Lila's attitude in this section?

How is Razvani presented? What do his reactions suggest about him? Is he what you expected?

Setting: How do the sounds of the jungle compare to the sounds of the bottom of Mount Mesapi? Why do you think the author decided to make such a contrast in sound?

How is the outside of Mount Merapi presented?

The author uses contrast again to present the inside of the Mount. What is its effect on you?

Look at the verbs used to describe the action facing Lila inside the Mount. What kind of place is being presented? How does it make you feel? How do you think Lila feels at this time?

Ideas: At the end of Chapter 5, Razvani states that 'The world itself is all illusion'. What do you think he means by this? How far do you agree with him?

He goes on to say that 'The only thing that lasts is change itself'. How far do you agree?

What do you think the three gifts are?

You could...

Collect words and phrases which you liked most and were most vivid to you. Include them in a story of your own.

B

Read to the end of the story

Focus on...

- The story ending
- The presentation of the firework competition
- Ideas within the story



Things to discuss

Character: How would you describe Lila and Lalchand's relationship in the last two chapters?

What do you think each has learnt about the other?

Who was your favourite character?

How pleased were you for Rambashi at the end of the story? What role do you think he played in the story?

What role did Chulak and Hamlet play in the story?

Did any of the characters change? If so, how and why?

Setting: How was the firework competition presented? What did the presentation of the other three firework-makers suggest about them and their display? Whose display could you imagine most?

How important were the settings in this story?

How would a change of setting affect the story?

Language: Near the beginning of Chapter 6, the author repeats the word 'they' when describing Lila and Lalchand's firework preparations. What does the repetition suggest about them both?

Structure: What contrasts exist in this last section of the story?

What did you think of the ending?

Story: Where you ever in any doubt that Lila and her father would succeed?

What do you think of the three gifts? How far do you agree that you need all three to succeed?

How did the story make you feel?

What elements of fairy tale did this story have?

You could...

Draw one of the firework-maker's firework displays.



After reading

Create & imagine

Developing a personal response to the novel



Firework recipe

Look back at Chapter 1 where Lalchand and Lila make fireworks together. Using some of their ingredients, as well as making up your own, write a recipe for your own firework creation. Include drawings showing how your finished firework will look in the sky or on water.



Soundtrack

Record your own scene soundtrack. Choose your favourite scene in the story that could easily have a soundtrack attached to it, for example the firework display or the jungle, and start recording or downloading sounds. Edit these sounds into a workable soundtrack. How well does your recording capture the scene?



Ceremonial dance

Create and perform your own ceremony. Think about what your ceremony will be celebrating, what you will wear, what dance you will perform, what you might sing, what flowers you might use.



Memorable quotes

'This is no place for a girl, now I come to think of it, and just look at you! Your hair's a mess, your fingers are burned and stained with chemicals, your eyebrows are scorched...How am I going to find a husband for you when you look like that?'

*Lila wasn't sure why a river taxi should have the name *The Bloody Murderer* painted on the bow, nor why Rambashi should be wearing no less than three daggers in his belt: one straight, one curved and one wavy.*

She felt her heart lift when she saw it again so powerful and dominating and she thought, I belong to that mountain, and it belongs to me!

'The goddess of the lake is not to be disturbed by your frivolous requests. Take him away! No! She shall not hear you! Be thankful we let you go with your life. Take him to the village boundary, and if he comes back, kill him!'

She hadn't come on this journey in order to wonder how things were at home. It was the way things were at home that had made her come on the journey after all.

She had never seen anything so gloomy and empty of life, and her heart sank, because she had come all this way and there was nothing there.

'Maiden, turn back! I was arrogant and headstrong! I didn't seek the water from the Goddess, and I perished in the flames!'

'Illusions, Lila. Fire burns away all our illusions. The world itself is all illusion. Everything that exists flickers like a flame for a moment, and then vanishes. The only thing that lasts is change itself.'

No matter what happened, it was worth it, everything was worth it, for a moment of joy like this!

And then she realised what she had learned. She suddenly saw that Dr Puffenflask loved his pink fire, and Signor Scorcini loved his octopus, and Colonel Sparkington loved his funny moon-people. To make good fireworks you had to love them, every little sparkler or Crackle-Dragon. That was it! You had to put love into your fireworks as well as all the skill you had...

...She laughed, and turned to Lalchand.

'Now I see!' she said.

And so it was that Lila became a Firework-Maker.

*'One of those rare books with a confident magic all their own...
delivered with a lightness of touch that is sheer genius.'*

The Independent

*'A brilliant book if you want to escape to more glamorous locations.
Full of hilarious, lovable characters, this is a book you will want to
read over and over again.'*

The Sunday Times

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