

Using
Kalifax
in the classroom

A dazzling fantasy tale about a brave crew attempting to sail north to the eaves of the world, fighting snow-goblins and finding Grandfather Frost, all the while guided by the magical legend of Kalifax.

- Duncan Thornton, the author of *Kalifax*, makes sure that readers know his e-mail address: thornton@kalifax.com and the *Kalifax* web site www.kalifax.com, which has a question and answer page. What are five or six questions your class might like to send him?

- In one way, *Kalifax* is a story about growing up. Two related discussion questions are:

- At the climax of the story, Tom disobeys orders to try to find help. Tom did find help, though not in the way he expected. Was Tom right or wrong to disobey his Captain's orders? What does the Captain think?

- Tom always remembers how frightened he was during the battle with the snow-goblins. Do students think Tom should feel bad about having been scared? Would Tom have acted differently later in the story if he hadn't felt so scared at that point?

- The Cook is always pessimistic about what might happen. But is the Cook brave or cowardly?

- Does the class think the Captain's idea for the voyage was brave or foolhardy?

- The author was born in Northern Manitoba, and in *Kalifax*, he took things that were familiar to him – the north, and the cold, and the northern lights – to make the myths and legends of a fantasy world. Have the class find things that make their community unusual and create a short myth to tell about them.

- Tom's friend Jenny would have liked to come along on the voyage. How do the students think the story would have been different if she had come? Why do they think

the author decided to have Tom be the only kid on a ship full of adults?

- Jenny is a presence in the book, even though she had to stay behind to work as a fisher. But Jenny is mad for adventures herself. What sort of adventures does the class think she might have had while Tom was away up north?

- The sailors have a tremendous battle with the snow goblins, but the author never actually says what the snow goblins look like. Why do students think he didn't say? What do they think snow goblins look like?

- The ship in *Kalifax*, the *Volantix*, was modeled after the *Nonsuch*, a real ship in Manitoba's Museum of Man and Nature (www.manitoba.museum.mb.ca/gall.htm). The *Nonsuch* is a replica of the ship that sailed into Hudson Bay in 1668 in search of furs. The voyage led to the founding of the Hudson's Bay Company, and was instrumental in starting trade and commerce in western Canada. The class could go to the web site and check out the history of this very important event in "real" Canadian history.

- There are a lot of strange words in *Kalifax*: old-fashioned sailing and cooking words, for example, but none of them are made up. Students can look up some of the strange words on the *Kalifax* web site, or see how many they can find in a big dictionary. Can they find other unusual, old-fashioned words in dictionaries and tell a story using them?

