

About *OCULUM*

“I’m Mann, just Mann.”

The world is slowly recovering after environmental collapse, and the children of the automated, domed city of Oculum have begun to awaken. Miranda, William and the 998 other children wake to tend the fruit trees and gardens behind the thick, opaque walls of their world. Some speak quietly of Outside, which is forbidden. Until William finds a door ...

The children outside the dome of Oculum — Mann, Cranker and others raised by Grannie — live amongst the rubble of the old destroyed city. They live with hunger, hard work, and stories about a time before the fall, of buggies without horses, light without fire ... and magical fruit called “peaches.” But it must be lies, until one day Mann and Cranker get close enough to the ancient dome to find ... a door ...

“Well-written and an imaginative description of a future world struggling to survive, *Oculum* ends on a positive note, and the book should appeal to both boys and girls in search of adventure.” *** $\frac{1}{2}$ / $\frac{1}{4}$

— *CM Magazine*

“...its rich world-building and determined characters give it an originality that sets it apart from similar stories.”

— *Quill & Quire*

About PHILIPPA DOWDING

Philippa Dowding is a middle-grade author, a poet, musician and copywriter. Her books have been nominated for numerous literary awards in Canada, the U.S. and Europe, including the SYRCA Diamond Willow, OLA Silver Birch Express, OLA Red Maple, and Hackmatack awards. In 2017, she won the OLA Silver Birch Express Honor Book Award for *Myles and the Monster Outside*.

Philippa lives in Toronto with her family, where she sails, plays guitar, and walks her dog every day.

Curriculum

Grade 5, 8 Science and Technology (Understanding Earth and Space Systems, Understanding Structures and Mechanisms)

Grade 6, 7 Science and Technology (Understanding Life Systems)

Grade 7 Geography (Physical Patterns in a Changing World, Natural Resources Around the World: Use and Sustainability)

Grade 8 Geography (Global Settlement: Patterns and Sustainability)

Grade 5, 6, 7, 8 Language (Reading, Writing)

Student Objectives

After reading *Oculum*, students should be able to:

Grade 5-6:

- Analyze the long-term effects of energy and resource use on society and the environment, and evaluate options for conserving energy and resources
- Assess human impacts on biodiversity, and identify ways of preserving biodiversity
- Assess the benefits that human societies derive from biodiversity and the problems that occur when biodiversity is diminished
- Investigate forces that act on structures and mechanisms and analyze their social and environmental impacts
- Analyze texts and explain how various elements in them contribute to meaning

Grade 7-8:

- Assess the impacts of human activities and technologies on the environment
- Analyze some challenges and opportunities presented by the physical environment and ways in which people have responded to them
- Analyze some significant interrelationships between Earth's physical features and processes and human settlement patterns, and some ways in which the physical environment and issues of sustainability may affect settlement in the future
- Develop and explain interpretations of texts using stated and implied ideas from the texts to support their interpretations

Getting Started

1. Ask the students about gardening and their experiences in the garden. Has anyone tried to grow food?
2. Discuss where seeds come from and are stored today.

Chapter-Specific Questions

1. What is the significance of Mannfred's nickname? (19)
2. Why are baby girls so unusual and rare? (21)
3. Do we have anything like Black Rain in our world? (22)
4. Miranda1, William1, and Mann all agree that doors exist to open and walk through. Why is Miranda1 initially so conflicted about the existence of the door to Oculum and its purpose? (29)
5. What causes Grannie and the children to leave their home? (35)
6. Grannie can remember Cambridge and the boys' choir there. How old does that make Grannie? How far in the future must we be? (38)
7. What is the signal to the Mothers that the children of Oculum must leave? (63)
8. Who are the Fandoms and what do they represent? (66)
9. What is the significance of the black boxes everywhere? (71)
10. Who built Oculum? (94)
11. What does William1 call himself after he leaves Oculum? (107)
12. What illness do the Littleuns come down with? (109)
13. What is the significance of the peaches? (159)
14. Why does Miranda1 call the dogs Caliban and Ariel? What is she referencing? (171)
15. What purpose do the Mothers serve? And the Sentinels? (190)

* Page numbers are in reference to the First Edition, ISBN 978-1-77086-512-9, published in 2018.

Discussion Questions

- What are the consequences losing our seeds would have on the environment? On us?
- What could lead to a world like Oculum being formed?
- What role do the children of Oculum play in their ecosystem?
- If all of Oculum's inhabitants were placed there to serve a specific purpose, what is the purpose of Regulus?
- Is it better to stay with the known or venture towards the unknown? Discuss.
- What do you think happened to Mann's parents, and the parents of all of Grannie's children?

Essay Questions

- Compare Oculum to another dystopian future (*The Giver*, *Wall-E*, *The Marrow Thieves*); what aspects of our culture survive, and why?
- How does the distribution of food work in this future world, and how does it compare to our world?

Class Activities

- Draw the Oculum structure; discuss the Arm mechanism and how the Dome would open and close.
- Discuss the items you think would remain in 75-100 years as garbage.
- Split the class into pairs, and have each pair put together a survival kit for surviving alone for a week and leaving behind no garbage.