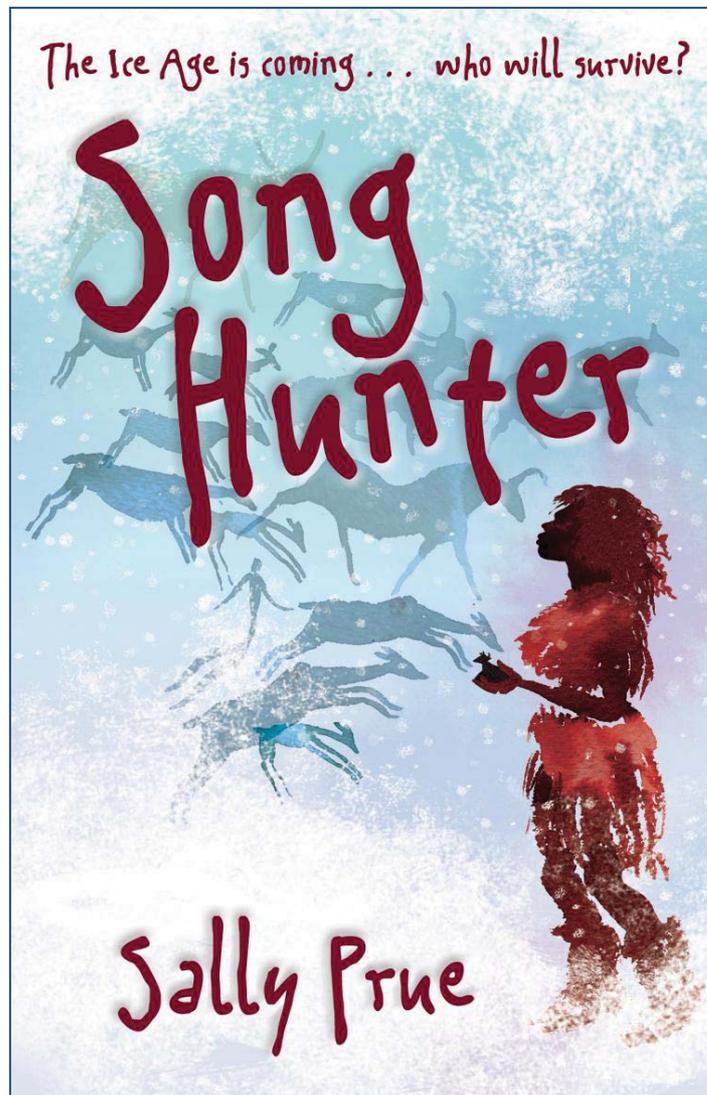


The World of *Song Hunter*

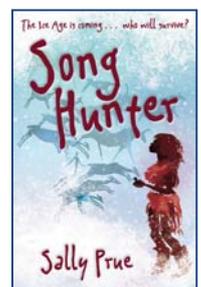
**Ideas for exploring Sally Prue's novel with pupils
in Years 5, 6, 7 and 8 (P5, P6, P7 and S1)**



Introduction

Song Hunter by Sally Prue is a thought-provoking novel that recreates the lives of Neanderthal people about 40,000 years ago, at the beginning of the last Ice Age, in what is now called Britain. Neanderthals were closely related to present-day humans but had a tougher build to cope with their much harsher living conditions. They were hunter-gatherers and survival was their only focus. Sally Prue explores what happens when Mica, a young Neanderthal female begins to sense that there might be more to life than daily struggle. Mica's story encourages young readers to consider:

- What we need to give our lives meaning after our basic needs for food and shelter have been met.
- What happens when young people challenge their elders' traditions.



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Synopsis

Mica belongs to a band of hunter-gatherers who call themselves the stonemen. Her father, Elk, is the band chief, called Strongest, and is constantly challenged by another male, Seal. Mica's mother Amber, grandmother Pearl, Seal's wife Garnet and their son Lynx make up the band, plus a young male called Bear who has lived with them since childhood.

Bear and Mica have always been close. When Bear becomes an adult after killing a mammoth, there is an expectation that they will eventually become more than friends, but Mica prefers their old friendship to Bear's new grown-up behaviour.

The stonemen fear starvation in the approaching harsh winter, especially as their hunting spears were broken in the mammoth hunt. Mica has ideas for hunting without spears but they are not taken seriously. Meanwhile, her attention has been caught by singing she's heard, which she connects with a mysterious figure from another tribe called the howlmen. The stonemen's days are focused on struggling to stay alive but Mica longs for a richer existence.

Mica works out how to stitch her furs together with mammoth hair. When a bull gores Elk, she stitches his wound and saves his life. With Elk unable to hunt, Seal becomes the Strongest. He has no time for Mica's daydreaming and feels threatened by her inventions. He is enraged when she spends time carving on a mammoth's tooth and attacks Bear when he tries to protect Mica. Miserable, Mica confides in Amber, who reveals that she also dreamt of exploring a wider world when she was young, but settled for staying with the band under Elk's protection.

After witnessing the howlmen's ritual and learning their dance, Mica gets lost in a storm. She shelters in a mammoth's carcass and hears the stonemen searching for her, but does not respond. Creeping back to the shelter, she overhears Bear's announcement that he is leaving because the band cannot survive under Seal's leadership.

Mica returns to the howlmen's camp but they have moved on. Bear joins her and tells her how she can perfect her new hunting technique. They agree to try it out and decide to leave the valley in search of a new life together.



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Life with the stonemen

“Young ones are not ever wise. They speak when they should be silent, and think things that are best not thought.” (Seal)

The stonemen live in an extended family group.

- How are they like a present-day family?
- How are they different?
- How are children/young people treated differently from adults?
- What responsibilities do they have?
- How are older people treated and how do they contribute to the group effort?
- How does Bear becoming an adult change his relationship with Mica?

All the stonemen’s energy goes into finding, hunting and making food, clothing, weapons, and other things they need to survive.

- After they have killed the mammoth, what do they use it for besides eating? Draw a diagram of a mammoth and write captions explaining how the stonemen use each body part.
- When Mica reveals her first invented technique (stitching), what is the reaction of the other stonemen? What advantages and disadvantages of her new method are pointed out to her?
- Mica spends more time than the other stonemen thinking about needs that reach beyond survival. What does she need in her life that cannot be supplied by hunting?
- In what ways do the howlmen seem to Mica to have a richer life than the stonemen?
- How does she express the new feelings that she has inside her?

Amber tells Mica about her own questioning of her life’s purpose when she was Mica’s age.

- Why does Amber tell her story to her daughter?
- Does it have the effect that she expected?
- How does Amber feel about her decision 16 years later?

Elk says near the end of the novel that Mica is “a fighter”.

- What does he mean? What is Mica losing, and what is she gaining, when she decides not to allow the stonemen to rescue her after the storm?



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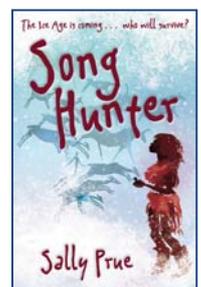
Leader of the pack

The Strongest of the band is the supreme leader and demands everyone's unquestioning obedience.

- Why do the stonemen organize themselves in this way?
- Why is the Strongest always a man?
- How is Seal's leadership different from Elk's?
- When Elk gives up his power to Seal, he is satisfied with the way it happens. Why is this?
- Why does Mica's life become more difficult when Seal is in charge?

Bear does not support Mica's efforts to find new ways of hunting while Elk is Strongest. Under Seal's leadership, he changes his mind.

- Why is this?



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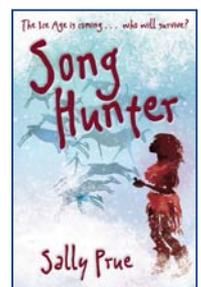
Why now?

Mica's feeling that she needs a change in her life becomes more intense as winter approaches.

- Why is this?
- What is different about the coming winter?

Pearl, the oldest of the band, talks a lot about the future.

- What does Pearl say will happen, and is she right?
- When Mica overhears Bear's farewell to the stonemen, what does she understand about what will happen in the future?



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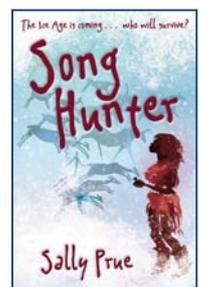
Adapt or die

“I’ve got to fight my way out of the old ways and find new ones, to suit the new times that have come.” (Bear)

What does the novel say about the stonemen’s bodies and why they needed to be different from those of present-day humans?

- Use reference books and the internet to collect information and images of Neanderthal people.
- Make a timeline of the history of the world and show where Neanderthal people fit into it.

Why might Mica outlive the other stonemen, despite being physically smaller?



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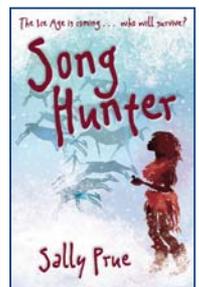
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About the author

Sally first started making up stories as a teenager, when she realized that designing someone else's adventures was almost as satisfying as having her own. Sally teaches recorder and piano and enjoys walking, painting, day-dreaming, reading and gardening. *Cold Tom*, Sally's first book, won the Branford Boase Award.

Visit Sally's blog, where she explores insights about Neanderthals and the Ice Age based on her research for *Song Hunter*:

<http://neandersong.blogspot.co.uk/>



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