

Island's End Discussion Guide

Possible discussion questions and research activities suggested by the author
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These are based on a cyberlesson plan the author created, but there's lots of material here that could form the basis of a discussion guide. Several questions and several possible activities.

IMAGINE YOU belong to a tribe that lives on a beautiful island remote from modern civilization. Your tribe's leader chooses you to be his successor. He warns you to keep the tribe safe from the influence of modern strangers from a neighboring island, who threaten to take over your island home and destroy your tribe's way of life. You are a step away from becoming your tribe's leader when your little brother falls deathly ill. Your medicines fail to cure him. If you journey to the stranger's island for help their medicines may save your brother's life. But if you cross over to their world you will endanger your tribe's survival by shaking their faith in tradition and in your capacity to lead. Should you let your brother die in order to protect your people? Or should you threaten their future for his sake? What would YOU choose?

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A LEADER?

In *Island's End*, Uido (the protagonist), struggles with the question of what makes a good leader.

In your journal, write answers to the following questions:

1. Do you like assuming leadership responsibilities? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever acted as a leader in your family, community or school environment? If not, is it because you dislike the idea of leading? Or is it because there are obstacles in your way and if so, what are they?
3. In your capacity as a leader or even otherwise, have you ever had to make a choice that was difficult? Why was this choice hard?
4. Who is a good leader?

Group Vocabulary workshop: In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a good leader? Collate words for character traits you think a good leader should possess – either in class as a group or on a virtual notice board your teacher sets up for you.

In Uido's tribe, the oko-jumu acts as a healer and storyteller. To find out more about medicines from the rainforest and increase your knowledge about rainforests, visit .

Write in your Journal: How does your family generally react when someone falls ill? Does anyone in your family believe in traditional home remedies? Do you know who discovered them and how?

To get a sense of Shamanistic traditions and Shamanistic concepts of reality and spirituality, read the interview with a Shaman at

www.mirandaproduction.com/shaminterview2.htm

Does your religion or spiritual philosophy influence your idea of reality? Does it include a spiritual leader whose decisions influence you everyday life?

What, if anything, do the words “spirit” or “soul” mean to you?

What symbols (spiritual or otherwise) are important to you, if any? In our modern culture? To us as a nation?

Optional activity : Keep a personal record of your own dreams for a week or so. You will not have to share this dream journal with anyone, but it may enhance your reading pleasure and deepen your experience of this novel.

A virtual visit to the Andaman Islands

Uido, the protagonist of ISLAND'S END, lives on an island belonging to the Andman Island chain. Have you any idea where in the world this is? In your journal, draw a freehand map of the world showing your best guess as to the location of these islands. See if you were right by checking the world map at www.eduweb.com/rainforest/worldmap.html

Now, visit the author Padma Venkatraman's website (www.climbingthestairsbook.com) and follow the link at the www.climbingthestairsbook.com/island'send to download photographs of the rainforests and mangrove wetlands that cover the islands.

Finally, set the mood by clicking on this link to listen to some rainforest sounds:

Stranger Dreams

In chapter 6, Lah ame retells the story of why Uido's tribe moved to the island they now inhabit. Why is storytelling so important to a tribe like Uido's? Is oral history important in our culture?

WRITE IN YOUR Journal:

Is there someone in your family who particularly likes to tell stories? Do you like listening? How well has the oral history of your family been passed down from generation to generation? Was there any significant gap and if so when and why did this break occur?

In chapter 7, Uido and Natalang display very different reactions to Lah-ame's story. What does this show about their characters? Do you think the gap that already exists between them will widen or narrow as the novel progresses?

Do you have a friend whose character and interests differ widely from your own? How does this difference affect your friendship?

Have you read any other story in which friends move apart as they grow up?

Although Uido is initially excited by the idea of becoming Lah-ame's apprentice, Uido expresses doubts in chapter 8. What are some reasons for this ambivalence?

Have you ever done or wanted to do something that your peers might not approve of? Or have you gone along with your peers at times when you wished you had the courage to stand alone or even against them?

Is it easier pretend you are part of a group or to openly admit you are different?

In Chapter 13, Lah-ame tells Uido that the Otherworld is not some distant location, but really just another way to sense the world. What do you think he means? Based on what you have read so far, what do you think he refers to as the Otherworld?

How do we sense "reality"? What does "reality" mean to you? Do you think your opinion of reality has altered since you were born? Do you think ideas of reality vary across cultures? How has the progress of science affected notions of reality in your culture over the ages?

How does Uido's dream of her tribe in chapter 15 strengthen her desire to complete her training?

Have you ever had a dream that strengthened your resolve to take an action or that otherwise helped you overcome a fear?

Have you ever experienced a blurring of the distinction between dream and reality? For example, have you ever dreamed of hearing a noise and then woken up realizing it's your alarm clock going off? Or woken up frightened or sweating after a nightmare?

In chapter 16, when Lah-ame leaves, how does Uido feel? Have you ever been in the wild? How did that experience make you feel?

At the end of chapter 25, Uido makes a strong decision of her own. Would you have chosen as she did in the same situation? Have you ever chosen to defy a family, school or cultural tradition? Was your decision courageous? What were the consequences of your decision and were you afraid of some of the potential outcomes? What are some potential outcomes that Uido fears and do they come to pass? Do you think her decision will hasten her tribe's end?

Across a strip of sea

How do Lah-ame and Maya serve as role models for Uido? Does seeing Maya help Uido and why?

Who, if anyone, is your role model? How is this person like you and how is this person different? Why does this person inspire you? Is there something about this person that you do not want to emulate?

Uido says she has gained confidence by crossing over to the strangers' world. What do you think she means by this? How has crossing over helped Uido?

What does the insect-eating plant symbolize to Uido? How does this symbol act as a powerful message to Uido as she explains to Uncle Paleva?

WRITE IN YOUR journal:

What are some symbols (dream or otherwise) that hold a meaning for you, personally. Why are these symbols powerful to you?

How does Uncle Paleva's story help Uido? Has reading or listening to a story ever inspired, encouraged or influenced you to act differently?

What role does mythology or parable have in today's world, your cultural tradition, your family?

ISLAND'S END

What decision does Uido make in chapter 42 and how does this decision differ from the earlier choice Uido made (at the end of part II of ISLAND'S END)?

How is the Tsunami described in chapter 43? How does Padma Venkatraman use the five senses to show the approach and the aftermath of the Tsunami?

How did Maya react to Uido's decision about the tribe's future contact with modern civilization? Did this decision surprise you?

In the final chapter, what rituals, emotions, thoughts and actions show us that Uido has, indeed, been established as the tribe's leader?

What do you think the tribe's future will be?

How does Uido change as the novel progresses? Are there aspects of her character that remain constant? Justify your answer by citing the text of ISLAND'S END.

Do you have mixed feelings about leadership as Uido initially does? Have any of your struggles paralleled Uido's?

After you read ISLAND'S END, trace the growth of Uido's leadership capacity by underlining words, or commenting on actions or emotions that show the development of leadership traits.

Has Uido's story changed your idea of who a good leader is or what a good leader needs? Did the novel make you consider any new aspects of leadership? Would you modify the initial list of words you'd created by adding or deleting a few? Why?

As a group, brainstorm words that describe these characters: Uido, Lah-ame, Danna.

Now, complete the sentences below. Justify your descriptions by citing actions taken or emotions shown by each character.

Uido is

I know this because

Lah-ame is ...

I know this because ...

Danna is ...

I know this because ...

The Natural “elements”

Ancient people in different cultures often attached a special importance to the natural “elements”. Cultures independently usually accorded a special place to four “elements” (to a scientist, these are not elements but mixtures): earth, water, fire and air.

Leaf through your copy of ISLAND’S END, and underline the metaphors and symbols you find using different colored markers for metaphors and symbols associated with each of the four traditional elements (e.g. highlight earth symbols using yellow or brown, fire symbols using red, water symbols using green and air/sky symbols using blue).

Can you see patterns or recurring themes emerging that extend across chapters ?

Can you see a link between the four elements and four of the characters in ISLAND’S END (Uido, Ashu, Lah-ame, and Danna)?

Draw on the previous exercise (describing three of these characters) to complete the table that follows.

Name	Character traits	“Element”	Associated metaphors (cite page number)
Uido			
Danna			

Lah-ame			
Ashu			

What guides your spirit?

Clearly, Uido's and Lah-ame's spirit animals are linked with the "element" they are most closely associated with (water and air/sky respectively).

Decide which character traits **you** show and then explain what "element" fits you best.

I am:

I know this because :

Now, choose a spirit animal that is part of your "element" and that you think fits **your** character. Explain why.

My spirit animal would be:

I think it fits best because:

To Dream

How is the symbol of a spider woven into and throughout the novel? How does this metaphor grow or change in response to Uido's emotional state?

WRITE IN YOUR journal:

Can you think of a modern symbol that can stand for something positive in certain contexts but that is also sometimes frightening, ugly or otherwise negative?

Optional activity: If you kept a dream journal before or as you read ISLAND'S END, look through it. Are there any recurring themes in your dreams? What do you think these themes mean? Does their interpretation/effect on you change depending on time or circumstance?

Number game

Do you think there is a number that holds a special significance to the tribe? What number is this? Where in the text can you find indications that this number is important to the tribe? Do aspects of the novel's structure reflect this pattern?

WRITE IN YOUR RRJ:

What number, if any, is special in your culture? In Western Fairy Tales, what are some special numbers?

Healer

In what ways does Uido's manner of healing resemble Western medical practice if any, and in what ways does it differ?

Do you know how many modern remedies are based on traditional knowledge and either are or were extracted from plants or animals? What might the medical community lose when rainforests and the ancient people inhabiting them become extinct?

What do you feel about "alternate" ways of healing or treating the body?

How closely do you think one's state of mind is linked to one's bodily well being? Can each affect the other?

The Mighty Ocean

What words and images come into your mind when you think of the ocean? What emotions does being near the ocean (or within it) evoke within you and why?

The ocean is described in different ways in different chapters of ISLAND'S END.

Cite places where the ocean, the forest or some aspect of nature is calming to Uido's soul and contrast these descriptions with places in the text where nature's power frightens Uido.

Teller of tales

Where in ISLAND'S END do you find layers of story-within-story?

Do characters' styles of speech change when they relate a tale?

Have you observed a change in your own way of communicating (or someone else's) while telling someone a story?

Draw or paint one exciting or significant scene from ISLAND'S END.

Find the text that supports your drawing

and below your drawing, record the pages referenced or the line(s) that inspired you.

Text reference, page ___

If you dislike drawing or painting, create instead a freehand map of the island, showing the location of the cliff, the fishing beach, Uido's dry-season village, the communal hut and the swamp.

Soar like an eagle

In your journal, write an entry describing the place in the world that you would most like to see from a bird's eye view.

Is this place that you want to see remote from modern civilization or in close proximity to nature or the "wild"? What is your personal relationship to nature?

Do you think nature should be preserved? Why?

How do you think we should treat ancient peoples such as Uido's tribe?

The Mighty Ocean

Do you SCUBA dive, snorkel or free dive? Have you ever seen a coral reef? If not, click here to virtually glimpse a tropical reef:

Do you enjoy swimming in the pool or the ocean? In what way do these experiences feel different?

What places in our nation are affected by Tsunamis? Do you know how Tsunamis are triggered?

What have you learned about Tsunami warning signs by reading ISLAND'S END?

Have you or has anyone you know ever been affected by a Tsunami or other natural disaster? How can you try to help? How can we try to prevent such disasters in the future?

As a result of global climate change, do you expect Tsunami frequency to increase, decrease or remain the same worldwide?

