



A CONVERSATION WITH FRÍÐRIK ERLINGS

Friðrik Erlings was born in Reykjavík, Iceland. He graduated as a graphic designer from the Iceland Art and Craft School in 1983.

Since then, he has worked as a writer and at an advertising agency.

Friðrik has written and translated numerous lyrics, written scripts for film and televi-

sion, as well as biographies and novels. He is the founder of the Icelandic band, The

Sugarcubes. The following is an excerpt of a much longer interview with the author

that you can find in the Resource Center at northsouth.com. **Check out**

mySPACE.com/benjamin@dove and email ellennorthsouth@comcast.net if you would

like to be Benjamin's mySPACE friend.

North-South: What boy--or girl, for that matter--doesn't dream of knighthood and chivalry? Yet, Roland takes it further--why and how?

Friðrik Erlings: Chivalry is not bound especially to boys, although they are usually the ones to swing the swords. Shortly after the publication of the

novel in Iceland, a friend of mine told me about a nine-year-old girl in his

neighbourhood who was fascinated by the novel and formed an Order of

Knights, with both boys and girls. They made swords and helmets, shields

and costumes, as described in the book, and did many an honourable deed

that summer, apart from fighting the "villains." I'm sure this girl found the

"knight" in herself that summer, and I hope she's still true to her "Order."

In fact, girls are no less interested in this story than boys, although the main

characters are boys. Maybe it's because the story shows the inner life of the

characters, not just the surface of actions and plots. And it is a fact that girls

are not as shy as boys to talk about emotions.

Roland's character is the dream of Benjamin come true. Roland is every-

thing Benjamin wants to be; self-assured, direct, and, most importantly, not

afraid. Roland also has this knowledge of his ancestors that gives him an

aura of grandeur, makes him aware of who he is, where he's from. It gives

Roland a certain dignity that Benjamin admires, in contrast with Jeff, who

suddenly starts to irritate Benjamin, now that he has the comparison.

Roland believes that chivalry is the way to behave; to be honest, to help

those in need and to fight injustice--but with justice. These are the keywords

to his character. But he lives in a dream; maybe Roland is really Benjamin's

dream of himself, of what he would like to become. But the dream is shattered by harsh reality, because reality is not a dream where you can make

things happen the way you want them to happen. They just happen, whether you like it or not. It's not the fault of your dream, but if you forget

yourself in your dream, reality is bound to wake you up one day.

Read further questions and responses including the significance of fire, the author's literary influences, the mechanics of writing, and what it's like to be an author in Iceland and answers at northsouth.com.

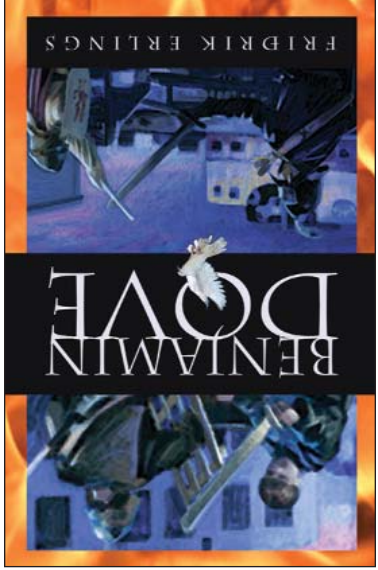
Visit <http://www.myspace.com/benjamin@dove> for further information about this book and to talk with others who have been touched by it.

A Discussion Guide

PEER PRESSURE GANG VIOLENCE LITERARY SYMBOLISM

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS POSITIVE COMMUNITY ACTION

Benjamin Dove by Friðrik Erlings



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NORTHSOUTH
BOOKS

--Silja Adalsteinsdottir

"Benjamin Dove is a story about maturity; a story about paradise lost, when the young lose their innocence and nothing will ever be the same again. A brilliantly well conceived and written work of fiction. . . . The conflict between good and evil creates a tension which becomes all the more poignant, as the good isn't all good and tolerant."

Truth and Consequences

A discussion guide to
Benjamin Dove by Fritørik Erlings

SUMMARY

As an adult, Benjamin Dove looks back on a childhood summer that changed his life forever. A summer when his new friend Roland, seemingly descended from the knights of the past, encouraged him to stand up for himself and for those he loves. It was a summer when he and his friends formed the Order of the Red Dragon that gave them a sense of identity and purpose in their turbulent world; a summer when innocent childhood games were torn apart by an almost inevitable tragedy.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Benjamin (Dove): it is primarily through his eyes that we see the summer's events unfold
Jeff (Eagle), friend of Benjamin, insecure and likes to be thought of as tough
Emmanuel, aka Manny (Unicorn), friend of Benjamin and Jeff
Christina, little sister of Manny
Howard the Hood, they say even his soul is "pitch black"
Eddie the Turd, the eventual leader of the Order of the Black Feather
Grandma Dell, the self-appointed guardian of the weak and the young, whose house looks over "The Ground" where the kids play

Socrates, Grandma Dell's cat
Roland (Dragon), the catalyst who transforms Benjamin and his friends into the heroic Order of the Red Dragon
Jacob Grant (Wolf), the bank manager

THE SETTING

Though Fritørik lives and writes in Iceland, the story of *Benjamin Dove* could be true of any city in the world. However, the action is mainly confined to the neighborhood including the "Ground," the homes, and the junkyard.

STANDING UP TO THE HOOD

Roland proves his courage early on when he stands up to the bullies. He doesn't even flinch when they prepare to set him on fire. "You should know only cowards make sport of picking on younger children," he says. Why do his words spark even more violence from the bullies? How did you feel about Grandma Dell's intervention? Pick three words to describe your perception of Roland after this incident.

REVENGE IS A DISH BEST NEVER SERVED

Grandma Dell's intervention results in tragedy for her when her beloved cat is found hanged in her house. Why do you think this happened? Would you have been able to do what Benjamin did? "The birds are silent today," Benjamin notes. "Even your worst enemy deserves forgiveness when he is dead." How does this foreshadow key events later in the story? Is it true that no one is past forgiveness?

PERSONAL SYMBOLISM

When Roland and his friends create the Order of the Red Dragon, they each choose a symbol of their own that illuminate their dreams and souls. Manny, who is afraid of horses, chooses a unicorn. Why does Benjamin chose a dove? What would *you* choose?

COMMUNITY ACTION

Howie redeems himself when Grandma Dell's house burns down by rescuing her. How does he rescue himself in the process? The Order of the Red Dragon make it possible for Grandma Dell to stay in her neighborhood. How do they plan and execute and what role do the adults in the community play? Do you see a need in your community that you and your friends can meet? Consider drawing up a plan of action similar to that of the Order of the Red Dragon.

PEER PRESSURE

Peer pressure happens on both sides. Why is Jeff pushed out of the Order of the Red Dragon? Why does he join Eddie? If the motto for the first is "for justice, against injustice," what is the motto for the Order of the Black Feather? How does Jeff get pressured into the mounting violence? What happens when he tries to escape? What kind of person do you think is most susceptible to peer pressure?

TRAGEDY

Howie reforms, Grandma Dell gets her house back but almost unbearable tragedy still happens in the community. Why? What purpose does Manny's death serve? Think back to Manny's choice of symbol--the unicorn, the "king of horses." How does Benjamin's dream at the end provide a measure of forgiveness to Manny's friends? How would you have ended the book? Would it still have the same impact? Does someone have to pay the cost for the mistakes others make? What redemption do you see at the end?

An expanded version of this Discussion Guide is available at northsouth.com. Also, visit Benjamin Dove's myspace page. Email ellennorthsouth@comcast.com to request to be added to Benjamin Dove's myspace friends list.