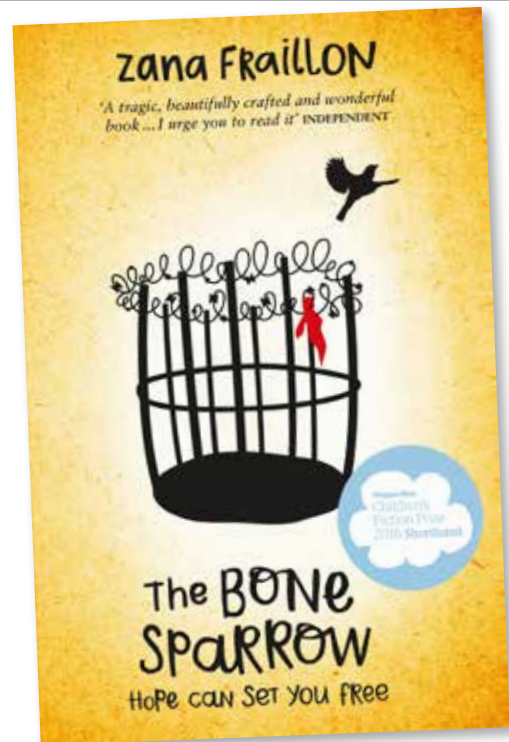


# THE BONE SPARROW

By Zana Fraillon



For readers 12+

Orion Children's Books

## ABOUT THE BOOK

This moving book explores what it means to live as a refugee. It covers a range of important themes such as friendship and family, grief and loss, hope, fear and freedom.

Nine-year-old Subhi, a member of the Rohingya people of Burma, was born in a detention centre in Australia and has only known guards and fences. His lifelines are a plastic duck, a strong imagination and a belief that 'Someday' his world will be a different place.

Then he meets Jimmie, a local girl, who finds a hole in the fencing. She appears with a notebook written by the mother she has recently lost. Jimmie can't read, but Subhi can, and together they bond over the stories.

The Australian author has written an important afterword. She says she was inspired by stories of real-life refugees in Australia and her horror at the way asylum seekers are treated worldwide.

## TEACHING NOTES

**These notes have been created to support students aged 12+ to explore the characters, storyline and issues in this book, including refugees, human rights abuses, courage, freedom and protest.**

**The notes contain:**

- Characters – questions and talking points
- Themes – discussion questions on the main themes and their importance
- Activities – each theme includes a suggested activity which covers art, writing, web research, photography and taking action for Amnesty International.

You can also download a simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for each student, particularly useful for the activities at [www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)

These rights are defined further in the Convention on the Rights of the Child ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)) and in the UK's Human Rights Act.

# Talking points Characters

## Subhi

Do you like Subhi?

He describes days which 'get my skin crawling and everything feels too jangly and loud'. He adds numbers or tells himself stories. What is happening?

He thinks Jimmie is his guardian angel. Could he be right?

Why are stories important to Subhi?

At the end, where does he find his courage? What do you hope happens to him?

## Jimmie

When Jimmie appears, how do we know she doesn't live in the camp?

What do Jimmie and Subhi have in common?

Why doesn't Jimmie go to school that often? Is there more than one reason?

Jimmie questions whether Max really saw the container full of bikes at the Centre. What does this suggest about Jimmie?

Why is Subhi written in the first person, and Jimmie in the third person?

## Maá and Jimmie's mum

Maá is never hungry, has tired days and then won't wake up. What might be causing these symptoms?

What impression of Jimmie's mum do you get?

Having mothers who are absent – how does this affect Subhi and Jimmie?

## Ba and Jimmie's dad

Before Queeny tells us, where did you think their ba was?

Jimmie's dad doesn't notice much, not even that his daughter can't read. Why? How does that make you feel?

What do Subhi and Jimmie miss most about their dads?

## Queeny and Jonah

Do you like Queeny?

Why did Queeny give up teaching the children? What does she hope the impact of her pictures will be?

Is Queeny a good sister? Is Jonah a good brother?

## Eli

How old do you think Eli is? Why is he moved to Alpha?

How did you feel when you learned that Eli has a brother? Is he a good brother to Subhi?

Why does Eli die? What do you think of the author's decision to do this?

## Harvey

Do you like Harvey?

What motivates Harvey to be kinder and more compassionate than the other 'Jackets'?

He chooses not to stand up to Beaver or report what he has done. Do you blame him?

## Beaver

We learn that Beaver saved Harvey and lost his eye in an attack by a detainee. Do you feel sorry for him?

What motivates Beaver to behave as cruelly as he does?

Why does Beaver kill Eli? What do you think should happen to him?

# Themes & activities

## Calls to action

Journalists play an important role in highlighting what is going on to the rest of the world. The Outside has little knowledge of what's going on in the Centre because they're denied access. Subhi says when reports about the Centre did feature in the news, they received lots of cards and letters. But then the journalists and cameras were stopped from entering and all the mail was sent back. 'It was just like those newspaper people had never been.'

- What impact does sending messages to refugees have?
- Why are journalists stopped from entering camps and detention centres?
- How will people react to Queeny's pictures? What can the people who see them do to achieve change?

### ACTIVITY

Amnesty International asks supporters to send cards and letters of solidarity to those who are suffering or at risk. Read the latest Junior Urgent Action at [amnesty.org.uk/jua](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/jua) from Amnesty: this is a current case of human rights abuse that Amnesty would like to draw wider attention to (appropriate for students aged 7+). Use the creative action to inspire you to take action.

## The Night Sea with creatures

- What do you think the sea and ocean represent in the book?
- Queeny dismisses the Night Sea, but plants the treasures it washes up – why?
- Maá says that 'there are some people in this world who can see all the hidden bits of pieces of the universe blown in on the north wind and scattered about in the shadows.' Is she referring to Subhi?

### ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are suddenly forced to leave home and can only take one small rucksack. What would you take? Create a painting or collage of your 'Night Sea' with creatures. Include the treasures that you decided to take and add sensory words to describe the sounds and smells.

## The bone sparrow

The author chooses a bird to be the talisman of the story because it is an iconic symbol of freedom and hope. Birds are migratory creatures who fly across borders. Sparrows are thought to carry the souls of the dead.

- Queeny says the sparrow is the sign of death. Jimmie says it is a symbol of change and hope. What do you think?
- Why does Jimmie give the bone sparrow to Subhi?
- What does the bone sparrow mean to you?

### ACTIVITY

Draw the shape of a sparrow on a piece of paper and then place it on top of several other sheets of paper. Carefully cut out the shape to create a flock of sparrows. Ask members of your family or your friends to tell you a story. It could be about themselves as children or it could be a story that a relative has told them. Write each story onto one sparrow and attach them to a ribbon or piece of string so you can hang them up.

## Themes continued

### The Centre

Subhi describes life in the Centre – he has never known anything else. This means he has not experienced the cruelty and violence that drove the others to seek refuge but also that he has never enjoyed many of the rights that everyone is entitled to.

- Why does Subhi refer to himself and the other children as ‘Limbo kids’?
- How does the description of life in the Centre make you feel?
- What would you change?

#### ACTIVITY

Look at the description of the different compounds in chapter 4. Draw a map. Add details as you read. Discuss how the people in the Centre are divided up.

Use copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and/or the Convention on the Rights of the Child to identify what rights Subhi is being denied. Create a display with each right and a drawing with quotations showing what life is like for Subhi and the others in the Centre.

Jimmie takes photos to show Subhi what her life is like on the Outside. Take photos or draw pictures to show how you enjoy human rights and add them to your display.

### The Outside

Some kids at Jimmie’s school think the people in the Centre are ‘lucky’. Max declares he’s seen bikes being delivered. ‘Are you sure about that container?’ questions Jimmie. She is sceptical and thinks critically about what she hears.

- What have you read or heard about refugees?
- Is it fact or opinion?
- How could you find out whether the facts you have heard are true or not?

#### ACTIVITY

Look at a news story about refugees. Bullet point all the facts asserted in the article. Now try to verify them. Use websites for governments and organisations working with refugees, eg UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Red Cross and Amnesty International.

### Treatment of refugees

Organisations such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International try to visit refugee centres and camps to monitor and protect human rights. In the book, the Centre gives everyone better food and treatment when the observers come.

- Are the staff aware of how the refugees should be treated?
- How does the author want us to feel about detention centres?
- What do you think the ‘Human Rightsers’ ought to do?

#### ACTIVITY

Look at campaign actions for different NGOs and charities advocating for and supporting refugees. Are you motivated to get involved? Discuss the information, language, images and action that appeal to you. What isn’t successful? Does your group agree?

## Themes continued

### Knowing the numbers

Eli tells Subhi that the Centre is getting too full and he'll have to go to another Transit Centre in another country. He says: 'They're sending us to a country that can't even look after its own people. Where people die of starvation and disease. A country whose people don't want us.'

- Who should be responsible for giving a new home to refugees? Why?
- Should refugee children be treated differently to refugee adults?
- How does the book make you feel towards the Australian government's treatment of refugees?

### ACTIVITY

Divide the class into five groups (five regions – but do not tell them this yet). Number them.

For a class of 30, suggested group size is:

Group 1 Americas: 12 participants

Group 2 Africa: 2 participants

Group 3 Middle East and North Africa (MENA) including Turkey: 1 participant

Group 4 Europe excluding Turkey: 12 participants

Group 5: Asia Pacific: 3 participants

Each group moves to where the A4 sheet with their number is. They can either stand or sit in a circle. Distribute balloons as per their assigned group number; each balloon represents 100,000 refugees but do not tell them this yet.

Suggested number of balloons:

Group 1 Americas: 7 balloons

Group 2 Africa: 44 balloons

Group 3 MENA including Turkey: 52 balloons

Group 4 Europe excluding Turkey: 19 balloons

Group 5: Asia Pacific: 38 balloons

Each group has five minutes to blow up their balloons, and take care of them. How did they find it – difficult or easy? Did they feel overwhelmed, unable to control the situation?

How is this linked to the refugee situation?

Explain that there are approximately 21.3 million refugees in the world, half of whom are under the age of 18. Most have fled from one poor country to another. There is a huge inequality in the distribution across the world. 86% of refugees under UNHCR's mandate are living in developing regions.

Now inform the class how many refugees each balloon represents.

Share the figures on regional distribution of refugees. Source: [unhcr.org.uk](http://unhcr.org.uk)

MENA (group 3) 5,239,500

Africa (group 2) 4,413,500

Asia-Pacific (group 5) 3,830,200

Europe\* (group 4) 1,891,400

Americas (group 1) 746,800

Less than 1% of the world's refugees are in the UK

Acknowledgement: Adapted from 'Where are the world's refugees?' created by Amnesty International for the I Welcome campaign.

\*For this exercise and for Amnesty International's data for the I Welcome campaign, Turkey is not considered part of Europe.

## Themes continued

### Hunger strikes

Hunger strikes have long been used as a form of peaceful protest. In 2015, asylum seekers at an Australian detention centre in Papua New Guinea, sewed their mouths shut.

See [amnesty.org.au](http://amnesty.org.au)

- In the book, why did the men sew their mouths shut as part of their hunger strike?
- When Subhi sees men like this he says: 'I feel a shaking that starts in my legs and moves up my whole body, until I'm juddering all over.' How does it make you feel?
- What does the author want us to feel about the men? How do you feel?
- What do you want to happen?

#### ACTIVITY

Divide the class into groups. Assign each group one of the following: The Manus Island protests, Suffragettes, Gandhi – and other hunger strikes in history. Ask each group to give a presentation, to include what they were protesting about, how they were treated by the authorities and what the impact of their protest had on the cause and individual.

### The Shakespeare duck

- Why is the duck so important to Subhi? It often questions, criticises or contradicts – why?
- Subhi doesn't know what a play is or who William Shakespeare is. Are you surprised?

#### ACTIVITY

Imagine you are writing to Subhi and the other children in the Centre. Create a book of duck jokes and cartoons to make them laugh.

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

### YOU CAN TALK ABOUT...

#### Right to safety (Article 3, UDHR)

'He shoves me backwards so hard that my feet leave the ground and my head cracks into the bricks behind me, and for a moment all I can see are little lights flashing in and out.' p34

#### Right to an identity (Article 6, UDHR)

'Most people have their Boat ID as their number. Maá is NAP-24 and Queeny is NAP-23. But I was born here so I have a different ID. DAR-1, that's me.' p15

#### Right to a family (Article 16, UDHR)

'Someday my ba will figure a way to get free, to get out of Burma, and then we'll all of us be together.' p47

#### Right to own property (Article 17, UDHR)

'There are only fourteen pairs of real shoes in this whole entire camp, even though there must be near about 900 pairs of feet.' p32

#### Right to a home (Article 25, UDHR)

'But there are forty-seven people in Family Four, and only forty-two in Family Three.' p5

#### Right to healthcare (Article 25, UDHR)

'Sometimes there's no doctor here for months, and when that happens, you just have to hope on not getting sick.' p169

#### Right to food and water (Article 25, UDHR)

'We've had food shortages for the last four days and have only been getting half scoops.' p6

#### Right to education (Article 26, UDHR)

'For a bit, a teacher came and taught everyone. But then the Jackets said it was too expensive and there were too many kids.' p136

Download a simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [amnesty.org.uk/udhr](http://amnesty.org.uk/udhr)

### FIND OUT MORE

- Info on refugees at [amnesty.org.uk/refugees](http://amnesty.org.uk/refugees)
- Free teaching resources at [amnesty.org.uk/education](http://amnesty.org.uk/education)