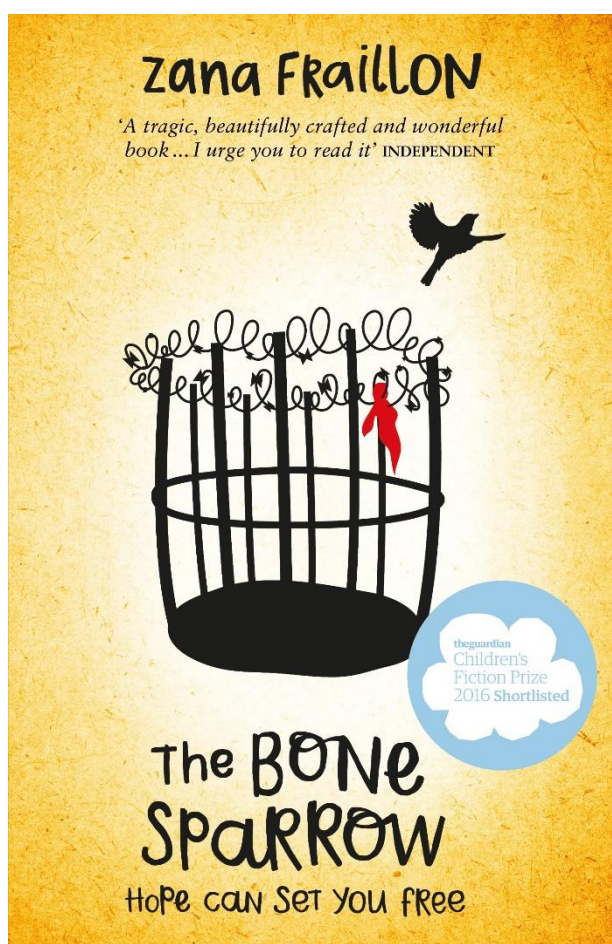


The Bone Sparrow

A TEACHING RESOURCE FOR KEY STAGE 3



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Introduction

The Bone Sparrow by Zana Fraillon has been described by readers as captivating, powerful, disturbing, necessary, important, touching, enlightening and much more. It tells the story of Subhi, a refugee who was born in an Australian detention centre to a mother who had fled violence in her Burmese homeland. Physically, Subhi's world is confined by the fences of the detention centre in which he lives, but through stories, relationships and encounters, a wider but not always comfortable world emerges.

The Bone Sparrow is a timely novel that deals directly with questions about migration, human rights and our broader humanity. It is highly relevant for young people and adults alike, providing a platform for engagement and dialogue around issues that are readily present in media and politics in the UK, and can present young people with challenging perspectives and uncomfortable realities.

To mark the release of *The Bone Sparrow* in paperback, this resource has been created to support learning for 11-14 year olds. It is intended to help critical engagement with the narrative and intent of the author and reflection on the powerful literary relationships that exist between fact and fiction. The resource explores the key themes of the book, and offers a range of activities that have been designed to link these to specific learning spaces, curriculum areas and outcomes. All four curricula within the UK have been considered in creating the resource and are signposted accordingly but it is expected that educators will use their own experience and discretion to access those elements that best fit their context and learners.

In terms of organisation, the first section of the resource provides an overview of Burma and the Rohingya people as important context for the reality in which the story is set. Before exploring the learning, there is also a brief section on dealing with controversial issues such as refugees and migration that are explored in *The Bone Sparrow*. The author tackles these issues with sometimes hard-hitting and graphic detail that some readers may find difficult or upsetting. In addition, educators may need to be aware of personal connections/experiences their learners have that resonate with the content of *The Bone Sparrow* and require appropriate and sensitive treatment.

The next section on key themes highlights some of the more obvious or available opportunities for learning and makes links to relevant curriculum areas across the four UK territories: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The remainder of the resource offers a number of structured or semi-structured activities that have been organised around the intended learning spaces as follows:

- Library/Learning resource centre (or equivalent)
- Assemblies
- Tutor time
- Lesson: English
- Lesson: Citizenship/SMSC

Within each of these, educators are provided with alternatives (where relevant) or suggestions to support differentiation to learner needs.

Towards the end of the resource there is a section providing onward links and further resources that could be used to extend or complement the learning or to combine *The Bone Sparrow* and this resource with other material to form a larger unit of learning.

A note on 'educator'

We use the term 'educator' in this resource to refer to teachers, teaching assistants, education support staff, library/resource centre staff and others who may be directly involved in delivering learning.

Audience

This resource has been designed to support learners aged 11–14 years. Each of the four UK territories has a slightly different structure for learning. The table below clarifies the intended audience for these materials by reference to the school structure in each territory. The stage shaded in grey is the target audience. Educators may wish to use some of the content for older learners, but owing to the subject matter of *The Bone Sparrow* it is unlikely to be suited to those younger than the target audience. The exception may be where a teacher has been supporting younger children in a unit of work on refugees or migration and wants to use elements of *The Bone Sparrow* with appropriate caution and differentiation.

Age of student (at start of school year)	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
5	Key Stage 1 (Y1–Y2)	First Level (P2–P4)	Foundation Stage (EY, Y1–Y2)	Foundation Stage
6				Key Stage 1 (P3–P4)
7	Key Stage 2 (Y3–Y6)	Second Level (P5–P7)	Key Stage 2 (Y3–Y6)	Key Stage 2 (P5–P7)
8				
9				
10				
11	Key Stage 3 (Y7–Y9)	Third/Fourth Levels (S1–S3)	Key Stage 3 (Y7–Y9)	Key Stage 3 (Y8–Y10)
12				
13				
14	Key Stage 4 (Y10–Y11)		Key Stage 4 (Y10–Y11)	Key Stage 4 (Y11–Y12)
15				

Curriculum connections

Each of the four UK territories has its own statutory curriculum requirements and cross-curricular initiatives/themes/strands. The table below identifies these for each territory and highlights those areas (in purple font) that have a clear connection to *The Bone Sparrow* and this resource.

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Curriculum subjects:	English Maths Science Design and technology History Geography Art and design Music Physical education (PE), including swimming Computing Ancient and modern foreign languages (at key stage 2) Citizenship	Expressive arts Health and wellbeing Languages Mathematics Religious and moral education Sciences Social studies Technologies	English Maths Welsh Science DT Art and Design Music ICT History Geography PE PSE RE Sex and Relationships Careers	KS1/2 Language and literacy Mathematics and numeracy The Arts Personal development and mutual understanding PE RE The world around us KS3/4 (above plus) English (KS3) Environment and society Learning for life and work Science and Technology
Relevant Cross-curricula themes	SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development)	Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Global citizenship	Skills: Developing thinking Skills: Developing Communication Learning across the curriculum: personal and social education	Cross-curricula skills: communication Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

Owing to the complexity of core and cross-curricular learning in the four territories, it is not possible to list the learning outcomes for this resource as they apply to every curriculum/learning area in each territory. Instead the outcomes below are key learning outcomes that apply (albeit through different terminology or areas or learning) across the territories. They are drawn from curriculum documentation and/or assessment objectives and are provided as indicative guidance of how this resource can contribute to learning. It is anticipated that educators will refer to the curriculum, programmes of study and assessment objectives for their own context in order to make more specific connections.

English/Literacy outcomes

Learners will be able to:

- Critically read and comprehend a variety of texts, identifying and interpreting themes, draw evidence-based inferences, use texts to support a point of view, recognise the possibility of different responses to a text, including the ability of language to convey and invoke a variety of powerful feelings.
- Summarise ideas and information from a text and synthesise from more than one text.
- Evaluate a writer's choice of vocabulary, form, grammar and structural features in terms of their effectiveness and impact on the reader.
- Develop an understanding of genres and methods of communication and how these can be used to create meaning.
- Understand the context of a text (social, cultural, historical, etc.) and relate experiences as depicted by the author to their own and others' experiences.
- Recognize the existence of stereotypes, biased or distorted viewpoints and form appropriately sensitive and informed responses that provide balance.
- Produce clear and coherent texts for different purposes and audiences, using creative language to maintain a consistent viewpoint, and to write in different forms using information provided by others.
- Write for impact with appropriate language and use of facts, evidence, ideas and key points to create persuasive and emotional impact.
- Argue or evaluate an issue by justifying opinions within a convincing line of thought and using relevant supporting information and/or detail.

Citizenship/Moral/Personal skills outcomes:

Learners will be able to:

- Critically engage with political and social issues
- Weigh up evidence and distinguish between facts and opinions
- Consider different perspectives in order to formulate their own understanding and ideas
- Express themselves confidently with reasoned arguments
- Consider human rights and the applicability of laws nationally and internationally
- Take appropriate actions as responsible citizens

Burma and the Rohingya people



Image source:

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/09/Burma Administrative Divisions 2007.jpg>

Burma (also known as Myanmar) is a large country in South East Asia, with a population of around 58 million. Around two thirds of the population are ethnically Bamar (Burman) with the remainder being made up of over 100 different ethnic groups. The country became independent from Britain in 1948 and many believed it would flourish, due in a large part to its rich natural resources. However, a coup in 1962 plunged the country into decades of oppressive military rule which saw Burma fall down the rankings in virtually all measurements of human development. Burma's ethnic groups suffered disproportionately during this time, with reports of human rights abuses in the ethnic states including torture and killings.

Tensions reached a head in 1988 with mass protests against military rule, originally led by students. The government declared martial law and an unknown number of protesters were killed – the official figure given is 350 but most estimates put the real death toll in the thousands. Elections were held in 1990 and Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party won a landslide victory. However, the military refused to hand over power and instead nullified the result. Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, where she remained for 15 of the next 20 years, finally being released in 2010.

The military government held a constitutional referendum in 2008 and in 2010 multi-party elections were held, although the NLD boycotted them and they were widely regarded as not free and fair. The degree of Burma's democratic reforms since 2010 have been contested although further elections were held in 2015 with the NLD taking a supermajority. Whilst Aung San Suu Kyi is barred from becoming President on the grounds she was married to a foreigner, she is the de facto head of the government and holds the office of State Counsellor. The constitution states that 25% of the seats in parliament are reserved for the military though and the army retains a prominent role in Burmese society. Tensions have continued in the ethnic states along with reports of human rights violations.

Of the various ethnic groups that make up Burma's population, the Rohingya have perhaps endured the most. A Muslim minority in a predominantly Buddhist country, they reside in Rakhine (Arakan) state in western Burma, bordering Bangladesh. Burma's government have consistently refused to acknowledge the Rohingya as citizens of Burma, instead claiming they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The 1962 Citizenship law recognises 135 ethnic groups as citizens of Burma but does not include the Rohingya, effectively rendering them stateless. The Rohingya people in Burma experienced frequent human rights abuses in the years of military rule including forced labour, land seizures and denial of the right to travel or marry freely.

The situation further deteriorated in 2012 when communal violence between the Buddhist Rakhine community and the Muslim Rohingya erupted in Rakhine state. Over 130,000 Rohingya currently live in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) in appalling conditions. More have fled across the border into Bangladesh where they live in squalid

camps (Bangladesh has refused to grant refugee status to Rohingya arriving from Burma since 1992). Some have attempted to reach other countries by making a perilous journey in rickety boats. Many human rights groups have documented the abuses against the Rohingya and have claimed these are tantamount to ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and even genocide.

This teaching resource was written against the backdrop of further abuses against the Rohingya, after a Burmese army post was attacked on 9 October 2016. The attack was blamed on the Rohingya community and the retributions have been severe. [Human rights violations against Rohingya villagers](#), including rape and killings, have been reported in the two months since the attack and [satellite pictures](#) have emerged which show entire villages burnt down. As of December 2016 the Burmese government, including Aung San Suu Kyi, are denying reports of violence against the Rohingya. However, travel to the area by journalists and international aid agencies has been blocked and therefore the true extent of the situation remains almost unknown to the outside world.

Whilst *The Bone Sparrow* is a work of fiction, the Rohingya are very much real and their suffering continues. It is hoped that this resource will introduce students and teachers to the Rohingya, and other groups like them around the world, and will provide a way of engaging with the often difficult issues surrounding refugees and migration. Although difficult subjects to broach, they are nevertheless important for our young people to tackle if we wish them to grow up in a world where people are no longer forced to flee their homes.

Dealing with controversial issues

The *Bone Sparrow* raises a number of issues that could be considered controversial. A controversial issue is normally one that divides opinion, arouses strong feelings of emotion, creates conflicting arguments/perspectives, engages with competing values and interests, is complex and does not always have easy answers.

Refugees and migration are potentially controversial issues dealt with in *The Bone Sparrow* and educators should be prepared for the implications of this in their planning and delivery of the activities in this resource. The table below identifies some of the challenges involved in teaching controversial issues, but weighs these against the potential benefits for learners.

Controversial issues and the...

...challenges for teaching	...benefits for learners
<p>Educators may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack confidence and experience of teaching controversial issues; • Lack knowledge and understanding about an issue or the skills effectively to engage learners in discussions; • Find it difficult to deal with pupils' emotional responses; • Be unsure how to deal with the unexpected outcomes of teaching controversial issues; • Struggle with disagreement amongst pupils and heated discussion between opposing sides. This can unsettle and may upset some pupils; • Be unfamiliar with how to facilitate effective discussion around controversial issues; • Have concerns around managing pupils' behaviour and emotions; • Be worried that teaching these issues may lead to complaints from parents/carers and others in the wider community; • Feel that the school ethos does not support the teaching of certain controversial issues. 	<p>Pupils can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a deeper understanding about important issues; • Learn to handle disagreement and acknowledge other viewpoints, and to resolve conflict; • Develop an understanding of their emotions and those of others; • Learn to work collaboratively and develop their communication skills; • Develop empathy and become better able to manage their emotions and emotional responses; • Learn to respect the views of others; • Develop higher levels of self-esteem and confidence; • Develop higher order thinking skills and learn how to become critically reflective thinkers; • Learn how to clarify their thoughts and values and to think for themselves; • Develop their capacity for ethical and moral reasoning; • Become more informed and better prepared to make a positive contribution to society.

Adapted from *Teaching controversial issues at key stage 3* by Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Northern Ireland.

Whilst engaging in controversial issues may at first appear an additional burden for already busy educators, a consideration of the learning involved in effective teaching of controversial issues reveals strong parallels with the learning outcomes of core curriculum subjects such as English and with cross-curricular themes such as SMSC, citizenship, or personal and social skills.

Take this progression pathway for KS3 learning through controversial issues for example:

- build confidence and acquire and develop the skills and capabilities required to engage in increasingly complex controversial issues;
- recognise and manage their emotions and respond appropriately;
- know and understand more about the issues being explored;
- think more critically about controversial issues – research, question and analyse information;
- deconstruct ideas; and draw conclusions;
- communicate better – create and present reasoned arguments, and form and restructure responses in clearer and better ways;
- apply their learning to dealing with unfamiliar controversial issues;
- become more capable – think about thinking and learning, learn from mistakes; challenge and reflect their own thinking, views and values and those of others; and
- work with others – negotiate with and influence the views of others, and manage and resolve conflict.

Further support and ideas for approaching controversial issues such as those raised by *The Bone Sparrow* can be found in the Further Resources section at the end of this resource.

Themes to explore

What makes us strong?

The Bone Sparrow deals with some harrowing situations and circumstances that many people would find very challenging. The book deals with a number of different coping mechanisms that people might use to stay strong (resilient) in times of hardship or trauma. There is a good extract in the challenge of staying strong on page 174 through to '...it will all be a dream.' on page 176. This raises different coping mechanisms (the protest of the men and Eli in Alpha, the protective strategy of Queeny, and the inward soul-searching of Subhi). Another good extract for this theme is near the very end of the novel, on page 221, from 'Tomorrow everything will change.'

These and other extracts (Subhi and the rat traps on pages 65-67; Subhi and the knife on pages 156-157) could be used to discuss: what does it mean to be strong, to be resilient? Learners could analyse some of the different strategies shared in the story and rate them on a scale from those that show greatest strength to those that are less so.

Subhi also focuses on his 'Someday' as a method of staying strong. Instead of thinking about his current circumstances, he imagines what his life will be like in the future. Discuss how imagining a 'Someday' could help you deal with a difficult situation. Are there dangers in doing this?

The power of story

The Bone Sparrow is in many ways several stories within a story. In particular the central relationship between Subhi and Jimmie is built around the stories laid down by Jimmie's mum and the time she spends with Subhi reading these. *The Bone Sparrow* lends itself to a good exploration of why story can be so powerful. Questions/dialogue starters that could be considered with learners might include:

Why might we choose to deal with real-life issues through story? [Responses might include ideas such as distance, emotional safety, neutral focus, developing empathy, protecting the subjects, etc.]

Is a story shared (read) more powerful than a story made (written)? [You might like to read the author reflection on p226 as a prompt to this].

The Bone Sparrow is a story about migration, human rights and refugees. Can you think of other stories you know, and identify the real-life issues that they deal with?

Why are stories so important for Subhi? Why are Jimmie's mother's stories so important for Jimmie? Both characters are using stories to discover the world. Subhi is trying to understand his future and Jimmie is struggling to understand her past. What other instances can you think of in which stories have been used to tell others about the world? (A cross-curricular link to cave paintings or creation stories from around the world could be used here).

To explore this theme in more depth see the English activity: *Another voice* on page 19.

A forgotten people

The idea of people who have been forgotten by the outside world is a recurring theme in *The Bone Sparrow* and is dealt with from a number of different perspectives. A particularly powerful extract that very clearly raises this is on page 123 beginning 'Queeny and I used to watch...' through to the break on page 124. This extract could be used to spark learning about the Rohingya as a forgotten, invisible or ignored people (in their own country of Burma and internationally) and could even be extended to think about other groups of forgotten people around the world.

Are there similarities in their plight? Who is doing the forgetting and why? Do forgotten communities exist where we are? How might it feel to be forgotten, ignored or invisible? What could we do to help people who might feel like this?

The English activity 'A forgotten story' explores this theme in more depth. You might also like to explore [Nowhere People](#), the work of photographer Greg Constantine that documents stateless communities around the world and [Exiled to Nowhere](#), his photographs of Burma's Rohingya.

Mental health and wellbeing: in adults and children

Mental health and wellbeing is a recurring theme in the book and is explored in both the adult and child characters. This is sometimes dealt with very directly such as when a new boy takes Nasir's bed following his death:

"All I could do was blink at the kid come here on his own, already sleeping in a bed that Nasir just died in. I bet he's a head-whumper. The new ones usually are. I can just tell that that banging will keep us up all night." (p110-111)

At other times the exploration is more subtle and dealt with through metaphor or inference. One of the most powerful vehicles used in the book for discussing mental health and wellbeing is the Shakespeare duck, and this is explored further in an English activity.

Personal possessions

The significance of personal possessions is raised at various points in *The Bone Sparrow*. It can be used to help learners think about what we truly need and cherish, and why. In Subhi's world very little can be taken for granted with even toilet roll rationed to six sheets of paper per person.

A good section to explore on possessions is the exchange of 'pebbles of happy' between Nasir and Subhi on Subhi's birthday (page 87-88). This could be used to prompt a discussion about what is really important in life or what do we really need.

A more structured activity based on this issue is offered in the library section below.

Treatment of refugees and asylum seekers

The Bone Sparrow deals directly with the treatment of people living in the camp through insights such as the out of date food leading to food poisoning (page 121) or the guards tipping away water (page 26). There are many other instances of poor treatment or inferred denial of rights, both in the camp and in the broader stories of the Rohingya wrapped up in the internal stories. The book could be effectively used to raise a number of human rights related topics and to compare the fictional accounts of the author with the reality of not just the Rohingya, but of people living in similar conditions in refugee/asylum/transit camps across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The regular news stories of people fleeing by boat across the Mediterranean to land in Italy or Greece are just one example of this.

The activity within the Citizenship lessons on Human Rights provides an opportunity to explore these issues in more detail.

Forced to flee: experiences of refugees and asylum seekers

The Bone Sparrow raises the issue of the Rohingya being forced to flee the place they call home and make hazardous journeys in order to try and save themselves and their families. The author also deals graphically with the reality that their escape is sometimes not all it promises to be. The short extract on page 133 that begins 'Like Saleem...' and ends '...wife again.' is a good example of this and could be used to support learners to investigate real-life refugee stories from the Rohingya or other groups seeking refuge or asylum from persecution.

Activities for the library/resource centre

Building friendships through humour

One of the central stories in *The Bone Sparrow* is the friendship that develops between Subhi and Jimmie, two children who live in quite different worlds and yet right next to one another. The author chooses to use humour as one of the ways that the children get to know one another and particularly the telling of jokes.

Display some of the jokes from *The Bone Sparrow* (page 93 and page 212) by asking learners to write them out and perhaps illustrate them appropriately too.

Leave some blank spaces on the display and invite people to add to the display by sharing their own favourite joke that they might tell to someone they had never met before, as a way of making friends.

You could add a thinking space on the display to ask learners to reflect on 'why is humour helpful/useful in making friendships?' and write their responses in this space.

Writing a place

This activity uses inference and deduction to create a map of the camp that is the main setting in *The Bone Sparrow*. Read out, or make available, the extract of text from page 27 'Eli and me...' through to page 28 '...place on earth.'

Use this description of the camp to create a diagram/map of the camp, positioning things as you imagine and see them from the descriptions in the text.

If reading *The Bone Sparrow* with a group over a number of sessions, then the diagram/map could be added to in time as other parts of the story reveal new parts of the camp such as the 16 steps to the weak point in the fence, or the corner where Subhi meets with Jimmie to read her mum's stories.

A further extension would be to use the idea of describing a physical place from one person's perspective and challenge learners to write a description of somewhere they know using this idea, and including their best tips or favourite places. It could be of the school with its different parts, connections and 'squeezeways', or perhaps of the journey between school and home. How do their descriptions vary? Do they see things similarly or differently? How do they choose to describe different places – what language is used for what place?

Can learners think of other books that have powerful descriptors of place and create a strong sense of being there? You could make a display of these books or the relevant extracts.

What would you take with you?

In a refugee camp, possessions can take on new and significant meanings. The people living there may have been forced to flee in the spur of the moment or with only what they could carry with them. This can mean people have very little, sometimes even lacking basics. In *The Bone Sparrow*, Zana Fraillon deals with this through the story of Subhi and Eli and their black market in trading basic possessions such as toothpaste or soap for example.

This activity uses the idea of limited possessions but focuses further on those special things that a refugee might cherish and bring with them if they were ever forced to leave their home. The idea is to get young people to think about this and to reflect on what they would take with them if they were in that situation.

Using this premise, learners could create a presentation (this could be digital for display on a school's internal information system or website) or a more conventional fixed display in a learning space or entranceway.

The display would be sharing what they would take with them if forced to flee their home. To gain inspiration and see what real life refugees have chosen to take when put in this position see this [short film from the UN High Commission for Refugees](#) which intersperses photos with film clips and narrative turned into a rhythmic poem. The photos that inspired this can be found [here](#) as an alternative way to engage with the idea.

An act of welcome

One of the main themes in *The Bone Sparrow* is the idea that nobody wants the people who are living with Subhi in the camp. This comes up on several occasions and can be used as the stimulus for a short activity within the library/resource centre.

Read out the short extract on page 36 beginning 'There were stories we had to hear...' and finishing '...Not in any place.'

Print this section out for display on a notice board/display board. Next ask learners to think about why they might want to extend a welcome to the Rohingya discussed in the extract. Ask them to think about how they might do this.

They could look at the [Simple Acts of Welcome website](#) to get ideas for their own act of welcome. Ask them to create their own act of welcome and display these next to the text from *The Bone Sparrow*. Once completed this display could raise awareness of the issue in the school and learners might even invite others to add their own acts of welcome to the display.

Activities for assembly

Connecting and coping with humour

Introduce the book to learners and explain the basic premise of the story using the short outline provided in the introduction to help if needed.

Explain that despite the difficult nature of the story and the very serious issues that it deals with the author chooses to use humour as one of the ways that the two central children (Subhi and Jimmie) get to know one another and build their friendship. This is especially done through the telling of jokes.

There are two passages in the book that share this idea well. Read out one or both of them to learners:

Passage 1, page 93 beginning 'I've got a joke for the duck...' and finishing '...before I worked that one out.'

Passage 2, page 212–213 from the start and ending at '*...and I smile back with everything in me.*'

Ask learners why they think using jokes and humour is helpful/useful in building friendships? [Invite ideas]

Invite learners to turn to someone they don't know that well and think of a joke to share with them [obvious warnings about decency and appropriateness may need to be given]. Allow a few minutes for learners to exchange their jokes.

Ask learners how many of them felt the smile inside themselves [referencing Subhi's feelings from the passage]?

Ask learners to reflect on when they might use humour (could be more than jokes – silly faces, etc.) with someone else and why? Examples might include cheering up a sibling who is miserable, remembering a shared moment or telling a story about something that happened.

You could invite them to consider why they think the author chose to use humour in a book about such a difficult issue.

Finish by leaving learners to reflect on the idea that even though there can be real troubles and real crises in the world around us (locally and globally), humour can be an important way to show people you care and to allow a moment of relief or joy in what might otherwise be very difficult times. This is not to say that the situation is funny, but to recognise that one way we can come together as humans is to make connections and that humour and fun can be a powerful way to do this.

A refugee story

This assembly could be used at any time, but would be especially relevant to share with learners during the annual Refugee Week in June and Refugee Day which is observed on 20 June each year. It may also be useful to share if issues around refugees and migration are making their way into the school because of recent news events or the specifics of a geographical location with a high proportion of refugees for example.

The key extract to read out for this assembly is from page 35 'When I was little...' through to page 37 '...It happens a lot'.

This extract raises some powerful insights as to why Subhi is a refugee and the response of the international community to the plight of people like him – especially the section about not belonging in any place.

Having read it to learners you could ask them to reflect on what it might feel like to flee your home, travel thousands of miles in fear of your life and then be told you are not welcome or do not belong. You could invite them to talk to someone near them about this and share a few responses from the room.

The news agency Reuters have produced a slideshow called '[adrift at sea, unwanted on land](#)' that shows the real life trial of a group of Rohingya and their treatment in a country that they claim to be their home (Myanmar/Burma) but where they are not recognised as citizens. You could show some of these images to connect the fictional account to the reality of many thousands of Rohingya and indeed people of different ethnicity in different parts of the world.

An alternative is to extract key information from this [BBC article](#) and show the short film that is embedded in it. This short film shows one of the boats being used by Rohingya to flee Burma but then being left adrift at sea with countries in the region rejecting their attempts to land.

Activities for tutor time

The power of writing

The author of *The Bone Sparrow* felt that something needed to be said about an issue she cared deeply about. She chose to write the book to share her thoughts and concerns, and although a work of fiction, it is based on realities that can be found in different parts of the world today. [Read the opening section of the author afterword on page 223 to share this idea.]

Introduce to learners that writing can be used to tell people something (like a letter or report) but also to record or reflect on something (like a diary or journal). Works of fiction may use both of these forms (and others – dialogue for example) in order to tell a story.

Sometimes the things we write down do not seem significant in the moment, but may be very important in the future. Think about the diaries of Anne Frank for example.

The power of writing (and of later reading what was written) is a recurring theme in *The Bone Sparrow*. Explore that power, by giving learners the chance to write for 10-20 minutes (whatever time you have) about anything they wish (whatever drifts into their mind at that moment). [NOTE: it is important to stress that this particular piece of writing can remain private to really encourage the students to write for themselves without feeling self-conscious about sharing or being graded on a piece of work.]

You could read out the section at the foot of page 214 of *The Bone Sparrow* to inspire and instil confidence in them: '*I find my notebook and pencil and I start to write. The letters flow from deep inside me without even a pause to worry about which way is which and where to put what.*'

How did they feel about writing from within? Was it different to writing in a lesson or against a fixed question or task? Why might it be important to write for pleasure or expression as well as for purpose? Do any of them write for pleasure themselves? Can they share why they choose to do that? Is there an issue you feel strong enough about to want to write about it? Would you be writing for you or for an audience?

The right to peaceful protest [citizenship]

Peaceful protest (to have one's voice and opinion heard) is considered a basic human right. In *The Bone Sparrow* the author explores what can happen if people feel they are not able to enjoy this right and looks at the measures people may take to be heard.

Read to learners from the break on page 138 to the end of page 139. Ask them to think about why the six men may have chosen to do what they did. What would make someone take such extreme measures to be heard?

In small groups ask learners to think about why the right to be heard is important. Why was it made one of our 30 universal human rights?

Ask them to think about how they act out their right to be heard and to express their opinions in their life? Who do they speak to? Who could they speak to? What if they were not allowed to express their opinions or be heard? How might that make them feel?

If we enjoy the right to be heard then do we have responsibility to make sure others enjoy that right also and/or to listen to them when they try to be heard?

What issues can you think of that people might peacefully protest about? [These could be examples from first person or from news/media, etc.]

Needs, wants and rights

This short activity engages learners in thinking about the difference between needs and wants (and perhaps also rights), using the text as inspiration.

Read out (or provide copies of) the extract from page 25 from 'there are only fourteen pairs of real shoes...' to page 27 'And my shoes.'

Give learners a sheet of paper and ask them to divide it into three columns headed Needs, Wants, Rights. Ask them to reflect on their own lives and to consider the things they have. What would they put in the Needs column? What about the Wants (but perhaps don't need) column? And finally the Rights column – are there things they feel they have a right to?

Read the short extract on page 87 from 'When I sit down...' to '...smelled of his wife.' Now ask learners to use the back of their sheet of paper to draw the outline of a suitcase, bag or 'belongings box'. If they were forced to leave their home like the people in Subhi's camp, what would they want to take with them? What key thing would they take? Ask them to draw a picture or write about the thing in the outline they have created.

Identity – who am I?

Explore the importance of names, by calling the register, giving each learner two letters and a number instead of their name. The letters could be their initials and the number could be the day of their birth (so Robert Bowden, 12 May would become RB12), but you could use your own criteria and even make it completely random and not related to them at all. It is possible that pupils will not answer. That is OK.

Ask them what you were doing? How did it feel to not have a name? Explain that although just an activity, this is how some people are treated in reality – known by a number instead of a name.

Read out the section of the book (page 13 from 'The first thing...' through to '...when he's supposed to.') that shares their numbers being related to the boat they came in on, and Subhi's number being different. Use the following to lead a discussion around identity and names:

How would it feel to have left everything behind and then not even be known by your own name?

Why did Harvey choose to learn the names of the children in the camp?

Why is having a name important?

Why might people in power choose to call other people by a number instead of a name? Is this done simply for pragmatic reasons or could it be used as an instrument of control?

Lesson: English

Another voice, creating new stories (90 mins)

Intro/context: The power of story is a recurring theme in *The Bone Sparrow* and there are several distinct but also interwoven stories throughout the book. This activity uses the novel as a springboard for learners to analyse the author's choice of vocabulary, form and structure and use what they have learned from this to write a short parallel storyline in the style of the book, but told through another voice.

Begin by reading chapter 13 (pages 83-90) as a class. This chapter is focused on one particular day in the story, Subhi's birthday, but in the process we encounter three different characters in his life, each with a different relationship to Subhi.

Activity: Ask learners to analyse the text in terms of its structure, form and any specific vocabulary. How does the author use these to help tell the story or to introduce aspects of character for the reader?

Explain to learners that they should write their own short piece, mimicking the style of author, but presenting the same day from the perspective of one of the other characters we have met. The three characters they can choose from are:

Maá (Subhi's mother)

Harvey (the friendly 'jacket')

Nasir (the elderly man)

They should read chapter 13 again paying particular attention to their chosen character and any clues as to who they are and how they might approach the day.

Once they have thought about the character, ask learners to write a short piece that shares the voice of their chosen character and their encounter with Subhi on his birthday. They may wish to incorporate known exchanges from the original text and weave these in to their new perspective on the story.

The Shakespeare duck: exploring our inner voice

Intro/context: The Shakespeare duck is introduced to the reader early on in *The Bone Sparrow* and becomes an important mechanism that the author uses throughout the story.

Introduce the duck as a character in the book by reading from 'And a rubber duck.' on page 16 and through to '...won't even notice.' at the top of page 18.

Read one or both of the following sections that involve the Shakespeare duck to show how it is used.

Passage 1, pages 70-76

Passage 2, page 203 from 'Harvey looks at me like he's never seen me before...', through to break on page 204.

Discussion prompt: Why do you think Zana Fraillon made the choice to use the duck in this way?

Discussion prompt: How might the duck add to our understanding of Subhi? What about the issues that the book deals with?

Discussion prompt: Do you think the decision to introduce the duck as the Shakespeare duck is significant? Why might this be? Does the phrase on its scroll 'to quack or not to quack' provide any additional significance?

Teacher Notes (to share with learners): The duck could be said to be a voice for Subhi's subconscious, allowing us to hear his inner voice, to share in his reasoning, his moral dilemmas and his decision-making or choices. Using such a voice is a popular literary tool and has been used by many writers. Think for example of the character Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien.

Shakespeare also used character and other devices in his writings to represent the subconscious dialogue or thinking of key characters, or to tell the audience and the characters important truths. For example in *King Lear* the Fool and Old Tom have this role, whereas in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the magical fairies including Puck add extra depth to the plot involving humans.

In literature this voice is sometimes called the 'unreliable narrator' and is something we are all said to have. In fact it is said that during an average day most of us speak around 16,000 words but our internal voices speak thousands more in the form of our thoughts, observations, silent comments and judgements.

We have to learn how to control this inner voice just as Subhi sometimes chooses to ignore or counter the Shakespeare duck.

Activity: Use this idea of inner voice to create a short piece (prose or poetry) that explores a time/situation when you have experienced this yourself. You can fictionalise the names and events, but try to base your writing on your own experience of your inner voice. What emotions and feelings can be expressed in this way? Does one truth emerge or is it a situation where there remain two very different perspectives and no easy answer?

Reflection (discussion): How might writing about the inner voice help both authors and readers in the art of storytelling? Why is it important to give voice to our subconscious?

Thinking about the focus of *The Bone Sparrow* dealing with migration and refugees, do you experience inner-voices about this? What do they say and where do those ideas come from? Does reading *The Bone Sparrow* change them in any way?

Fiction reflecting reality

Intro/context: As outlined by the author Zana Fraillon on page 223: '*The Bone Sparrow* is a fictional story. However it is based on an all too true reality. While the characters, events and places described in *The Bone Sparrow* are fictitious, the policies which have put people like Subhi and his family in detention, and the conditions described, are not.'

This activity will get readers to explore the connections between fiction and reality through a captioning activity. The captions come from *The Bone Sparrow* book and are available as a photocopy sheet for pupils to cut out at the end of this resource. The photos that require captions are real photographs taken from news and other sources dealing with the real life issues covered by *The Bone Sparrow*. These are available to download in a [separate document](#).

Activity: working in small groups of around four to six learners give each group: a set of images; a set of captions; a pair of scissors; and a glue stick. Explain to the learners that the captions are taken from the book and are fictional but the photographs are real and reflect refugee/migration issues in the world today. The challenge is to explore how fiction reflects reality by matching a caption to a photograph.

[Note: there are not necessarily right answers and one caption may be suited to more than one photo or one photo may have a choice of captions. The most important thing is the discussion about these.]

Captions (see the end of the resource for a worksheet):

'Most people have their Boat ID as their number'. (page 13)

'When the jackets hand out provisions from the truck, we don't get to choose. You get what you get and you don't get upset,...' (page 26)

'...we're all dumped out here in the bum end of nowhere. ... So everyone forgets us. ... 'This way we don't even exist.' (page 106)

'...this here is just one big cage of invisible people who no one believes are even real.' (page 123)

'They reckon it's getting too full in here, so we have to go to a Transit Centre' (page 135)

'The man has only strong in his eyes, and I can see where he's used that string to stitch his own lips shut.' (page 138)

'The sharpened wire on top of the fences sends splinters of light into my eyes.' (page 12)

'Eli and another man hold the sheet next to them and Queeny takes a picture, and then another.' (page 139)

'He even paid extra because he was promised a good boat with a motor and a roof and life jackets...' (.page 133)

A forgotten story

Intro/context: Zana Fraillon opens *The Bone Sparrow* with a dedication: 'To those who refuse to be blinded by the glare or deafened by the hush, who are brave enough to question and curious enough to explore.'

The book itself is arguably written to tell a forgotten story, but within this story, the author also deals directly with the challenge of stories like Subhi's being heard, and of the role of the press and the public in this. This activity uses the text and places learners in the position of a newspaper journalist in order to tell a forgotten story.

Read pages 104-107 up to 'I feel like I'm not even there at all.'

Read pages 141-143.

Activity: Use the questions Jimmie asks on page 142 as the basis to write the newspaper article that Jimmie is looking at but cannot read. What will it tell the reader? You may want to give learners some research time to find out about the Rohingya people and the issues facing them. See the further resources section below for some suggested websites on this.

Discussion/reflection questions:

Why do you think Jimmie's dad is so quick to move on from this story and to say what he does about the sports article? What is the author trying to tell us in portraying it like this?

What role should newspapers and journalists have in dealing with issues like those in the book? Do they always take a responsible position on the issue? Why might this be?

Brian Bilston is a poet who chose to react to the way the media was portraying the refugee crisis in Europe by playing with the language used to describe the situation. Use his poem 'Refugees' to raise this issue and talk about how language can be powerful in creating perspectives for the reader.

REFUGEES by Brian Bilston

They have no need of our help

So do not tell me

These haggard faces could belong to you or me

Should life have dealt a different hand

We need to see them for who they really are

Chancers and scroungers

Layabouts and loungers

With bombs up their sleeves

Cut-throats and thieves

They are not

Welcome here

We should make them

Go back to where they came from

They cannot

Share our food

Share our homes

Share our countries

Instead let us

Build a wall to keep them out

It is not okay to say

These are people just like us

A place should only belong to those who are born there

Do not be so stupid to think that

The world can be looked at another way

(now read from bottom to top)

Bystander effect

Intro/context: Pages 188-193 of *The Bone Sparrow* deal with the most harrowing part of the story in which Eli has his fateful encounter with Beaver, witnessed by Subhi and Harvey. The author plays with language in a way that ignites your imagination and makes the events feel very real. This is powerful and shocking and can leave the reader quite affected so educators should be aware of this and be in a position to support learners with their emotions here.

To help unpack the events and consider what happened, it is useful to look at the story using the idea of the 'bystander'. The bystander effect is when people (for whatever reasons) feel unable or choose not to act, in order to reduce suffering in a crisis. Examples of this might be not stopping if you see someone trip over and drop their shopping; driving past the scene of a recent car crash instead of stopping to see if anyone needs help; ignoring a peer who is clearly upset and tearful during break time.

The author chooses to position both Subhi and Harvey as bystanders in the incident described in pages 188-193. Once learners have listened to or read the relevant section ask the following to initiate reaction and discussion:

Why do you think the author chose to have them as bystanders?

Do they have the same reasons for being a bystander?

Does one of them bear more responsibility for choosing to be a bystander than the other? Why is this?

Activity: Once learners have a firm understanding of what a bystander is and how this idea was portrayed in the book ask them to consider an alternative scenario. Re-read the last section of this extract from page 190 'Eli is running towards the bushes...' through to page 193 and finish on 'And then Beaver...'

Ask learners to use this hanging sentence as the prompt to craft a different ending to the chapter in which the bystander-effect is overcome by either Subhi or Harvey (or both). Write what happens next and how – describing the actions taken and the reactions of the other characters in the scene.

You may like to divide the group and give them either Subhi or Harvey as the character so that you can see how they might take on the role differently.

Learners could share their alternative endings (this could be done as prose or performed as a short role play with learners working in groups to take on the four roles in the scene) and reflect on what it takes to not be a bystander – to refuse to ignore people in a time of crisis.

As an extension to this activity learners could read the afterword by the author and reflect on the bystander effect in relation to Zana Fraillon. Is writing a book about something being a bystander or taking action and refusing to ignore? What do you think the author is trying to encourage in the reader? How do you feel as a reader of *The Bone Sparrow* about the issues it raises? What could you do about this, if anything?

Looking at the real life issues covered by *The Bone Sparrow* and the different voices and audiences involved, who are the real bystanders?

Lesson: Citizenship/SMSC/Thinking/Communication Skills

Human Rightsers – exploring human rights

Intro/context: Zana Fraillon touches on various human rights issues in *The Bone Sparrow*, sometimes very directly, but other times inviting the reader to infer and/or deduce from the text.

Teacher notes: This close reading activity encourages learners to analyse two very different but related text forms. The first is chapter 13 from *The Bone Sparrow* [note that this is also used for the *Another voice* activity and so could form a continuation of that work or be combined to create a larger unit of work around the one chapter]. The second is a simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that is presented as an infographic available in PDF format [here](#).

Activity: Working in pairs or small groups of three or four, provide learners with a printed version of the Human Rights infographic and explain that these are universal rights for ALL humans that have been in place since 1948. Ask them to read through the infographic to get a good sense of what it includes.

Next give learners an A4 or A3 photocopied version of Chapter 13 (pages 83–90). The challenge is to use the human rights information to analyse chapter 13 and explore how they think it relates to human rights. They can annotate the photocopy with relevant human rights taken from the declaration. Prompt questions might include:

Are there moments or events that they think might deny people one of their human rights?

Are there examples of where they can see human rights are being upheld?

Are there some instances where they are not sure and would want to find out more? If so what questions would they want to ask?

Teacher input: In chapter 13, Queeny, Subhi and Nasir refer to government people, Human Rightsers and Human Rights Watch. Ask learners: why might such people/organisations visit a camp like the one where Subhi lives?

Ask them further, based on your analysis of the text: what were the things that you think the visitors to the camp might be concerned about? Do you think they would have different concerns if they spoke to Subhi, Queeny or Nasir about life in the camp?

Extension option: Human Rights Watch is a real organisation and produces reports on human rights issues and on camps like the one in *The Bone Sparrow*. Learners could produce a Human Rights Watch style report of their own on Subhi's camp. They could use the information they have gathered in the above activity and combine this with a reading of pages 25 (from 'There are only fourteen pairs of real shoes...') to 30 which provides a good overview of the camp.

Ask learners to produce a short report following an inspection of the camp (as in chapter 13) using the following prompts to encourage a report format:

Name of camp:

Date of inspection:

Name of inspector/s:

Description of the camp (physical conditions, number of people, etc):

Evidence of positive respect for residents' human rights:

Concern for residents' human rights:

Issues needing further investigation in follow-up visit:

Tomorrow, everything will change

Intro/context: At the end of *The Bone Sparrow*, Subhi chooses to make a stand against the things he has witnessed by speaking to an outsider about what happened to his friend Eli. This represents a difficult choice for Subhi as the author shares with the reader on page 216 and on pages 221-222.

This could be used to raise important issues with learners around morality, rule of law, responsibility and action - all significant aspects of the personal development encouraged in Citizenship, SMSC, Thinking skills and similar subjects and strands across the UK.

One way to approach this might be to use Subhi's decision to act as inspiration for learners to reflect upon and take action on something they feel strongly about, or something they have seen that they believe to be wrong. Use the phrase 'Tomorrow, everything will change' and ask learners to complete it. In other words:

What will change?

Why does it need to change?

How is going to change? What change can you bring about?

Who could help you with your change?

NOTE: This could raise potentially personal issues for some learners and so educators should be aware of any issues that arise and deal with these appropriately. If you are concerned as an educator about such issues then you may choose to make this activity more directed and focus the idea of change around a shared issue such as 'the attitude towards, and treatment of, refugees and migrants'.

Activity: Learners could share their thoughts on this with each other in a variety of ways including:

Create a short dialogue with a partner to be performed and mimic the conversation between Subhi and Sarah in the book;

Produce a short newspaper article with the journalist asking questions and the respondent using their voice to share their thoughts;

Produce a poster that raises the change and the issues associated with it;

Create a series of 'Tweets' that stick to the 140 character rule but share the essence of what it is you are wanting to change. You could add a hashtag for your change.

Further resources

Human rights

You can find out more about the human rights situation of the Rohingya people in their native Burma on the [Human Rights Watch pages](#).

Refugees, migrants and asylum

[Amnesty International](#) has pages to support this – including an [education section](#).

There are resources freely available from [British Red Cross in support of Refugee week 2016](#).

Also from British Red Cross, there are resources dealing specifically with the [stigma associated with migrants and helping young people to understand](#) and address this.

The UNHCR has produced a page of [teaching resources for schools](#) to teach about refugees.

News articles about the Rohingya

An article from the [BBC](#).

[Amnesty Press Release](#) on Rohingya pushed back to Burma from Bangladesh.

Dealing with controversial issues

[Teaching controversial issues at key stage 3](#) by Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Northern Ireland.

[Teaching controversial issues](#) by Oxfam.

[Teaching controversial issues: professional development pack](#) by Council of Europe.

Other books dealing with these issues

The Islander by Armin Greder: A powerful picture book that could be used to explore how the migrant crisis is playing out across the world.

Arrival by Shaun Tan: Another powerful picture book that tells the story of a new arrival in a strange city through powerful images that would provide a wonderful opportunity for story boarding activities.

Amnesty have produced a useful [list of books to support teaching about human rights](#).

A list of [10 refugee heroes in children's literature](#), produced by the Guardian for refugee week 2015.

Photo captions

'Most people have their Boat ID as their number'. (page 13)

'When the jackets hand out provisions from the truck, we don't get to choose. You get what you get and you don't get upset...' (page 26)

'...we're all dumped out here in the bum end of nowhere. ... So everyone forgets us. ... 'This way we don't even exist.' (page 106)

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