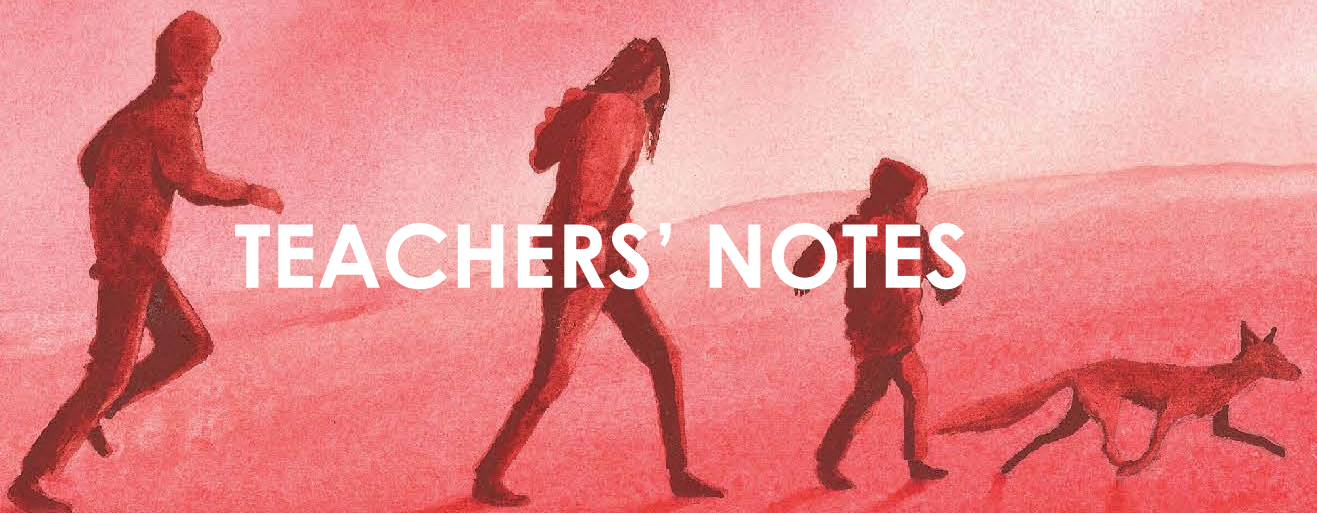


From the author of *THE BONE SPARROW*,
shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal

ZANA FRAILLON

the ones
that
disappeared

TEACHERS' NOTES



THE ONES THAT DISAPPEARED

BY ZANA FRAILLON

TEACHERS NOTES BY ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT

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INTRODUCTION

'My name is Esra Merkes. I am eleven years old. The tattoo on my arm says I belong to Him, Orlando Perel. It says the Snakeskins are my family for life. It says I am kept. It says I am owned. They think just because I close my eyes and shut my ears and follow their words, that I have forgotten who I am. They think I am theirs to make.

But that is not my truth...

'I am Esra Merkes. They do not know me. They do not know I can wait. They do not know, one day, I will be free.' (p 1)

Esra, Miran and little Isa are victims of child slavery and trafficking. Held captive by a man named Orlando Perel in a locked basement, they are forced to tend and harvest his indoor crop of cannabis. They are only allowed to go outside on missions to steal from people in the street. When fire breaks out, the automatic watering system breaks down and the plants die, they are brutally beaten by their masters and escape, but Miran sacrifices himself to the police so that Esra and Isa can get away. Then they meet Skeet and he takes it upon himself to look after them. Miran is taken to hospital and cared for, but one of the Snakeskins infiltrates the hospital and his life is endangered again. Silviu, a street kid, offers to help them but is killed, leaving them with an obscure message about Miran. Meanwhile, a mysterious Riverman (who may or may not be the 'mud man' created by the three friends, come to life) leads them to Miran. This is a harrowing but also uplifting tale of four children's courage in the face of adult corruption and cruelty. At the mercy of child traffickers and adult neglect, they manage to survive, with only their memories of their lost homes and their dreams of the future to give them the strength to carry on.

'They can take everything from us, but they can never take our stories.' (p 108)

BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Before you read the novel, examine the cover of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?
- After you have read the novel, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?
- After you have read the novel, read about Zana Fraillon in reviews and articles and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (Studies of Society and History, and English Language and Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND HISTORY (SOSÉ)

- **CHILD SLAVERY AND TRAFFICKING**

DISCUSSION POINT: This novel deals with the inhumane practice of child slavery and trafficking. Children fleeing from war as refugees are often vulnerable to child traffickers who tell them lies to lure them away. They often lie to their parents with promises of 'a better life' as Orlando does in order to entice Miran's mother to let him go: "'Where we are going, children aren't allowed to work so hard. He will only work weekends so he can concentrate on his studies. But where we are going they pay many dollars for just a few hours work. And with the money he sends back, you will be able to eat three meals a day, instead of just one. Then you won't need to worry about your daughters so much. You won't need to marry them off so young. Twelve is still so young to be married.'" The man looks at Miran's oldest sister. She had already had one offer of marriage. "Or perhaps it is one of the girls who needs an education most?"' (p 141) Research this topic and discuss Australia's and other governments' responses to child slavery and trafficking. [See **Bibliography** for relevant websites and non-fiction sources.]

DISCUSSION POINT: Such children are vulnerable to traffickers who, after purporting to help them find work and a new life, then blackmail them into becoming slaves: 'Orlando stomped all over our talk with His silver tipped boots. He showed us how much we all owed, the thousands and thousands of dollars, more money than our families had ever known. We owed Him for every sip of water we'd taken, and every crumb we'd eaten on the way here. We owed for the cost of coming to this country, for the truck's petrol and the driver and the clothes and blankets given us, and the space on the floor where we'd slept. He showed how we were to pay Him back every bit, by hard work and hard hours all day every day. He showed what happens when we don't work hard enough, or fast enough. He showed pictures of those who ran and were hunted back down. He showed pictures of their families.' (p 12) How would you respond to such cruel treatment?

DISCUSSION POINT: Many child slaves suffer physical abuse as Esra and Miran do. Sexual slavery is another crime committed by such traffickers; Esra is lucky to have escaped it, but little Isa is in danger: 'But he kept looking at Isa. I've seen people look like that before, looking, like he had ideas to move Isa to a different kind of job.' (p 8) Many young girls are sold into prostitution: 'Those three standing up there, waiting on those cars to stop and give them a job for the night, for a few hours even, those are Orlando's girls shivering in their short skirts and singlet tops, and painted red lips and high heels that ache the backs of their legs from standing all night. It was only luck that kept me from those heels all this time.' (p 152) Research the incidence of such sexual slavery in Australia and in other countries.

DISCUSSION POINT: Children who are stolen are often never traced. They may come from impoverished families or from war-torn areas, and may be orphans. These children are truly lost; there are no records of their immigration; they don't attend a school; they have no adult carers. They truly 'disappear'.

DISCUSSION POINT: Bureaucracies are not always kind to such trafficked children; there may be corruption in the police force; inept social services; or spies in supposedly safe places like hospitals.

DISCUSSION POINT: Humour and jokes help people deal with trauma; for example, read some of Miran's jokes and discuss.

DISCUSSION POINT: This novel presents a grim picture of how children are often driven to commit terrible actions by the adults who have 'taken' them – to steal, harvest drugs, commit sexual acts, and even to kill, as Esra does, in order to survive.

DISCUSSION POINT: Discuss the variety of jobs these children are asked to do in relation to global consumerism, and how multinational companies rely on child labour and adult 'sweatshops' (which are allowed to operate in unregulated labour markets) in order to increase their profits.

DISCUSSION POINT: Why don't these children escape earlier? What hold does Orlando have over them?

DISCUSSION POINT: Discuss the legal situation that might confront such children. Should they be held legally culpable for the actions they were forced to do by unscrupulous employers like Orlando? Is it ever right for a person to commit a crime?

- **REFUGEES**

DISCUSSION POINT: The contentious issue of refugees who escape by boats driven by 'people smugglers' is given a human face in this novel: 'I could never tell Miran, that when he talked of us going home to the beach, of the waves and the sand in our toes, that all I can think of is my brother, dead with the jellyfish while those bodies wash up around him.' (p 80) Esra's terrible journey and loss of family has been buried in her day-to-day struggle for survival, but her memories emerge when Skeet gives them food, and builds his mud figure. How do the events described in this novel differ from punitive government policies and negative media coverage of so-called boat people?

DISCUSSION POINT: Consider Esra and Miran's descriptions of their country before the war. What countries are war-torn today? Are there any similarities between Australia and these pre-war countries? You might consider the picture book *Home and Away* (2008) by John Marsden, illustrated by Matt Ottley, when you consider this question.

- **MEMORY, HISTORY AND THE POWER OF STORY**

DISCUSSION POINT: Miran holds a strong belief that the stories his grandfather told him can provide the link to his lost home and culture and offer comfort in times of trauma. Discuss the power of story in forging relationships between people.

DISCUSSION POINT: Esra reveals how her childhood friend has been her constant companion in this terrible time. 'Miran has always been with me. Whispering me through every job, every boss, every beating. Right since that very first journey over in the truck, when we were still fool enough to think we were finally going to a safe place after all the running, and hiding from the bombs and guns and soldiers and death. That must have been close to three years ago now.' (p 11) Memories of past happy times can provide enormous comfort when one is in a seemingly impossible situation.

- **HOPE**

DISCUSSION POINT: "'We're going home to the smell of the trees that whips in on the breeze before night. We're going home to hot cups of tea in the morning, and the beach and the sea warmed just right by the sun. We're going home to every one of our almost dreams that got whipped out from under us and scattered on the wind.'" And he keeps whispering, until there is no sound and it is just his lips moving, and soon the slow of his breathing starts and he's sleeping again.' (p 64) Miran's 'Tomorrow' stories have kept all three of them safe in the shelter of the fragile hope that they might return to their old homes. Skeet has survived his terrible home life in the hope that his dad will return from 'Peru' and take him there. How important is hope in survival?

- **GRIEF, TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE**

DISCUSSION POINT: All four children are traumatised: Esra and Miran have been savagely beaten, held captive, and have witnessed the death of family members; Isa has been orphaned at a very young age; Skeet's mother is neglectful and alcoholic and his father has abandoned him. What gives each of them the strength to overcome their grief and trauma?

- **POLITICAL ACTION**

DISCUSSION POINT: Resistance to tyranny or persecution can be active or passive. Esra decides to take an active role and to confess to the police in order to save other children: 'We are the voices that whispered No.' (p 87)

- **FAMILIES**

DISCUSSION POINT: All four children are missing families; three have lost them and Skeet has neglectful parents and says: 'I'm done with families. Finished. This is my family now and a better one than those two've ever been.' (p 193) Skeet, Esra and Isa 'become' a family. What constitutes a family?

- **MORAL DILEMMAS AND VALUES**

DISCUSSION POINT: Skeet steals food, clothes and other supplies for his friends; Esra kills to save Isa and Miran. Are such actions justified when you are trying to protect others?

DISCUSSION POINT: Miran allows Esra and Isa to escape by sacrificing himself to the police. How difficult would that have been after all that he had already suffered?

DISCUSSION POINT: Skeet had several opportunities to abandon his friends but didn't. What value/s does he evince in his decision to stay with Esra and Isa?

DISCUSSION POINT: Esra is determined to confess her 'crimes' and to tell the police all about the illegal child trade in order to prevent similar treatment being meted out to other children. What sort of strength would this take, to ignore the possibility of escape in order to right such wrongs?

DISCUSSION POINT: What other moral dilemmas or challenges do the characters face?



ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

Study the writing style employed in this narrative, and examine the following sub-topics:

- **NARRATIVE PERSON AND TENSE**

DISCUSSION POINT: Two alternate stories are told by Esra and Skeet in first person present tense, with Miran's dreamy reflections in italics in third person, present tense alternating with them. This creates a multi-layered story. Discuss the use of these three different types of narrative in the novel and how they provide a range of perspectives.

- **TITLE**

DISCUSSION POINT: The title of this novel refers to children who are trafficked or taken into forms of slavery, many of whom die as a result of their treatment. Invite students to explore the meaning of this title. What other title might the novel have had?

- **LITERARY DEVICES**

DISCUSSION POINT: Read this passage, analyse how it works, and what literary devices are contained within it: 'I close my eyes, try to quiet the roar, and something in me twitches. I feel my ribs poke from my skin, the wind edging my fur and sending the smells of trees and grass and cold wet dirt swirling over and around me. There is the taste of the wild on my tongue and the music of freedom in my ears. My feet tell of a hundred journeys gone and a thousand more to come, and when I tip back my head and howl, the ache of it cracks the moon wide open, and the stars fall from the sky, every one.' (p 189)

ACTIVITY: Find other examples of the use of literary devices in this novel, using the table below to identify examples:

SIMILIE	
METAPHORS	
PERSONIFICATION	
OTHER	

- SYMBOLISM**

DISCUSSION POINT: There are several symbols employed in this novel, for example, **mud/riverman; mosaics; river; giant's eye; watch; fox; pigeons.** eg "“Birds travel year after year, searching for the tales to shape their spirits, to set their souls soaring,” his grandfather pointed his finger to the sky, to the birds wheeling on the wind, making their way back to the loft. “That is why birds are always free.”“ (p 108) OR ‘I feel the burn of my fox tattoo, and it drags me up tall and steady.’ (p 242) Discuss any of these symbols and how they relate to the action in the novel.

- **POETRY**

ACTIVITY: Read Esra's heart-wrenching poem for her dead parents (p 66); her angry poem (p 87) which is a plea for help; Esra, Isa and Skeet's poems in memory of Silviu (p 190); Esra's final poem (p 242) for all the children who have disappeared. Discuss their meanings. Then write your own poem in response to this novel, reflecting on the issue of child slavery and trafficking. [See **Writing Tasks** and **Further Activities** below.]

- **HUMOUR**

ACTIVITY: **Identify incidents** that are humorous.

ACTIVITY: **Identify techniques** by which humour is provoked. Add quotes to the following table:

SARCASM	
IRONY	
EXAGGERATION	
HUMOUR	

- **STRUCTURE**

The structure of the story can be analysed in terms of the key narrative features used to engage the reader's attention:

a) This work doesn't have conventional chapters but rather three types of sections headed 'Esra' or 'Skeet' or 'Miran'. *Strong beginnings and endings* to each section in the narrative is one way in which the story is structured, for example:

Beginning: Skeet: 'Today is a whistler, that's for sure.' (p 49)

Ending: Esra: 'Miran's down there, Esra. He's waiting.' (p 129)

b) *Suspense* is the key to any narrative's structure. How is it created in this text?

c) Using a '*framing story or idea*' makes a narrative more cohesive. Miran's memories of his grandfather's stories and of his pigeon-keeping frame the narrative in a metafictional manner. What do these stories denote?

- **SETTING**

DISCUSSION POINT: Choose a passage that describes the locale vividly for you. Discuss the passage with the class.

- **CHARACTERS**

These include **Major characters** (Miran, Esra, Isa and Skeet), and **Minor characters** (Orlando Perel and his employees, Skeet's mother and father, the Riverman, hospital staff, red-haired woman who tries to poison Miran.)

ACTIVITY: Draw up a character chart and find key quotes that give a clear picture of any of these characters, and isolate events that demonstrate their natures. Then write a brief character study of the person using the quotes and events to illustrate the points made in your summary.

QUESTION: Which character is most intriguing and why? Which character would you like to have heard more about?

- **WRITING TASKS**

ACTIVITY: Write an acrostic poem using the letters DISAPPEARED.

ACTIVITY: Write a diary entry by Isa describing his perspective on finding Miran.

ACTIVITY: Write a letter as if it was written by Skeet to his father.

- **VISUAL LITERACY**

ACTIVITY: Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel. (See **Bibliography** for resources.)

ACTIVITY: Design a new cover for this book.

ACTIVITY: Create a book trailer for this novel. (See **Bibliography** for resources.)

FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'It's like Orlando says. Here, in this country, we don't even exist.' (p 7)
2. "'What do poor people have, and rich people want, and if you eat it, you die?' He didn't even wait for me to work it out. 'Nothing,' he answered and laughed until the footsteps came to warn us to keep quiet. It was a stupid riddle though. Rich people want stuff all the time.' (p 14)
3. "'People in this country don't want criminals like you running around. There's a war on crime, a war on you. The police want to lock you away so they can say they are doing their job,'" Orlando told us, and he gave us all a number to call if the cops ever picked us up.' (p 29)
4. "'Miran was teaching me. He said everyone needs to know how to read and write. He said reading is how you discover your world, and writing is how you discover yourself. It's your turn.'" He points again at the cave wall.' (p 40)

5. ““Where we are going, children aren’t allowed to work so hard. He will only work weekends so he can concentrate on his studies. But where we are going they pay many dollars for just a few hours work. And with the money he sends back, you will be able to eat three meals a day, instead of just one. Then you won’t need to worry about your daughters so much. You won’t need to marry them off so young. Twelve is still so young to be married.” The man looks at Miran’s oldest sister. She had already had one offer of marriage. “Or perhaps it is one of the girls who needs an education most?”” (p 141)

6. ‘The man looks at me and shrugs. “We won’t bite girly,” he says. I don’t tell him that everyone bites, sooner or later.’ (p 150)

7. ‘Because part of me wants to make Him proud. What He said was true. I am just like Him. And the shame of that is big enough to drown me.’ (p 153)

8. ‘This is your land. This land, it is in your blood, and in your heart. No matter where you travel, this land, it is always in you. Remember that, and you will never be far from home.’ (p 200)

9. ‘But now I get it, what my abbi was saying, what Miran was trying to get me to understand all those years he whispered his Tomorrow Stories and talked of home. It’s not our old home he was telling. It’s the home that will be. Home will be wherever we make it. Wherever we remember who we are.’ (p 200)

10. ‘Hope,’ I tell him. ‘The answer to your stupid riddle. It’s hope.’ (p 231)

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Compare to other fiction and non-fiction texts that deal with child slavery and trafficking, and the issues faced by refugees from war-torn countries. (See Bibliography for resources.)
2. Design a poster to protest against child slavery and trafficking.
3. Paint a portrait of Esra, Isa, Miran and Skeet.
4. Debate any of the topics covered in these notes, or suggested by the novel.
5. Read and discuss other poems about child slavery and trafficking. [See Bibliography.]

CONCLUSION

This, like Zana Fraillon's previous novel *The Bone Sparrow*, is a timely and important work. The world is experiencing enormous waves of political and economic unrest and as a result there are millions of refugees, many of whom are vulnerable children. This novel will encourage empathy and greater understanding of the situations confronted by children who are orphaned by war.

'Miran is crying, silent streams mapping his face. I want to tell Miran, that I am the speaker for my dead, but I am the speaker for the living too. Of all those lost and forgotten and disappeared, whose tongues can't tell. But I don't. Instead I kiss his fingers.' (p 234)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zana Fraillon was born in Melbourne, but spent her early childhood in San Francisco. As a child Zana always had her head in a book. This could have been because she was eight years old before anyone realised that she was incredibly near-sighted and probably couldn't see anything further away than the words in a book. But regardless of its origins, her love of reading has remained central to her life and work. 'I grew up in a house that had a whole room full of books and comfy chairs and this was my favourite place to be.'

Zana studied history at university before training to be a primary school teacher and both these passions influence her approach to writing. Through meticulous research she has also discovered that it is essential to eat copious amounts of chocolate in order to write anything at all. Zana has written two picture books for young children, a series for middle readers, and a novel for older readers based on research and recounts of survivors of the Forgotten Generation.

She lives in Melbourne, with her three sons, husband and two dogs, and still always has her head in a book, despite now using glasses to see anything further away. When Zana isn't reading or writing, she likes to explore the museums and hidden passageways scattered across Melbourne. They provide the same excitement as that moment before opening a new book – preparing to step into the unknown where a whole world of possibilities awaits. See also: '12 Curly Questions with author Zana Fraillon' <<http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2014/05/12-curly-questions-with-author-zana.html>>

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