

TEACHERS RESOURCES

Wisp

A Story of
Hope



From the
winner of the
**AMNESTY
CILIP
HONOUR**

Zana Fraillon and Grahame Baker-Smith

WISP

BY ZANA FRAILLON AND
GRAHAME BAKER-SMITH

Teachers Resources
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INTRODUCTION

'Idris tasted the pull of the moonlight, and explored the soft scent of new knowings. He felt the rumbles of the earth and the tremble of stories from a thousand kingdoms.'

Idris lives in a desolate camp 'where fences grew from the dirt and shadows ruled'. But the Wisp blows in one night and is 'gentled' and 'softened' into life by Idris's welcoming hands. Each time the Wisp appears Idris takes it to a fellow inmate of this camp, and in each encounter, it reminds the person of the happy times in their past.

Once...

Idris himself has no happy memories. He has lived in this bleak place for his whole life. However, all is not lost.

'For Idris's Wisp wasn't a memory... It was a promise.'

The experiences of refugees, and in particular, of children brought up in refugee and detention camps is explored in a magical, whimsical fashion designed to offer hope. Idris dreams that his Wisp will fly away and touch others to remind them of the need for empathy and compassion for those who live interned. His dream is of a world in which all people are free.

Zana Fraillon has explored similar themes in her two novels, *The Bone Sparrow* (2016) and *The Ones That Disappeared* (2017), and here creates a touching and moving story evocatively illustrated by Kate Greenaway medalist Grahame Baker-Smith.

This is a haunting and uplifting tale about the power of memory – of stories and words – to offer solace and comfort when one is unable to escape.

Someday...

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

- **REFUGEES AND DETENTION**

DISCUSSION POINT: Idris and his family have lived in a refugee camp all his life. This sort of upbringing is difficult for those living in safe and secure communities to even imagine. And yet millions of people live like this and governments struggle to deal with this global crisis. Discuss with students the facts of this crisis. For example, explain to students that there are legal requirements for immigration but that many have no option but to flee persecution in ways which are unsafe or may be deemed illegal. How should governments tackle this issue?

DISCUSSION POINT: Discuss the contribution which has been made to Australian society by immigrants, some of whom were deemed illegal, e.g. Vietnamese boat people in the 1970s.

ACTIVITY: Brainstorm with students how refugees might be assisted and housed, rather than being kept in detention.

ACTIVITY: Encourage empathy by having a guest speaker who has emigrated to Australia describe the journey they took to find safe harbour here, or by reading to students the memoir of someone who has made a successful transition to Australian society.

ACTIVITY: Read other picture books about refugees and compare them to this one [see **Bibliography**].

- **MEMORIES**

DISCUSSION POINT: This picture book is about the nourishing power of memory to infuse even the direst of circumstances with a sense of hope. It is also about how flashes of memory can be provoked by a random sensory object. What memories do the people Idris encounters share with him?

ACTIVITY: Read other books about memory and compare them to this one. Examples might include *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox and Julie Vivas (Omnibus Books, 1984); *One Photo* by Ross Watkins and Liz Anelli (Penguin Books, 2018); and *The Memory Tree* by Britta Teckentrup (Orchard Books, 2014).

ACTIVITY: Invite students to share their own happy memory and to write a story about it.

- **HOPE**

DISCUSSION POINT: Hope is a major theme in this book. Idris, despite his terrible circumstances, is offered a dream of a promising future by the Wisp. What is the Wisp? Is it the power of whispering secrets and stories and protests around the world until they grow into a powerful message of hope?

ACTIVITY: Read other books about hope such as *The Feather* by Margaret Wild and Freya Blackwood (Hardie Grant Egmont, 2018).

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

DISCUSSION POINT: This is an example of a cumulative tale which relies on a traditional structure in which a character embarks on a journey, encounters a series of people or animals, repeats either a question or action, and then a turning point leads to a climax. Repetition is also important in cumulative tales. The word 'Once' is repeated to emphasise that the past is what the Wisp gives each of these characters, until the climax, when the order is upset by Idris's lack of a past, but is then resolved, by a warm and hopeful ending. Discuss the structure of this story.

ACTIVITY: Examine the use of language in this text with words such as 'softlied', and 'gentlied'. Sentences are also constructed inventively, for example,

'He watched it wing higher and higher, flying over the fences to where people had forgotten how **to welcome wide feel.**'

ACTIVITY: Write an acrostic poem using the letters in refugee; write a haiku or tetractys poem on the theme of refugees [see **Worksheet 2**].

ACTIVITY: Test your students' comprehension by asking them questions about the written and visual text.

- **VISUAL LITERACY**

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

ACTIVITY: The cover of a book is an important part of its message. What does the image on the cover suggest to the reader? Take into account the way Idris is standing, and the mood evoked by the image.

ACTIVITY: The title page is a double page image of a refugee camp. Draw your own image of this place.

DISCUSSION POINT: The format of the book is portrait in design. How does the layout of the storyboard and the design of the book influence your reading of it? See, for example, the page where Idris is depicted in four squares.

ACTIVITY: The medium or style employed is paint, dip-pens, pencil sketches and then everything is processed through Photoshop. Using a simple online drawing program, invite students to create an artwork in response to this book.

DISCUSSION POINT: The colours used in this book are in sombre tones, or black silhouettes in a stark contrast to the brighter colours used in the memory sequences. Discuss colour and how it can influence feeling and mood.

ACTIVITY: The images of the Wisp have some similarities to images of a crystal ball. Such balls often predict the future. What might Idris's future hold? [See **Worksheet 1**]

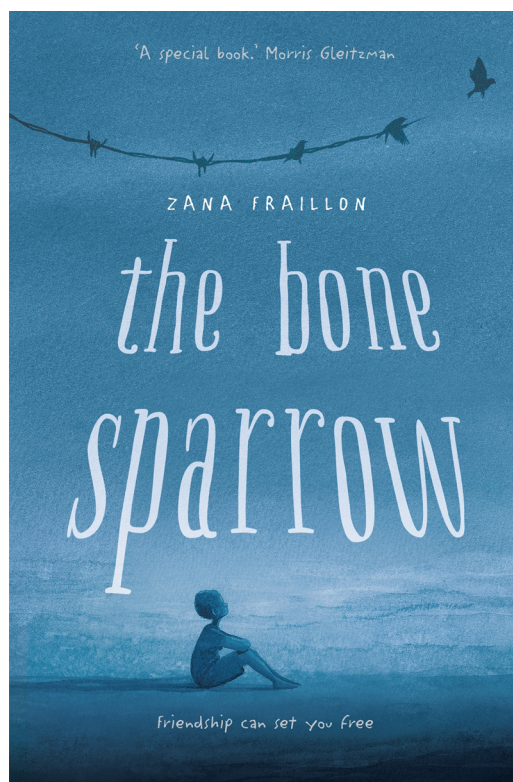
ACTIVITY: Invite students to create an image to accompany the story about a memory which they wrote about above [see **English Language and Literacy**].

ACTIVITY: Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book [see **Bibliography**] [see also **Worksheet 3**].

- **CREATIVE ARTS**

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

1. **Create a diorama** of the image of the houses in the camp depicted on the title page.
2. **Write a song** which reflects the experiences of children like Idris.
3. **Create a drawing** based on the issues explored in *Wisp* (like the one used on the cover of *The Bone Sparrow* below).



4. **Create a poster** to explore the issues suggested in this book; write a slogan and illustrate it graphically [see **Worksheet 4**].
5. **Create a book trailer** to promote this book [see **Bibliography**].

- **LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES**

ACTIVITY: Research the topics above online.

ACTIVITY: Research the author's and illustrator's work online [see **Bibliography**].

FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

- Research the work of Zana Fraillon. Older readers might compare this to her novels *The Bone Sparrow* and *The Ones That Disappeared*.
- Research the work of Grahame Baker-Smith. Compare *Wisp* to his other picture books.
- Students might research the issues explored in this book with reference to reading other books and websites listed in the **Bibliography**.
- Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

CONCLUSION

Wisp is a heartfelt plea for empathy and understanding for those who seek refuge. This is one of the greatest challenges the world has faced and the scale of the problem grows ever larger. In focusing the story on one child's hope for the future Fraillon and Baker-Smith encourage young readers to consider the human impact of government decisions and to question policies which have left millions languishing in refugee camps all over the world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zana Fraillon was born in Melbourne, but spent her early childhood in San Francisco. Her 2016 novel *The Bone Sparrow* won the ABIA Book of the Year for Older Children, the Readings Young Adult Book Prize and the Amnesty CILIP Honour. It was also shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, the Queensland Literary Awards, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Gold Inky and the CILIP Carnegie Medal.

She spent a year in China teaching English and now lives in Melbourne with her three sons, husband and two dogs. 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.

Further information is available here:

<https://www.zanafraillon.com/>

See also:

'Author Q&A: Zana Fraillon' *Better Reading* July 11 2016

<http://www.betterreading.com.au/kids-ya/author-qa-zana-fraillon/>

'Zana Fraillon on writing about refugee children: 'Their resilience keeps hope alive' *The Guardian* 16 November 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/nov/15/zana-fraillon-writing-about-refugee-children-the-bone-sparrow-guardian-childrens-fiction-award>



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Grahame Baker-Smith taught himself to paint and draw whilst living in Oxford in his early twenties. Drawing had been a great interest to him as a child but as a young adult it flared into a passionate and all-consuming activity. He was offered a place at Berkshire College of Art and Design and joined the course in the third year as he'd already covered the first two years independently. On leaving college in 1986 with portfolio in hand he went to London to look for work. Commissions from magazines, design groups and publishers soon followed and his career in illustration began.

Further information is available here: <<http://www.alisoneldred.com/biogGrahameBakerSmith.html>>

See also:

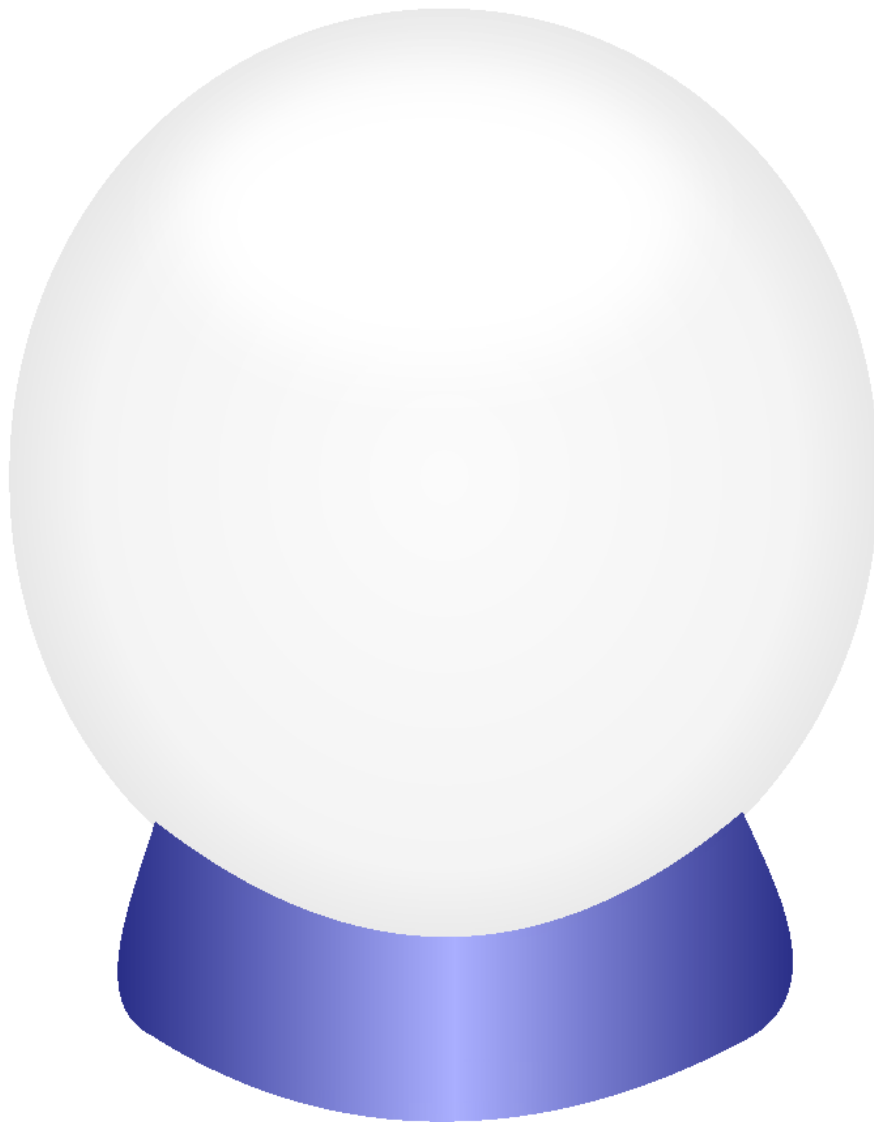
Grahame Baker-Smith 'Art Lesson Video' YouTube March 7 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr7zwcmtKc>>



WORKSHEETS

WORKSHEET 1: DRAW THIS IMAGE

Idris's Wisp has visual similarities to a crystal ball. At the end of the book we see him riding a bicycle on a bright summer's day. Draw another image of what you see in Idris's future inside the crystal ball below.



WORKSHEET 2: REFUGEE POEMS

A. Write an acrostic poem:

R	
E	
F	
U	
G	
E	
E	

B. Write a haiku poem:

5 syllables	
7 syllables	
5 syllables	

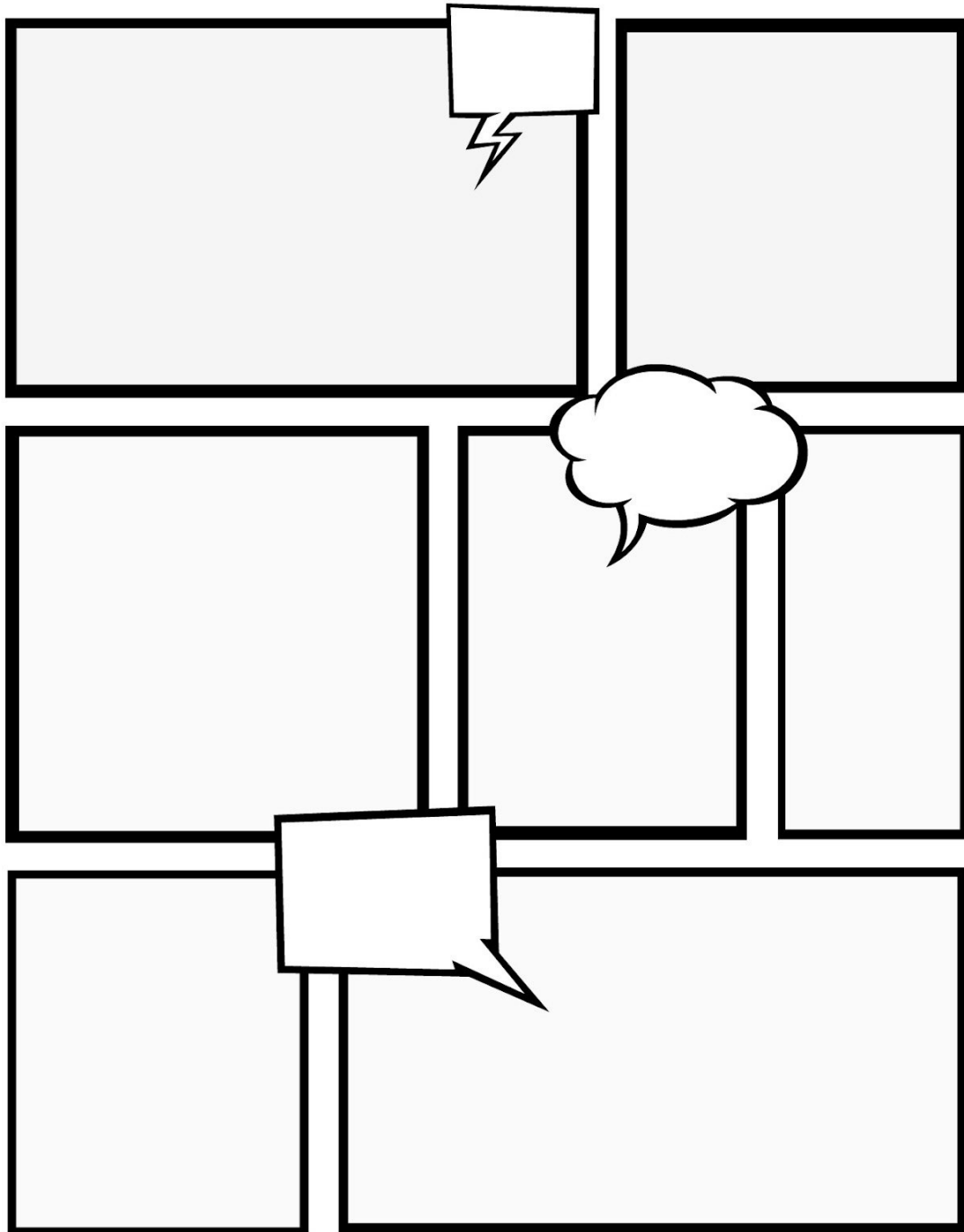
C. Write a tetractys poem:

1 syllable	
2 syllables	
3 syllables	
4 syllables	
10 syllables	



WORKSHEET 3: GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

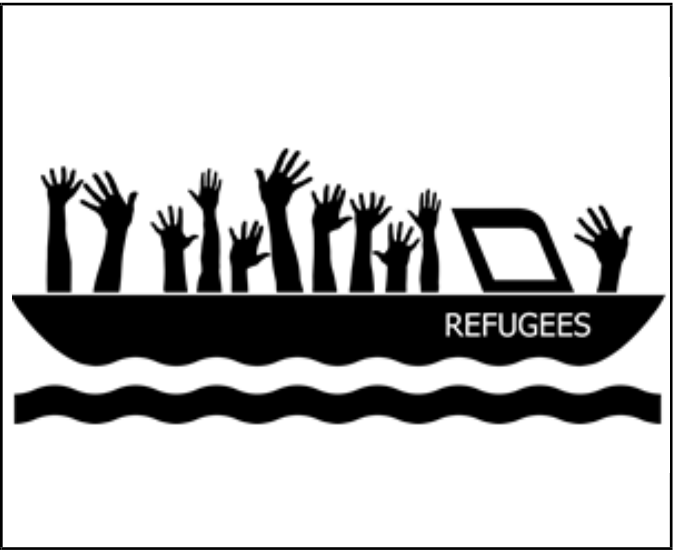
Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use the layout below as the storyboard for your comic. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



Free} Graphic Novel (Comic Book) Templates Mr Mosley's Creations for Graphic Novel Template Pdf from <<http://www.researchpaperspot.com/graphic-novel-template-pdf/free-graphic-novel-comic-book-templatesmr-mosleys-creations-for-graphic-novel-template-pdf/>>

WORKSHEET 4: REFUGEE POSTERS

Examine these posters and then design two of your own below.



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JUNIOR NON-FICTION

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<<http://idtl.net.au/book-trailers.php>>

Book Trailers' *Insideadog*

<<http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers>>

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<<https://www.amnesty.org.au/>>

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC)
<<http://www.asrc.org.au/>>

ChilOut Children out of Immigration Detention
<<http://www.chilout.org/>>

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<<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>>

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency
<<http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/>>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award.

