

ARE YOU READY? Are you LISTENING?

SOMETHING is about to begin.



A Small Collection of Happineses

ZANA FRAILLON

TEACHERS RESOURCES

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Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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INTRODUCTION

“That,’ Ada said, ‘is my small collection of happinesses. I haven’t shown anyone that before.’ Hettie opened the pouch and looked inside. ‘But there’s nothing in it. You can’t have a collection if there is nothing there.’” (p 57)

This is an unforgettable story of young and old friendship and the healing power of stories, from two masters of their craft, renowned Australian writer Zana Fraillon and illustrator Stephen Michael King.

Are you ready? Are you listening? Something is about to begin.

When Ada arrives on the day of the Great Summer Storm, it is like the wind had picked her up and blown her in – walking stick and all – and dumped her right at the front gates of number 9 Hawkhurst Lane.

Unfortunately, Ada is not the kind of neighbour Hettie was hoping for. Cranky, impatient and a hater of cats, Ada has no intention of making friends.

But as the summer unfolds, Hettie and Ada discover they have more in common than they think. Could their unlikely friendship be the missing piece they never knew they needed?

BEFORE AND AFTER READING 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 AND CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), Science, English Language and Literacy, and Visual Literacy) might be identified in this novel.

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>

HAPPINESS

Key Quote: “Our small collection of happinesses is quite big now,’ Ada said, and they sat together in their garden, surrounded by their neighbours, nibbling on the food from a hundred friends, until the rain began and the sun went down.’ (p 174)

Discussion Point: What is happiness?

Discussion Point: What makes Hettie happy? What makes Ada happy?

Discussion Point: Invite students to say what makes them happy or sad.

WISHES

Key Quote: ‘Hettie thought carefully. ‘I think,’ she said softly, ‘I would like to come back as the light from the moon.’ She waited for Ada to argue and say you couldn’t come back as light, and that it had to be an animal, and what was she thinking? But Ada didn’t. She nodded instead. ‘That would be wonderful,’ Ada said. ‘You could look over everyone you loved, and visit them through their windows, and light up their faces and grant them all their wishes. You would always be with them, whether they could see you or not, because the moon is always there, even in the daytime.’
(p 106)

Discussion Point: Discuss wishes with your students. What do they each wish for?

Discussion Point: Have they ever had a wish come true?

REALITY AND IMAGINATION

Key Quote: ‘Ada and Hettie walked quietly down the stairs and along the street and down onto the forest path that ran along the river. Hettie had never seen the world so quiet before. And so noisy at the same time. There were sounds that Hettie hadn’t even known existed, and the dark and the fog changed everything so that it felt like they weren’t walking along the path Hettie had walked every day of her life, but along a completely different path that just reminded her of one she had once known. It was a strange and eerie feeling, and Hettie tried to hold tight to it so it wouldn’t go away. It was like, Hettie decided, being *inside* the book of fairytales, and it wouldn’t have surprised her one little bit if a house on chicken legs had run past, or a wolf dressed as an old woman had stepped from the shadows. Hettie looked extra hard at Ada, just to make sure the wolf hadn’t got in first, but Ada’s teeth were far too small and old and crooked and brown to belong to a wolf.’ (pp 58–9)

Discussion Point: Fairytale creatures such as gorgons are referred to frequently in this narrative, for example: “There aren’t any lions in these parts, are there? Or bears? Or ...’ Hettie started thinking of creatures from her *Book of Dragons and Monsters* and felt even more frightened than she had earlier.’ (p 60) What role does fairytale or folktale play in this novel?

Discussion Point: ‘She’d thought it was just an old folktale. Sort of. If she was being completely honest, she had dearly wished it *would* work, and was delighted when it did, but no one needed to know that now. Anyway, she had undone the knots, and told the storm thanks very much but enough was enough, and had thrown the string away, but the storm *still* raged, so she really couldn’t be blamed at all. Even so, she didn’t think she would tell anyone about her part in it. Just in case.’ (pp 8–9) How do folktales and fantasy relate to or explore aspects of everyday life? How do they relate to psychological or emotional issues?

URBAN RENEWAL

Key Quote: ‘There was a pond down the bottom of The Gardens. It wasn’t a real pond, and they weren’t real gardens, because the ground was all covered over in concrete and nothing grows in concrete, but everyone called them The Gardens anyway. Hettie had never stopped to wonder why before now, but suddenly, here she was, thinking and wondering and finding it all very curious.’ (p 66)

Discussion Point: Ada has a brainwave about the concrete garden: ‘She began to wonder if they could perhaps start a garden of their own, right here. Just a small one. With vegetables maybe. ‘We could use some old pallets,’ Ada mused.’ (p 70) Discuss the potential for inner city renewal like this. Are you aware of any projects like this in your suburb, town or city? Research

the development of community gardens. You may wish to establish one with your students. [See **Bibliography**.]

Discussion Point: Read picture books on this theme and discuss. [See **Bibliography**.]

URBAN MYTHS

Key Quote: “You don’t believe the rumour? Why not? Salim said that—” ‘Well, yes yes yes, but that’s how rumours spread, isn’t it? Someone probably found an old dog bone and wanted to make the story a bit better, and then everyone starts saying they found a bone because they don’t want to miss out and before you know it, you have naked killer whale-rats floating about the place. People around here really should learn to be more accurate, if you ask me.” (pp 99–100)

Discussion Point: The rumour that a panther is at large in Hettie and Ada’s area fuels a council campaign, but also Ada’s memories of her lover Bessie and Hettie’s dreams of adventure. How do urban myths originate and what do they represent?

FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP

Key Quote: ‘Hettie slumped onto the couch. She ran her fingers over Ada’s patchwork quilt and wished that she had something like this, something passed down through her family. Her family was all so scattered and lost and forgotten that she hardly knew anything about them. Sometimes she felt like she didn’t really *belong* anywhere. She wondered what it would be like to be surrounded by a great, big, huge family. To know there was always someone to talk to, someone to go to if you needed help. Someone who had stories to pass on and secrets to share. Someone who would give her a quilt one day and who would know that she would pass it on herself.’ (p 113)

Discussion Point: What does this novel suggest about the role of a family in a person’s life?

Discussion Point: Can friends constitute ‘family’ in someone’s life?

MEMORY

Key Quote: ‘Collect a seed. Collect a someone who is special to you. Together, plant the seed on your windowsill. Feed it with water and stories and songs. Eventually, a memory tree will grow. If you are very clever, and have done a particularly good job, then more than one tree may sprout. Memories will sprout with it. These will not only be old memories that grow, but new memories also. And one day, a seed will fall from this tree. Someone will find the seed, on their breakfast table perhaps, and plant it on their windowsill. They will feed it with water and stories and songs. This will continue until the end of time.’ (p 165)

Discussion Point: This novel is full of references to memories. Hettie misses her father terribly, and the family that his memory represents now that it’s just her and her mother. Ada misses her lover Bessie (p 148). How do memories connect us to our lost loved ones?

Discussion Point: “That is a bee orchid,’ Ada whispered. ‘It takes its shape from the female bee. Male bees mistake it for a female and fly into it. And when they see it isn’t a bee, they leave, but they take the orchid’s pollen with them.’ ‘Okay,’ said Hettie. She still couldn’t see what all the fuss was about. ‘The thing is, the bee that this orchid looks like doesn’t exist anymore. It’s extinct. All that is left is the memory of the bee, held in the shape of the flower. Without the bee to spread the pollen, soon the orchid will die out too.’ (p 147) Ada tells Hettie that the plant was special to her and Bessie. How does the bee orchid relate to the themes in this novel?

Discussion Point: Memories bind the multicultural community members who share the building and the area with Hettie and Ada. The treasured painting on the garden wall (p 155, p 160) is indicative of communal memory, as is the idea to create *The Gardens Family Cookbook* (p 180). What other community projects celebrate communal memory?

SCIENCE

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/science/>>

Discussion Point: This novel discusses a range of concepts related to biology and ecology – for example, growing from seeds and the biological development of species. What scientific fact did you discover or want to know more about after reading this novel? For example: “People think panthers are a species, but they aren’t,” Ada said quietly, as if she was talking almost to herself. ‘*Panther* is actually just the name given to any black feline of the big-cat family. Usually a melanistic leopard or a jaguar.’ (p 101) Research the topic of melanism. [See **Bibliography**.]

Discussion Point: Hettie tells Ada: ‘The very last of a species is called an Endling. Isn’t that sad?’ (p 68). Research endlings or extinct creatures. [See **Bibliography**.]

Discussion Point: Hettie tells Ada: ‘When a balloon flies, a seabird dies!’ (p 82) and that other sea animals do as well. Research this environmental theme, which runs through the novel in a subtle and suggestive way. [See **Bibliography**.]

Discussion Point: ‘Like yesterday, when you came and banged on the door because you thought it was important that I know that whale sharks aren’t whales or sharks but really a kind of very large dolphin, just like killer whales, which are also dolphins, not whales, and no more “killer” than any other carnivore. And you also said, while we were on the topic – which I wasn’t by the way – that it was very important that I knew that naked mole-rats aren’t actually moles or rats either, and are more closely related to porcupines than they are to moles or rats and are no more “naked” than anything else. And then you called me a “clothed killer girl” and left.’ (pp 98–99) What is Ada telling Hettie in this quote?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

Study the writing style employed in this narrative and examine the following subtopics:

NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE AND TENSE

Discussion Point: Although focused on Hettie’s point of view, the story is told in third person, allowing Ada’s perspectives to be shared with the reader as well. Rewrite a segment of the novel in first person from Hettie’s perspective and observe how this alters the narrative.

LITERARY DEVICES

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

Simile	
Metaphors	
Personification	'The sun burned bright and warm, pretending that it had never given in to such a storm.' (p 16)
Aphorism	'Spend at least a week walking only in someone else's footprints.' (p 115) [See also pages following for other such wise sayings.]
Symbolism	
Other	

Activity: Read this passage and discuss the devices employed in it:

'Hettie sat for a moment more in her bed, looking at the ripples of light turn the floor into a moonriver, then she pulled back her blanket and tiptoed to the window. She loved how everything was different at night. The bushes, the bike shed, the lone dead tree and the broken old swing below all twisted into creatures and beasts that stalked on the edge of night-knowing. Hettie imagined she could hear them rustling and growling, she imagined she could see them shuffle ever so slightly ... and then a shadow, thick, dark and silent, broke away from the others. A real, non-imagined shadow.' (p 25)

HUMOUR

Activity: Hettie and Ava are decades apart in age, but each have a very similar quirky temperament. There are several humorous incidents in the novel. What did you find most amusing?

STRUCTURE

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

a) *Strong beginnings and endings to chapters* are one way of structuring a narrative, for example:

Beginning: 'There was a rumour going about.' (The Rumour (Part 1), p 92)

Ending: "I think it's time we had a meeting with the witch!" (Treasure, p 155)

Which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?

b) *Suspense* is key to any narrative's structure. What mysteries or clues created suspense in this novel?

SETTING

Discussion Point: Description in setting can be evoked via a complex range of literary devices. What devices did Zana Fraillon use to describe setting in this novel?

Activity: Draw a picture of how you imagine Hettie's building and The Gardens.

CHARACTERS

Major Characters: Hettie, Ada.

Minor Characters: Walter, the postman; Salim, Hettie's friend and neighbour; Bessie, Ada's deceased partner; Harriet Mackenzie, the neighbour who receives the book illustrated by Harrison Rusdenhall in the mail. (Hettie's mum is mentioned but plays no part in the action. Graffiti the cat is also a character! Neil and Moxie were Hettie's former neighbours.)

Activity: Locate a key quote or an event that indicates the nature of any of these characters.

Discussion Point: Which character was most intriguing and why?

WRITING TASKS

Activity: Make a list of Hettie's favourite things.

Activity: Write a diary entry by Ada about meeting Hettie.

Activity: Write a newspaper article reporting on the successful renewal of The Gardens.

Activity: Make a class cookbook, full of recipes and their stories. Zana Fraillon says: 'I actually included this in the novel because when my eldest was at kinder, I did this as a fundraiser, and we still use the recipes that are included in it.'

Activity: Make a 'Book of Knowings' like the one Ada writes – it could be based on advice that students get from people in their community, or equally, from the kids themselves.

Activity: Create a nature journal (like the one Salim shows Hettie how to make). Zana Fraillon says: 'The Reggio-Emilia schools network would have lots of ideas for this cross-curricular activity, as nature journaling is a big part of the Reggio philosophy.'

Activity: Make a class patchwork 'quilt' – either by using pictures or self-adhesive material etc. so that each student could choose a story to represent and share.

VISUAL LITERACY

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>

Discussion Point: Stephen Michael King's work is often whimsical and features detailed line drawing. In this book, he has opted to use a very striking and abstract style, which is evocative of the themes being explored. The images at the opening of chapters are dramatic. The headers on each chapter are fluid and suggestive. Silhouettes are also used in some images. Invite students to examine the images and create one in a similar style.

Activity: Design a new cover for this novel.

Activity: Create a book trailer for this novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

Activity: Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'Maybe she had just let her imagination run wild like her teachers always complained that she did.' (p 26)
2. "Even if it is only a tree and not a magic beanstalk, think how great that would be! It could be a memory tree! To remind you of your special thing!" (p 50)
3. 'And they wondered at all the wishes held inside the rock, and if any of them were theirs, and which of them would be the first to come true.' (p 63)
4. 'From the shadows, the creature was watching too. Ada turned once, and looked right at the place where the beast was crouched, but it was too dark for her to see a thing. She knew something was there though. She could feel it in her bones. 'Did you hear that growling?'" (pp 75–76)
5. "Don't you know anything? When a balloon flies, a seabird dies! You mustn't! It isn't just seabirds, you know, it's other sea animals too, like turtles and octopuses and squids and dolphins and whales and sharks and fish and penguins and everything, but they don't fit the rhyme so no one bothers to mention them! Now you have gone and got a balloon and a seabird is going to diiiiiieee!" (p 82)
6. "I'm good at exploring and finding and I'm really good with animals. That dog around the corner that attacks everyone loves me. I'm like a dog whisperer. I'm sure it would work for panthers. I—" (p 94)
7. "Well, yes yes yes, but that's how rumours spread, isn't it? Someone probably found an old dog bone and wanted to make the story a bit better, and then everyone starts saying they found a bone because they don't want to miss out and before you know it, you have naked killer whale-rats floating about the place." (pp 99–100)
8. 'Hettie had tears streaming down her face now. 'But Ada! They could just fix these ones up instead! Don't you see? We won't be neighbours anymore. Salim from next door isn't even going to be in the same building as us! All of us are being scattered about like, like, like I don't know what. Like leaves! Like rubbish! We're being scattered like rubbish in a really big storm! I've always lived here! Always! I can't leave.'" (p 127)
9. "If there is a famous painting on that wall, and that wall is attached to our building, then that means our building is famous. And that means they won't be allowed to knock it down. It is a piece of our town's history! Now *that* is a story for the newspapers!" (p 155)
10. "This will become the town's number-one tourist site! You can't have tourists visiting if the people who live here don't even have proper heating! What would the tourists think when we tell them all about it! What would they think of a mayor who was more interested in money than in the welfare of his residents?' The newspapers agreed. They were adamant that this story would be a good news story.' (pp 159–160)
11. 'She let her eyes close. Let the sun warm her skin and listened to the chatter of everyone around her. Like one big family, she thought. And as she drifted away, she thought how wonderful it was, just sitting, knowing that a garden and a community – a family – was growing up around her.' (pp 170–171)
12. 'The last thought Hettie had as she drifted off to sleep was how her full-moon wish had come true after all, in that half-almost way that wishes seemed to work.' (p 182)

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Compare this novel to other junior fiction novels featuring whimsical, strong and quirky heroines. [See **Bibliography**.]
2. Design a poster to advertise this book.
3. The title of this book refers to Ada's small bag of 'happineses'. What other title might the book have had?
4. Debate any of the topics covered in these notes or suggested by the novel.
5. Locate and study poems about happiness and then write one of your own in any poetic form you choose.
6. Invite students to bring in an object to add to a large collection of happineses...

CONCLUSION

This whimsical tale has the stamp of a classic story. It is a multilayered tale about happiness, wishes, reality and imagination, family and friendship, urban renewal, urban myths, and individual and community memory. Peopled with two memorable characters, Hettie and Ada, it powerfully reinforces the notion that both imagination and human connection can enrich and sustain a life in a myriad of ways.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zana Fraillon (she/they) is an internationally acclaimed, multi-award-winning author of books for children and young adults.

Zana's books have won the Amnesty CILIP Honour Award, the ABIA Book of the Year for Older Readers, the Readings YA Book Prize, NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the CBCA Honour Book Award. Her book *The Bone Sparrow* was chosen as the biennial book to represent Australia for the International Board on Books for Young People.

Zana was born and lives in Naarm (Melbourne), but spent her early childhood in San Francisco. She has degrees in history and teaching and is undertaking a PhD in Creative Writing at La Trobe University.

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

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Stephen Michael King has illustrated over 100 books and written many, including: *Three*, *Blueberry Farm*, *Rainbow Bear* and *Mutt Dog!* His books are read worldwide and have won a myriad of awards, including the Prime Minister's Literary Award and the CBCA Book of the Year.

Stephen lives and shares a life with his wife, Trish. They happily live in a mudbrick house on an island that touches the Pacific Ocean.

www.smkbooks.com

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011, she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award; in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature; and in 2014, of the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.