

*Kiran Millwood Hargrave*




LEILA  
AND THE  
BLUE FOX

*with Tom de Freston*

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR KS2/KS3  
TEACHERS & LIBRARIANS







## *Explore themes of:*

- Family relationships
  - Migration
- Animals in the wild
  - Home
- Climate change
  - Memories

## *Subject checklist:*

- Literacy
- Geography
- PSHE
  - Art

## *Contents*

### THEME 1: THE TRUE STORY OF THE ARCTIC FOX

**Objectives and Activities:** Identify key themes from the book based on the blurb; research the original story of the Arctic fox

### THEME 2: MIGRATION

**Objectives and Activities:** Discuss Leila's arrival at the airport and reflect on how she might be feeling; learn about migration; complete a diary entry from Leila's perspective

### THEME 3: JOURNEYS

**Objectives and Activities:** Analyse how Leila is feeling at the start of her journey; identify what Miso needs in order to survive

### THEME 4: CLIMATE CHANGE

**Objectives and Activities:** Discuss climate change in the Arctic; consider the impact of ice vanishing

### THEME 5: RAISING AWARENESS

**Objectives and Activities:** Discuss the positive impact of social media in raising awareness; complete a series of posts for @misothefox; design a poster to raise awareness of climate change

**Teacher note:** If, at your school, you have children who are refugees or in the process of seeking asylum, visit The Red Cross website to read about how to discuss this topic empathetically with your learners.





## *Theme 1:* THE TRUE STORY OF THE ARCTIC FOX

*She was very tired.*

*She lay down, her soft head on her soft paws.*

*The sunset licked her face.*

*The snow covered her like a blanket.*

*Fox wakes, and begins to walk. She crosses ice and snow, over mountains and across frozen oceans, encountering bears and birds beneath the endless daylight of an Arctic summer, navigating a world that is vast, wild and wondrous.*

*Meanwhile, Leila embarks on a journey of her own – finding her way to the mother who left her. On a breathtaking journey across the sea, Leila rediscovers herself and the mother she thought she'd lost, with help from a determined little fox.*

BLURB

### *Discussion Questions*

- From the blurb, what themes do you think will be explored in *Leila and the Blue Fox*?
- The author uses descriptive language to conjure an image of the Arctic. Can you pull out examples of this?
- What parallels can you draw between Leila and the Arctic fox?





## *Activity 1: Research the true story*

*Leila and the Blue Fox* is inspired by the true story of an Arctic fox who walked from Norway to Canada in seventy-six days.

Research the true story and complete the below fact file.

What happened?	
How far did the fox travel?	
How did scientists track the fox's journey?	
Why (according to scientists) did the fox make this journey?	







## Theme 2: MIGRATION

*“Look them in the eyes, but don’t stare, don’t blink too much, smile, not with teeth, with your eyes, but don’t squint.”*

*But she is blinking, rapidly, trying to control the tears. She digs her fingernails into her palm as he looks at her. A ball is swelling and swelling in her throat, making it hard to breathe. She hates this, all of it. She hated saying goodbye to Mona and her aunty at the airport, she hated the flight, with its dry, artificial air and Fiona, too silent and too smiley. She hated the man searching her bag, she hated the staring woman and she hates the banana and she hates this man, looking at her like she—*

*But he’s looking down now at her passport. His hand moves in a practised motion, reaching for a stamp, up and down and a satisfying click, then he is handing the passport back, not to Fiona, but to her.*

*‘Welcome to Tromsø,’ he says in a lilting, bored voice.*

*She takes the passport. It was easy, it was over. The part she and Mona had been most scared about. The part she’d had nightmares about, nightmares full of white rooms and bolted down tables. Done. Leila wipes the banana off her face with her sleeve. She feels almost dizzy with relief as she follows Fiona to the conveyer belt, around which bags are already circulating. ‘All OK?’ asks Fiona. Leila’s starting to think it might be. Leila lets her breath out slowly. It’s exhausting being braced all the time, against the staring, the occasional comments. Even at her school, where there are other Middle Eastern girls, even other Syrians. It makes moments like the immigration officer looking away feel like the best sort of relief. If she can’t be invisible, she just wants to fit in.*

pg 9-10

### Discussion Questions

- How is Leila feeling in this extract? Consider how she feels while the immigration officer reviews her passport, and how she feels after he says, ‘Welcome to Tromsø’. What language does the author use to show this?
- Why did Leila expect the immigration officer to be unwelcoming?
- “If she can’t be invisible, she just wants to fit in.” What does it mean to “fit in”? Why do you think this is important to Leila?





## *Activity 1: Learn about migration*

Leila and her family migrated from Syria to the UK. Migration means:

**“The movement of a person or people from one country, locality or place of residence to settle in another.”**

Source: Geographical Association

In pairs or small groups, think about the reasons why someone may leave their home and go to another place. Write down your notes below.

<b>Push factors</b> (things that might make someone leave their home)	<b>Pull factors</b> (things that might draw someone to a new place)
<i>Lack of job opportunities</i>	<i>Lots of job opportunities</i>









## Theme 3: JOURNEYS

*Activity 1: Analyse how Leila is feeling  
at the start of her journey to sea*

Leila looks over her shoulder at Tromsø, the bridge and the magical glass cathedral, watching the harbour fade from sight behind them, the sea open out like a book in front. Leila feels, for the first time, the tingly beginnings of excitement in her stomach.



In these pages, Leila is about to embark on a journey out to sea to find the Arctic fox. How is Leila feeling in this moment? Use the words and the illustration to find clues.

---

---

---

---

---







## *Activity 2: Identify what Miso needs to survive*

While Leila journeys out to sea, Miso the Arctic fox is also on a journey.

*Sleeping in the light is harder. There are things she can see in the dark better than they can see her, but in this light it is impossible.*

*She has lost her advantage, feels more hunted than ever.*

*She runs through unchanging, scentless places, though she has eaten nothing but a mouthful of rotted, scavenged walrus for days. The ice is thinner. She is thinner, her ribs struck out against her fur. She is used to the gnawing now. She moves to find thicker ice, loops a place where she smells a carcass, a whale dead and floating in the sea, too far to reach.*

*Around her, the season has changed. Further south, there is moss unfreezing, the buds of flowers forcing through.*

pg 72-75

Write down three things that Miso needs in order to survive.

Use the extract above to help you.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_







## Theme 4: CLIMATE CHANGE

*‘Everything I’ve worked on, even back home in Damascus, has been about climate,’ continues Mum. ‘The air we breathe, the water that flows around the world, the seasons and how they change. And we are living through some of the most rapid change this planet has ever experienced. It’s changing everything: what flowers grow, where people live and what they wage wars about. That Miso is using the sea ice is a perfect little snapshot of this. That ice is vanishing. Migration is becoming harder—’ Mum breaks off, shakes her head.*

*Leila has never heard Mum talk like this. Not about home or her work. Hearing the name of their home city leave her mouth was like an electric shock against Leila’s skin.*

*‘My point is,’ says Mum. ‘Miso offers so many questions in miniature. Maybe even some answers. She’s a scavenger, she has to take all she can get, go where she needs to, to find food or territory or a mate. Safety. She’s not so different from a person, really.’*


pg 89-90

### *Discussion Questions*

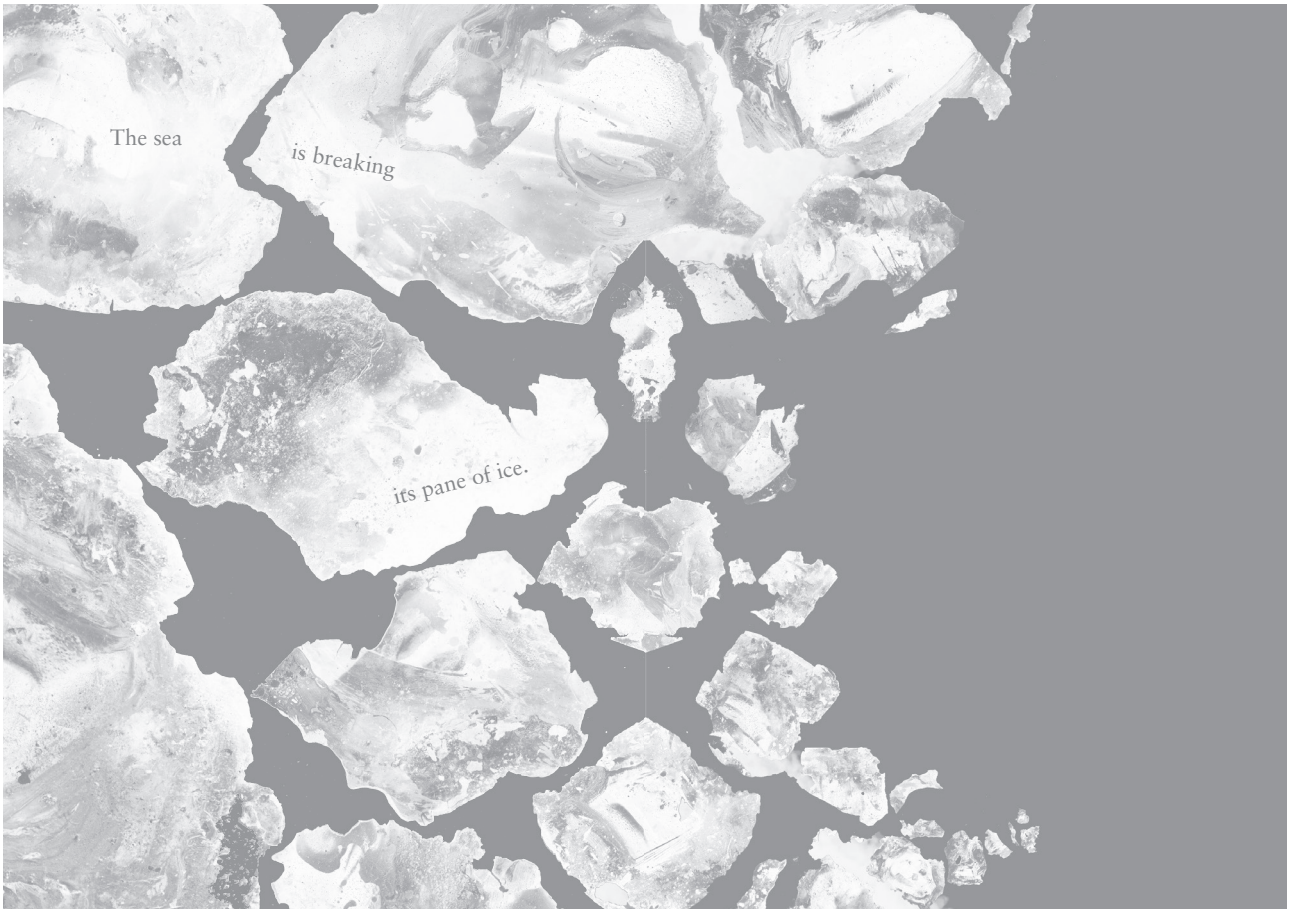
- What is climate change? Discuss as a group
- How is Miso helping the scientists to understand more about climate change and its impact?







*Activity 1: Consider the impact of ice vanishing*



What is the impact of the ice vanishing? In pairs or small groups, discuss the potential impact on both people and animals. Make some notes below.

*Impact  
of the ice  
vanishing*







*Activity 2: Write a scene from another point of view*

*‘Shh!’ Matty’s voice is urgent.*

*All four of them look at him in surprise. But it’s clear from the expression on Matty’s face that he isn’t messing around. Leila follows his gaze, over Mum and Liv’s heads. She can’t see anything, and then there is movement in the distance and Leila’s heart turns to ice – the outline, the pebble-black nose of a polar bear.*

*‘Bury the food,’ Matty hisses. He is transformed from his usual, loose-limbed stance into someone else, alert and tense, hand steady on the gun though his voice shakes. ‘Slow.’*

*Leila and Britt scrape a shallow bowl into the snow, pouring in the leftover soup, placing the last of the crackers on top. Britt presses snow back over. But it is clear the polar bear has smelt them, seen them. It walks closer with a loping, rolling gait, so much bigger than Leila ever imagined an animal could be. Big as a Range Rover, built as broad, yellow-white fur matted over its hanging belly.*

*The bear stands now at the base of the slope they sit on. It is nothing like seeing one on television, nothing like a bear from a story. It is unmistakably, unquestionably wild.*

pg 144-145

Read the above extract and consider how the polar bear feels in this moment.

What is its motivation for approaching the group?

Have a go at writing the scene from the polar bear’s point of view.

---

---

---

---

---

---





## *Theme 5:* RAISING AWARENESS

Leila and Matty set up a social media account to raise awareness of Miso's journey. As a result, they raise lots of money for the Arctic Institute, who carry out important research and initiatives to protect the Arctic.

### *Discussion Questions*

- In Chapter 17, Matty says “people need stories”.  
Why do you think this is?
- Why is raising awareness important for issues like climate change?
- As well as social media, what are some other ways to raise awareness?







## *Activity 1: Write posts for @misothefox*

Imagine you are running the social media account for @misothefox.

Write a series of tweets about your adventure so far.

Think about what information you want to share and how to get this across in as few words as possible.

Social Post 1

Social Post 2

Social Post 3

Social Post 4





## *Activity 2: Design a poster*

Reflect on everything you have learned from reading *Leila and the Blue Fox*.

Design a poster to raise awareness of the impact of climate change in the Arctic.

Consider what you want people to feel or think when they see your poster.

