



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION

COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

This guide is aligned with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) for Reading (Informational Text), Writing, and Language. The broad CCR standards are the foundation for the grade level-specific Common Core State Standards. Each question and activity in this guide includes a reference for the CCR strand, domain, and standard that is addressed. To support instruction, also reference your grade level-specific Common Core State Standards to scaffold the questions for your students.

This study guide aligns with the following Common Core Standards for English Language Arts.

English Language Arts Standards – Writing – Grade 6

6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9

English Language Arts Standards – Writing – Grade 7

7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 7.9

English Language Arts Standards – Writing – Grade 8

8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8, 8.9

English Language Arts Standards – Speaking and Listening – Grade 6

6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6

English Language Arts Standards – Speaking and Listening – Grade 7

7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6

English Language Arts Standards – Speaking and Listening – Grade 8

8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6

English Language Arts Standards – Reading: Literature – Grade 6

6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6

English Language Arts Standards – Reading: Literature – Grade 7

7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6

English Language Arts Standards – Reading: Literature – Grade 8

8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6

FOR INSTRUCTORS Given the intense topical matter of *The Bone Sparrow*, use caution in assigning activities and assignments to your students. These are suggestions and should be used as guidelines depending on your knowledge of the particular class.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Subhi is a refugee. He was born in an Australian detention center after his mother and sister fled the violence of a distant homeland, and the center is the only world he knows. But every night, the faraway whales sing to him, the birds tell him their stories, and the magical Night Sea from his mother's stories brings him gifts. As Subhi grows, his imagination threatens to burst beyond the limits of the fences that contain him. One night, it seems to do just that.

Subhi sees a scruffy girl on the other side of the wire mesh, a girl named Jimmie, who appears with a notebook written by the mother she lost. Unable to read it herself, Jimmie asks Subhi to unravel her family's love songs and tragedies, which are penned there.

Subhi and Jimmie might both find comfort—and maybe even freedom—as their tales unfold. But each of them will have to be braver than ever before and make choices that could change everything.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

- 1 Have students research refugee camps around the world and compare their research to the world presented in the novel. How accurate is the portrayal in *The Bone Sparrow*?
- 2 Break the class into smaller research groups. Assign each group one of the following: Syrian refugee camps, Nazi concentration camps, American internment camps for Asians during World War II, Russian gulag camps under Stalin, and Native American resettlement camps. Have each group give a presentation to the entire class about its research topic. After all the presentations are finished, discuss the similarities and differences between the researched camps and the detention center in *The Bone Sparrow*.

- 3 Have students sit in a circle. Explain to them that they are in charge of maintaining the country, and that resources such as food, water, jobs, housing, transportation, and medicine are limited. (You can actually break these into units available to make it easier for students to picture: for instance, one unit of medicine will treat ten people.) Now explain that refugees are coming into the country and they must figure out how to handle the incoming people while balancing out the resources available to the country. Encourage them to find solutions beyond those demonstrated in *The Bone Sparrow*.

WRITING PROMPTS

- 1 Both Subhi and Jimmie consider stories to be important, especially stories that have been passed down through their families. Does your family have any stories that have been passed down through time? Talk to your family (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles) and see if there are tales that go back a generation or more. If you're willing, tell them to the class, or, alternately, write them out and illustrate them like a graphic novel.
- 2 Compare the stories and songs of Subhi's family and Jimmie's family. How are they alike and how are they different? The author implies that the two families have a connection in the distant past. Why would that be relevant to the events that happen in the novel?
- 3 Subhi believes the appearance of a sparrow in one's home is an omen of death, while Jimmie says it is an omen of change. Are these ideas mutually exclusive, or can the sparrow mean both things? How does the idea of the living sparrow relate to the bone sparrow in the novel?
- 4 The bone sparrow is a symbol of faith for Jimmie. She believes that it offers luck and protection to whoever wears it. Given the way events unfold in the novel, do you think it does? Why or why not? Can you think of a time when your faith in something or someone allowed you to carry on when nothing else would? Research times in history where symbols of faith allowed people to endure oppressive and harsh situations.

- 5 Who do you think has the strongest character—Subhi, Eli, Queeny, or Jimmie? Who is the most courageous? Of those four, which one would you probably become friends with and why?
- 6 Growing up in the detention center, Subhi speaks mostly English instead of his native tongue of Rohingya. He also doesn't know much about the history or culture of his people. Sometimes, when immigrants to a new country have children, their children grow up using the language and knowing the culture of their current home instead of the language and traditions of their original family home. What are the positive effects of embracing the culture they live in? What are the negative effects of losing the culture they originally come from? Is it important to stay connected to the past or is it better to look forward to the future? Why or why not?
- 7 At the end of the novel, Subhi is going to testify about the events of the riot to the outside world. His family is still in the detention center under the same conditions. Do you think his family will get to leave eventually? Do you think his testimony will create change for the detention camps and for the Rohingya as a whole?
- 8 Subhi imagines that the Night Sea washes up to the edges of the tents and leaves presents for him to discover in daylight. He can hear and even smell the sea at times. He even imagines seeing all the creatures, including the whale from Eli's story. What do you think the Night Sea represents?
- 9 The detention center is located in a dry and dusty part of the country. Places in the world that are now deserts used to be underwater as part of the oceans. Do you think the author is using the idea of the Night Sea to call attention to how the past shapes the present? Why would that be important in this story?
- 10 Do you think the story of Oto and Anka is true? Why or why not? Why do you think the author decided to include it in *The Bone Sparrow*? Other than being a favorite story of Jimmie's that her mother used to tell her, how does it relate to the main storyline?
- 11 The book's foreword states that the detention center is the only world Subhi knows. Imagine if Subhi were going to come from the detention center to live with you and your family. What sorts of things would you introduce him to and why?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zana Fraillon was born in Melbourne, Australia, but spent her early childhood in San Francisco. Zana has written two picture books for young children, a series for middle-grade readers, and a novel for older readers based on research and recollections of survivors of the Forgotten Generation. She 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.



Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

- 1 How did you first learn about the detention centers for the Rohingya? How long have they been in place in Australia?

Australia has had immigration detention centers for a long time now. What has changed however, are the policies about who gets put in the centers and for how long. As of the time of my writing *The Bone Sparrow*, any person who enters Australia by boat without a valid visa gets placed into a detention center for an indefinite amount of time. These people will never be resettled in Australia. This includes children and people who are found to be genuine refugees. In Australia, there are no specific detention centers for Rohingya refugees.

I learned about what conditions were like in the detention centers by going through lots of media articles, documentaries, photos, reports, drawings, and testimonials.



- 2 In researching *The Bone Sparrow*, did you use other detention centers, such as those for Syrian refugees, as examples, or did you rely on the Australian camps only?

I really wanted the conditions described in *The Bone Sparrow* to represent refugee camps and detention centers around the world. So, while I did base the descriptions on Australian detention centers, I was careful to make sure these were conditions that were similar in other countries as well.

- 3 Since the writing of your book, has there been any change in the detention centers for the Rohingya? Are people being processed and free to leave, or are they still in limbo?

Unfortunately, the issues and conditions described in *The Bone Sparrow* remain unchanged in Australian immigration detention centers. One of the centers is based offshore, on an island called Nauru. Recently the government has allowed the asylum seekers to leave the detention center and live on the island, but this has caused new issues and new problems for those seeking asylum. They are still being denied their basic human rights, and they are still facing extreme danger. There is still a distinct lack of adequate medical care and little, if any, access to education. They do not know how long they will be required to stay on Nauru, and what will happen to them next—they are still very much in limbo.

- 4 Do you feel that there any practical ways to help the people being kept at these detention centers?

Yes, I do. Different detention centers and refugee camps have different requirements for what can be sent and received. However, there are some great refugee charities which can help you find out what is most needed. Some detention centers allow letters to be sent and received, and this can be a great help for people. Raising money for refugees and asylum seekers is also a huge help and can provide basic necessities that would otherwise be difficult to provide.

UNHCR is the United Nations agency specifically designed to assist refugees and people seeking asylum all over the world. You can find local charities too, such as Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Australia, as well as charities for refugees in specific locations, such as Help Refugees, which assists refugees who are currently living in the “Jungle” in Calais, France.

Kelly Johnston, a former English and humanities teacher with more than a decade of classroom experience, created this study guide.

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THE BONE SPARROW

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