



# The Song That Sings Us by Nicola Davies

Teaching Notes by Eva John

# COVER

## Discussion:

What do you think the title means?

'*When animals speak, it's time humans listened.*' What do these words imply? What scenario flashes into your mind?

How do you think the animals will speak?

Which animals do you think are already good at communicating with humans?

What sort of bird is featured on the front cover, and why do you think this particular bird was chosen?

Find out more about the artist, Jackie Morris.

What is within the circle image and what do you think is its function?

## Research:

Chart different types of song and the roles the songs play in different cultures. If possible, collect audio examples.

Research and list the range of animals that can sing, remembering that "all songs are sounds, but not all sounds are songs." You might find some surprising facts.

## Creative challenge:

Collect a range of musical terms, such as *harmony, melody, discord, crescendo, diminuendo, pitch, tone, rhythm, accent, vibrato, ostinato, ascending, descending, trill, major, minor, fortissimo, morendo, silence*.

Find out what all the words mean and use them to create a poem. It could be free verse – it doesn't have to rhyme. Think about different techniques, such as rhythm, repetition, alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance and consonance.



# BLURB

## Discussion:

Predict what sort of story this will be: *'When animals speak, it's time humans listened.'*

Predict the types of character and possible plot outline, giving reasons for your opinions.

Now look at the **Contents**. Do the chapter titles give you more clues? Do you need to amend your prediction?

## Ongoing activities as you read the novel:

### Characters:

Create an alphabetical index of all the character and place names as you encounter each one in the story. What observations can you make?

Keep character profile notes in bullet form, adding relevant details as the novel progresses.

Note whether you think they belong to a particular group or culture, are a force for good or evil, or a neutral character, and whether your opinion changes.

### Plot

Map the different threads of the story as it unfolds, using colour coding.

### Author technique

Magpie examples of vivid imagery, such as simile, metaphor and personification. Think about why they are so effective.

### Vocabulary

Collect any words where you are not certain of the meaning, noting the page number. Return to clarify. Look at dictionary definitions and synonyms. Think of your own sentence using this word.



# I. Skull Gully



## Vocabulary

What is a *gully*?

## Discussion

What do you visualize when you read the words, *Skull Gully*?

Why is the name Harlon part of the chapter heading and what do you think the symbol signifies?

Compare this with other symbols as you read the book.

How is tension created in the opening?

What information are we given in the first page? Bullet point it.

## Author technique

Find the image, on page 4, which Harlon uses to describe her Ma.

Think of your own similes to evoke:

- a shy child forced to act as a voice
- a bully forced to show regret
- an artist forced to do a routine job

## Discussion

### Page 4

What sense is paramount in the description of Ma's coat?

Why do you think this sense is so important to us?

Think of a vivid memory of your own that is evoked by this sense and do a short burst piece of writing about it.

## Author technique/Creative challenge

Re-read the first two sentences beginning with 'Outside ...' Look at the type of imagery Nicola Davies has used.

**Either:**

Find a photo showing particular weather conditions. Write two sentences to capture the scene, using imagery such as personification, similes, metaphors. When you have refined your sentences, see if you can match each other's words to the correct photo.

**Or:**

Create a picture of a land or skyscape and write sentences to describe it.

## Discussion

Think of a range of different dangerous scenarios. Apply Ma's philosophy to each one. Does it work, or not?

## Creative challenge

Watch a short snowboarding film on mute. Jot down ideas that you could develop into a commentary. You might need to research some of the terminology beforehand. Refine your ideas and make an audio commentary to accompany the film.





Pages 8 and 9

## Discussion

What do you think of the way Harlon deals with her fear and sorrow?

Think of a time when you have tried or managed to overcome worry by immersing yourself in an activity, where *'time slows down and stretches.'*

Why do you think this happens?

Page 10

## Vocabulary

Think of synonyms for *'malevolent intent.'*

What does the word *'fletches'* mean?

## Creative challenge

Draw a picture or diagram of how you visualize the falcons.



## Author technique

*'Moonlight, deep shadow ...birds pursue them.'*

Read this passage closely. How does Nicola Davies build up sensations in your mind?

Create a toolkit for imitating or improvising on this piece of writing. E.g. three nouns, present tense, general comment, sense of sound and light, rhythm, repetition, alliteration, consonance. Then think of a scenario and use the toolkit to help you write up a tense situation.

## Discussion

What is the difference between listening and telling? Why do you think the listening element is important? What type of people do you think would come under the category of Automators in our current world and which as Listeners? Which are you?

## Discussion

What are the pros and cons of living in a city?  
What have we discovered during Covid 19 lockdown about the advantages and disadvantages?



## Creative challenge

Write clear instructions on how to survive an avalanche.

### Page 19

Ma's mantra: *'Don't think about what you can't change; focus on what you can.'*

What do you think of this? Can you think of any current situations where this advice would be useful?

### Page 21

## Research

Create a fact file on wolverines. What do you think the term *Gula* means?

### Page 23

## Creative challenge

**Either:**

Draw a cartoon of the character described here.

**Or:**

Create an eccentric character of your own. Think about the detail and then write a short, evocative description.



## Discussion

Why do you think the green thorn was chosen as a symbol by the rebel force?

## Creative challenge

Write a preposition poem about the island. Decide which ones are most fitting for your piece.  
Play around with order and give your imagination free reign.

*above, across, against, along, among, around, at, before, behind, below, beneath, beside, between, by, down, from, in, into, near, of, off, on, to, toward, under, upon, with, within*



## 2. Three Braids

### Harlon

#### Discussion

What observations can you make about the Automators' slogan:

*'Suspect a Listener? Speak out!'*

Do you think the Automators are representative of anyone in our society?

*'They want to cut the world to fit their shape and fill their pockets. They don't want humans listening to any voices but their own.'*

Do you think you can infer what Nicola Davies's opinion might be?

### Page 42

#### Discussion

Can you think of a time when silence was ominous? Why was that?

### Page 43 – 44

#### Drama

In groups, act out the scene, planning the positioning, thinking about facial expressions and behaviour. Start with a freeze frame and end with a freeze frame.

*'Most customers ... the back door.'*



## Discussion

What different reactions might people have, when caught by the Automators?

What words could you use to describe Harlon's character at this point? A thesaurus might extend your choice of words.

## Research

Find out about a person who has been in a perilous situation and how they coped with it. Where did they draw their strength from? What qualities and values did they show? Which qualities and values do you think are the most important combination and why?

## Discussion

Locate another of Ma's mantras. Rephrase it in your own words and discuss whether you are in full or partial agreement, or disagree totally. Can you think of any examples to support your opinion?

## Research

**Either:**

Write a set of instructions or create a film for putting on a parachute.



**Or:**

Find out about the history of parachutes.

**Or:**

Find out five fascinating facts about parachutes.

## The Gula Speaks

### Discussion

Discuss the meaning of the Gula's words in pairs, then attempt to paraphrase what the Gula is saying. What sense do you get of the Gula's character from what she says?

### Creative challenge

Find a short piece of film of an animal of your choice, research facts about the animal and jot down any observations. Create a bank of useful words and phrases, thinking about the sort of character you think your chosen creature has and play around with ideas to create your own free verse poem.

Look at the techniques Nicola Davies has used and see if you can magpie any for your writing.



### 3. Run With the Gula

Ash

Page 55 - 56

#### Discussion

Look at the way the Gula communicates.

If you could communicate with another creature, which would you choose, and why?

#### Word games

Look at the extended simile that Ash uses about communicating.

**Either:**

Create your own extended simile about something you find particularly easy to do, or particularly difficult.

**Or:**

Create your own short, abbreviated phrases to communicate observations and see if others interpret your ideas correctly.

**Pages 58-59**

## Discussion

Why do you think Xeno was frightened of the starling?

**Either:**

Think of an occasion where you regretted not having told someone a piece of information.

**Or:**

Think of a time when you have not known what decision to make. What did you end up doing?

**Page 62**

## Research

**Either:**

Find out about an area of habitat destruction and make a brief two-minute presentation on the impact.

**Or:**

Focus on the destruction of an ancient tree and evaluate the impact.



Page 64

## Creative challenge

Make an annotated diagram, indicating scale, of the giant dogs.

Page 67

## Discussion

What historical or current day parallels can you think of, where families are forcibly separated? Do you ever try to think how you would feel in their shoes? Do you think separation is ever justified?

Page 69

## Discussion

Why is the final sentence so effective?  
Can you think of any synonyms for 'Unlife'?

## The Elephant Speaks

## Vocabulary

Find out the meaning of *musth*.

## Discussion

Split into groups to read each stanza more closely.

What kind of world does the Elephant depict?

Which stanza of this poem has the most impact on you? Why do you think this is? Compare with other people.

How is the Elephant's voice different from the Gula's?

What role do you think Enklamaba will play in this story?

## 4. The Woken Forest

Harlon

Page 76 - 77

## Discussion

What do you think the meaning of the song is?

## Author technique

What do you notice about the writing style of the section beginning, 'Voices ...'

How is new information conveyed to the reader?





## Discussion

Page 78

### Author technique

Closely read the paragraph beginning, *'Harlon is inside ...'*

Which senses are drawn on in the description? Why do you think the author has focused on these?

Page 81

## Discussion

What does Harlon mean by, *'But I was not alone in the forest...not at all alone.'*

What associations do we normally make with forests and woods in fables? What examples can you think of?

Why do you think we make such associations?

Page 84

## Discussion

Do you think dreams carry meaning?

How would you interpret Harlon's dream?

**Page 87**

## Discussion

What do you think Tolly's back-story might be?

**Page 88**

## Research

What knowledge do you have about first aid?

The NHS/first aid website is a useful source of information.

Find out how to respond to one type of first aid emergency and teach others in your class.

E.g. heart attack, drowning, electric shock, poisoning, anaphylactic shock, choking, bleeding heavily, burns/scalds, fracture, shock, stroke, lack of consciousness.

**Page 90**

## Discussion

Do you think nature is capable of fighting back, when the natural world is being destroyed? How might this happen?



## Creative thinking

Map out your ideas of what you think might happen to Harlon, Tolly and Enkalamba from this point in the story.

# 5. The White Sea

## Ash

## Discussion

What/where do you think *The White Sea* is?

## Research

Find out about atmospheric pollution in different countries.

How is it caused and what are the effects?

Which countries have the worst pollution rates and why is this?

Think about ownership of natural resources. What is the driving force behind this?  
Discuss how you feel about harvesting of natural resources from Earth and outer space.

## Page 109

### Discussion

Read the two paragraphs closely, *'All day...where? where? where?'*

What facts do we learn about the tern?

Find out about another animal that migrates. How does it know how to navigate?

Ash comes back to life. *'To fearing. To grieving. To wanting.'*

What emotions do you feel life involves? Sort them into positives and negatives. Do we need both?

Why/why not?

### Creative challenge

Create a poem or piece of lyrical prose about your chosen migratory animal, incorporating facts into your writing.

## Page 111

### Drama

Create two lines of people - those in favour of trusting Mabbit, and those against.

Choose someone as Ash and, as he proceeds between the two lines, whisper your reasons for/against. At the end of the line, Ash has to decide, giving the reasons for his decision.



**Page 114**

## Creative challenge

Write a job description for a Capo, stating qualifications and qualities required.

**Page 118**

## Discussion

Where do you think Ash is, at this point in the story?

## Drama

In pairs, take it in turns to be blindfolded and led slowly around an area. How does it make you feel? What senses do you rely on?

**Page 124**

## Discussion

Think of different types of activism, through history to the current day, and the actions taken in the name of a cause. Is such action justified?

Examine definitions. When does activism become terrorism?

Where would women's rights be now if the Suffragettes hadn't taken action?

## 6. The Vampire of the Fang

### Doda

#### Discussion

Can you think of different societies where there *'are old families, with alliances running back through centuries of power and privilege.'*?

How do you think a more equitable society could be created?

Are there any examples of a more equitable society?

#### Research

Investigate the names of different high-rise buildings, e.g. The Shard, The Walkie Talkie, The Cheesegrater, The Typewriter, The Gherkin, The Toast Rack.

Choose images of buildings from the internet and create names for them, reflecting their design characteristics.

Which buildings do you know of that are important as political statements?

#### Author technique

Find the simile about the Vampire of the Fang's character. What does this indicate about him?

### Page 128

#### Discussion

What is your opinion of the analysis of plans for society?



Page 141

## Author technique

How does the author build up to this surprising denouement?

Page 143

## Discussion

Think of times when song has been important in maintaining spirits and supporting movements.  
Why do you think music has this impact?

Page 149

## Discussion

Make a prediction as to the path these characters will take in the story.

## Drama

Recreate the dialogue as a playscript and act it out in pairs.



## Spring, Seventeen Years Earlier

### Toren's Story / 1

#### Discussion

Why do you think there is a flashback at this point in the story?

### Page 154

#### Discussion

What strengths does Toren have to prepare her for this crisis?

What historical or fictional parallels can you think of, when families have betrayed each other?

### Page 157

#### Discussion

Do you think people who act in an evil way are able to detach themselves from their conscience?

What factors do you think motivate people into behaving in an evil fashion?

### Page 158

#### Survival Challenge

List, in order of priority, essential items you would take for emergency camping.





## 7. Out of the Forest

Harlon

Page 164

### Discussion

What do you think is the significance of the scene with the birds?

### Research

Find out about the different birds mentioned and create fact files.

### Creative challenge

Create a painting, drawing or collage of the scene.

Pages 168 - 171

### Discussion

How did reading about the river crossing make you feel? Was there anything that particularly surprised you? It's written in a cinematic way. Pick out a segment that you found evoked strong visual images in your mind. Compare your thoughts with each other.

### Research

Find out about incidents between elephants and crocodiles. Write up one as an online news story, or a feature for television or radio.

## Discussion

Compare and contrast the scene in the forest with the elephant graveyard scene. Why do you think the author chose to juxtapose them?

## Research

Find out more about elephant poaching: where and why it happens, how different countries respond to the problem.

Write a report or a persuasive argument to feature in a campaign to stop ivory poaching. Think about how to appeal to the general public who don't come into contact with elephants and have never considered their plight as having anything to do with them. Perhaps a true story would engage their empathy.

## Discussion

How has Tolly's character developed? Is this what you were expecting?  
Why do you think that Enkalamba sacrificed herself in this way?  
What are your reactions to this chapter as a whole?



## 8. Ice Ship

Ash

Page 189

### Discussion

Consider the arguments for and against vegetarianism/veganism.

Pages 194 - 204

### Discussion

How do you feel about events at this point?

What do you think of Amlig's philosophy? Paraphrase it.

Charting the events in this chapter, what do you find the most surprising?

Page 196

### Discussion

What other instances in film or literature can you think of, where enemies have to join forces for survival?

Look at the following extracts:

Page 195: *'Mist is blurring ...out of the shingle.'*

Page 199 - 200: *'One side ...sounds fade away.'*

Page 209 - 210: *'With a full ...Liorna sings all around us.'*





## Creative challenge

*'The creature's face looms above them, fur like fire and soot, whiskers like strands of white wire, green eyes like the aurora.'*

Choose a creature and write a short, vivid description, without naming the actual creature, using three similes. Can other people guess which animal you are describing?

## Discussion

Read William Blake's poem, *The Tyger*. What sort of imagery does he use? How well do you think that poem would fit within the themes you are encountering in this book?

## Creative challenges

Devise your own crew for a ship or vessel of your naming. Think carefully about the qualities and skills which might be of benefit to your venture.

Design a range of costumes for your crew. Think about climate, materials available and any special features required. Be as inventive as possible, annotating your sketches.

## Discussion

What is meant by, '*Liorna does not stand still.*'?

Think of an item, garment or vehicle that is '*so full of stories*' and record some of them. You could work as a group, with different individuals contributing a different story for the same thing, or it could be one person's set of stories. They could be fact-based, or pure imagination.

**Page 214**

## Discussion

Explain how the communication between Ash and the Gula fits into the theory of evolution.

**Page 217 – 218**

In groups of four, act out the scene, starting from, '*Ekar invites Ash ...*' to "*Yes,*' Ash says. '*Of course.*'"

**Page 219**

## Research

Find out about animal acts, both past and present. What are the pros and cons of circuses?  
Are circuses, in your opinion, an acceptable form of entertainment?

Do you think there is a difference between using domestic and wild animals in circus acts?  
Look at the different levels of ban that exist today across the world. Are there any surprises?

<https://www.federalcircusbill.org/briefings/worldwide-summary/>

<https://www.bornfree.org.uk/circuses>

<https://www.onegreenplanet.org/tag/circuses/>

<https://www.peta.org/features/10-reasons-attend-circus/?v2=1>

[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/douglas-mcpherson/circus-animals-10-reasons\\_b\\_6768110.Html](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/douglas-mcpherson/circus-animals-10-reasons_b_6768110.Html)

**Page 220**

## Discussion

Consider the effect Skrimshank feels words have had on him.

Discuss the power of words. Are they enabling, or can they be a source of evil?

What options do you think Ash has?

Have you ever stopped to give any thought to your life? Do you think it's an important thing to do?



## 9. The Beacon of Progress

### Doda

#### Discussion

Consider Doda's evaluation of 'Vellum's invaluable characteristics: dogged determination, cold cunning and absolute ruthlessness. He was in short, capable.'

Look up the definition of capable. Do Vellum's qualities equate with capability in your opinion? What synonyms could you use?

### Pages 225 – 6

#### Discussion

What strategies have helped to make rebellion effective in the past?

You might want to consider J.F.Kennedy's opinion:

*'Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.'*

Perhaps consider some of the following, or others that you know of:

**61: The Iceni Uprising**

**1381: The Peasants' Revolt**

**1400 -15: The Welsh Revolt**

**1536: The Pilgrimage of Grace**

**1642: The English Civil War**

**1745: The Jacobite Rebellion**

**1798: The Irish Republic**

**1838-58: The Chartist Movement**

**1903 – 1918: The Suffragettes**

**1948: The NHS and Welfare State**

**1984-5: The Miners' Strikes**

**2003: Iraq War protests**

**2010: The Arab Spring**

**2010: The Student Fees protest**

**2011: The Brixton Riots**

### Page 228

Which other buildings can you think of that are important features in works of fiction?

### Page 230

*'Rebellion, conspiracy, and fighting require one thing above all others: communication.'*

Consider current and past rebellions. In what way did the different sides communicate?

How have things changed since the use of the internet? What are the pros and cons of instant communication?

### Page 232

## Discussion

Why do you think Borden hasn't told his wife about the map?

### Page 233

## Research

Find out about deep ocean trenches and locate them on an atlas or globe.

## Discussion

What do you think motivates Doada? Why do you think he and Toren are so different, although they have been brought up by the same parents?

## Discussion

What do you imagine the finer details of Doada's plan might be at this point?

## Creative Challenge

Create a picture of the starling encircled by feathers.

## Research

Find out about the 'wood wide web' and the part that fungi play.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVK9TCXZz6I> (4:22)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un2yBgIAxYs&t=506s> (18:24)

## Discussion

Re-read Doada's broadcast. What words could be extracted as his slogan?

Do you agree that fear and greed can be used as a means of manipulation? Can you think of any examples?



**Page 242**

## Discussion

Can you think of any parallels with this weapon in history?  
Do you think Dooda's trap will work? Why/why not?

## Winter, Fifteen Years Earlier

### Toren's Story / 2

**Pages 244-245**

## Drama

**Either:**

Hot seat Keasik

**Or:**

Create a conscience alley for the pros and cons of direct action, choosing someone for the role of Qimmiq.

**Page 246**

What are your opinions on parental responsibility? Should it be expected that the woman takes on the major nurturing role?

## 10. On the Red Ship

Harlon

Page 250

Using the title, '*A clock is ticking*,' create a speech or poem on why action matters and why it should be immediate. You could use the title as a periodic refrain.

Page 259

### Discussion

Are there other instances in film or literature which the Special Project remind you of?

Page 260 - 261

### Author technique

How does the author help you to imagine what it is like on the Red Ship?

### Discussion

Do you think the incident with the bird will prove to be important? If so, in what way?



## Word game

Unusual word combinations:

Write down a word for each letter of the alphabet on a slip of paper, making them as disparate as possible. Pick three out of a hat and create an imaginary scenario, incorporating them all.

### Pages 271-276

## Discussion

How do you expect the interactions of Doda with Colt and Xena to work out?

### Page 277

*'The seeds are sown; you sowed them. The sky will hatch; you cracked it. The ocean will ring, you struck it. It has begun.'*

What do you think is meant by these words? Can you explain each sentence?

### Page 278

## Discussion

What is the significance of the thread?

Can you think of anything unusual that has significance for you or someone else?

Gather Xeno's words throughout the book and choose from them to create a poem.



## II. The Raven Tells

Ash

Page 281

### Discussion

What does the word rogue mean? What synonyms can you think of? How can a rogue be a '*good rogue*'?  
What do you think Skrimсли's back story might be?

Page 294

### Discussion

Why are Daunt's recollections of the past, connected with the raven, particularly important at this point in the story?

Page 297

### Discussion

Why is the reappearance of the snow tern also important at this juncture of the tale?

## 12. The Striped Coat

### Doda

#### Discussion

What can you infer from the word choice for this chapter heading?

### Page 307

#### Discussion

What do you think the markings on the map signify?

#### Research

Find out five fascinating facts about phosphorescence in the ocean.

### Toren's Story / 3

### Page 309

#### Discussion

What happenings in modern history does the behaviour of the Listeners remind you of?



## 13. Code

### Harlon

#### Discussion

Work out how many different occasions Harlon and Tolly have to rely on their wits and quick thinking to talk themselves out of difficult situations in this chapter.

### Page 331

#### Discussion

is there ever any justification for killing? If you think there is, can you think of some real-life examples?  
What are the advantages of partnership stealth work with Skrimсли?

### Pages 332 – 333

#### Author technique

Examine the passage that describe Skrimсли's and Harlon's attack on the guards.  
How does Nicola Davies build up the tension and convey the action?

### Page 337

#### Author technique

Why are the final words of this section so effective?



Page 338

## Discussion

What do you make of Harlon's inmost thoughts at this point?

Page 341

## Discussion

Never underestimate the importance of using punctuation accurately!

How has the meaning of Ma's words changed, by the insertion of two commas?

Investigate online other examples of how meaning can be significantly altered by punctuation and try and create sentences of your own, where you can alter the meaning with the use of punctuation.

# 14. Waking the Greenhouse

Ash

Page 345

## Discussion

*'Being is what matters.'*

Do you agree with the idea that 'because people want and want and want' terrible things happen?

Can you think of any examples?

**Page 354**

## Discussion

At various points in the action, when things seem to be going well, disaster strikes. Discuss the way in which this chapter ends. What helps to build up a sense of foreboding?

# 15. A Perfect Shot

**Harlon**

**Pages 358 – 359**

## Research

Investigate different types of windsurfer and hydrofoils and how they work.

**Page 364**

## Creative challenge

Write a short action scene. Decide who the protagonists are, where the action is set and make a rough map, working out the lie of the land, be it urban or rural. Describe what happens, thinking about all the detail and information the readers need to know if they are to visualise exactly what is happening. Think about the different senses that are involved.

Page 368

## Author technique

Look at the paragraph starting, '*Time slows...*' and the sentence that follows this.  
What has the author done? How has she achieved this?

# 16. No one Leaves

Doda

Page 370

## Discussion

Which sentence on this page sums up what is fundamentally wrong with Doda?  
What psychological terms might you use to describe a character like this?

What qualities do you think are needed for the development of decent human relationships?  
Do you think people are capable of change?



## Toren's Story / 4

Page 376 – 377

### Discussion

What effect does life on the island of Lost have on Toren?

How do you think you would cope with island life? Think about the things that we take for granted in our world.

Which do you think you really need for a 'simple and full' existence?

During lockdown during the pandemic, many people found solace in connecting with nature.

Why do you think this was?

Page 382 - 383

### Discussion

Why do you think Tui's last words are written with one word to each line?

What do you think '*Sing the world new*' means?

What makes the final paragraph particularly poignant?

## 17. Walk the Line

Xeno

Page 385 - 387

### Discussion

What do these pages tell you about the way Xeno feels and thinks? What words would you use to describe her?  
Pick out the sentence that tells you Xeno's role in this saga.

### Author technique

The style of writing at this point is poetic.

Think of an animal that you would like to be. Find out as much as possible about the animal by reading and watching films of its behaviour. Then create your own piece of poetic writing, improvising on the structure used by Nicola Davies.

*Look at your feet ....*

*Look at your arms ...*

You could finish with the line, You are yourself, or you might find that your writing goes in a totally different direction.





## 18. Worse than Dying

Ash

### Discussion

Why do you think the author chose song as the means of deliverance?

## 19. The Song that Sings Us

Harlon

Page 394

### Creative Challenge

Re-read the paragraph starting, *'It sings in voices ...'*

Create a picture, it might be abstract, to represent this scene, using a medium of your choice.

### Discussion

Do you think people mainly think in terms of *'I'* rather than *'we'*? Or is it variable?

Page 396 - 397





## Discussion

How does this poem, by William Blake, fit with the philosophy of this book?

“To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.”

— William Blake, Auguries of Innocence

What meaning do you take from the following?

*‘This is a force bigger than the sky and smaller than a grain of sand. It will not change the world forever, because that’s a work in progress. Life will always have to fight against the powers of unlife.’*

If you had been in that merging instant, who or what do you think you might have been?

## Epilogue

Doda

## Discussion

What do you think about the epilogue? Why do you think Doda is the focus at the end of this tale?

FURTHER READING, AVAILABLE TO THE RESIDENTS OF RUMYC

## Creative challenge

**Either:**

Write a blurb or a review of one of these books.

**Or:**

Take on the role of one of the authors and create an extract that might feature in one of these books.

Further considerations

## Discussion

Animals feature in an unusual way in this book. Nicola Davies is a zoologist and had no wish to anthropomorphise these characters in a Disneyesque way. Do you think she has succeeded in making them believable and capable of evoking our empathy?

In what ways has her zoological knowledge informed her writing?

The illustrator, Jackie Morris, did not draw the characters, choosing to represent the main protagonists, with symbols. She said this is because she feels that reading is a creative process, like drawing and writing, and that people conjure their own images of what characters look like. How did you envisage the different characters?

If you were to make a film, would you choose animation or live action? Give reasons for your choice.  
If you were to create a screen play, what special effects would you have to take into consideration?

Consider attitudes towards women in the novel, from the point of view of:

- different characters
- the society in the novel
- the author, Nicola Davies

Choose any one incident that has occurred in the novel and has had the greatest impact on your mind's eye.  
Compare with other people. Have you chosen differently? Why do you think you have chosen this particular episode?

## Creative challenges

Create your own imagined world, mapping different features, terrains and place names.  
People it with different races and creatures, creating fact files detailing:  
habitat, diet, life expectancy, cultural habits, customs and value systems.

Create an honour roll for all the characters who have sacrificed their lives.

## Philosophy

Climate change is a difficult, unsettling concept to come to terms with. We can be overwhelmed by the bigger picture, to the point where it immobilises us. Nicola Davies recommends '*do the bit that's in front of you, then the next and the next...as a way of planet mending.*' Every action, no matter how small, helps.

Think about small actions and decisions you can make that will help contribute towards saving the planet.



Maria Popova writes a blog called Brain Pickings, which she has recently renamed Marginalium. One comment she has made is:

*Who would we be if we relinquished our arrogant conviction that we are Earth's biological crown jewel? We extol our intelligence as the uniquely human faculty that sets us apart from other animals, but even our definitions of intelligence are narrowly anthropocentric and based on things we humans happen to be good at. Bearing this in mind, listen to the Ted Talk by Rachel Sussman, The World's Oldest Living Things.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oa82WNk0mis>

Popova comments on this:

*Life, for us as much as for those ancient organisms, is often about withstanding the uncontrollable, unpredictable, and unwelcome curveballs the universe throws our way, and that resilience comes from the dignity and humility of that withstanding.*

How has reading *The Song that Sings Us* impacted on your thinking and your view of the world?

## Some reading links

**This is How the Change Begins – Nicola Davies - Graffeg (2021) - poetry**

**Gaia Warriors – Walker (2009) – non-fiction**

**Be the Change - Liz Brownlee – Macmillan (2019) - poetry**