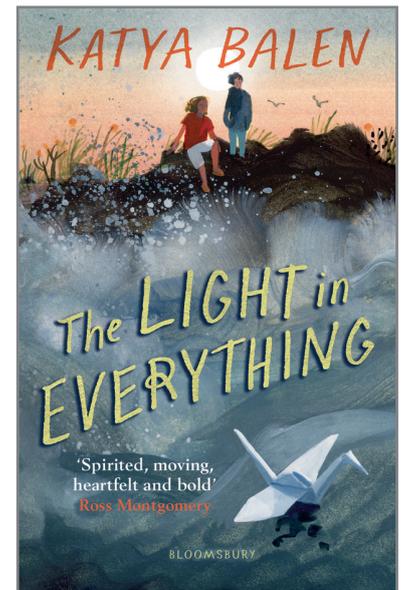


The Light in Everything



AUTH OR
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ILLUSTRATOR
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SCIS: 5412868

ISBN: 9781526647405

RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary

SYNOPSIS

This is the story of Tom and Zofia.

Tom is quiet and careful and is only just starting to feel safe, even though his dad has been in jail for nearly two years now.

Zofia is the opposite. Inside her there's a storm that's always raging and it makes her want to run and shout and fight the whole world to make it give her what she wants.

What she wants most is for boring, babyish scaredy cat Tom to get out of her life. And Tom can't think of anyone he likes less than loud, unpredictable Zofia. But Tom and his mum are moving into the little cottage by the sea where Zofia and her Dad live. Because Tom's mum and Zofia's dad are in love, and they're having a baby.

Tom and Zofia both wish with all of their hearts that the stupid baby had never happened. But then, as Tom's mum gets more and more ill, it begins to look like their wish might come true ...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katya Balen studied English at university. She is now a writer and is co-director of Mainspring Arts. Her debut novel, *The Space We're In*, was highly commended for the Branford Boase Award 2020. Her second book, *October, October*, published to critical acclaim in the same year and is the winner of the Yoto Carnegie Medal 2022. When she's not writing books or planning projects, she likes to scroll through dog-rescue websites, bake and attempt to keep all her house plants alive. She lives in London with her partner and their dogs Raffi and Mouse.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Sydney Smith has illustrated multiple children's books, including *Town Is by the Sea*, the winner of the 2017 Kate Greenaway Medal, *The White Cat and the Monk*, written by Jo Ellen Bogart, and the acclaimed *Footpath Flowers*, which was a New York Times Children's Book of the Year and a winner of the Governor General Award for Illustration. Find Sydney online at sydneydraws.ca and on Twitter and Instagram as @sydneydraws.

STUDY NOTES

- When Zofia says, 'I sometimes feel like the storm blasted its way into me' what does she mean?
- Zofia thinks that the word FERAL is her dad's favourite word to describe her. What does it mean?
- Why doesn't Tom want Mum to meet anyone? (p 37)
- Why is Zofia so angry when she meets Tom and Fiona?

- Zofia describes the water as being ‘so cold it sets me on fire’. This is a paradox. Can you explain what a paradox is?
- When Tom describes Zofia, she appears to be the exact opposite of him. Do they have any similarities?
- Zofia is reluctant to get rid of the junk. What do you think it represents to her?
- Marek describes Pablo, the dog, as ‘half idiot and half tornado’. Is this a fair description?
- What do you think Zofia sees in Tom’s eyes? (p 133)
- Tom says he has folded his feelings away for a long time. Why is this a clever description? (p 162)
- Why is Dad so keen for them to have a joint project? (p 192)
- Tom doesn’t think Zofia cares about the baby. Do you think he’s right?
- How does Tom know that putting a flag on Fiji is so important to Zofia?
- Why does everything change when Tom and Zofia share their secrets?
- Why does Zofia feel alone when she is surrounded by friends? (p 269)
- Why is Tom the bravest person Zofia knows?
- Re-read and think about the following examples of action or character interaction taken from the book. Which theme do you think each example is mainly demonstrating? Create boxes for each theme, then choose the best theme for each example and write the corresponding letter in that box. Note: You might put more than one letter in some boxes!

Themes

- Fear
- Family
- Light
- Wishes
- Belonging
- Anger.

Examples

- **A.** Zofia sees Dommo and Halima playing on the beach without her. (p 9–10)
- **B.** Tom and Zofia go to the festive market with Fiona and Marek. (p 54–55)
- **C.** Tom says goodbye to Mrs Adams. (p 75)
- **D.** Marek shows Tom his new room. (p 97–98)
- **E.** Zofia sneaks into Tom’s room when he’s at school. (p 116–118)
- **F.** Marek and Fiona show Tom the baby’s scan picture. (p 125)
- **G.** Zofia finds out that there’s something wrong with the baby. (p 147)
- **H.** Zofia shuts Tom in the cabin. (p 171–172)
- **I.** Tom impresses Zofia when they come back from the boat yard. (p 215)
- **J.** Tom, Zofia and Fiona play computer games. (p 235–236)
- **K.** Tom and Zofia share hot chocolate and truths in the middle of the night. (p 250–251)
- **L.** Zofia saves Tom from drowning. (p 294–296)
- **M.** Everyone joins together to make a thousand paper cranes. (p 310–312)
- **N.** Dad and Zofia make it to Fiji. (p 319)
 - Were there times you chose a different box to others in your group? What does this tell you about the themes?
 - Discuss with your group why you chose to put each example where you did.
 - Now write the corresponding letter for each example in ALL the theme boxes it fits into.
 - Which scene fitted in the most boxes?
- If you made a thousand cranes, what would you wish for?
- What do you think Zofia and Tom would wish for? Do their wishes change as the book progresses?
- Tom controls his fear by making things out of paper. Write some of your fears on an origami crane either using the instructions printed on the inside of the book or by scanning the QR code. Whilst making the crane, imagine it taking care of your fears and helping you deal with them.

SCAN ME FOR
PAPER CRANE
INSTRUCTIONS



- There is virtually no dialogue in *The Light in Everything*. Why do you think the author made the choice to avoid speech?
- Examine the kitchen scene on p 99–101 when Tom and Zofia’s two families become one. Tom and Fiona have just moved in with Zofia and Marek, and there is a new baby on the way. Use speech bubbles to create a dialogue between Tom and Zofia. Think about what they would like to say to each other. What would their voices be like? What words and phrases do you think they would use in this particular situation? Remember, we all choose different vocabulary for different situations depending on how we are feeling, who we are talking to and what we are talking about.
- Anger plays an important part in *The Light in Everything*, but Fiona doesn’t ever seem to get angry. Does this mean she doesn’t have anything to get angry about?
- Think about Zofia’s anger. Do you think she can help the way she behaves? Does she have reasons to act the way she does? How does she work to control her anger? What else could she do?
- Create a mind map that investigates anger. Think about some different things people can get angry about and all the different ways they show this anger. Which acts of anger are acceptable and which are not? How does one person’s anger affect those around them?
- The author, Katya Balen, uses a lot of imagery or detailed description in her writing. Use imagery and some writing tools Katya Balen has used, write a beautiful description of the seaside by the cottage. Imagine you are either looking at it through Tom’s fresh eyes or Zofia’s familiar ones. Remember to use all your senses when you are describing a setting. What would it look like, sound like, smell like and feel like to be standing by the sea? (Taste is not always appropriate, but it might be in this case as the air down by the sea has a very particular salty taste.)