

# The Raven's Song

AUTHORS

**ZANA FRAILLON AND BREN MACDIBBLE**

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Primary



## SYNOPSIS

Shelby and Davy's lives are limited to seven hundred hectares, waiting, along with the other 348 other people assigned to their seven hundred, for the earth to heal. But a hole in the perimeter fence leads Shelby and Davy out into the wilds, where they come across an abandoned city, and a lonely old man leaving desperate messages to try to save his friends.

Decades earlier, Phoenix, Walter and their sisters, are free to explore the wilds and the bog near their home. Phoenix, like his mother and his brother, has the gift of sight. When his younger brother Walter, brings home 12 raven feathers, the same day that Phoenix sees a raven standing at the foot of his bed, Phoenix knows that something bad is going to happen. But nobody could have predicted the pandemic that is about to hit, or the way it will send all of their lives spinning out of control.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Zana Fraillon is an internationally acclaimed, multi-award-winning author of books for children and young adults. Her work has been published in over 15 countries and is in development for both stage and screen. Zana was born in Melbourne but spent her early childhood in San Francisco. Her 2016 novel *The Bone Sparrow* won the ABIA Book of the Year for Older Children, the Readings Young Adult Book Prize and the Amnesty CILIP Honour. It was shortlisted for the PM's Literary Awards, the CBCA awards, the Qld Literary Awards, Vic Premier's Literary Awards, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Gold Inky and the CILIP Carnegie Medal. Zana spent a year in China teaching English and now lives in Melbourne with her three children, husband and two dogs. Find out more about Zana here: [www.zanafraillon.com](http://www.zanafraillon.com).

Bren MacDibble was raised on farms all over New Zealand, so is an expert about being a kid on the land. After 20 years in Melbourne, Bren sold everything and spent two years living and working in a bus travelling around Australia. She recently parked her bus in Kalbarri on the beautiful west coast, where she now manages a holiday villa. In 2018, *How to Bee*—her first novel for younger readers—won the Children's Book Council Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers, the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature, and the New Zealand Book Awards Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction. In 2019 *The Dog Runner* won the New Zealand Book Awards Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction. Bren also writes for young adults under the name Cally Black. Find out more about Bren here: [www.macdibble.com](http://www.macdibble.com).

**STUDY NOTES****BEFORE READING**

- Examine the front and back covers of the book. How does the raven appear on the cover? Is it comforting? Threatening? Discuss your emotional response to the book's cover illustration and compare your response to your classmates.
- Read the blurb aloud. What is the book about? What kind of story do you think this will be? Make some predictions about what you think might happen in the book based on the blurb.
- Read the folksong at the beginning of the book. Who is it about? What happens to her? Discuss the way the song makes you feel, and the tone it sets for the story.
- *The Raven's Song* is about a fictional pandemic that bears strong resemblances to COVID-19. Discuss the book in relation to your experiences of 2019–2022. How did your life change during this time? As you read consider the way your experiences are similar or different to Phoenix's experience. What would you say to someone like Shelby from the future?

**COMPREHENSION**

- After reading the book, answer the following comprehension questions:
  - How does Phoenix feel about his visions? How do his family respond when he tells them?
  - What is the first thing that strikes you as different about the way Shelby and Davy live? What would you miss if your life was contained to 700 hectares? Who/what would you want to have with you?
  - What do Phoenix and Shelby have in common? Describe their differences.
  - What is the role of the Raven Girl in the story? What do you think she would say to Phoenix if she could speak to him?
  - Why isn't Phoenix able to survive outside the pod? Is his death a sad experience? What is he able to share with Shelby before he leaves?
  - Is death seen in the story as something to be frightened of? How do each of the characters feel about death?
  - What similarities does the story make between the sacrifice of the Raven Girl and the way that Phoenix and Walter are preserved in glass pods? How are their experiences the same? How are they different?
  - What do you think the writers of the book would like us to think about the future? What kind of future do they present in the story?
  - Discuss the ending of the book—how does it make you feel? What do you think will happen next?

**AFTER READING**

- 'You see, now the city has been abandoned and now we all live in groups of three hundred and fifty people on seven hundred hectares each. It's been that way for ages. No one lives in the cities anymore. Now we all live kindly zero-pollution lives. We look after the earth and the earth looks after us.' (pp 228–229) Explain what 'living kindly zero-pollution lives' means to the people of Shelby's township. How does their view of the earth differ from our contemporary view? What sort of things might we do in the real world to 'live a kindly zero-pollution life'?
- Put yourself in the shoes of Alle as he leaves the posies that Shelby and Davy find. What do you think he hopes to achieve with the posies? What sort of things might he be thinking and feeling as he travels around the city?
- Write a letter to a future ancestor, living 100 years from now. What would you say to them about your life today? What questions would you have for them about their life? What personal items would you choose to put with the letter? Where would you leave the letter and the items?
- Search online for an article published by *The Guardian*, headlined *CliFi – A new way to talk about climate change*. In your opinion is *The Raven's Song* a good example of CliFi? Give specific events from the book to support your argument.
- Write a book review for *The Raven's Song*. Include a summary of the plot, a brief description of the main characters, a personal comment about how much you enjoyed reading the story and a rating out of 5.