

# A Small Collection of Happinesses

AUTHOR

**ZANA FRAILLON**

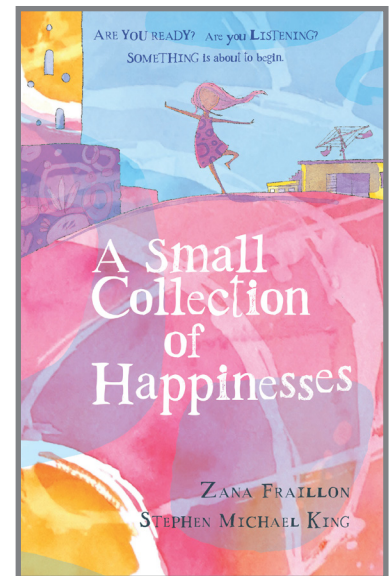
ILLUSTRATOR

**STEPHEN MICHAEL KING**

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid Primary



## SYNOPSIS

*Are you ready? Are you listening? Something is about to begin.*

When Ada arrives on the day of the Great Summer Storm, it is like the wind had picked her up and blown her in—walking stick and all—and dumped her right at the front gates of number 9 Hawkhurst Lane.

Unfortunately, Ada is not the kind of neighbour Hettie was hoping for. Cranky, impatient and a hater of cats, Ada has no intention of making friends.

But as the summer unfolds, Hettie and Ada discover they have more in common than they think. Could their unlikely friendship be the missing piece they never knew they needed?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zana Fraillon is an internationally acclaimed, multi-award-winning author of books for children and young adults. Zana's books have won the Amnesty CILIP Honour Award, the ABIA Book of the Year for Older Readers, the Readings YA Book Prize, NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the CBCA Honour Book Award. Her book *The Bone Sparrow* was chosen as the biennial book to represent Australia for the International Board on Books for Young People.

Zana was born and lives in Naarm (Melbourne), but spent her early childhood in San Francisco. She has degrees in history and teaching, and is undertaking a PhD in Creative Writing at La Trobe University.

Find out more about Zana at <https://www.zanafrailon.com/>.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Stephen Michael King has illustrated over 100 books and written many, including: *Three*, *Blueberry Farm*, *Rainbow Bear* and *Mutt Dog!*. His books are read worldwide and have won a myriad of awards, including the Prime Minister's Literary Award and the CBCA Book of the Year.

Stephen lives and shares a life with his wife, Trish. They happily live in a mudbrick house on an island that touches the Pacific Ocean.

Find out more about Stephen at [www.smkbooks.com](http://www.smkbooks.com).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (co- edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011, she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award; in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature; and in 2014, of the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.

## STUDY NOTES

- Examine the cover of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?
- After you have read the novel, examine the cover again. What does it suggest to you now?

## HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

- What is happiness?
- What makes Hettie happy? What makes Ada happy?
- Invite students to say what makes them happy or sad.
- Discuss wishes with your students. What do they each wish for?
  - Have they ever had a wish come true?
- Fairy tale creatures such as gorgons are referred to frequently in this narrative. What role does fairy tale or folktale play in this novel?
  - How do folktales and fantasy relate to or explore aspects of everyday life? How do they relate to psychological or emotional issues?
- Ada has a brainwave about the concrete garden: 'She began to wonder if they could perhaps start a garden of their own, right here. Just a small one. With vegetables maybe. "We could use some old pallets," Ada mused.' (p 70). Discuss the potential for inner city renewal like this. Are you aware of any projects like this in your suburb, town or city? Research the development of community gardens. You may wish to establish one with your students.
- The rumour that a panther is at large in Hettie and Ada's area fuels a council campaign, but also Ada's memories of her lover, Bessie and Hettie's dreams of adventure. How do urban myths originate and what do they represent?
- What does this novel suggest about the role of a family in a person's life?
- Can friends constitute 'family' in someone's life?
- This novel is full of references to memories. How do memories connect us to our lost loved ones?
- Ada tells Hettie that the bee orchid was special to her and Bessie. How does the bee orchid relate to the themes in this novel?
- Memories bind the multicultural community members who share the building and the area with Hettie and Ada. The treasured painting on the garden wall (p 155, p 160) is indicative of communal memory, as is the idea to create *The Gardens Family Cookbook* (p 180). What other community projects celebrate communal memory?

## SCIENCE

- This novel discusses a range of concepts related to biology and ecology. What scientific fact did you discover or want to know more about after reading this novel?
- Hettie tells Ada: 'The very last of a species is called an Endling. Isn't that sad?' (p 68). Research endlings or extinct creatures.

## ENGLISH

- Although focused on Hettie's point of view, the story is told in third person, allowing Ada's perspectives to be shared with the reader as well. Rewrite a segment of the novel, in first person from Hettie's perspective, and observe how this alters the narrative.
- Find examples of the below literary devices in this novel:
  - Simile
  - Metaphors

- Personification
- Aphorism
- Symbolism.
- Read the below passage and discuss the devices employed in it:
 

Hettie sat for a moment more in her bed, looking at the ripples of light turn the floor into a moonriver, then she pulled back her blanket and tiptoed to the window. She loved how everything was different at night. The bushes, the bike shed, the lone dead tree and the broken old swing below all twisted into creatures and beasts that stalked on the edge of night-knowing. Hettie imagined she could hear them rustling and growling, she imagined she could see them shuffle ever so slightly . . . and then a shadow, thick, dark and silent, broke away from the others. A real, non-imagined shadow.’ (p 25).
- Hettie and Ada are decades apart in age, but each have a very similar quirky temperament. There are several humorous incidents in the novel. What did you find most amusing?
- The structure of the story can be analysed in terms of key narrative features used to engage the reader’s attention and shape the work:
  - Strong beginnings and endings to chapters are one way of structuring a narrative, for example:
 

Beginning: ‘There was a rumour going about.’ (The Rumour (Part 1), p 92)

Ending: “I think it’s time we had a meeting with the witch!” (Treasure, p 155)
  - Which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?
- Suspense is key to any narrative’s structure. What mysteries or clues created suspense in this novel?
- Description in setting can be evoked via a complex range of literary devices. What devices did the author, Zana Fraillon, use to describe setting in this novel?
- Draw a picture of how you imagine Hettie’s building and The Gardens.
- Choose a major or minor character. Then, locate a key quote or an event that indicates the nature of that character.
- Which character was most intriguing and why?
- Make a list of Hettie’s favourite things.
- Write a diary entry by Ada about meeting Hettie.
- Write a newspaper article reporting on the successful renewal of The Gardens.
- Make a class cookbook, full of recipes and their stories.
- Make a ‘Book of Knowings’ like the one Ada writes—it could be based on advice that students get from people in their community, or equally, from the kids themselves.
- Create a nature journal (like the one Salim shows Hettie how to make).
- The title of this book refers to Ada’s small bag of ‘happineses’. What other title might the book have had?

## VISUAL LITERACY

- The illustrator, Stephen Michael King’s, work is often whimsical and features detailed line drawings. In this book, he has opted to use a very striking and abstract style, which is evocative of the themes being explored. The images at the opening of chapters are dramatic. The headers on each chapter are fluid and suggestive. Silhouettes are also used in some images. Invite students to examine the images and create one in a similar style.
- Design a new cover for this novel.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

**DR ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT AM**