

Notes for teachers and librarians on

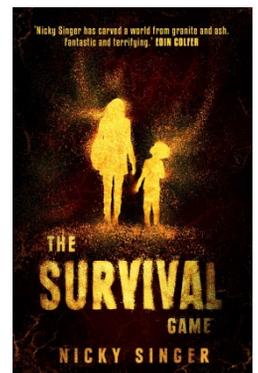
THE SURVIVAL GAME NICKY SINGER

OVERVIEW

In the wake of personal and global catastrophe, 14-year-old Mhairi is walking home to the Isle of Arran, from Khartoum. On the way she is joined by mute 6-year-old Mo. But will they make it to Arran in an increasingly hostile world, desperate for resources? And if they do, will they still be welcome?

BEFORE READING

Gather students' ideas about refugees – use the images below as discussion starters:



The Survival Game by Nicky Singer,
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BEFORE READING cont.

- Ask where do refugees/asylum seekers come from? Why do they leave their homes? What happens to them when they arrive?
- Use the following link to dispel prejudices and challenge views:
https://newint.org/sites/default/files/features/2016/01/26/ni489_refugees_infograph.jpg
- Encourage students to find out more using this link:
<http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/3b779dfe2/protecting-refugees-questions-answers.html>
- Ask students in groups to create their own set of "Rights of a Refugee."

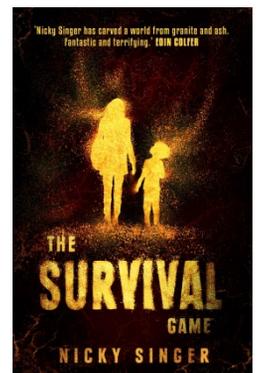
ACTIVITIES DURING/ AFTER READING

Character profiles/ collages

- Create collages of images and key adjectives for the characters of Mhairi, Peter, Grandmother, Corlinda Lee, Mo, Finola and any others you find interesting.
- Look at Papa and Muma. We never meet these characters ourselves but we hear a lot about them from Mhairi and we can infer something of their characteristics and personalities from this. Make lists of everything you know for certain about Papa and Muma, and what you can deduce about them.
- Create "top trump" cards for the characters. Award a score out of 10 for each of 5 categories. You could use these suggestions or encourage students to come up with their own:
 - Courage
 - Determination
 - Strength
 - Positivity
 - Stoicism

Students should be encouraged to justify their scores.

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Refugees and prejudices

- Collect differing views that are expressed in the novel about the refugees. You could look at:
 - The woman in Glasgow (p162)
 - Corlinda Lee (p176-206)
 - Grandmother
 - Peter
 - Mhairi
 - InGen council.
- Create a "moral bus stop" out of the collected views where the ones readers agree with most are placed at the left hand edge, moving to those disagreed with most at the right hand edge. Discuss the views – link to pre-reading research/discussions.

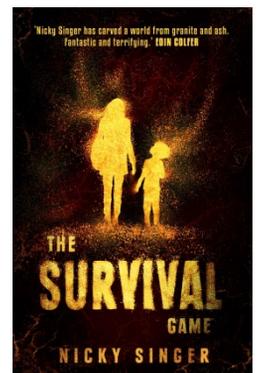
Creative Response

Mo does not have a voice in the novel, but he is the only other ever-present character. Imagine how the story (and Mhairi) might look from his point-of-view. Try rewriting key chapters from his perspective. Chapters 1, 26, 55 and the trial would work especially well.

Drama Response

Before students read the trial (Chapters 98-end) they could act out how they think it will fall out based on their knowledge and understanding of events and characters in the novel. Create groups to work on what Mhairi, Peter, the InGen council and expert witnesses might say and then play out the trial. See how it compares with what actually happens. Which outcome do your students prefer and why?

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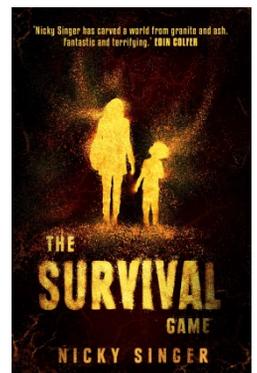
Language

- In Chapter 72 ("Words"), Mhairi says that there are words that "slide and ones that don't". What do you think she means by this? Look at the words that she places in each category – could you add any others? You could create a dictionary of "sliding" words giving different definitions "depending on who's in charge". This is also an interesting topic for discussion – ask students what they think Mhairi means in this chapter.
- In Chapter 1 Mhairi introduces the idea of "Castle". What is castle? How effective do you find this metaphor? What else might she have called it and how might the connotations change as a result?
- Description and language choices. There are several passages in the novel that would suit some close language analysis. Try these:
 - *Chapter 49* – The Tomb of Colin Dunlop
 - *Chapter 18* – Storm
 - *Chapter 75* – The Leuchram Burn

Global Warming and Climate Catastrophe

- Although climate change is at the centre of the novel, it is never explicitly mentioned as the reason for Mhairi and Mo heading to Scotland. Find out some of the arguments around climate change. Look at the Friends of the Earth website as a starting point.
- Produce information leaflets about steps people can take to reduce their impact on the climate.
- Create infographics to show the impact of climate change on people, places, environment, animals.
- Write persuasive letters around a local or national climate or environmental issue.

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Further ideas

- Create a new cover for the novel and explain your choices – perhaps incorporate a Dragon's Den type task to "sell" the new cover to the publishers, author, agent etc.
- Storyboard the crossing of the river into Scotland scene; or the ending; or the desert kiosk incident. Include ideas about sound/music/camera angles.
- Create a poster for the film of the book – who would you cast in the key roles and why?
- Read some news stories about Syrian refugees fleeing civil war.

READING GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you make of the central character, Mhairi? Some of her actions are cruel and violent, but she also ends up caring deeply for Mo. Is her behaviour simply a means to survive?
1. What do you think of Nicky Singer's depiction of the world in the face of a global climate catastrophe? It seems to be a world where people have become very selfish. Do you think Singer's presentation of the world and people is optimistic, pessimistic or realistic?
1. How do you respond to the ideas in the story about belonging and outsiders? Do you think the attitudes shown towards Mo and Mhairi by certain people are understandable or fair? What reasons can you give for your answers?
1. Which characters in the story do you: admire?; sympathise with?; dislike? Why? How does the writer use situations, actions and words to shape your response to the characters?
1. In what ways has the world changed in Nicky Singer's story? Think about the climate; attitudes to refugees; justice; and ideas like "taking the needle". How different is it for our world?

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