

## LEARNING RESOURCES – DAVID ALMOND

## IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING...

## EXTRAORDINARY ACTIVITY:

BIRDBRAIN AMONG THE BRANCHES

Visual displays are often a great way to reinforce discussion points and this activity asks pupils to discuss, read, create and draw.

The purpose of the exercise is to get the children to recognise the significance of the bird motif in the story and to see how Mina fits into this. Start by discussing the many types of bird. (see table Additional Resource 2). Which ones can they remember? Ask the pupils to think of any associations they have with any of those birds – e.g. owls associated with wisdom, the night, bird of prey, hunter etc. Give each group the table and ask them to discuss then research the symbolism/associations of that bird. This may be a good homework task. Each group presents their findings and adds them to the table.

Then as a whole class think about MINA. How is she like a bird. What aspects of the birds in the story also apply to her? E.g. wants to fly like a lark, (literally? In what sense?), sits in a tree? Seems to rise above her peers (e.g. squawks from the tree to Sophie and others)? More comfortable in the night? Relationship with Whisper? Like a chick herself, fledgling child – growing up.

Create through **collage** or painting a large tree (wall size) – draw plenty of branches. Pupils in small groups can take a bird template (Additional Resource 5) or draw an outline of a specific bird. Once cut out, write on the key words associated with the bird and stick the shape onto a branch. Another group could prepare a collage of the nest with 3 green/blue eggs. Another group should prepare a collage of Mina sitting. Try to remember details (e.g. pale skin, black

hair) to be accurate. Create a book to place in her hands. In the book write all the words which also apply to Mina. Perhaps draw a skeleton of a bird or the archaeopteryx. Discuss the relevance of these in the story – links to the past/survival of a cataclysmic event? How do these ideas relate to Mina?

The final display will cement the **symbolic meaning of the birds** and Mina's attachment to them. Read the last few pages again. Notice the references to 'chick', 'fledgling', 'making a first flight' – discuss with the pupils the part that the bird imagery adds to the meaning of Mina's first 'flight' from her tree to make a new friend.

*ART EXA 2-03A/2-04A; READING LIT 216S/316S; ENG 219V/319V; DISCUSSION 209J*

## EXTENSION/HOMEWORK

## Primary or Secondary School

Write a character study of Mina. Try to describe her struggle to fit in to an ordinary school and how like a bird she seems to be. Explain the ending in detail and the way in which the author portrays her like a chick taking her first flight.

*ENG 219V/319V; LIT 328 AF*

## Secondary School

Write an essay on the use of symbolism in My Name is Mina. Explore the many symbols (Persephone, Whisper, eggs, nests) in the story, especially the symbolic references to birds. Try to explain how the writer links Mina's 'journey' to the emergence of a chick from an egg.

*ENG 319V/419V*