



Zandi's Song

Author: Zandile Ndhlovu

Illustrator: Katlego Keokgale

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The Otto Foundation Children's Book Award

Picture Book Shortlist

Zandi's Song is an empowering and inspiring tale that dives deep into the magical connection between humans and the natural world. Zandi dreams of the big blue ocean, imagining the vibrant fish and colourful coral reefs, even though she lives far from the sea and has not yet learned to swim. One day, the ocean gives her a life-changing gift and she embarks on an incredible adventure beneath the waves.

Transformed into a mermaid, Zandi explores the underwater world with wonder, meeting fascinating sea creatures and discovering the beauty of marine life. But amidst the enchantment, a dark threat looms over the ocean, and Zandi realizes that her mission is to protect this fragile, magical world. The key to saving it may lie in ancient stories from the past - tales that can teach us how to care for the planet today.

Written by South Africa's first Black female freediving instructor, Zandile Ndhlovu, *Zandi's Song* carries an urgent message of conservation and environmental stewardship.

Teaching notes

These notes have been written by the Otto Foundation to provide teachers and caregivers with ideas to develop reading comprehension and support literacy skills. They encourage deep reading of the text and illustrations, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, not just one sitting.

These notes have been written with Grade R, 1, 2 and 3 readers in mind, but teachers and caregivers will need to adapt them to the age and experience of their readers.

Themes

- Conservation
- Adventure
- Empathy
- Courage
- Folktales
- Teamwork

Before reading the story

- Open up the discussion by allowing the children to share their initial responses to the front cover of the book. Encourage them to discuss what they see and their responses to it.
 - *What do you notice about the cover illustration?*
 - *What does the cover illustration make you think about?*
 - *How does the cover illustration make you feel?*
 - *What do you like most about the cover illustration?*
 - *Name the different animals on the cover.*
 - *Who do you think the different people on the front cover are?*
- Explain that the title of the book is **Zandi's Song**. Ask the children to share their thoughts about the title.
 - *Who is **Zandi**? What is unusual about her?*
 - *What do you think Zandi might sing a song about?*
 - *What do you think might happen in this story?*
- Read the back cover blurb aloud. Explore how your children may change their ideas about the story now that they have more information.
 - *How does reading the back cover blurb change what you thought might happen in the story?*
 - *What does Zandi dream about?*
 - *What **special gift** do you think Zandi might receive?*
 - *What is the **natural world**? Share some examples of the **natural world**. What type of things do you think might threaten the **natural world**?*
 - *What is a **mermaid**?*

Reading aloud discussion points

- On pages 1 – 2 we meet Zandi.
 - *Describe what is happening in the illustration on pages 1 – 2.*
 - *What was Zandi always thinking about?*
 - *What did Zandi dream about at night?*
 - *Sometimes Zandi dreamed about waves pulling her to **lands unknown**. What does **lands unknown** mean? What examples of **lands unknown** can you think of?*
 - *What did the ocean whisper to Zandi?*
- Zandi visits the ocean for the first time on pages 3 – 4.
 - *Zandi was **scared** when she first got to the ocean. Why did Zandi feel **scared**? How can we stay safe when we visit the ocean?*
 - *Do you think Zandi should trust the ocean will not harm her? Why or why not?*
 - *Look carefully at the picture on page 3. What do you notice about the ocean?*
 - *Describe what Zandi saw when she dipped her feet into the water.*
 - *What does it mean to feel **belonging**? Why did Zandi feel she **belonged** when she put her feet in the ocean? Where do you feel like you **belong**?*
- On pages 5 – 6 Zandi transforms into a mermaid.
 - *Describe what is happening in the illustration on page 6.*
 - *What gift did the ocean offer Zandi to help her swim faster?*

- Point to your **toes**, your **legs** and your **belly buttons**.
 - Zandi's legs started **tingling**. What does **tingling** mean? Why do you think Zandi's legs started to **tingle**?
 - Would you have trusted the ocean like Zandi did? Why or why not?
- Zandi receives more gifts from the ocean on pages 8 – 9.
 - What did the ocean do to Zandi's afro?
 - Who did Zandi's braids remind her of?
 - Who do you think the women from Zandi's family in the illustration on page 8 might be? (grandmother, mother, sister, aunt or cousin)
 - The ocean gave Zandi a bracelet to remind her of her **lineage**. What is **lineage**? (your ancestors and the people you come from). What was Zandi's **lineage**? What is your **lineage**?
 - What superpower did Zandi have if she tapped her bracelet twice. If you had a bracelet from the ocean, what superpower would you want it to give you?
- On pages 10 – 11 the ocean explains to Zandi why she has been waiting for her.
 - What name did the ocean ask Zandi to call her? (Maya)
 - Why do you think Zandi was **surprised** that Maya had been waiting for her?
 - Compare the illustration of Zandi on page 1 to page 10. How has Zandi changed?
 - What story did Zandi remember her grandmother telling her?
 - Why do you think the man warned the village to stop throwing rubbish into the river? Why is it wrong to throw rubbish into rivers?
 - Zandi had been chosen to **protect** the rivers and ocean. What does it mean to **protect** rivers and oceans? Do you think Zandi will be able to **protect** the rivers and oceans? Why or why not?
- On pages 12 – 13 Maya begins to show Zandi the wonders of the ocean.
 - What animals can you name in the illustration on pages 12 – 13? (sea turtle, stingray, fish, jellyfish and starfish)
 - How do you think Zandi felt swimming with Maya? Why do you think this?
 - Maya explained to Zandi that **we are all one**. What does it mean that **we are all one**?
- Maya and Zandi experience the effects of pollution on the ocean from pages 14 – 15.
 - A **current** swept Zandi and Maya along. What is a **current**? Why should we be careful of **currents** in the ocean?
 - Compare the illustrations on pages 12 – 13 and pages 14 – 15. How are they different?
 - What is **trash**? Name the **trash** in the illustration on pages 14 – 15. Describe the effects of this **trash** on the ocean.
 - Where does Maya explain that all the trash has come from?
 - How do you think Maya and Zandi felt swimming through the trash? What makes you think this?
- On pages 16 – 17 Maya and Zandi arrive at the Umkhomazi River (the place of whales).
 - Why do you think Maya and Zandi could move so quickly through the ocean?
 - What was the name of the river Maya brought Zandi to?
 - What do you notice about the colour of the water flowing under the bridge in the illustration on page 17? Why do you think the water is this colour?

- Maya tells Zandi the story of Umkhomazi on pages 18 -21.
 - How would the villagers celebrate the whales arriving each year?
 - What did the whales feel safe enough to do when they visited Umkhomazi?
 - What is **drought**? How did the whales take care of the villagers during a **drought**?
 - What does it mean when a whale **beaches** itself?
 - Why do you think the villagers had a strong relationship with the whales? Do people have strong relationships with whales now? Why or why not?
 - How did the dolphins help the villagers?
 - When the **strangers** from faraway places arrived the villagers had to move **inland**. What is a **stranger**? What does it mean to move **inland**?
 - Do you agree with the way the strangers treated the whales? Why or why not?
 - The whales still return every year to **mourn** the family they lost. What does it mean to **mourn**?
 - Zandi cried after hearing the story of Umkhomazi. What do you think made Zandi feel so sad? Have you ever heard a story that made you feel sad? What was the story about?

- On page 22 – 23 Zandi meets a whale.
 - When the whale appeared, Zandi looked at in in **awe**. What does **awe** mean. Why do you think Zandi looked at the whale in **awe**?
 - What is the biggest animal you have ever seen?
 - What is the special word for where a whale breathes from? (blowhole)
 - Would you ever swim up to a whale like Zandi did? Why or why not?
 - When the whale started singing the song **vibrated** into Zandi's heart. What does **vibrated** mean? How do you think Zandi knew the song was beautiful, even though she could not understand the words?
 - What did Zandi do to help her understand the whale's song?
 - Describe what is happening in the illustration on page 23.

- Zandi swims underwater with the whale and listens to its song on pages 24 – 25.
 - What are **hard times**? What do you think the **hard times** the whale has experienced are?
 - What do you think the **big task** ahead of Zandi is?
 - What is the special word the whale told Zandi to call if she needed help? Uthandiwe – you are loved)
 - Zandi promises to **protect** the whales home. What does it mean to **protect** something? What do you think Zandi can do to help **protect** the ocean?
 - What do you think Zandi and the whale are saying to each other in the illustration on page 25?

- Zandi says goodbye to the whale and Maya on pages 26 – 27.
 - Why do you think Zandi was feeling so tired?
 - What were the words of the whale's song that made Zandi smile?
 - What message does Maya ask Zandi to share?
 - Where can Zandi find Maya if she needs her?
 - Look at the illustration on page 27. How do you think Zandi feels giving Maya a hug goodbye? Do you think Zandi will see Maya again? Why or why not?

- On pages 28 – 30 Zandi returns home.
 - *How does Zandi travel so quickly from the ocean back to her home?*
 - *What is Zandi looking forward to sharing with the people on land?*
 - *What did Zandi learn about protecting the ocean?*
 - *Do you think people will listen to Zandi's song and her message? Why or why not?*
 - *What did Zandi dream about as she slept?*

Topics for discussion after reading the story

- Ask your children:
 - *What did you like most about this story?*
 - *What did you learn from reading this story?*
 - *If you were writing this story, what would happen to Zandi next?*
 - *Who do you think should read this story next and why would you recommend it to them?*

Activity ideas for after reading the story

- Brainstorm ideas with your children on how to protect the environment. Ask them to draw a picture or write a sentence of one way they will help to protect the environment. Create a collaborative display with their contributions.
- Ask your children to design and write about their own superpower bracelet.
 - *Draw a picture of your superpower bracelet*
 - *What superpower does your bracelet give you?*
 - *How will you use this superpower?*
- Ask your children to draw themselves as a mermaid. Use foil, glitter or metallic pens to add sparkle to their scales.
- Encourage your children to explore the non-fiction section of the library to find out more about the following sea animals:
 - *Whale*
 - *Dolphin*
 - *Jellyfish*
 - *Sea turtle*
 - *Starfish*
 - *Stingray*

Please see the following pages for Grade specific CAPS aligned skills covered in these teaching notes.

CAPS skills covered in teaching notes

Listening and speaking

Grade R

- Listen to stories
- Listen and respond to simple questions
- Listen without interrupting
- Talk about pictures
- Participate in discussion and asks questions
- Ask questions
- Give explanations

Reading

Grade R

- Use pictures to predict what a story is about
- Predict what will happen in a story through pictures
- Recognise and point out common objects in pictures
- Interpret pictures
- Make up own story by 'reading' pictures
- Pretend to read
- Make links to own experience when reading with teacher
- Discuss and describe characters in a story
- Describe characters in stories and give opinion
- Answer questions based on the story read

Listening and speaking

Grade 1

- Listen to and express feelings about a story
- Listen without interrupting, taking turns to speak and asking questions of clarification
- Respond to pictures
- Listen to stories with interest and enjoyment, drawing on a picture to show understanding
- Listens for the detail in stories
- Talk about personal experiences and feelings
- Answer closed and open-ended questions
- Participate in discussions

Reading

Grade 1

- Develop book handling skills (holding the book and turning pages correctly)
- Uses book cover to predict what a story is about
- Use pictures in the book for understanding
- Make up own story by 'reading' pictures
- Discuss a story identifying main idea and characters
- Ask questions related to a story told and read
- Recognise cause and effect in a story
- Give an opinion on what was read
- Answer open-ended questions based on text read
- Interpret information from pictures

Listening and speaking

Grade 2

- Listen to stories and answer higher-order questions
- Listen to a story with enjoyment and answer questions related to the story
- Listen to stories for a longer period with enjoyment
- Listen without interrupting showing respect for the speaker
- Use ever increasing vocabulary when answering questions
- Understand and use appropriate language in context
- Ask questions and comments on what was heard
- Talk about personal experience
- Express feelings about a story

Reading

Grade 2

- Read books as a class with teacher
- Use the cover of a book to predict what a story is about
- Use pictures in the book for understanding
- Identify key details in what was read, such as main characters and setting
- Express whether a story was liked and justify response
- Express personal response to a text read
- Give opinion on what was read
- Answer open ended questions based on text
- Answer higher order questions based on text read
- Recognise cause and effect in a story
- Describe main ideas in a text
- Identify key details in what was read

- Answer closed and open-ended questions and justify answers
- Participate in discussions, asking and answering questions and suggesting ideas

- Discuss different cultures represented in a story

Listening and speaking

Grade 3

- Listen for main ideas and detail in stories
- Listen to story for cause and effect
- Ask questions for clarification
- Express feelings and opinions about text and gives reasons
- Talk about personal experiences
- Answer open-ended questions and justify answer
- Answer higher order questions based on text
- Participate in discussion
- Engage in conversation as a social skill, accepting and respecting the way others speak
- Listen without interrupting

Reading

Grade 3

- Read books as a class with teacher
- Discuss main idea, characters, plot and 'problem' in a text
- Answer a range of higher order questions based on text
- Express whether a story was liked and justify answer
- Interpret information from pictures
- Use illustrations in text to increase understanding