

The Lightning Bird

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Publisher: Pan Macmillan

The Otto Foundation Children's Book Award 2026
Chapter Book Shortlist

Timo has a strange talent. Since he was little, he has been able to talk to animals. Well, sort of. When he and his pet rat, Lucky, make news headlines, it is the start of a wild adventure - the kind of adventure that Timo has only read about in books. Why is a world-famous billionaire suddenly after him? And what breathtaking secret is she hiding on her private island?

- Pan Macmillan

Teaching notes

These notes have been written by the Otto Foundation to provide teachers and caregivers with ideas to develop text 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 4, 5, 6 and 7 readers in mind, but teachers and caregivers will need to adapt them to the age and experience of their readers.

Themes

- Family and identity
- Community
- Friendship
- Environmental conservation
- Courage
- Overcoming prejudice

Before reading the story

- Open the discussion by allowing the children to share their initial responses to the front cover of the book. Encourage the children 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?*

- Explain that the title of the book is **The Lightning Bird**. Ask the children to share their thoughts on the book cover.
  - *What kind of book do you think this is going to be, based on the title?*
  - *Is a* **lightning bird** a real bird*?*
  - *What do you think the girl and boy on the cover will do in the story? What makes you think that?*
  - *Where do you think book takes place? What makes you think that?*
  - *What do you think might happen in this book?*

- Read the back cover blurb to the children. Explore how they might change their ideas about the story now that they have more information.
  - *How does reading the blurb change what you think might happen in this book?*
  - *What do you think the boy and girl might do in the story?*

Reading aloud discussion points

Chapter 1

- *What is the rat doing that is so unusual?*
- *What are stories* **in which talking animals throw tea parties and go on outings** *called?*
- *What is the rat's name?*
- *How can you tell the words that Timo is saying* **in his head** *from the words he speaks out loud to his uncle? How are they written in the story?*
- *How do you know that* **Uncle Adam** *is a hard worker?*
- *Who is the main character?*
- *What is one* **advantage** *to living in a scrapyard? Can* **Timo** *think of any other advantages?*
- *Describe Timo's relationship with* **Uncle Adam***. How do you know that* **Uncle Adam** *is nice to him and loves him?*
- *How is* **Uncle Adam** *related to* **Timo's** *father?*
- *Do you think that* **Uncle Adam** *and* **Timo** *have a lot of money? What makes you think this?*
- *Who is* **Mr Stevens***? Do you think Mr Stevens is a good person? What makes you think this?*
- *Mr Stevens is* **convinced that everyone at the scrapyard was trying to steal from him**. *Do you think that this is true? What does it mean to* **sack** *someone?*
- *Did* **Uncle Adam** *want to set out the rat traps? What word tells you why he did it?* (forced)
- *What made* **Timo** *cry?*
- **Uncle Adam** *says that Timo's mother* **had a special knack with animals**. *What does this mean?*
- The word **inherited** means that something has been passed down to you from someone older in your family. For example: "You inherited your father's brown eyes." *What does* **Uncle Adam** *say* **Timo inherited** *from his mother?*
- *What do you think happened to* **Timo's** *parents?*
- *Where did Timo find* **Lucky***? How old was* **Lucky** *when* **Timo** *found him? How did* **Timo** *care for Lucky when he found him?*
- *Why do you think* **Timo** *named the rat* **Lucky***?*
- *What did* **Uncle Adam** *tell* **Mr Stevens** *to avoid setting any more rat traps?*

- *The man at the gate says* **"erm"** *a lot. What does this tell you about how he is feeling? Do you think he is confident?*
- *Why is* **Junior Davids** *at the scrapyard? What does he want to talk to the owner about?*
- *Do you think that* **Mr Stevens's** *scrapyard is selling illegal electric cables? Why do you think this?*
- *When* **Junior** *holds out his finger to Lucky, the rat* **sniff-sniffed** *it. What is the effect of repeating the word* **sniff***?*
- *There is* **oil** *on Junior's hands after shaking hands with Uncle Adam* **but it didn't seem to bother him**. *What does this tell you about the kind of person Junior Davids is?*
- *Junior asks Timo about Lucky's tricycle. When Timo explains, Junior says* **How on earth do you do that?** *What do you think is so surprising to Junior about the situation?*
- *Why do Junior's eyes* **sparkle** *when he learns about Lucky's trick?*
- The word **muttered** describes the way that Junior spoke. When you **mutter**, you speak very quietly and not very clearly, usually with your mouth almost closed. People often mutter when they are grumpy, embarrassed, or saying something they don't really want anyone to hear. *Can you* **mutter** *the word* **incredible***? How is it different to simply saying it in your normal voice? When would you* **mutter** *a word?*
- *What did Junior do without Timo and Uncle Adam's permission?*
- *Junior shows Timo a video. Explain what Timo is doing in the video. What does* **hypnotised** *mean?*
- *What does it mean to be* **uncertain***? Why is Timo feeling uncertain? Who does he turn to when he feels this way? Do you have a trusted adult to turn to when you feel uncertain?*
- *Why is it important to note that Timo found Lucky* **in an empty fish tin***? How does it change the reason you thought Timo named him Lucky?*

Chapter 2

- *Why was Timo* **tossing and turning** *that night?*
- *The journalist was at the scrapyard to follow a different story to Timo and Lucky. What was it? Why do you think the journalist forgot about it?*
- *What else was keeping Timo up at night? Why did it give him* **a knot in his tummy***?*
- *Why does Uncle Adam refuse to take time off work? Is Mr Stevens a supportive employer?*
- *What two positive things does Uncle Adam say come from his job at the scrap yard? Does Timo think that this is enough? Do you think it is enough?*
- *How do you know that Timo should not be reading at this time of night? What does he do to hide his reading from Uncle Adam?*
- *Timo is reading* **The Secret of the Jungle**. *What is it about? What is unusual about Timo's copy of the book?*
- *Were Timo's parents alive when Timo first found the book? How do you know this?*
- *Something arrived at the scrapyard that reminded Timo of his parents. What was it? What happened to Timo's parents?*
- *Did Uncle Adam understand what Timo would be thinking when the kombi arrived? How do you know?*
- *How long has it been since Timo's parents died? If Timo is 12 years old now, how old was he when his parents died?* It has been six years. Timo was six years old when they died.
- *How does Timo feel when he misses his parents? Do you miss someone who has died? How does your body feel when you miss them?*

Chapter 3

- *What kind of mood is Mr Stevens in? Do you think he is often in a bad mood? How do you know this?*
- *Think about the times that you are in a* **super-duper extra-bad mood**. *What are the signs?*
- *What does Uncle Adam usually do on a Saturday?*
- *How do you know that Mr Stevens has read the newspaper article about Timo and Lucky? Do you think he is pleased about the newspaper article?*
- *Mr Stevens's finger is described as a* **pork sausage finger**. *What do you think a* **pork sausage finger** *looks like?*
- *What word tells you that Mr Stevens is shouting at Timo and Uncle Adam?* (roared)
- The headline says: **LUCKY THE SCRAPYARD RAT ASTOUNDS WITH CLEVER TRICKS**. *What does* **astound** *mean? What about this headline do you think has made Mr Stevens upset?*
- *Timo* **squeaked timidly**. *Why is* **squeaked timidly** *an interesting choice of words, considering what they are talking about?*
- *Why do you think Mr Stevens asks Timo to show him Lucky's trick? Do you think this was honest or fair? Why do you think that?*
- *Lucky is* **terrified** *but seemingly unharmed.* **A wave of relief** *washes over Timo, followed by* **something else**. *What is the* **something else***?*
- *Why do you think Lucky does not* **hesitate** *to attack Mr Stevens?*
- *How does Timo feel after the* **wave of anger***? How do you feel after you have gotten really angry and calmed down again?*
- *What does* **the last straw** *mean?* It is the one final thing that makes a person lose their patience completely.
- *Timo is* **dumbfounded**. *What does* **dumbfounded** *mean?* **Dumfounded** means you are so o shocked or surprised that you cannot speak or move for a moment. *Do you think he expected Mr Stevens to get so angry?*
- *Do you think Timo regrets getting so angry with Mr Stevens? Why do you think this? Could he have handled the situation better? How could Mr Stevens have handled the situation better?*

Chapter 4

- *What does it mean if someone has a* **lump in their throat***?* When you have a **lump in your throat** you have a tight, uncomfortable feeling you get when you are trying not to cry.
- *Timo has lived here and in* **a house on a plot outside the city**. *Who do you think he lived there with? What happened to that house?*
- *The fourth paragraph starts with the word* **fortunately**. *What is fortunate about the situation? What has Uncle Adam made sure they will have for the next few months?*
- *Why do you think Uncle Adam insists that they* **thoroughly clean the house***? What does this say about Uncle Adam as a person? Did Timo agree with this? What would he have preferred to do?*
- *Why does Mr Stevens show up early for work on Monday? Do you think he will miss Uncle Adam? Why do you think this?*
- *What does Uncle Adam call Mr Stevens before they leave? Why do you think he calls him this as they are leaving?* Uncle Adam calls Mr Stevens by his first name because he is no longer employed by him and no longer cares about being respectful. They are now equals in life.

- *The woman who gets out of the* **black Jeep** *is polite to Mr Stevens. Does he return her politeness? What does the* **tall man** *say to him about his attitude?*
- *Mr Stevens says to the man:* **"… who scrawled all over you with marker pens?"** *Why do you think Mr Stevens describes the man this way?*
- *What does the woman call the tattooed man? Do you think* **Chef** *works for the woman? Why do you think this?*
- **Chef** *tips a bin over Mr Stevens. How did it make you feel when you read that part of the story?*
- *How do you know that the woman is not angry with* **Chef** *about what he has done to Mr Stevens even though she scolds him?*
- *Timo says that he gets Lucky to do tricks with* **patience** *and* **peanuts***. Does the woman believe him?*
- *How does Timo describe the feeling he gets when he concentrates hard to speak to Lucky?*
- **Chef** *says about Mr Stevens* **"Apologies. I had to take the trash out."** *Explain the joke.*
- *We learn that the woman's name is* **Kayah***. What does Timo show Kayah that seems to help her come to a decision?*
- *What does* **Kayah** *promise Timo at the end of the chapter? (*a real-life adventure)

Chapter 5

- *Why is* **Kayah Kunene** *described as* **a human whirlwind***. Do you know a person who is a* **human whirlwind***? What kinds of things do they think, say or do? Is it a good or bad thing to be a* **human whirlwind** *(or perhaps both)?*
- *Why had Uncle Adam never heard of* **Storm Island***? Where is it? Name a language that is spoken by local people in* **Mozambique***.*
- *Why did Timo's tummy flip-flop? When did you last feel excited? How did your body feel?*
- *How do you know that* **Kayah Kunene** *is very wealthy?*
- *How does Timo find out more about* **Kayah Kunene***?*
- *The article that Timo clicks describes Kayah as a* **tycoon***. What is a* **tycoon***?* A **tycoon** is a very rich and powerful person who runs a large business. *What businesses are run by* **Kayah Kunene***?*
- *Kayah's son,* **Kagiso***, used to be the CEO (Chief Executive Officer - it means that he was the boss) of her businesses. What happened to him?*
- *Chef seems to have many jobs. List the jobs you have read about him doing so far.*

Chapter 6

- *Who is* **Nina***? What does Timo call her when they first meet? What does* **Nina** *say?*
- *What tasks have been done for Timo that he expected to do for himself?*
- *What does Timo find on his pillow? How do you think Timo feels about the gift?*
- *Timo has only ever read up to page 244 of* **The Secret of the Jungle***. Why is Timo* **undecided** *about where to start reading? What would you do?*
- *Why does Timo get a* **weird creepy-crawly sensation***? How does he know that there is a person* **spying** *on him?*
- *How did* **Kenzi** *get high enough to* **spy** *on Timo on the second floor?*
- *How would you describe* **Kenzi** *as a person? Describe why you do or do not like about her.*

- *Why is Timo surprised to see another young person on the island? Why is* **Kenzi** *on the island?*
- **Kenzi** *says* **"You don't know yet, do you?".** *What does she mean? Do you think she is excited to be the one to tell Timo? How do you know?*

Chapter 7

- *Timo has been living at the scrapyard for six years. Why is this relevant now?*
- *Kenzi had shown them a map. Judging by the* **dense trees** *and* **footpaths** *that they are walking through, are they on the southern side or the northern side of the island?*
- *How do you know that the area they have come to is dangerous?*
- *Timo has* **butterflies in his tummy**. *What does it meant to have* **butterflies in your tummy?** *How do you think Timo is feeling?*
- *Is the fact that there are* **two fences** *more or less worrying? Explain why you think so.*
- *Kenzi insists that Timo needs to see what they are there for* **with his own two eyes**. *What tells you that Timo is feeling annoyed with her? What does he want her to do?*
- *How does Kenzi do school? What does it mean to be* **homeschooled***?* Homeschool means that you study online or at home and that your parents teach you the curriculum, instead of going to a school with teachers and other learners. *Why does Timo understand that Kenzi does not* **miss other kids***? If you were* **homeschooled***, would you miss other kids?*
- *Why is Timo becoming frustrated with Kenzi? How would you feel if you were asking a person questions and they were not answering them? What would you say or do in that situation?*
- *Do you think that Lucky knows what a circle is? Timo "speaks" to Lucky, but do you think he uses language the way that humans do to communicate? How does Timo tell Lucky to put the green fruit in a circle?*

Chapter 8

- *Timo falls off the platform. Why were Kenzi and Timo on the platform in the first place? Is it bad that Timo had fallen off the platform? Why or why not?*
- *Timo hears a sound that makes his* **breath freeze in his throat**. *What is the sound? What would you think it is?*
- *What is the bird's name? How do we find this out?*
- *What is Chef carrying to make* **Pundu** *leave Timo alone? What do you think the* **dead rabbit** *is for? What is the* **metal rod** *for? What does it do?*
- *Chef tells Timo to climb higher. He says it* **without looking up**. *Why do you think he does not look at Timo when he talks to him?*
- *Kenzi is speaking in a* **hushed voice**. *How is this different to how she has been speaking before? Why do you think she is suddenly speaking quietly?*
- *Describe how* **Pundu** *eats the dead rabbit. Why is this scary to watch?*

Chapter 9

- *On the way back* **Chef didn't say a word** *and* **there was a thunderstorm brewing in his eyes**. *How do you think Chef is feeling? What do you think he is thinking? If you were Kenzi and Timo, how would you be feeling right now?*

- *Chef calls Kenzi* **irresponsible**. *What does it mean to be* **irresponsible**? *Do you agree that Kenzi was irresponsible? What did Kenzi do that Chef felt was irresponsible? What should Kenzi have done instead?*
- *How did the grown-ups know where the children were?*
- *Timo is confused and wonders if he's been brought to the island to be* **devoured** *by Pundu. What does* **devoured** *mean?* **Devoured** means to eat something in an extremely quickly and greed way. *Do you think that is why Timo is on the island? Can you think of a reason why Kayah would invite him?*
- *Uncle Adam tells a story about Timo when he was younger. What did Timo do to show that Kayah might be right and that Timo has* **two tongues**? *Would you like to be able to communicate with animals? Which animals would you most like to communicate with?*
- *What is special about Pundu?*

Chapter 10

- *What two signs tell us that Timo is feeling very nervous? How do you feel when you are nervous? Do your hands shake? Do you feel sick? Do you feel like you cannot speak properly?*
- *What would you do if you were in Timo's position? Would you want to be safe? Or would you want to have an adventure?*
- *What is a* **castaway**? A **castaway** is a person that has been left alone in a place they cannot escape from.
- *Why do you think the bird species is not well known? What does "***no one ever wrote anything down or documented their existence"** *tell you about the way humans understand the world and history? How did your ancestors pass down knowledge?*
- *Kayah says she named the* **lightning birds** *after* **impundulu**. *Do you think that the lightning bird that Timo has met can do the same things as the* **terrifying magic bird**? *Why do you think this?*
- *Who stayed behind at the house while the others came to see Pundu? What do you think Nina is doing back at the house?*
- *Why does Chef pay attention to the* **monkey**? *What do you think the monkey is warning* **the rest of the troop** *about?*
- *When Pundu appears, his beak is* **ominously open**. *What does it mean is something is* **ominous**? When something is **ominous** it makes you feel like something bad is about to happen, even if you cannot explain why. *Have you ever seen, heard or experienced something that felt* **ominous**? *What did you do?*
- *Timo notices Pundu's feathers and he realises why Kayah chose the name. Why did Kayah choose the name* **lightning bird**?
- *Pundu reacts to Chef unexpectedly. What does he do? What does Timo do to stop him? Does it work?*
- *Pundu seems to be angry. Why do you think Pundu is angry?*
- *How is Uncle Adam feeling now that he has seen Pundu and watched what Pundu can do? What does he say to Kayah? Is this a decision that Uncle Adam has made too quickly? What makes you think that?*
- *Kayah does not argue with Uncle Adam and promises that Chef will take him and Timo back the next day. What does that tell you about Kayah as a person?*

Chapter 11

- *What exciting thing has finally happened to Timo? Did it disappoint him? Have you ever read the ending of a good book and been disappointed? Have you ever read the ending of a good book and thought it was* **brilliant***?*
- *Why do you think* **dinner had been awkward***?*
- *Timo wonders if Lucky is dreaming. Do you think rats dream? What do you think rats dream about?*
- *Timo closes his eyes and plays back the morning in* **his mind's eye***. What does it mean to play something back in your mind's eye?* To play something in your **mind's eye** means to think about something, like a memory, and 'see' it with your mind, almost as if it were a movie. *Do you do this? Do you think about something that has happened like it is a movie playing in your mind? Do you think it is helpful to do this or not?*
- *Timo is comparing how it felt to talk to Pundu to how it feels with Lucky. What is the main difference?*
- *What does* **agile** *mean?* **Agile** means being able to move quickly and easily. *Do you think that you can become more* **agile** *with practice?*
- *How does Timo call Kenzi to come with him? Compare how quickly she climbs out of her window to how Timo climbed out of his.*
- *It* **didn't take much convincing** *to get Kenzi to agree to go along with Timo. What does that tell you about the kind of person that Kenzi is? Do you have a friend like Kenzi? Would you like a friend like Kenzi?*
- *Why is it a good thing that Timo asked Kenzi to come along with him?*
- *The code on the gate is* **two nine one one** *– 2911. If you used your birthday to make a code, what would it be? Why do you think using your birthday for a code is not a good idea?*
- *Kenzi reveals that* **Pundu wasn't always like this***. What do you think* ***Vula*** *and* **the eggs** *have to do with him becoming* **vicious***? Who do you think* **Vula** *is?*
- *Where does Pundu sleep? How is this similar to other birds?*
- *What does* **now or never** *mean? Why was it* **now or never** *for Timo to communicate with Pundu?*
- *What breaks Pundu and Timo's concentration? How do you think Timo felt in that moment? How did you feel as a reader in that moment?*
- *What does Timo ask Uncle Adam to do? Why do you think he wants to stay* **for a few more days***?*

Chapter 12

- *What does Timo want with the* **screwdriver***? Why does he need to fix the tricycle? Who is the* **horrible man** *that kicked it?*
- *Again, Timo hears the name* **Hugo***. What clues do we have about* ***Hugo*** *so far?*
- *When Timo asks Kenzi about* ***Hugo****, a* **thundercloud crossed her face***. What does that mean about her feelings towards* **Hugo***? Do you think that* **Hugo** *was a good person?*
- *Can you guess why* **Hugo***, who was* **a trained animal handler***, would no longer be on the island or working for Kayah?*
- *Why does Timo smile when he sees Uncle Adam and Kayah together? Do you think Uncle Adam is happy staying on the island?*
- *What is noticeable about Kayah's outfits? What is she always wearing?*

- *Why does Kenzi turn* **red** *after showing excitement that Timo and Uncle Adam will be staying a while longer? Do you ever feel embarrassed to show your true feelings about something?*
- *Kayah asks Timo if he thinks* **there are still secrets in the world**. *Do you think there are still secrets left in the world? What kinds of secrets do you think are out there?*
- *How did Kayah discover the birds, Pundu and* **Vula***?*
- *Why was the island left deserted for so long? How do you think this helped Pundu and* **Vula***? Why do you think this?*

Chapter 13

- *What is the difference between the way Pundu greets Timo this time compared to how he greeted Timo the first few times they met? Do you think Pundu trusts Timo?*
- *Do you think it is a good or bad thing that Timo cannot* **help feeling a little scared** *of Pundu? Why do you think this?*
- *What did Timo take from the kitchen to give to Pundu? How do you think this will help their relationship? How does Pundu thank Timo for the gift?*
- *Timo thinks that Pundu looks* **vulnerable**. *What does* **vulnerable** *mean?* Being **vulnerable** means that something or someone is easily hurt and needs to be protected. *Explain how a* **gigantic bird** *can be vulnerable (hint: it has to do with humans!).*
- *What does Timo figure out about Hugo and Vula?*
- *Timo tells Pundu that he* **knows what it is like to miss someone**. *Who does Timo miss?*
- *What does Uncle Adam ask Timo to do to stay safe?*
- *Why does Uncle Adam think that Timo and Kayah get along so well? How do you think it makes Uncle Adam feel to see Timo having* **adventures***?*
- *How do you know that Timo's parents loved him very much? What kinds of things did they do with their son?*
- *What does Uncle Adam tell Timo about adventures? If you could* **choose the ending** *to Timo's adventure now, what would it be?*

Chapter 14

- *What happens to make Timo understand why the island is called Storm Island?*
- *Kenzi tells Lucky not to be afraid because it is a* **soccer storm**. *What do you think a* **soccer storm** *is? Would you play soccer in a storm? Is it safe to play soccer in a storm?*
- *Do you think there are other types of storms on the island? How do you think Chef can tell a* **soccer storm** *apart from a longer, more dangerous storm?*
- *Does it surprise you that Kenzi thinks that* **fishing is the most boring thing on earth***? Why do you think she finds it boring? Would you find fishing boring?*
- *Why do you think they play soccer on the beach? Do you think Timo is glad he brought his* **takkies** *along? Why do you think this?*
- *Another one of Chef's previous jobs is revealed. What is it?*
- *Kenzi calls Timo their* **big hope**. *Does Timo feel confident with this title? Why or why not?*
- *Why does Chef call Nina* **his quick-footed wife***? How did Nina get so good at playing soccer?*
- *Timo and Kenzi talk about Kenzi's parents. Do you agree with Kenzi that Nina is a brave person? Why do you think this?*

- *Kenzi asks Timo why Uncle Adam had never married. Do you think Timo had ever thought to ask Uncle Adam? What about his reaction tells you that he feels guilty that Uncle Adam never married?*

Chapter 15

- *Timo asks for an old soccer ball for his* **strange, slightly silly idea**. *What do you think the* **strange, slightly silly idea** *will be?*
- *Why does Timo take* **a few pork sausages**? *Are they for him?*
- *Does Kenzi secretly want to come with Timo? How do you know this?*
- *How do you think Lucky feels about Kenzi? Do you think he trusts her? How do you know this?*
- *The first time Timo kicks the ball toward Pundu, the bird is* **clearly alarmed**. *Why do you think Pundu is so* **alarmed**? *What do you think Pundu is feeling or thinking seeing Timo kick an object towards him?*
- *Why do you think Pundu does not kick the ball back? Do you think he understands Timo?*
- *What is Kenzi's reaction to this situation? Do you think that Kenzi is being a good friend?*
- *What does Pundu do that gives Kenzi a fright? Do you think Pundu did it on purpose because Kenzi was teasing Timo?*
- *Why do you think it is such a big deal that Timo got Pundu to kick the ball back?*

Chapter 16

- *Why was Timo out of bed? Is it a good or bad thing to listen to adults talking when you should not be around?*
- *What did Timo manage to get Pundu to do that Hugo could not? Why do you think this is important? What does it say about Pundu's relationship with Timo, as opposed to his relationship with Hugo?*
- *For the first time, Timo hears* **impatience** *in Kayah's voice. What do you think she is impatient about?*
- *What does Kayah think has happened to Vula? Do Kayah and Chef have an idea of where Vula might be? How do they know this?*
- *What does it mean to put* **cards on the table**? To put your **cards on the table** means to tell someone every detail without leaving anything out.
- *Explain why Kayah is worried about Vula, and how Hugo is involved.*
- *Kayah tells Timo about* **Martha the Passenger Pigeon** *and* **Benjamin the Tasmanian Tiger**. *Why does she tell Timo about these animals? How does it explain why it is so important to find Vula?*
- *What does Kayah tell Timo to do? Why does she think it will be difficult and dangerous?*
- *Kayah says that Pundu will need to* **lure** *Vula out of* **her hiding place**. *What does* **lure** *mean?* To **Lure** something means to convince something or someone to come out of where they are hiding or feel safe. *Why is Vula hiding in the first place?*

Chapter 17

- *What do you think Timo wants with an* **old saddle** *and* **some rope**? *Who do you think it is for?*
- *Usually Timo would ask Uncle Adam for help, but he decides not to. Why does he decide not to ask Uncle Adam for help? What do you think Uncle Adam would say?*

- *Kenzi realises what Timo wants to do. What does she say that is out of character for her and makes Timo worry that* **his plan really *was* crazy***?*
- *What lie do Kenzi and Timo tell Chef? Do you think that Chef believes their lie? What makes you think that? Why do you think Chef lets them carry on?*
- *Why would Chef need to go check out* **a boat spotted close to the island***?*
- *What does Chef say that makes Kenzi feel angry and betrayed by Timo? How would you feel if your friend was keeping a secret from you?*
- *Timo seems to think that* **a trampoline for a rat** *is a far-fetched lie. Why is this funny, considering what else he has trained Lucky to do?*

Chapter 18

- *Pundu looks at the saddle and makes* **suspicious noises***. What do you think he thinking or feeling about it?*
- *What is a* **halter***?* A **halter** is a strap or headpiece that goes around an animal's head so that you can lead it or tie it up. *Why would wearing a* **halter** *make Pundu nervous?*
- *Why is Pundu disappointed with Timo?*
- *Do you think that Timo trusts Pundu? Do you think it is a good thing to be nervous around a large animal, even if you can communicate with it? Why do you think so?*
- *What does Pundu bring Timo that makes Timo laugh?*
- *How does Timo convince Pundu to let him put the* **halter** *around his neck?*
- *Pundu was* **betrayed** *before. Who is Pundu thinking of when he is feeling* **doubt***? Why do you think he decides to trust Timo?*
- *What did Pundu do to show Timo that he will allow Timo to climb onto his back and ride him?*
- *What contribution did Kenzi make to the design of the saddle? Why was this a kind thing to do?*
- *Why does Kenzi say,* **"Are you going to get on him before Christmas?"** *If you were Timo, what would you say back to her?*
- *What reminder does the author give about Pundu's height?*
- *Do you think the animal that is being ridden is the only one who must feel trust? Why is it also important for the person riding the animal to trust the animal?*
- *Did Kenzi expect them to leave the enclosure so soon? What did she think Timo would do for a longer time? Do you think it is a good idea for Timo and Pundu to be leaving already?*

Chapter 19

- *Why does Pundu wait at the gate?*
- *How does Timo convince Kenzi to climb on to Pundu's back?*
- *Kenzi declares that she is not scared. Do you believe her? Would you be scared if you were riding a homemade saddle on a lightning bird?*
- *What tells you that Pundu is in his natural habitat?*
- *Pundu begins to call. Timo whispers,* **"He's calling her."** *Who is the* **her** *that Timo is referring to?*
- *They see clouds starting to gather but Kenzi says it is not a soccer storm. Can you remember what a soccer storm is? How would a storm be different to a soccer storm? Are Timo and Kenzi in danger?*

- *Where are Timo and Kenzi on the island: the northern part or the southern part? How do you know this?*
- *When Timo and Kenzi get to the cave, it is clear that Timo did not plan for this adventure properly. What is the one important thing that he forgot to bring? What else should he have packed?*
- *Why is it so exciting that Kenzi and Timo find rock paintings? What does it tell you about the lightning birds? What else does it tell you about the lightning birds' relationship with humans?*
- *What tells you that Pundu was hoping to find Vula in the cave?*
- *What is the* **deafening bang** *they hear outside? What does this mean for them? What does Kenzi suggest they do? What would you do?*

Chapter 20

- *What does Kenzi see that makes her say:* **"Something's wrong!"***? Why would this be a sign that something is wrong?*
- *How do you know that Timo had* **fully earned the bird's trust***?*
- *Timo and Kenzi begin to see more signs that something is wrong. What would you do if you started to think that a situation was not right? Would you investigate or run away?*
- *Nina shouts out and warns Timo and Kenzi to be careful. Where is Nina? Who has her?*
- *Pundu appears nervous to see Hugo? What does that tell you about Hugo's relationship with the bird?*
- *What has become easier for Timo to do with Pundu?*
- *What does it mean to* **flee***?* To **flee** means to run away quickly, especially when there is danger. *Why does Timo decide not to flee? What does that tell you about his character?*
- *Why can Timo suddenly hear Hugo speaking to Pundu? Do the other people seem affected in the same way?*
- *Hugo is holding a gun. What does Nina shout to them about the gun? Does it make Hugo seem more or less dangerous? What do you think he wants to do with the gun?*
- *What does* **naïve** *mean?* A **naïve** person is a person that believes things too easily and has not yet learnt that the world can be complicated or unkind. *Why does Hugo think that Kayah is* **naïve***? What kind of a person is Hugo? Does he care about nature or money?*
- *Who is* **Kagiso***? How is he related to Kayah? Is his appearance shocking? Why or why not?*
- **Kagiso** *reports that Kayah has been* **locked up** *back at the house. Who is the man* **Kagiso** *does not know?*
- *How do you think Hugo makes Pundu feel? Do you think Pundu trusts Hugo? Why does Pundu do what Hugo tells him to?*
- *Nina tells Kenzi and Timo to* **do whatever they say**. *Why do you think she says this? Why is it safer for Kenzi and Timo to follow Hugo and* **Kagiso's** *instructions?*

Chapter 21

- *Kagiso reveals that Kayah is his* **adoptive mother**. *Do you think this matters? Do you think it excuses what Kagiso has done and is doing?*
- *What does Kagiso call the lightning birds?* (supersized chickens)
- *How does Kagiso know about Lucky?*

- *Explain this statement:* **Everything and everyone has a price**. *How does this relate to Kagiso and what he did to his mother's business? Do you think it is true that all people have a price?*
- *What makes you think that Chef is not dead?*
- *Timo feels like his brains are being scrambled with an eggbeater. What does this tell you about how he is feeling?*
- *What is* **seeping out** *of Timo's nose? Why do you think this is happening to him?*
- *What does it tell us about Kagiso and Kayah's relationship that Kagiso cannot remember Kayah's birthday?*
- *Kagiso asks if they have a remote and Timo answers* **remote control**. *Explain the joke.*
- *What does Pundu do during the next thunderclap?*
- *What is a* **Swiss army knife***?* A **Swiss army knife** is a small folding knife that has many different tools tucked inside it, like a blade, scissors, screwdriver, file, and more, all neatly folded into a pocket-sized case.
- *Do you think it is a good idea for Kenzi and Nina to tie up Kagiso? Explain why you think so.*

Chapter 22

- *What do you think* **wet feathers** *smell like?*
- *Timo is asking himself many questions. What does this tell you about the way he is feeling?*
- *Who or what is replying to Pundu's call?*
- *What is a* **mechanical bull***?* A **mechanical bull** is a machine made to look and move like a bull that people climb on and hold on with one hand while it tries to shake them loose – the challenge is to stay on for as long as possible without falling off. *Why do you think Timo compares riding Pundu to riding a* **mechanical bull***? How does Timo stay on Pundu's back?*
- *How does Timo help Pundu on the beach? How is this different to how Hugo treats Pundu?*
- *The lightning bird being dragged onto the boat is described as an* **unwilling animal**. *What does* **unwilling** *mean? Why do you think the animal is* **unwilling***?*
- *Does Hugo seem afraid of Pundu? Why do you think this?*
- *What does Timo realise is about to happen?*
- *Hugo appears to be* **in control** *of Pundu until Timo screams at him in his mind. Why do you think Hugo suddenly looks afraid of Timo? What does he realise about Timo's ability?*
- *What do you think Pundu wanted to do to Hugo? What does Pundu end up doing to Hugo? What do you think happened to Hugo after he was thrown into the water?*
- *Why does Chef want to get the* **birds away from here***?*
- *Why is Vula* **looking confused** *and* **glowering** *at everyone? What do you think calms her down?*
- *What does Timo find under Pundu's feathers? How did it help Hugo find the birds?*
- *What do you think the* **noise above their heads** *and sharp lights are?*

Chapter 23

- *Were Kagiso and Hugo the bosses of the operation? How can you tell?*
- *What does Chef have that Timo wants him to use? Do you think that plan would work? What could go wrong with the plan?*
- *Have the men ever seen a lightning bird? How do you know?*

- *Hugo* **staggers out of the sea**. *Describe Hugo's injuries.*
- *Why does the shorter man say,* **"A kid?"**
- *Who is the* **big boss** *planning to sell the lightning birds to? How do you know that the deal is worth a lot of money?*
- *Kenzi is annoyed with her mother. Why?*
- *How do you know Hugo has not realised that Vula has been freed? How do you think he will react when he realises that Vula is no longer in the crate?*
- *What else does Hugo not know about the lightning birds?*
- *Hugo says* **"I'm not an amateur."** *Do you think that he is acting like a professional? Say why you think so.*
- *What happens when the* **red-haired man** *puts his hand inside the backpack?*
- *What do you realise about their gun? Is it the same as the gun that Chef took from Hugo and Kagiso?*
- *How do you know that this was a carefully organised plan between Kagiso, Hugo, and the two men?*
- *Who is Kayah most surprised by: Hugo or Kagiso? Why do you say so?*

Chapter 24

- *For the fourth time, Timo describes Kayah's voice as* **warm cinnamon sugar**. *Now that you know Kayah's character well, explain what you think this means. Do you know someone whose voice sounds warm and calming?*
- *What does it mean to be a* **nasty piece of work***? What makes Kagiso and Hugo's boss* **a nasty piece of work***? Do you think that everyone on the island is in danger?*
- *Do you think that Kayah is upset and hurt by Kagiso's actions? Say why you think so.*
- *Do you think that Kayah was a good adoptive parent to Kagiso? What could she have done differently? What responsibility does Kagiso have to be a good son?*
- *What tells you that Pundu and Vula are feeling comfortable on the island? How is their movement through the island and compound different?*
- *What is the significance of the feather being different to Kayah and Vula's feathers?*
- *What kinds of* **courage** *does Kayah describe? What does* **courage** *mean to you?*
- *What is one clue that Timo is starting to feel more comfortable at the house?*

Chapter 25

- *What is the* **failed poaching expedition***? Who are the poachers?*
- *Why did Chef sleep* **outside on the deck** *every night after the incident? Would you feel safe if Chef was protecting you? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think that Timo is excited to go back? Why or why not?*
- *Timo asks Uncle Adam why he never married or had children. Why do you think he asks this?*
- *How did Uncle Adam feel about Timo's mother? Does it give you a better idea about why he treats Timo the way he does? What do you think about Uncle Adam as a person after reading this?*
- *Do you think Uncle Adam is proud of Timo? Give reasons from the story. Who do you know that is proud of you and supports you? Do you think it makes a difference in your life?*

Chapter 26

- *Why is Kenzi so excited to see Pundu?*
- *Why does Timo pretend that he has bad news? What is the difference between teasing and taunting?* Teasing is playful and kind-hearted; both people usually laugh and no one feels hurt. Taunting is mean; it is done to make someone feel bad or embarrassed. *Do you think Timo and Kenzi have a good 'teasing' relationship, or a bad 'taunting' relationship? Say why you think so.*
- *Where do you think the eggs are?*
- *The last sentence of the book says:* **Or maybe it was simply what it feels like when you have just finished reading the final chapter of a fantastic adventure story and are ready for the next one.** *What is relevant about the last sentence of the book? Do you understand the feeling? Have you ever felt like this?*

Topics for discussion after reading the story

- Explore with your children:
  - *Who is your favourite character in the book? Why is this your favourite character?*
  - *What do you think will happen next for Timo? What do you think will happen next for Pundu and Vula?*
  - *Is there anything you particularly liked or disliked about this story?*
  - *Has anything that happened in this book ever happened to you?*
  - *What is something you have learnt from this story?*
  - *If the author asked you what could be improved in the book, what would you say?*
  - *What would you tell your friends about this book?*

Activity ideas for after reading the story

- Remind the class about **Martha, the Passenger Pigeon** and **Benjamin, the Tasmanian Tiger**, which are both mentioned in the book by Kayah. Ask the class to work in groups to research one of these animals (Martha, the Passenger Pigeon or Benjamin, the Tasmanian Tiger).

  Research questions:
  - What did they look like?
  - Where did they live?
  - Why did they become extinct?
  - What might have saved them?

  Have a class discussion about the animals and help the children connect their stories to Pundu and Vula's situation in the book.

- Ask the class to create a mind map about what makes Timo feel or act brave using examples from the book. Their mind map should have the name, Timo, at the center.

  Each branch of the mind map will be for:
  - A moment of courage

- A person or animal who supported Timo
- Something Timo learnt about himself
- What Timo would tell his younger self

When the class have completed their mind maps, have a discussion around feeling proud of who you are, even when you feel you don't belong.

- A hamerkop is a medium-sized water bird. Show your class photos of real hamerkops and their nests. Ask your class to draw their own hamerkop, focusing on the features that make the bird unusual. Display their drawings as a class exhibition, followed by a discussion about why Jaco Jacobs might have chosen the hamerkop as his inspiration for the Lightning Bird.

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 4

- Predict what a text could be about
- Identify characters
- Name characters correctly
- Listen for main message and specific details
- Describe events
- Identify specific details
- Discuss main ideas and specific details
- Express feelings in relation to events
- Express thoughts and feelings about a story/characters/setting or theme of a text
- Relate to own life experiences
- Answer oral questions based on the text
- Participate in group discussions
- Take turns to speak
- Share ideas, opinions and participate in the discussion
- Ask relevant questions
- Keep to the topic
- Maintain discussions
- Respond to others' ideas with empathy and respect

Reading and viewing

Grade 4

- Pre reading: Make predictions for the title and cover of the text
- Predict from title and discuss related themes/content
- Make predictions
- Identify and explain central events
- Identify and comment on the plot, setting and characters
- Discuss characters
- Give reasons for the actions of characters
- Give and explain own feelings about the text
- Express emotional response to text read
- Identify and discuss values in the text
- Use reading strategies: Make predictions and use contextual cues
- Use contextual cues to make meaning
- Discuss message/moral of the story
- Reflect on text read
- Infer meaning of unfamiliar words and images
- Use reading comprehension strategies: Visualisation and making connections
- Determine the impact of visual techniques
- Discuss new vocabulary from the text
- Understand vocabulary

Listening and speaking

Grade 5

- Make predictions
- Describe events
- Identify and explain cause and effect
- Comment on social, moral and cultural values
- Ask critical questions
- Express and justify own opinion with reasons
- Use information from the text in response to questions
- Identify main ideas and specific details
- Identify central idea, plot, setting and characters
- Relate text content to own life
- Discuss and give own opinion
- Express thoughts and feelings about the storyline
- Participate in group discussions
- Ask relevant questions
- Justify own opinion
- Maintain discussion
- Take turns to speak
- Respond to others' ideas with empathy and respect

Reading and viewing

Grade 5

- Pre reading: Predict from title and pictures and discuss related themes/content
- Comment on choice of pictures in text
- Share ideas and offers opinion using speculation
- Use reading strategies: Contextual clues and prior knowledge
- Discuss characters
- Give reason for actions of characters
- Discuss the central idea, plot, characters and setting
- Discuss cause and effect in the story
- Identify and discuss feelings expressed in text
- Express own feelings and opinion
- Identify and explain how central events and characters relate to own life
- Infer the meaning of unfamiliar words and images
- Discuss new vocabulary from text

Listening and speaking

Grade 6

- Predict what will happen in a story
- Discuss main ideas and specific details
- Identify themes
- Discuss characters
- Discuss plot, conflict and setting
- Discuss messages in text
- Discuss responses to text
- Discuss social, moral and cultural values in text
- Relate ideas to own life experiences
- Ask relevant questions and respond appropriately
- Stay on topic
- Explain logically
- Interact positively during group discussions
- Respond to others' ideas with empathy and respect

Reading and viewing

Grade 6

- Pre reading: Make predictions based on title and/or graphics and related themes/content
- Make predictions about the text
- Ask questions about the text
- Make inferences about the text
- Visualise parts of the text
- Identify and explain the central idea
- Interpret and discuss the text
- Discuss plot, theme, setting and characters
- Discuss suspense and twist
- Critically discusses cultural and social values in the text
- Relate events and characters to own life
- Show understanding of the text and relationship to own life
- Identify and discuss feelings expressed in text
- Express emotional response to texts read
- Identify different perspectives
- Give own perspective based on evidence in the text
- Infer meaning of unfamiliar words and images
- Invent or describe preferred results or endings

Listening and speaking

Grade 7

- Make predictions from cover page and blurb
- Confirm predictions
- Identify main and supporting ideas
- Make inferences
- Share ideas and experiences to show understanding of concepts
- Share ideas and opinions
- Identify characters
- Identify main and supporting ideas
- Use appropriate language
- Answer questions

Reading and viewing

Grade 7

- Make predictions
- Make connections
- Identify key features of a text such as characters, plot, setting, conflict, theme and message
- Discuss main ideas and themes
- Discuss fact or opinion in text
- Infer meaning of unfamiliar words
- Infer meaning and conclusions
- Visualise parts of the text
- Identify formal/informal language in the text
- Answer questions based on text