



# ACROSS THE RISEN SEA

BREN MACDIBBLE

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**Format: Paperback**  
**Recommended for 9-13-year-olds**

## Summary

Neoma and Jag and their small community are 'living gentle lives' on high ground surrounded by the risen sea that has caused widespread devastation. When strangers from the Valley of the Sun arrive unannounced, the friends find themselves drawn into a web of secrecy and lies that endangers the way of life of their entire community. Soon daring, loyal Neoma must set off on a solo mission across the risen sea, determined to rescue her best friend and find the truth that will save her village.

*Across the Risen Sea* is another thrilling adventure for young readers from the bestselling author of *How to Bee* and *The Dog Runner*.

## Author Style

As with her previous novels, *How to Bee* (winner of the 2018 CBCA Book of the Year – Younger Readers) and *The Dog Runner* (shortlisted for the 2020 CBCA Book of the Year – Younger Readers), Bren MacDibble's *Across the Risen Sea* deftly pulls off the difficult task of writing in first person/present tense to create a heightened sense of tension and suspense. And like its predecessors, *Across the Risen Sea*'s narrative voice is warm, colloquial and very conversational – making it easy for the young reader to instantly connect with the protagonists, Neoma and Jag.

## Use in the curriculum

This story is ideal for upper-primary aged children who like adventure stories. It will suit primary classrooms studying climate change, the environment and ecosystems.

It can be used in the English curriculum as an example of the speculative/dystopian genre and as a study of style.

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## Themes

- Adventure • Courage • Environment • Resilience • Loyalty • Climate change •

## Discussion questions

### Comprehension questions relating to the first chapter:

1. What creature is Jag unnaturally afraid of? (page 2)
2. What was it he saw coming towards the sea wall? (page 3)
3. What have the villages built to make sure that visitors to their island must come in the front of the bay? (page 5)
4. Where do the tall strangers come from? (page 6)
5. What clues did you find in the first chapter to suggest that this story is not set in current times?

### Informal language:

*"Not so close," the olds yell at us Rusty Bus kids, when we's daring each other to run in and touch of them tall sblings ... They do the doctoring if anyone's sick, and all us kids who ain't babies and ain't teenagers we sleep cosy safe in Rusty Bus so no diseases can get to us.'* (pages 7-8)

1. Describe how Neoma speaks in the novel?
2. Why do you think she (and her friends) speak like this?
3. What does Neoma's speech pattern tell you about her character?
4. Does the way she speaks make the story more or less interesting?

### Characterisation:

*'Sometimes when we're out salvaging from buildings Jaguar says, "Hey Neoma, can you get across this rusty metal beam?" ... I can never turn down a dare. Smart people are more careful. Me, maybe I ain't so smart, coz I like to test things out myself. I'm a doer. I do things.'* (Page 11)

1. Do you agree with Neoma's assessment of herself?
2. How would you describe Jaguar based on this paragraph (and what you already know about him)?
3. Do either Neoma or Jaguar change as the story progresses?
4. Choose three new adjectives to describe Neoma and Jaguar. Now find a scene in the book to illustrate each word you chose. For instance, if you chose the word *brave* for Neoma or *loyal* for Jaguar, describe a scene or scenes in the novel where Neoma demonstrated her bravery and Jaguar proved he was particularly loyal.

### Theme: Living Gentle Lives

*'We each do all we can to live low-impact lives. Our electric stovetops are no worse than your water-drawing windmill there. Let's not lose sight of what really matters her, old friend. Living gentle lives.'* (page 38)

*'We live simply coz our folks learned that what people do can damage the planet ... We salvage anything we need.'* (page 94)

1. Explain what 'living gentle lives' means to the people of the Ockery Islands.
2. How do the people of the Ockery Islands feel about technology?
3. Why do you think that 'living gently' is especially important to the people who remember the before-times?
4. What sort of things might we do in the real world to 'live a gentle life'?

## Writing to heighten drama:

Read the scene where Neoma is climbing down the outside of the Silver Water (pages 60-61) and find examples of:

- Simile/ Metaphor
- Personification/ Anthropomorphism

## Empathy:

Put yourself in the shoes of Gerra as she is recovering in Marta's cottage. What sort of things might she be thinking and feeling about finding herself in this village and meeting Neoma?

## Heroes and Villains:

1. Should the Valley of the Sun people have marched into Cottage Hill and erected their communication poles without explanation?
  2. Do you think the Valley of the Sun should be entitled to proclaim itself the new government?
  3. Should the Valley of the Sun have the right to take people as punishment for crimes?
  4. Were the Jacob's Reach people right to hide what had happened to Gerra and her siblings?
  5. What should Jacob have done as soon as he discovered what had happened?
  6. Did you feel sympathy for Tyrell? Why?
  7. Who is the worst villain in the book: Gerra, Leonor, Tyrell, Jacob or Pirate Bradshaw?
- Where would you prefer to live: the Valley of the Sun or Cottage Hill? In your answer consider the different levels of wealth, living standards and power, as well as the treatment of Susan, the elderly engineer.
  - The seas have risen in the story and much of Australia's coastline has been flooded because of climate change. To calculate how far the seas would have to rise to flood where you live, go to <https://www.freemaptools.com/elevation-finder.htm> Keep expanding the world map until you find your suburb and then click on it to discover its height above sea level.
  - Read the following article about the emergence of a new literary genre called Cli-Fi. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2017/oct/18/clifi-a-new-way-to-talk-about-climate-change>. In your opinion is *Across the Risen Sea* a good example of Cli-Fi? Give specific events from the book to support your argument.



## A word from the author

'Sea level rise is a major problem for many areas. Inundation and erosion maps exist for most of Australia's coast, and globally many cities would look like Venice with just a 5m sea rise. Auckland clings to the rest of the North Island by a narrow causeway, it may be that Auckland and the land north become an island in the future.

'Researching it, though, I couldn't find a scenario where the great inland seas rush back in and split Australia in two once more, which I was hoping to find for a really exciting story. I found that we will be retreating from the coasts a little but it's not all doom and gloom. It's just expensive, which left me wondering what happens to the poor people, the regional people, if governments spend money building walls around Sydney and moving Brisbane to the hills. How will governments find money to help everyone? Which led to displacing people, and refugee camps, and disease.

'Travelling down the West Coast of Australia has been eye-opening. Erosion is a major problem. The Indian Ocean is driven in by powerful winds and every coastal town has a set-back plan in place to cover the next 25 years, and many purchase back from landowners to remove the houses in the way. They are also building rock walls to stop wash out, but every rock wall they build causes more erosion further up the coast. Protect one beach and suburb to the detriment of the next.

'Anyway, once I decided the areas I expected to flood wouldn't under the worst case scenario, it freed me up to be a little more anonymous about where the novel was set and that let me be a little loose with croc and shark behaviour. It liberated me to write a novel where anything could happen. It became so much fun to write, and I hope that passes on to the reader.'

– Bren MacDibble

## About the author

Bren MacDibble was raised on farms all over New Zealand, so is an expert about being a kid on the land. After 20 years in Melbourne, Bren sold everything, and spent two years living and working in a bus travelling around Australia. She recently parked her bus in Kalbarri on the beautiful west coast, where she now manages a holiday villa. In 2018, *How to Bee* – her first novel for younger readers – won the Children's Book Council Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers, the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature, and the New Zealand Book Awards Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction. In 2019 *The Dog Runner* won the New Zealand Book Awards Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction. It has also been shortlisted for the 2020 CBCA Book of the Year for Younger Readers. Bren also writes for young adults under the name Cally Black.

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