

The Beacon

by
Abrar Sirohey
Illustrated by Genevieve Irwin Goelet



The
Beacon

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Voices of Future Generations Children's Initiative



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أصوات أجيال المستقبل لمنطقة الشرق الأوسط
Voices of Future Generations for the Middle East Region



CISDL
Centre for International
Sustainable Development Law



WORLD'S
LARGEST
LESSON



OMBUDSMAN FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS



MOORE
CHARITABLE
FOUNDATION

This book is printed on recycled paper, using sustainable and low-carbon printing methods.

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Dedication

Without the unwavering support of HH Sheikha Hissa bint Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum and her network, this book would not have been published. Her generous contributions aided the editing and translation processes, enabling Abrar Sirohey to select a professional illustrator who best represented the essence of his story.

HH Sheikha Hissa bint Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum, as the Goodwill Ambassador for the Middle East, has ensured that important messages from children in the Arab world are communicated to their peers worldwide in all six UN languages.

We would also like to express our gratitude to our regional partner, VoFG Arabia, as well as the Emirates Literature Foundation, who administers this wonderful initiative.

foreword

There is something quite unique about the imagination of a child, for each has the capacity to forge endless sparks of creation and hope, especially in places where grown-ups see none. Such a gift, however, can only thrive if and when it is able to break free from the obstacles of constraints and borders so often imposed by those who are blind to the joys of creating for the sake of creating and speaking a story that must be told and shared.

Abrar's story, which traverses a world of silver-winged falcons, hissing snakes, and bellowing oryxes, is one such example of the type of magic that can be gifted to others when children are not only given the space to expand their inner world but also convey what matters most to the hearts of writers-in-the-making. Polluted skies in which birds cannot fly, oil-filled waters that cry out to be cleansed, and dying reefs that lie in the hands of creatures with none are fused together in Abrar's imagination like the twine he uses to convey his ultimate message: that nature, when met with patience and understanding, can release the best of spirits to benefit and heal all.

This is, I have no doubt, the very first of Abrar's award-winning storytelling endeavours, amplified as it is by the voices of every child this story series contains. All the rest of the world needs to do is stop, read, listen, and heed.

Let our imaginations unite from the seeds of theirs.

Congratulations to every young writer whose stories are now part of this story series, and to all who, like Abrar, know that with a little bravery, belief, and unity, we can accomplish even more in the future.

— *Onjali Q Raúf*
Author and founder of the NGOs Making Herstory and O's Refugee Aid Team

preface

I am genuinely inspired by the wisdom of a child author who understands the significance of improving our ecosystem and then rallies forces through literature to motivate change. As an educator, I take my responsibility to our planet very seriously. I'm grateful to be residing in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where collaboration, protection and preservation shape environmental initiatives across the country.

Voices of Future Generations Children's Initiative aptly chose Abrar Sirohey's work, 'The Beacon', to shine in its effort to highlight the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The three principles that the characters are challenged by are a stark reminder of how belief, bravery and dedication form the basis for our success in attaining a vibrant environmental future. Very often, our vision (and its foundation) is blurred, which causes our focus to lack clarity and direction. Zayn, Rashid and Amira take us along on a cultural adventure that culminates in achieving the intended goals: having belief in a clear vision of the future; being brave and dedicating our efforts by working together; and having hope for a positive outcome.

UAE President His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, an exceptional leader in sustainable development and solutions, undoubtedly sowed seeds of action within the students of the UAE. Abrar, a talented homeschooler, penned 'The Beacon' considering elements such as combating pollution, remedying rain and water crises and creatively introducing the ghaf tree as a character.

This book truly spoke to me. I recommend it to all who cherish the land in which they live.

— *Michaela A. Cooper*
English Teacher & DUNEHA Founder, Dubai UAE




Chapter 1



Zayn woke up with a pep in his step. It was the opening day of the Al Dhafra Festival! He quickly slipped on his best kandoora and ran downstairs. He found his big brother Rashid and his twin sister Amira waiting for him. Today would be the beginning of his greatest adventure, but Zayn didn't know that yet.



A watercolor illustration showing a view from inside a car. The top part of the image is a light blue sky, with a dark blue, textured shape representing the car's interior or window frame in the upper left corner. The middle section is a vast, flat, yellowish-brown landscape, representing a dry, arid region. The bottom part of the image shows the dark blue, textured interior of the car, with a white line indicating the edge of the window. The overall style is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a muted color palette.

Everyone climbed into the car. Along the way, Zayn rolled down his window and felt dry, arid air on his face. He saw vast stretches of barren, overgrazed land. Why hasn't it rained this season? he wondered.





Upon reaching the festival, the children wasted no time going to their favourite activities. Amira headed off to the Khoos Display (handwoven palm fronds), Rashid to the Traditional Performances, and Zayn to the Falconry Contest. They agreed to meet later at the Palm Date Competition.

As Amira got immersed in her craft and Rashid met up with his friends, Zayn saw something most peculiar at the Falconry Contest: a silvery, translucent falcon with a white crescent on its chest. It sat atop the highest dune, watching the others. It sat atop the highest dune, watching the others.



“Excuse me sir, whose falcon is that?” Zayn asked the organiser, while pointing at the silver falcon. The organiser squinted in the direction where Zayn was pointing.

“Ya Habibi, there is no falcon there.”



Zayn looked back at the dune and realised that the falcon was hopping towards him. He wondered why the falcon wasn't flying and why no one else could see it. As the silver falcon came closer, it appeared much larger than a normal falcon.

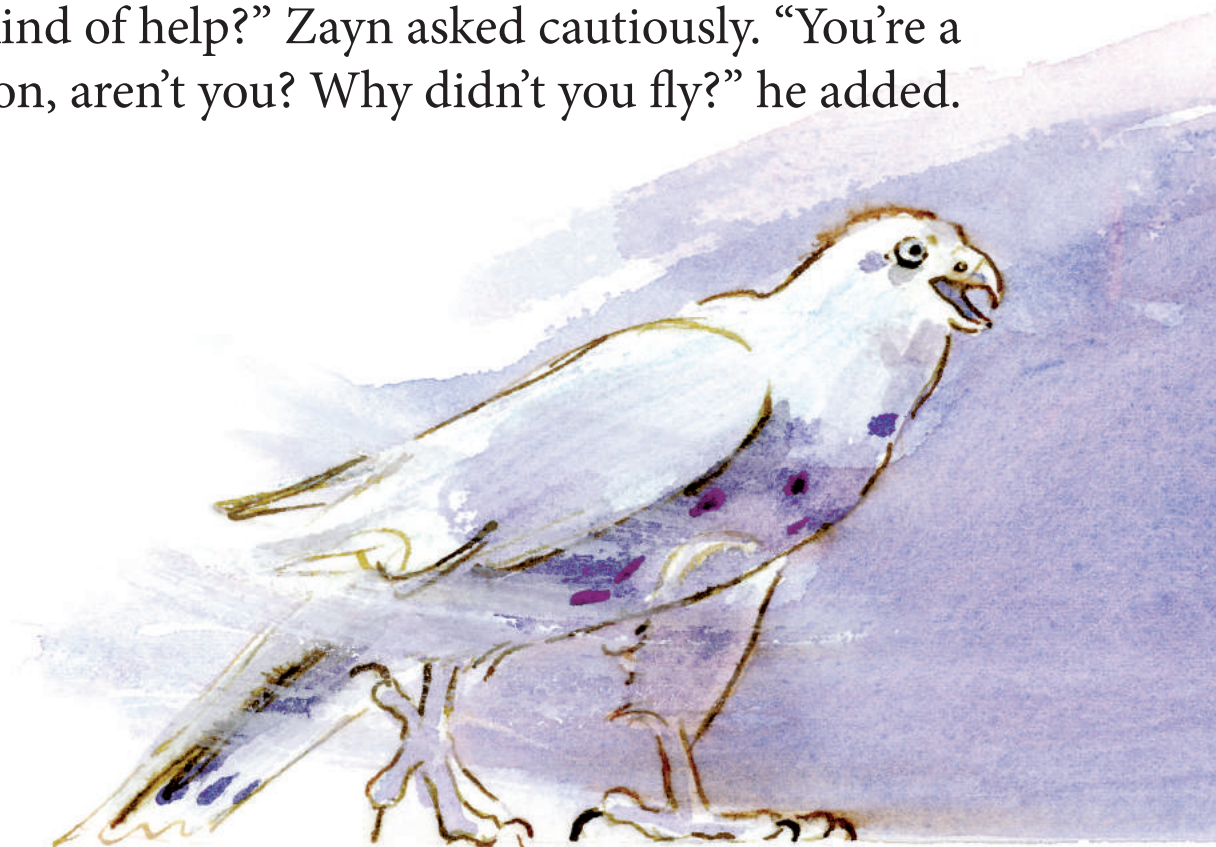
Zayn moved to a quieter area, and it followed him.
“Why are you following me?”

“You can see me?” the falcon asked.

“You can talk?!” Zayn exclaimed.

“I am following you because I require help,” the falcon replied calmly.

“What kind of help?” Zayn asked cautiously. “You're a real falcon, aren't you? Why didn't you fly?” he added.





“I am a spirit falcon named Fida. I cannot fly because the skies are polluted,” she answered.

“I need you to take this whistle and blow into it after sunset in the outer parts of the desert. This is a test to see if you are worthy,” she explained, as a small whistle materialised in front of her.

Spirit?! Worthy?! He froze, his heart thumping in his chest. I need Rashid and Amira. There’s no way this is happening, it’s just a dream. Is this the adventure I’ve been looking for? Or wishful thinking? Besides, how can children help? Zayn was filled with questions.

Fida nodded reassuringly, as if she had read his mind. She then hopped away, leaving the whistle. Zayn picked it up and set off towards the Palm Date Competition, lost in thought.





Chapter 2



Zayn told his siblings all about the encounter. Amira remembered that she had heard about a Silver Spirit Falcon named Fida in an old folktale. Together, they decided there was no harm in trying what the falcon had asked of them.



The sun was setting. They had all trekked to a more secluded space in the desert. Zayn held the whistle nervously as he saw the shades of orange and red disappearing within the endless sea of sand and dunes. After some encouragement from Rashid, he finally decided to blow into it. The sound it made was like the call of an Arabian oryx. The whistle disintegrated into the sand and slipped through Zayn's fingers. A deeper call echoed, and a huge spirit oryx charged through the dune in front of them. It had a golden translucent body with a crescent on its chest!



“Who has summoned me?” he bellowed. Hesitantly, Zayn raised his arm.

“It was me... er... .”

“Are you brave enough to pull off one of my horns?” the oryx asked abruptly.

The children shared an uncertain glance and looked at the long, slender, sharp horns. Zayn mustered all his courage, stepped forward, and tugged at one. It didn't budge.

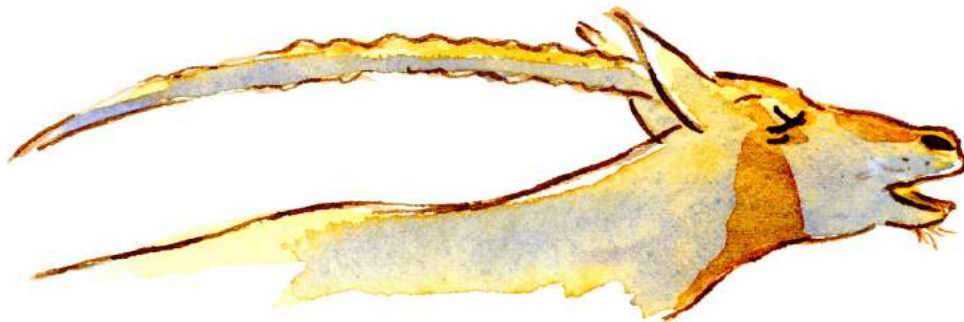
“Yalla! Go on!” said the oryx lightheartedly.



Zayn tried again, a little harder. It still wouldn't budge. He braced himself and yanked it off. Zayn expected a crack or a snap, but instead the horn was hollow. He marvelled that it resembled a Ney, an Arab flute-like instrument. A small piece of blue twine was tied to one end and a sea snake's head was carved into the other.



“Very good. My name is Ramal. I once frolicked through these now desolate lands, but they have become too dry and empty since the cloud forests were cut down. I will teach you a melody, which you will play at Mirfa Beach, after cleaning the oil spill that has plagued my brother.”



Amira stepped forward, since she had some music experience. She quickly wrote down the melody that Ramal taught her. Ramal then disappeared into the same dune from which he first appeared.



The next day, at Mirfa Beach, they dropped the twine into the seawater. It expanded immediately and transformed into a very heavy rope, which floated and started absorbing the oil spill. The children pulled the rope over the beach until all the oil was gone. The rope then mysteriously turned into clear water.

They felt exhausted, but were determined to finish the task.



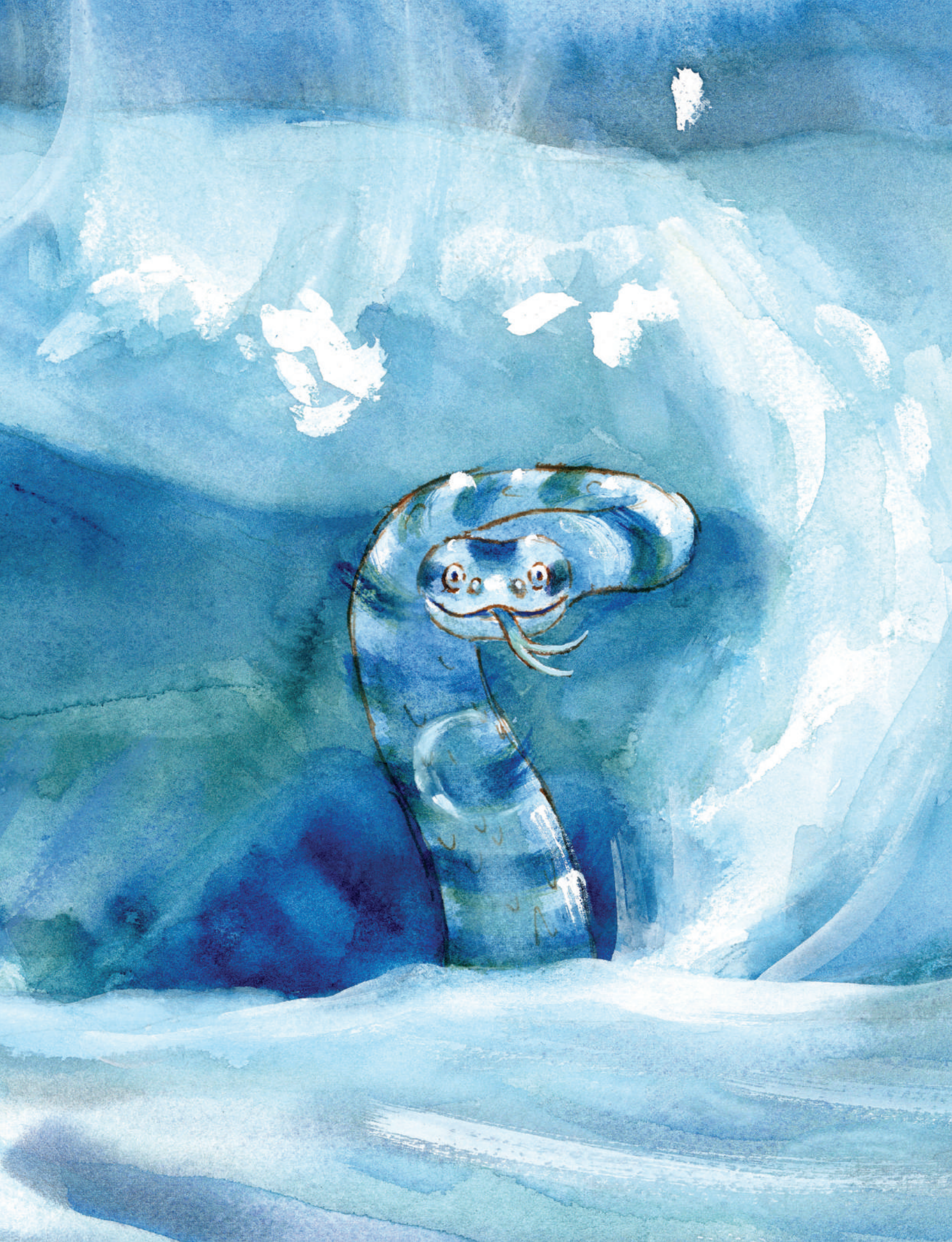
Chapter 3



Amira stood before the wild waves, holding the flute. She reached into her bag for the paper and gasped. Oh no! She thought. It must have gotten wet while we were cleaning! What am I going to do? What if I forget the melody?

She took a deep breath and blew into the flute. As she relaxed, the notes came to her naturally.

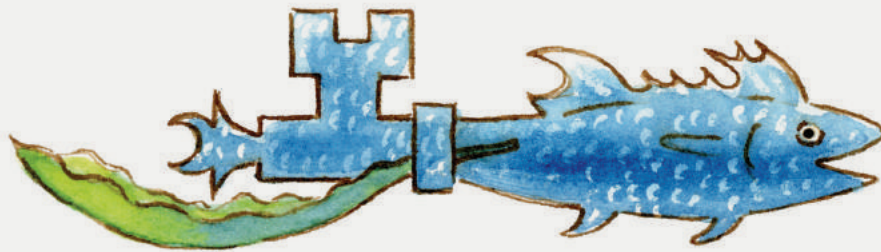
As soon as she finished playing the melody, the flute dissolved into seawater and a humongous Reef Snake spirit launched out of the waves and onto the sand. It glowed an amazing teal colour and was also translucent with a crescent symbol.





Its tongue flicked in and out of view as it hissed,
“It takes but a selfless act to save the sea from
spill and scrap.

“You have passed our tests. There were three
tests: Fida challenged you in belief, Ramal challenged
you in bravery, and I challenged you in dedication.
I am Thueban. You have removed the oil spill. Now
I can tend to my dying reef. Thank you. You have
earned my key.”



“With that, Thueban disappeared. In his place, he left
a small key shaped like a fish. Amira picked it up and
rushed over to her brothers. It was made of a blue
jewel. Zayn pointed out a small piece of seaweed at-
tached to the key’s side. He unfolded it and found
some writing on it that said:

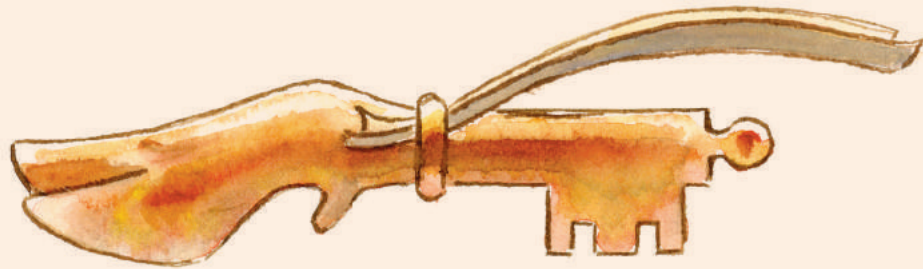
“Rejuvenate and cleanse the first two spirits’ realms
as you did mine to earn the other two keys. You have
only the festival days to do this before the spirits and
humans must separate once again.”



Over the next two months of the festival, with the help of friends and family, they sowed the seeds of native Mangrove, Ghaf and Acacia trees in the hopes of improving the ecosystem and turning the desert green in the coming years.

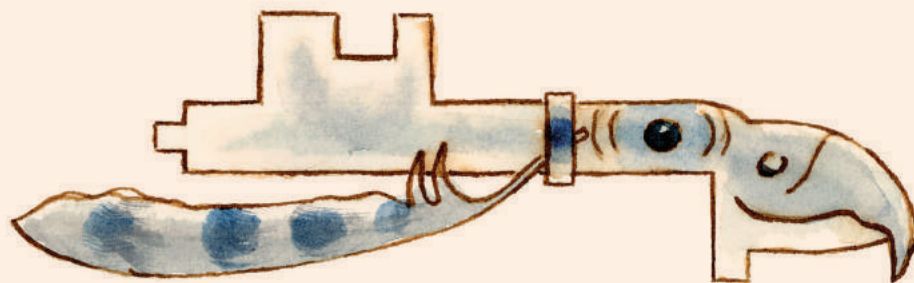


They participated in a cloud seeding operation to help restore the degraded air quality. Unfortunately, the seeding didn't work. With only a week left in the festival, they launched an initiative to try another cloud seeding operation. Thankfully, this time it worked! The resulting rains cleared the dry, arid environment and the hazy smoke in the atmosphere.



Thrilled, they went back to the places where they first met the spirits to find more keys. The oryx left a key made of sunstone, with its head shaped like a hoof. The falcon left a key made of white pearl, with its head shaped like a beak. The two keys had more instructions:

“Go to these coordinates on the last day of the festival, six minutes before sunrise, to find The Great Ghaf.”



Chapter 4



It was 6:15 am. A flash sandstorm raged through the desert. The time was coming. Zayn, Amira, and Rashid waited in the tent for the six-minute window in which the Great Ghaf would appear before sunrise.

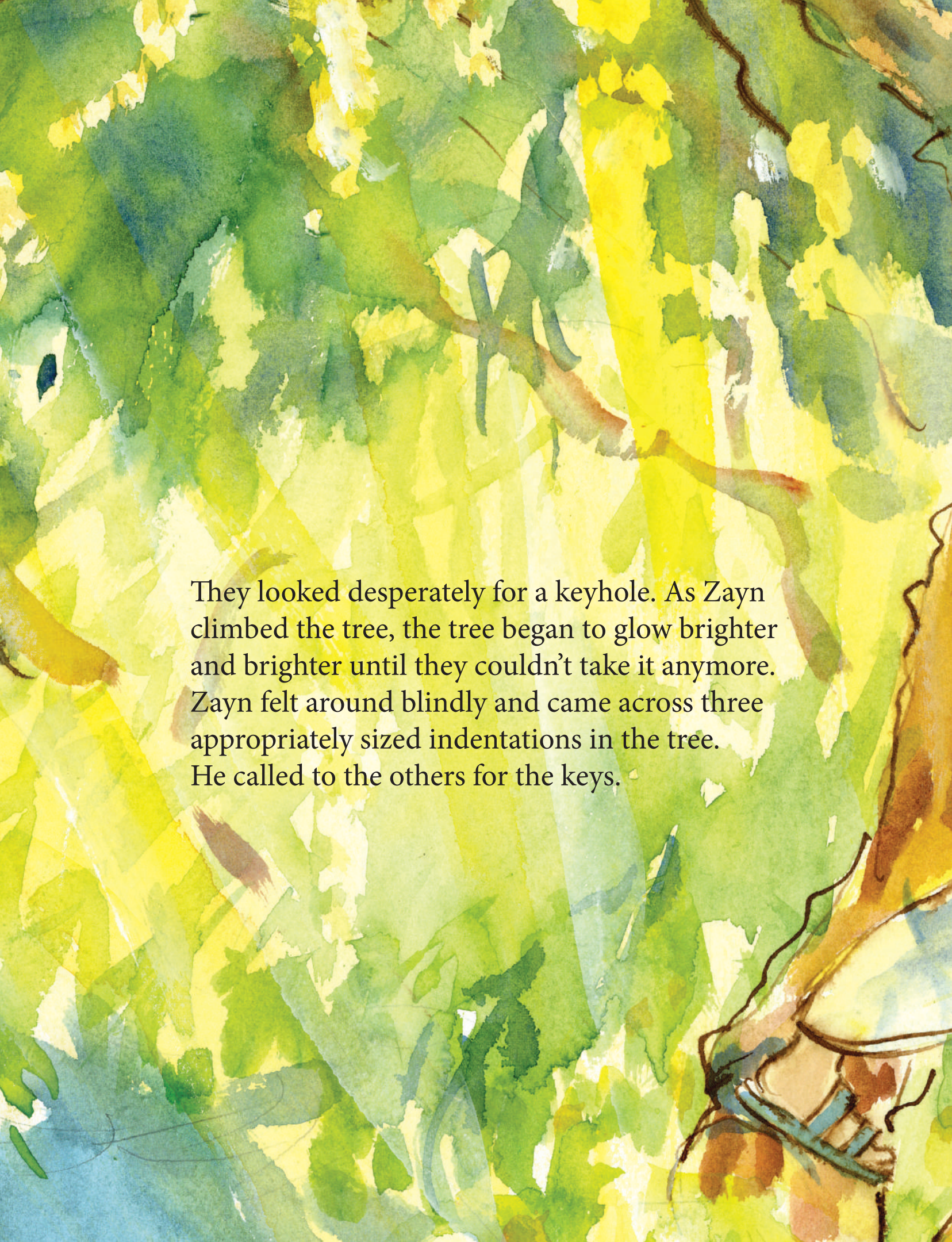
The alarm rang. They peeked out of the tent to see a clearing not too far away, like the eye of the storm. Right in the middle of the clearing lay a huge Ghaf tree with crystalline flowers on pearly green leaves, all atop a tree trunk with accents of sandy sunstone.



The children shared one final glance before they charged into the blistering sandstorm. Zayn neared the clearing, but a huge blast of wind flung him back. He lost his footing and stumbled, getting pushed all the way back to the tent.

Amira got flung back too, but Rashid charged straight towards the clearing, pushing against the wind, and managed to finally break through. The wind died down, and Amira and Zayn rushed over, each with a key in one hand. Rashid checked the time – there was only one minute left!





They looked desperately for a keyhole. As Zayn climbed the tree, the tree began to glow brighter and brighter until they couldn't take it anymore. Zayn felt around blindly and came across three appropriately sized indentations in the tree. He called to the others for the keys.



Only five seconds were left when Zayn arranged the keys in order and tried putting them in. The tree engulfed the keys and stopped glowing.

Time was up.

Nothing happened. All was lost. After all that. Zayn started climbing back down the tree and looked at his sibling's faces, which were crestfallen just like his own. He could see the sun peeking over the horizon.

Never in his life had he been so sad to see the sunrise.







The tree began to feel warm. It began to shake. Zayn jumped off just in time to see an old, wizened face appear on the trunk of the tree, its features twisted out of bark. It smiled at the children.

“It’s great to be awake once again. Thank you. Only hopeful souls and mindful people can use those keys to awaken me from my deep sleep. You have all proved yourselves as just that. You are worthy and able.

“Recently, the world has become polluted because of increasing ignorance towards animals and the land. Even my mother, the Earth, has fallen ill. Humans themselves have been competing with each other for centuries, but it has gone too far.

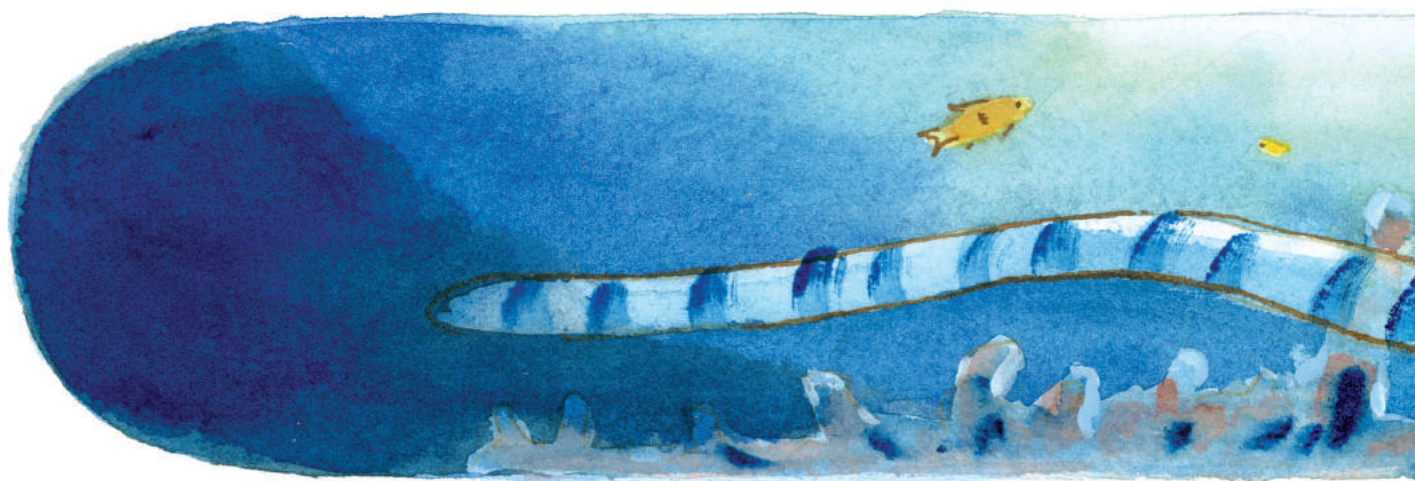
People must stay mindful of those who live alongside them, and of those who have sheltered and nourished them for centuries, ever since man came to Earth. Alas, we trees cannot do everything. The rest is up to you remarkable embodiments of the future, better known as children,” it winked at them.







The glow emanating from the tree focused and shot upwards into a blinding beam of gold, silver, blue, and green – the three colours of the spirits and the colour of the Great Ghaf’s own energy!



“Now, tell me. What have you learned?” The Great Ghaf asked. “So... the keys represent three principles,” answered Zayn.

“Belief; we need to believe in a better vision of the future,” he continued, piecing it together. “Bravery; we must not be afraid to take action to make that vision come true. Dedication; we must work hard to achieve that vision,” Zayn explained.

“Not to forget unity, we have to do this together! There’s no point dwelling on the mistakes of the past. But we, together, can learn from them and take action now,” Amira added.

“And most importantly, the final principle, Hope. Through thick and thin, through good times and bad, we must never lose hope,” finished Rashid.



“Truly amazing,” the Great Ghaf remarked.

“Now go! You have work to do! Plant the seeds of vision and these principles in the minds of other children as this adventure did in yours!”

“Be the Beacon of Betterment!” the Great Ghaf exclaimed.

With beaming smiles, the children set off on their way back home and thought of the Great Ghaf’s words. They couldn’t help but think what a wonderful world it could be with a little teamwork and dedicated effort!







about the author

Residing in the vibrant cityscape of Dubai, **Abrar Sirohey** emerges as a homeschooled luminary. His passions traverse the realms of cycling, badminton, immersive video gaming, and the captivating exploration of diverse languages and cultures. Amidst this tapestry of interests, the enduring classic “Le Petit Prince” authored by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry finds a cherished spot on his literary podium.

Embedded within his core philosophy is the profound notion of stewardship—Abrar firmly believes in tending to and nurturing the Earth, mirroring the tender care the little prince bestowed upon his own planet. Such custodianship, he maintains, ensures that our planet, in turn, can continue to sustain us. Moreover, the power of unity resonates strongly within him; he envisions our collective voices harmonizing to forge unbreakable bonds, empowering us to surmount any obstacle that dares cross our path.

Abrar wishes that this story will act as a beacon to the younger generations to connect and be inspired to take charge and make change together.

Abrar dedicates his work to his late elder brother, Ammar, who passed away in 2016.



about the illustrator

Genevieve Irwin Goelet is an accomplished illustrator, printmaker, and art teacher hailing from the vibrant realm of New York City. Her academic journey led her to a BA degree from Princeton University, followed by an MFA in Illustration earned at the prestigious School of Visual Arts. Hailing from the picturesque landscapes of Connecticut, Genevieve's formative years unfolded alongside honeybees and miniature donkeys, a setting that nurtured her creative spirit.

Within the embrace of her family, a rich culture of storytelling thrived, encompassing everything from captivating theatrical performances to the crafting of life-sized gingerbread houses—an atmosphere that kindled her artistic fervour. For Genevieve, the language of drawing and painting transcends mere artistic expression; it becomes a conduit through which she comprehends and exults in the tapestry of existence.

The pages of this book come alive under her deft hand, with each illustration a masterpiece crafted using a palette of watercolour, gouache, and walnut ink—an artistic fusion that lends depth and vibrancy to the imagery.



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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

All children are holders of important human rights. Twenty-five years ago in 1989, over a hundred countries agreed on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the most important human rights treaty in history, they promised to protect and promote all children's equal rights, which are connected and equally important. In the 54 Articles of the Convention, countries make solemn promises to defend children's needs and dreams. They recognize the role of children in realizing their rights, which requires that children be heard and involved in decision-making. In particular, Article 24 and Article 27 defend children's rights to safe drinking water, good food, a clean and safe environment, health, and quality of life. Article 29 recognizes children's rights to education that develops personality, talents, and potential, respecting human rights and the natural environment.

— *Dr. Alexandra Wandel*
World Future Council



Voices of Future Generations Children's Initiative



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Sustainable Development Goals Statement

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are a bridge from the previous Millennium Development Goals adopted by the international community in 2000 to the future. Construction of this bridge began in 2012 at the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development. At this Conference, countries agreed that it was time to take concrete action for the present and the future by acting on issues such as climate change, poverty, inequality, and biodiversity. This resulted in *The Future We Want*, a global statement of priorities and responsibilities for countries toward the people, environment, biodiversity, and future.

In 2015, the bridge took shape in the form of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which countries agreed to implement between 2015 and 2030. The SDGs, as they are commonly called, comprise a set of 17 specific goals, over 160 targets within these goals, and hundreds of indicators to measure if the goals and targets are being met. The SDGs address the key issues that face our world community now and that will define this community in the future, such as poverty, climate change, education rights, gender equality, discrimination, health, food and water access and safety, and the promotion of justice for all members of society. Since 2015, children around the world have joined in efforts to incorporate the SDGs in their countries and communities, adding their voices and perspectives as future leaders. The SDGs show the power of all people, including children, to create positive and lasting change that addresses the needs of local and global society.

— *Dr. Alexandra R. Harrington*
Centre for International Sustainable Development Law



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Thanks and Inspiring Resources

Voices for Future Generations Children's Initiative' International Commission and Leadership Council

Warmest thanks to the International Commission, launched in 2014 by His Excellency Judge CG Weeramantry, UNESCO Peace Education Research Award Laureate, which supports, guides and profiles this new series of Children's Books Series, including Judge Marcel Szabo (Hungary), Prof. Marie-Claire Cordonier Segger (CISDL), Prof. Kirsten Sandberg (University of Oslo), Isobel Abulhoul OBE (Emirates Literature Foundation), Ms Alexandra Wandel (WFC), Ms Ms Hannah Rolls (UK), Prof. Carey Newman or Hayalthkin'geme (University of Victoria), Kristiann Allen (University of Auckland), Dr James Moody (Australia), Dr Christina Voigt (Norway), Mr James Moody (Australia), Jona David (VoFG CI Alumni), Ms Helene Kotter (UK), Mr Erick Kassongo (DRC), Dr Robert Kibugi (Kenya), Ms Adriana Zacarias (UNEP), Dr Alexandra Harrington (CISDL), Ms Melinda Manuel (PNG).

Voices for Future Generations Children's Initiative' Goodwill Ambassadors and Team

Most sincere appreciation to HH Sheikha Hissa bint Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum (ELF / Middle East), Dr Gabrielle Sacconaghi-Bacon (Moore Foundation / North America), Adv. Neshan Gunasekera (VoFG CI / CISDL), Dr Odeeth Lara-Morales (VoFG CI / CISDL), Ms Ela Martinez (VoFG CI), Ms Allison Lalla (VoFG CI), Isabel Fernandez-McAuley (VoFG CI).

The World Future Council consists of 50 eminent global changemakers from across the globe. Together, they work to pass on a healthy planet and just societies to our children and grandchildren. (www.worldfuturecouncil.org)

United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) strives to build networks among nations that enable humanity's moral and intellectual solidarity by mobilizing for education, building intercultural understanding, pursuing scientific cooperation, and protecting freedom of expression. (<https://en.unesco.org/>)

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its three Optional Protocols, by its State parties. (www.ohchr.org)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. (www.unep.org)

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) envisions a just world that values and conserves nature, working to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. (www.iucn.org)

Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL) supports understanding, development, and implementation of law for sustainable development by leading legal research through scholarship and dialogue and facilitating legal education through teaching and capacity-building. (www.cisd.org)

Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF) established in 1984 is the premier ENGO in Taiwan. Implementing environmental education, tree plantation, and international participation through coordinating transdisciplinary resources to push forward environmental and sustainable development in our time.



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World's Largest Lesson (WLL) World's Largest Lesson brings the Global Goals to children all over the world and unites them in taking action. Since it was launched in September 2015, the World's Largest Lesson has reached over 130 countries and impacted over 8 million children each year. (<https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/>)

Emirates Literature Foundation, home of the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature is a not-for-profit nongovernmental organization that supports and nurtures a love of literature in the UAE and across the region through a programme of varied cultural initiatives. Recognising the distinctive contribution that literature makes to children's lives, the Foundation focuses on introducing and cultivating a spirit of reading while acting as a catalyst for writing and cultural exchange. (<https://www.elfdubai.org/en/home>)

About the Voices of Future Generations Children’s Initiative

The Voices for Future Generations Children’s Initiative (VoFG CI) is a not-for-profit worldwide programme promoting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, supporting children globally to write, publish books and raise their voices today about the world they hope to inherit tomorrow.

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Voices of Future Generations Children’s Initiative (VoFG CI), led by the United Nations and a consortium of educational charities including the World Future Council (WFC), the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL), the Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF), the Fundacion Ecos and the Trust for Sustainable Living (TSL) among others, as well as the Future Generations Commissioners of several countries, and international leaders from the UN Division for Sustainable Development, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and other international organizations, launched the Voices of Future Generations Children’s Initiative, which included a series of books for children, written by children.

Every year since 2014, we feature stories from our selected group of Child Authors, inspired by the world’s Sustainable Development Goals and by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) itself. Our junior authors, ages 8-12, are concerned about future justice, poverty, the global environment, education, and children’s rights. Accompanied by illustrations, each book profiles creative, interesting, and adventurous ideas for creating a just and greener future, in the context of children’s interests and lives.

We aim to publish the books internationally in ten languages, raising the voices of future generations and spread their messages for a fair and sustainable tomorrow among their peers and adults, worldwide. We welcome you to join us in support of this inspiring partnership, at www.vofg.org.

— *Dr Odeeth Lara-Morales*
Programme Manager, VoFG CI

Abrar has shown not only his talent as a storyteller but also his comprehensive knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals in a way that will help young people better understand and tackle the difficulties that lie ahead for them. In the years to come, the dissemination of knowledge through stories will be an essential weapon in the fight against climate change.

David Hirsch

Advisor for Library Services, Mohammed bin Rashid Library Foundation

The passionate tale of Zayn, Amira and Rashid will encourage readers to take on the challenge of preserving our ecosystems. The siblings embark upon a courageous adventure to bring about a brighter future, working together on a series of tests to reverse environmental degradation.

Michaela A. Cooper

English Teacher,

Dubai and Northern Emirates Homeschooling Association (DUNEHA)

Founder, Dubai, UAE

In the realm of the extraordinary, where the boundaries of reality intertwine with the magic of the unknown, unfolds a tale of courage, unity, and transformation. 'The Beacon' traverses shifting sands and dances with the wind, embodying the very essence of belief, bravery, dedication, unity, and hope. As the story unfurls, it unveils more than a tale—it beckons us to examine our relationship with the world around us, encouraging us to become stewards of a harmonious existence.

Dr Odeeth Lara-Morales

Programme Manager, VoFG CI



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Voices of Future Generations Children's Initiative



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