

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

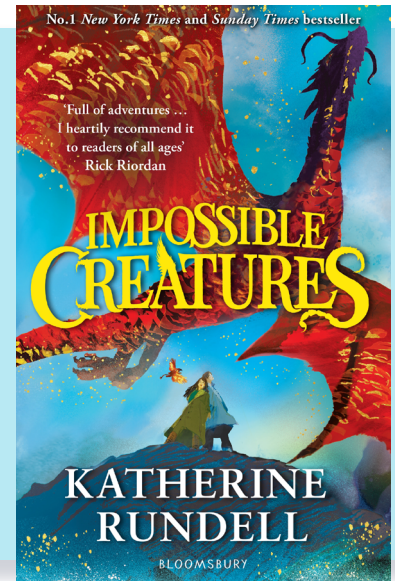
KATHERINE RUNDELL



‘Full of adventures, wonderful side characters, new lands and so many fantastic creatures. I heartily recommend it to readers of all ages’
Rick Riordan

ABOUT THE BOOK

Christopher is stunned when he discovers a passage to the Archipelago: a cluster of magical islands where all the creatures of myth still live and breed and thrive in their thousands. There he meets Mal: a girl from the islands, who is in possession of a flying coat and a baby griffin, and who is being pursued by a killer. Together they embark on an urgent quest to discover why the creatures are suddenly perishing, voyaging across the wild splendour of the Archipelago, where sphinxes hold secrets and centaurs commit murder, in a bid to save both the islands and the world beyond them from a rising evil – before it’s too late.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Katherine Rundell is a multi-million-bestselling author whose novels for children have won the Waterstones Children’s Book Prize, the Blue Peter Book Award and the Costa Children’s Book Award, among many others. *Impossible Creatures* was Waterstones Book of the Year 2023, and in 2024 Katherine was named the British Book Awards Author of the Year and *Impossible Creatures* won the Children’s Fiction Book of the Year. She is a Quondam Fellow of All Souls College and a Fellow of St Catherine’s College, Oxford, where she works on Renaissance literature. Her books for adults include *Super-Infinite*, winner of the Baillie Gifford Prize. Very occasionally she goes climbing across the rooftops of Oxford, late at night.

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TEACHING RESOURCES SUITABLE FOR AGES 9+

Explores themes of:

✓ Mythical creatures ✓ Fantasy worlds ✓ Endangered animals ✓ The natural world ✓ Friendship

Subject checklist:

✓ English ✓ Science ✓ Geography ✓ PSHE ✓ Art and Design

The activities included here are suitable for the classroom or library sessions.

CONTENTS

Pre-reading activities

Focus 1 – Mal's Character

Activities: Create a character profile for Mal.

Objectives: Retrieve information from the text and make inferences from details stated and implied.

Focus 2 – Real-life Incredible Creatures

Activities: Research an endangered animal; present research in a creative and engaging way.

Objectives: Carry out research using a variety of sources; communicate effectively with an audience.

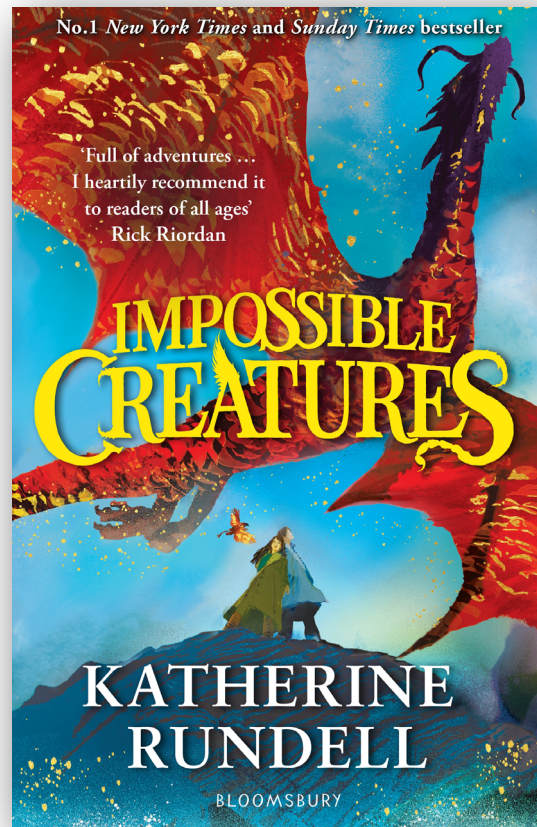
Further Activity Ideas

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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES



Book Cover Discussion Questions:

1. What is the first thing you notice about the front cover?
2. What genre do you think this book might fit within and why?
3. What do you notice about the typography of the book title?
4. What do you think an 'impossible creature' is?
5. Can you make any inferences about the main characters in the story based on the front cover?
6. Does the book cover remind you of any other books you've read?
7. What questions do you have about the book based on the front cover?

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Read the blurb on the back of the book. What do you picture when you imagine a land 'where all the creatures of myth still live and thrive'? Discuss with your class.

Have a look at the pictures of mythical creatures below. Which of these creatures appear on the front cover of the book? Can you match each creature with the statement you think describes it?



This creature uses the lights of its ears to attract prey, which it then devours.

The tooth of this creature, when held in the mouth of a human, allows its owner to understand any language.

There are thirty-seven species of this creature. The largest is the size of a cathedral.

This creature has the wings of an eagle. Its wingspan is broad enough to shelter a child beneath it.

Turn to the back of the book and read *The Guardian's Bestiary* to find the answers!

Which of the creatures in the *The Guardian's Bestiary* would you most like to meet? Which would you definitely not like to meet?!

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Focus 1 – Mal’s Character

Read this extract from pages 9-10

So it was with no instruction at all that Mal took to the sky. The nearest neighbours had laughed at her, a small girl swamped in a coat running into the wind; so she’d flushed, and woken earlier the next day so nobody would see her. At first, when the wind dropped, she used to thump down to the ground with a bone-breaking crack; she had fractured both her ankles at different times, snapped an arm and bent her little finger backwards to the wrist. Her big toenail had turned an interesting green-black and fallen off. But she had tried again, and again, licking the blood off her skinned knees, climbing up trees and jumping out of them.

And she had proved her neighbours wrong.

‘No, I will do it,’ she said, when the neighbour’s boy laughed at her. ‘You don’t know anything about it.’ She wore her chin high, on those days. People were difficult – she felt herself grow spiky around them, liable to say the wrong thing and blush right up to her forehead – but the sky made perfect sense to her. She might be grubby and awkward on the ground, but in flight, the locals said, Mal Arvorian was a thing worth seeing.

By the age of nine, she’d learned to glide to a gentle stop. By ten, she could land on the tips of her toes, or on one foot. By twelve, she could tuck her chin to her chest and throw herself forwards, somersaulting in the wind. That spring morning she had flown over the sea with her bare feet skimming the water, her boots in her pockets, the ocean spray flecking her ankles, laughing with the speed and joy of it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How did Mal react when her neighbours laughed at her?
2. Can you think of a time you have persisted in learning a new skill even though it was hard? What helped you to keep going?
3. The author tells us that ‘the sky made perfect sense’ to Mal. What do you think this means? Is there an activity or place that ‘makes perfect sense’ to you?
4. How do you think Mal feels when she is flying?
5. Would you like to be friends with Mal? Why or why not?
6. Does Mal remind you of any other characters in books you’ve read? How is she similar or different?

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ACTIVITY! Create a Character Profile for Mal

Read on to the end of page 12. What have you learned about Mal's character? Complete the Character Profile for Mal below by filling in each of the four boxes with as much detail as you can.

Appearance	Character Traits
Interests and Skills	Friends and Family

MAL

As you continue reading, pay close attention to the challenges Mal faces and the moments of happiness she experiences. How do these events shape her? Think about how her character grows and changes throughout the story.

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Focus 2: Real-life Incredible Creatures

Read this extract from pages 170 - 171

‘Pantherfruit!’ cried Mal. She threw one to Christopher. ‘I love these,’ she said. ‘But they go rotten very quickly once you pick them, so people make them into wine, or jam. I’ve never had them fresh.’

The outer skin was tough – Mal spat hers out – but biting through to the flesh of it was astonishing. It was translucent, and tasted like red grape, only sweeter and deeper. He ate two so fast that juice ran down his wrists all the way to his elbows. Mal was similarly covered.

‘Why is it called pantherfruit?’ he asked.

‘Because it looks like a panther’s head. You know – they’re mythical – black, with claws – they run as fast as the wind? You must have heard of them.’

‘Panthers aren’t mythical.’

She stared at him. ‘Yes they are! Huge cats, that outrun horses?’

‘They’re real! I’ve seen one, in a zoo. And they didn’t look particularly like fruit.’

Naravirala spoke to them. ‘It’s true, Malum, that panthers exist.’

Mal looked at her; but she did not argue with so many teeth.

“‘Humans have always travelled between the Archipelago and the Continents,’ said Naravirala, ‘but still there is ignorance on both sides. People have always disbelieved travellers – particularly when they return, windswept and wild-eyed, and not quite in control of their tongues.’

She flicked her gaze at Christopher. ‘There are many here in the Archipelago who believe that your story of Henry VIII is a metaphor, or a parable: a warning to little girls, not to get involved with kings. And your panthers, your hedgehogs, your giraffes, your swifts: they all sound just as improbable and mythic to Archipelagians as unicorns do to you.’ She rolled back her gums and bared her teeth. ‘You humans must take care that they do not become so in reality’.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is Mal surprised that Christopher has seen a panther?
2. Imagine describing a panther, hedgehog, giraffe or swift to someone who has never seen or heard of one before. What would you say, and how do you think they would respond?
3. What is the most remarkable real-life animal that you know of? Share what you know about this animal with your class.
4. What do you think Naravirala means when she says, ‘You humans must take care that they do not become so in reality’?
5. Naravirala is right that many real-life animals are at risk of going extinct and becoming nothing more than myths themselves. Animals at risk of extinction are called endangered animals. Can you find out the main causes of animals becoming endangered?
6. What do you think humans can do to care for the natural world and protect endangered animals?

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ACTIVITY! Raise Awareness of an Endangered Animal

Your mission is to use your creativity to shine a spotlight on an endangered animal. You will help others see how incredible your animal is and inspire them to want to protect it!

1. First, choose an endangered animal that particularly interests you.
2. Carry out some research into your animal. Can you find out:
 - Where it lives
 - What it eats
 - Its size and appearance
 - What makes it special
 - Why it's endangered
 - How we can help protect it
3. Now, think about how you could share your research with others in an engaging way. Perhaps you could create a poster, leaflet, podcast or video? Aim to capture your audience's attention, inspire them to fall in love with your animal and encourage them to take action to protect it.
4. Share your project with your class, family and friends. By sharing your findings, you are helping to protect a real-life incredible creature and making sure it doesn't become a myth of the future.

When everyone has shared their projects, work together as a class to agree on three small actions you will take as a class or school to help protect the natural world and all its incredible creatures.

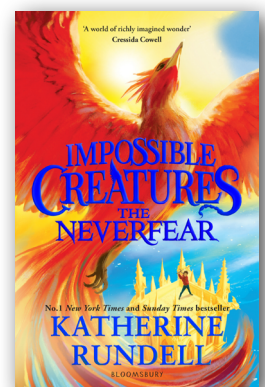
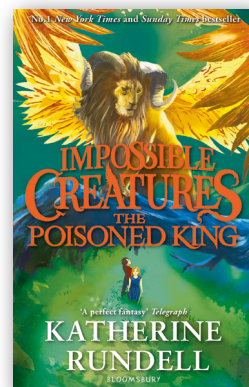
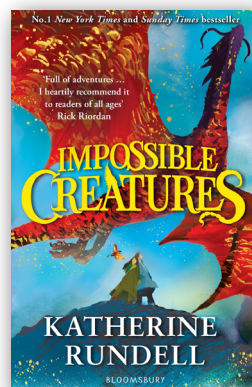
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FURTHER ACTIVITY IDEAS:

- On page 87, Christopher describes friendship as 'a defibrillator for the heart'. What do you think he means by this? What does it tell us about his friendship with Mal? Can you think of a simile or metaphor to describe how friendship makes *you* feel? Write a poem about friendship!
- What is the significance of Mal's name in the story? How do you think the author chose other names in the novel such as Christopher Forrester, Fidens Nighthand, Irian Guinne and Adam Kavil? Can you find out the meaning of *your* name? If you were a character in the book, what special skills or powers might you have?
- On page 131, Galatia tells Christopher about kappas, makaras, seabulls and hippocamps. Find out where each of these mythical creatures originates from. Now, choose a country or continent of the world that interests you and research mythical creatures from this region. Write an information text about a creature from this region including pictures and interesting facts. As a class, put your texts together to create a book or display entitled 'Mythical Creatures of the World'!
- On page 167, Mal and Christopher answer the Sphinx's riddles. The first two riddles contain statements about an object that seem to contradict each other. They follow the structure: 'I am/I have ____ yet ____ . What am I?'. Have a go at making up a riddle of your own! First, think of an object e.g. a clock or a chair. Then come up with two contradictory statements about it. Can your classmates guess your object?
- On page 174, we learn that the Glimourie Tree grows at the heart of an incredibly complex maze. Research some famous mazes from around the world. Now, have a go at designing your own maze to protect the Glimourie Tree! Use pencil and squared paper. When you have finished, share your maze with a friend. Can they complete it and find the Glimourie Tree?
- Design your own mythical creature! Draw a picture and write a vivid and detailed description of your creature inspired by the pages of *The Guardian's Bestiary* at the end of the novel.
- In chapter eight, Mal considers whether to take the potion or not. What are the reasons for or against this course of action? What do you think she should do and why? If you could speak to her at this point in the story, what would you say?
- On page 237, we learn that Jacques the jaculus dragon is desperate to be known in the Outerlands. Help Jacques become famous by writing and telling stories about him! Can you make up a story that will show the world what a heroic and important dragon Jacques is?
- On page 315, Naravirala says, 'great power must never reside in only one person. It must be shared.' What do you think she means by this? Do you agree? What might happen if one person has all the power over a group of people? How is power shared within your school, community and country?
- Themes that run through the story include: the natural world, bravery, friendship, love, freedom and power. Can you order these themes from the one you think is the most important in the novel to the one you think is the least important? Are there any other themes that run through the novel?
- The second adventure in the Impossible Creatures series, is called *The Poisoned King*. What do you think might happen in this story? Which characters do you hope to meet again?



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