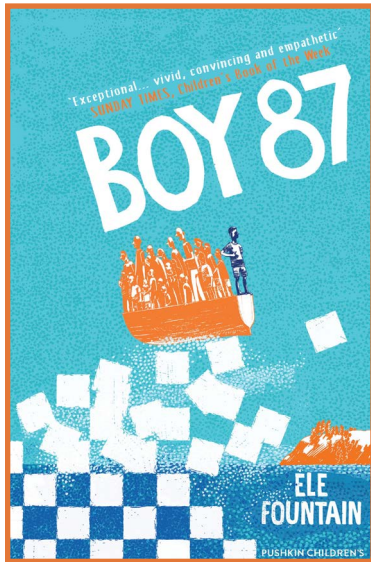




AN
EXPLORATION
OF

BOY 87

ELE FOUNTAIN



THE STORY

Shif is just an ordinary boy who likes chess, maths and racing his best friend home from school. But one day, soldiers with guns come to his door — and he knows that he is no longer safe.

Shif is forced to leave his mother and little sister, and embark on a dangerous journey; a journey through imprisonment and escape, new lands and strange voices, and a perilous crossing by land and sea. He will encounter cruelty and kindness; he will become separated from the people he loves.

Boy 87 is a gripping, uplifting tale of one boy's struggle for survival; it echoes the story of young people all over the world today.

'**BOY 87** is an original and beautifully written page-turner of a novel about love, survival and the strength that can be found in a hopeful human spirit'

Sarah Crossan, Carnegie Medal Winner

'Shif is an unforgettable character, and his story should be read by everyone who cares about one of the unfolding tragedies of our time'

Award-winning author Elizabeth Laird

SHORTLISTED WATERSTONES CHILDREN'S BOOK PRIZE

SHORTLISTED NORTHERN IRELAND BOOK AWARD

SHORTLISTED NORTH EAST BOOK AWARD

WINNER PORTSMOUTH BOOK AWARD

WINNER SOUTHWARK BOOK AWARD

WINNER SEFTON SUPER READS

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BOY 87



Title

Ele Fountain has said that while she is telling the story of one particular boy, this story also represents the many thousands of young people who are forced into exile because of insecure political situations in their home countries.

Do you think that the title **BOY 87** works well in making the reader realise that the story is both about one person as well as representing many people? Do you think that the title of the book is always significant? Would it feel different if the book was called Shif's Journey?

Activity: Can you think of some alternative titles for the book?

Writing style

BOY 87 is written in the first person. This point of view is a very good way of allowing the reader to get into the mind of the central character. It also ensures that the central character is the most important person in the book. This is particularly relevant in **BOY 87** as the book is about one boy's journey undertaken against great peril.

We see the world through Shif's eyes and experience his story alongside him. Do you think that this makes the character come alive for you? Do you feel that you empathise with Shif more than you do with the other characters in the book?

Activity: can you choose a short section of the book to write from a different character's point of view?

Friendship

Shif and Bini are best friends and do everything together. They live next door to each other, go to the same school and spend all their free time together. Then there is a part of the book when Shif is on his own. When Shif meets Almaz he makes a new and very important friend. Read **page 142** from 'I hope you can come with us...' to 'so I look at my feet.' Why do you think Shif finds it so hard to say anything to Almaz?

Activity: role play — with a partner, pretend that you are meeting for the first time. Afterwards: discuss the things you shared about yourself. What felt important to share?

Kindness

Throughout the story Shif shows great loyalty and love for his friends and he meets many people who support and help him. In **BOY 87** we see how important the kindness of other people is in life. Sometimes kindness is shown in small ways and other times in very big and important ways.

Read **page 126** from 'slowly, I ease myself from the rafters ...' to 'the grain sacks and the rafters'. What does this act of kindness on the part of the older woman mean for Shif? It is quite a small thing for her to do in some ways, but it is such a big thing for Shif as it means he has money to buy food.

Activity: as a class, discuss acts of kindness. Are they normally 'big' or normally 'small'? Which ones make you feel most special?



BOY 87

Themes

IMMIGRATION
FRIENDSHIP
KINDNESS
FAMILY
COURAGE
HOPE

Courage

Even in very difficult situations people show great courage. Think about the ways in which the characters in **BOY 87** show courage. Are Bini and Shif's mothers brave in the choices they make to send their sons away on their own? Are the men in the prison who help Shif and Bini brave in offering them the opportunity to escape? Is Shif brave when he leaves Bini behind in the desert?

Activity: write a descriptive account of an occasion when you were brave. Focus on describing your feelings.

Hope

One of the important themes of **BOY 87** is hope. Read **page 97**. Why do the men look at Bini and Shif with hope? Why would it be important to the men to share the stories of their lives with the boys? Then read **page 98**. When Shif and Bini play chess, what do you think it reminds them of and do you think that it would give the boys hope?

Activity: as a class, discuss what Shif's hopes are. Do his hopes change as the story progresses? Then, discuss what Almaz might be hoping for.

Family

Read **page 150** from 'Medhanie types in the country code...' to **page 151** 'as if Mesfin and I aren't there'. This is a very important moment in the book as it shows that not only has Shif made new friends but he has also found a new family to be part of. How important is family in **BOY 87**? Do you think families can be made by people who decide to be together or only when people are born into them? On **page 191** Shif talks about what family means to him.

Activity: as a class, discuss what family means to you.

BOY 87

Setting

Ele Fountain has not named the country Shif is from, nor the places that he walked through and where he went to get the boat across to Europe. But she has said that every place in the book is based on a real place and the route that Shif and the other people in the book take across the desert to the Mediterranean coast of North Africa is a route that is used by real people. Why do you think she chooses to make the places anonymous?

How does Ele show us that Shif is not living in the UK? What does she describe which gives an idea of the country that Shif lives in and the political situation of that country?

Write a description of your morning at home and your journey to school which gives the reader a clear idea of the place in which you live. Think about what you eat, what you wear and what you do: for example, do you listen to the radio or watch television while having breakfast, and if you do, what do you hear or see?

Further activities

Have a look at newspapers and magazines to find reports about immigration. Think about the people you read about and why they have undertaken their difficult journeys.

Now you have read **BOY 87** do you feel differently about the people whose faces you see on the news and who you read about in newspapers? Write a list of the things that would help you understand them better as individuals.

What do you think it would be like to live in a country where you could be arrested for saying something against the government, where you could be conscripted into the army and where journalists are not allowed to report in their newspapers about what is happening to the people of the country? Do you think that this political situation was the reason for Shif having to leave home?

Think about the men in the prison that Shif and Bini are kept in and think about the stories that they tell the boys about their lives. Why do you think Shif and Bini's mothers did not tell them the truth about their fathers' disappearances? What do you think Shif feels when he finds out about his and Bini's fathers and what happened to them?

