

**Xenoflight Teachers' Notes**

Title: *Xenoflight*

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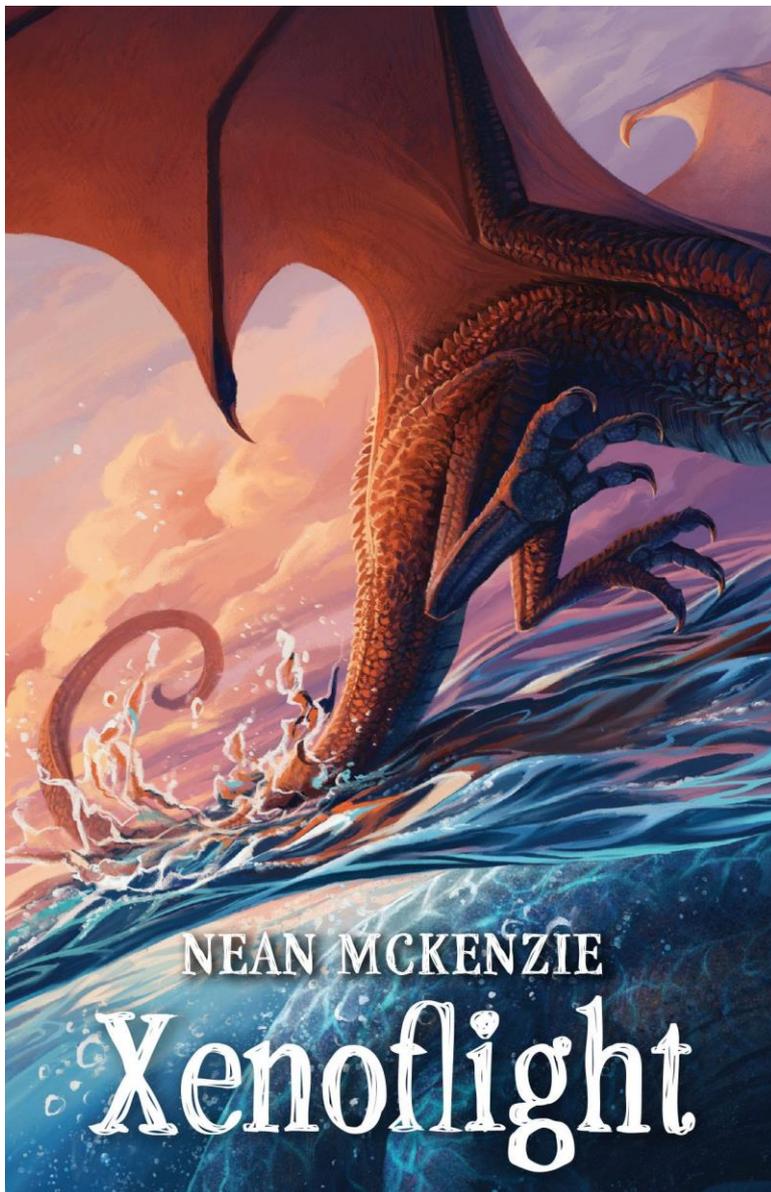
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Age range: middle primary/upper primary 8-12 years  
years 4 to 6



## SYNOPSIS

Nessa Santiago runs away to save her pet flying ferret Fernando from the Cryptid Hunter, who captures animals not proven to exist. With Kep Parker, a boy from school, Nessa tracks down her long-lost father while keeping clear of the anti-cryptid organisation HARNCESS. Along the way Nessa and Kep encounter weird creatures and are followed by a giant bird in the sky. When Nessa discovers evil plans for the Cryptid Park, she must discover the meaning behind her visions in order to protect the animals and to be with her family.

Australian Curriculum: years 5 and 6 Key Learning Areas

1. English (Literature)

## CHARACTERS:

**Nessa Santiago** is 13 years old and lives in Wye River with her Auntie Carla, who trains her in circus skills and counsels her to rely only on herself. Nessa's mother died in Spain when she was very young and she has never met her father. Since arriving in Australia, she has moved around a lot and her main friend is her pet ferret, Fernando. Nessa loves animals and passionately hates the **Cryptid Hunter** and his organisation HARNCESS for their treatment of cryptids.

**Kep Parker** lives with his mum and dad, who help to save cryptids from being discovered. Kep doesn't believe in cryptids and wishes his parents were less weird. He is popular at school and cares what other people think of him. He has an adopted sister Lia, who is from Africa and lives on their family boat.

Many of the characters in the story are either hiding or on the edge of society in some way (just like the cryptids)

**Auntie Carla**, hiding Nessa from the Cryptid Hunter

**Lia** on board the Bunyip's Lair, hiding from immigration authorities

**Quin** hiding in his shack with an underground gallery of cryptid photos

**Reggie**, the hybrid, hiding from humans and cryptids alike

**Sheridan**, protecting the HRS and ICEPA's Box

Then there is **Hardwin Smythe**, who has no respect for creatures and the environment and is in it for the money. He collects cryptids as trophies and organises a hunt for rich people. He also has lied to his best friend, Duncan Ness, about how his wife really died.

#### SETTING:

The story is mostly set in real Australian places, beginning in Wye River, along the Great Ocean Road in Victoria. Nessa runs away, along the coast to Apollo Bay. There, she and Kep get on a boat for Melbourne, sailing into Port Phillip Bay. From western Melbourne they are driven in a van up to Myrtleford in northern Victoria. Then they walk along the magical 'Underway' to the town of Brooklyn on the Hawkesbury River in New South Wales. Nessa then flies (on the mythical Drakenbird's back) to the Warrambungles in outback NSW, then to Kati Thankda - Lake Eyre in South Australia. From there she travels to the Cryptopark, in an undisclosed location.

#### THEMES:

##### **Family**

Through the story Nessa searches for her father and for the truth about how her mother died.

Neither of these things are what she expected and at first it is hard to accept them.

Page 123 *'She had a father. And look how it had turned out.'*

Page 179. *'Nessa felt like a cold stone had suddenly entered her chest. That was it.'*

## **Friendship**

Nessa and Kep are very different but become friends through their shared adventure. Nessa learns that she doesn't have to rely on herself and shows loyalty when she goes to look for Kep when she thinks he's in trouble.

Page 161 *Nessa thought of Kep coming with her to Myrtleford. Getting them out of Apollo Bay. He was her friend, she realised. Maybe the only one she'd ever had.*

## **The Environment**

Nessa and Kep travel to many beautiful places around Australia including the Otways where they see an 800-year-old tree, the unspoilt Warrambungles and the unique Kati Thankda-Lake Eyre. The thought of people destroying the environment makes Nessa very angry. She and others in the story are also working to protect animals from being mistreated.

Page 9 *There was nothing worse than litter on the beach, getting into the ocean and destroying the lives of tiny sea creatures.*

## **Accepting Difference in Others**

Cryptids are creatures (whether real or imaginary) that are different in some way. With Fernando, it is because of his wings, with Garark, it is because he shouldn't exist at all in this time. Reggie is part-cryptid and has even more issues, not fitting in to either world. Even the cryptids themselves are scared of one another.

Page 181

*Reggie's eyes widened as she took in Garark and his immense size. 'Is it ... safe?'*

*Garark took a step back at the sight of Reggie and snorted through his nose.*

*Fernando trembled in Nessa's arms and bared his teeth.*

## **Resilience**

Nessa displays strength in many ways when faced with adversity. She finds herself somewhere to stay when she has to escape her home, using the lock picking skills she has

been taught and buys herself food with money she found on the beach with the metal detector. Also, when things don't go as planned, she tries to fix her mistakes and makes sure she is loyal to her friends and those she is looking after.

On page 219 *There was no way she could succeed where her mother had failed.*

Then on page 220 *This man who took her mother away couldn't win this time.*

Australian Curriculum Key Learning Area English

## 2. Language

### WRITING STYLE

The story is written in close third person, past tense, with excerpts (visions from the past) written in a more remote third person, present tense.

Extra clues and information are provided in various forms such as

A scrap of paper on the beach

A TV interview

Letters found in hidden drawers or locked rooms, or written in invisible ink

A book of cryptozoology

Text message on a phone

Examples of figurative language used:

Page 188 *He got up and stretched his wings out to their fullest. Catching the light, they shone like a precious bronze metal.*

Page 128 *In the morning light, her black hair gleamed like a black swan's feathers.*

Australian Curriculum Key Learning Area HASS

Sustainability/Environment

The setting is in various places around Australia, showing quite different environments in an appreciative way.

The characters want to save animals and stop them from being mistreated. Cryptids are best if left alone, much like a lot of native Australian animals and our Australian ecosystems.

Page 226 *Duncan shook his head. 'You never cross a cryptid. It's out of our hands.'*

### **Discussion ideas**

1. Why didn't Nessa realise the Cryptid Hunter was her father when he came to the house in Wye River (if she was expecting her father)?
2. Why is Kep scared of Reggie but Nessa isn't? How does Kep become comfortable with Reggie in the end?
3. Why does Nessa assume the person organising the Hunt is the Cryptid Hunter, even though he's her father? Why do you think she contacts Hardwin Smythe?
4. Do you think Quin is over reacting about people seeing his photos? What would happen if everyone was able to see proof of the existence of these strange creatures? Would people be able to leave them alone?
5. When Nessa tried to buy a bus ticket, the woman was suspicious because she was on her own. How did she travel to the places she needed to? Can you think of any other ways she could travel without adults being suspicious?

### **Activities**

1. Make up your own cryptid. It can be any size, a combination of two animals, or a completely new one. Just use your imagination. Where does it live? What does it eat? Write a story about you discovering it.

2. Write a message in invisible ink. Write a story about a time where this technique could be useful.
3. Nessa doesn't understand when Lia talks to her about different parts of the boat. What nautical words can you find and what do they mean?
4. Quin was deeply suspicious of any mobile phones or computers. Try going through a day without using a phone or computer. What is different? What is difficult? And what sort of things do you do instead?
5. What circus tricks would you like to learn? Which ones would be useful in an adventure? Write a story about when a circus trick that saves the day.

#### Inspiration for the story

Nean first started writing *Xenoflight* in 2015. She felt she had finished with the characters from *Cryptosight*, but hadn't had enough of the world of cryptozoology. She saw a photo of a large pterydactyl-type creature flying above the La Sagrada Familia cathedral in Barcelona and in 2016, went on a wonderful family holiday to Spain. Nean also travelled to the Hawkesbury River, the Warrambungles and Myrtleford. Wye River she had been to many times and it is a special place for her. That was the start for her story.

#### About the author

Nean McKenzie is a children's writer and optometrist who lives in western Melbourne. Originally from Bendigo, Nean lived in New Zealand, Europe and North East Africa before returning to Australia. When Nean was a child she had a pet ferret called Fairy, which bit her father and then got lost down a rabbit hole.

Nean's first novel *Cryptosight* came out in 2019. She was awarded a Maurice Saxby mentorship for this story in 2017. Her second published book *Xenoflight* is a companion

novel to *Cryptosight*, set in the same world but with different characters. Nean has a diploma in Professional Writing and Editing from RMIT and writes regular children's book reviews for *Buzzwords* magazine