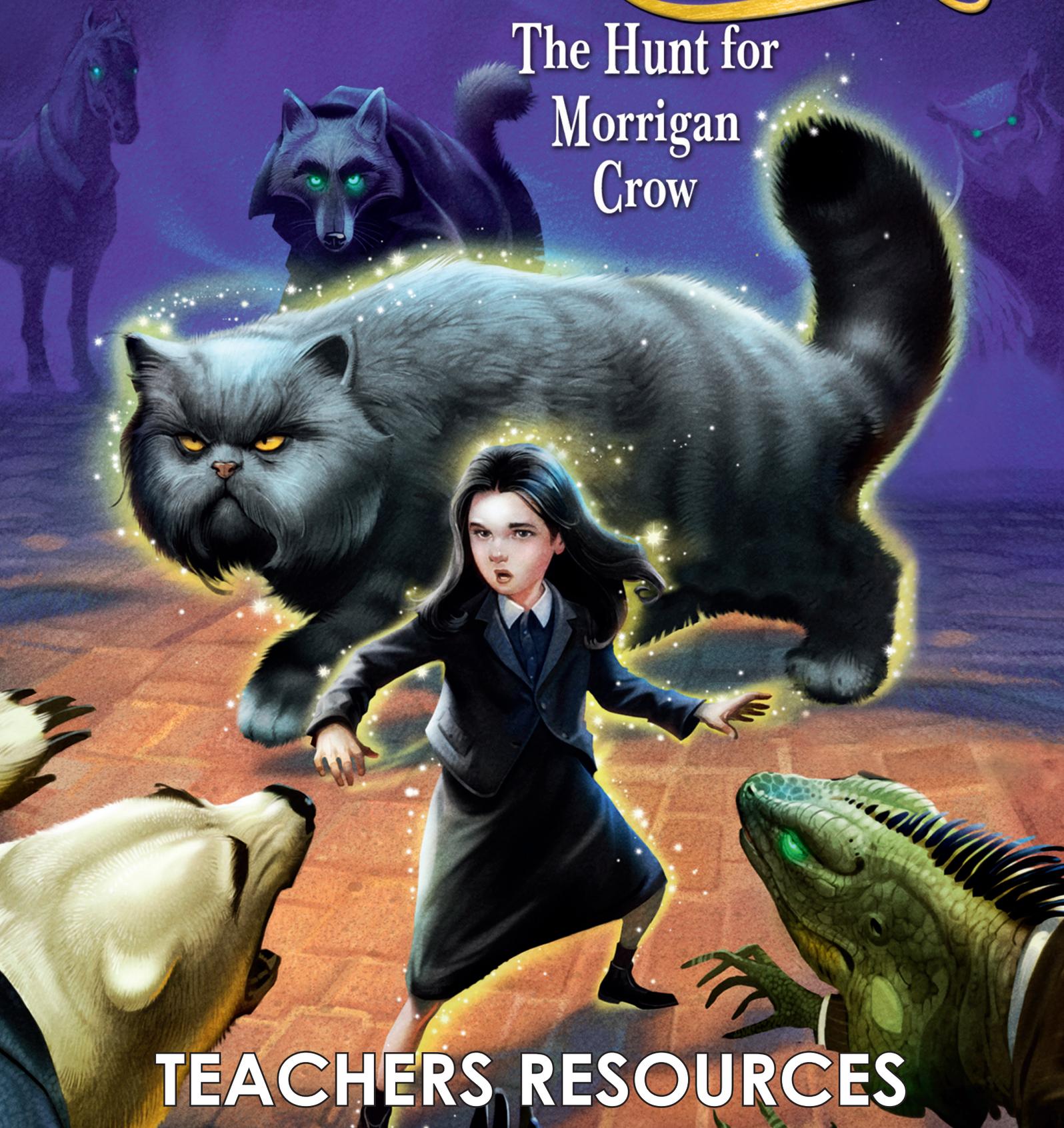


Jessica Townsend

# Hollowpox

The Hunt for  
Morrigan  
Crow



TEACHERS RESOURCES

Jessica Townsend

# Hollowpox

## Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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# INTRODUCTION

## **BOOK 3 HOLLOWPOX: THE HUNT FOR MORRIGAN CROW**

'Jupiter had warned Morrigan about this, two whole years ago, when he'd first explained to her what the Wondrous Society was offering. Respect, adventure, fame! Reserved seats on the Wunderground! *Pin privilege*, he'd called it. But it was a privilege the Society expected you to earn not just once, not just in the entry trials, but *over and over again, for the rest of your life*. She hadn't thought about it much at the time. But he *had* warned her.' (pp 42–3)

In this third book in the *Nevermoor* series, Morrigan (Mog) Crow discovers even more about the demands placed on a Wundersmith and about using her predecessors' powers, by being initiated into the Ghostly Hours in which she witnesses several Wundersmiths delivering lessons in the past. Meanwhile, a dreadful virus known as Hollowpox infects Wunimals in Nevermoor, and the government is forced to intervene to impose strict curfews and quarantine regulations. In response, a rabid protest group known as The Concerned Citizens of Nevermoor Party stir up anti-Wunimal sentiment. Morrigan's new friendship with Sofia, a foxwun, who becomes infected, makes the health crisis all too real for her. Then, Ezra Squall, Mog's old nemesis and fellow Wundersmith, arrives on the scene again, and tries to blackmail Morrigan into becoming his apprentice by promising a cure for Hollowpox. Mog finds out that Maud Lowry, the President of Wintersea, has the cure but that the Free State city of Nevermoor's Prime Minister Gideon Steed won't liaise with her. Morrigan's patron, Jupiter North, is forced to intervene with the Elders (who have played a somewhat duplicitous role in the negotiations) to bring about a possible rapprochement. And, as usual, Jupiter North, and her adopted family at the Hotel Deucalion, including Jupiter's nephew Jack, and her Wondrous Society (Wunsoc) school friends from Unit 919, support her as she exercises her previously underdeveloped skills.

Given that this novel was written well before the current pandemic, it is eerily prescient, reflecting so many aspects of life now, and the way that fear can create division, violence and even a tendency towards anarchy. Instead, though, it proposes joyfully that, despite all – friendships, family, and adhering to a moral compass will always prevail. And so, at the novel's end, even after the health crisis has been resolved, Morrigan makes the hardest choice she has ever made, simply because she believes it is the right thing to do...

## **BOOK 2 WUNDERSMITH: THE CALLING OF MORRIGAN CROW**

'Funny peculiar. He said that he and I have a shared enemy.' She frowned, trying to recall Squall's exact words. 'He said I had to be given the freedom to become the Wundersmith he needs me to be. Because... terrible things are coming. And he said that by teaching me to use my powers, he was shutting the window. But... his long-term plans were more important. He said he needed me alive.' (p 266)

'You are sisters and brothers for life. Not because you took an oath, but because you proved it.' (p 273)

Morrigan Crow has been inducted into Unit 919 of the Wondrous Society along with new members Archan, Anah, Cadence, Francis, Hawthorne, Lambeth, Mahir and Thaddea. But her new friends (apart from Hawthorne) aren't entirely happy to have been grouped with a Wundersmith. Meanwhile, Wunder is gathering in Nevermoor. Morrigan may have defeated her deadly curse, passed the dangerous trials and joined the mystical Wondrous Society, but her journey into Nevermoor and all its secrets has only just begun. And she is fast learning that not all magic is used for good.

Morrigan's perilous adventures continue in this triumph of inventive and original storytelling.

## **BOOK 1 NEVERMOOR: THE TRIALS OF MORRIGAN CROW**

Morrigan Crow had been a 'cursed child', the unloved daughter of state Chancellor Crow of Great Wolfacre, living in Jackalfax, in the Wintersea Republic. But all that changed on the eve of her twelfth birthday (which was predicted to be the day she would die) when she was invited by Jupiter North to join the 'Wondrous Society' and was spirited away to Nevermoor (the 'free' or fifth state no one talks about). There she befriended the eccentric staff of North's Hotel Deucalion, who included the housekeeper, Fenestra, a 'Magnificat', Kedgerie Burns, a concierge, Frank, a dwarf vampire and party organiser, Martha, a maid, and Dame Chanda Kali, a 'Grand High Soprano and Dame Commander of the Order of Woodland Whisperers'.

When Morrigan learned that she must discover a 'talent' or knack (like Jupiter, his nephew Jack, and her friend Hawthorne) in order to complete the trials needed to enter the Wondrous Society and to stay in Nevermoor, she briefly despaired. She also discovered that Mr Jones who had also tried to sponsor her in the trials, was actually Ezra Squall, the Wundersmith. The thrilling escapade ended with Morrigan discovering that she too was a Wundersmith. All this took place against a backdrop of growing political unrest and a looming energy crisis.

## **NEVERMOOR SERIES**

This is a stunningly original fantasy series. It is about a search for love, friendship, family and identity. For, despite being based on a fantastical premise, *Nevermoor*, *Wundersmith* and *Hollowpox* are fundamentally about what it is to be human and what it means to be part of a community.

# BEFORE & AFTER READING THE NOVEL

- Examine the cover of the novel. What does it suggest about the novel's themes?
- After you have read the novel, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?
- After you have read the novel, read about Jessica Townsend in reviews and articles and use the notes below to examine the text more closely.

## THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes relevant to curriculum topics (Studies of Society and Environment and English Language and Literacy) might be identified in this novel:

### STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT (SOSE)

#### FAMILY, FRIENDSHIPS AND LOVE

*DISCUSSION POINT:* Morrigan has spent her childhood as an outsider not belonging to her family, and the series is about her search for family which has resulted first in being embraced by Jupiter and his staff at the Hotel Deucalion who become a protective second family, and then by becoming part of Wunsoc and a group of friends in Unit 919 who have become a third family. But she stills searches for those she has lost, which takes her back (via the Gossamer) to her old home and to Emmett, the toy rabbit she was forced to leave behind. Why does she still yearn for that home despite her family's cruel treatment of her?

*DISCUSSION POINT:* 'Well, yes. Jealous. If she was being honest with herself. She couldn't even articulate precisely *what* she was jealous of. It was something about their ease with one another, the natural way they all just seemed to . . . fit. They were a puzzle with no missing parts.

Morrigan's family – her father, stepmother, grandmother and twin half-brothers – lived far away in the Wintersea Republic, and they didn't have any missing parts either. They used to have an unwanted spare part, but now she lived in Nevermoor at the Hotel Deucalion.' (p 77)

Is Morrigan's niggling jealousy of the Swift family typical of children who have been neglected?

*DISCUSSION POINT:* 'Friends who were *family*, who would defend her against anything, like Jupiter, and run through a horde of crazed Wunimals to protect her, like Fen. And she knew she'd do the same for them, no matter what.

That was what made her and Squall different. She wasn't him. The sudden certainty of it made her feel buoyant and brave.' (pp 474–6)

What role do friends play in one's emotional growth?

## COMING OF AGE & RITE OF PASSAGE TRIALS AND TESTS

*DISCUSSION POINT:* Morrigan's trials didn't end in Book 2, for in this sequel she confronts Ezra Squall again and discovers the complexity of making choices when issues are never really either 'black or white'. What does she learn about herself?

*DISCUSSION POINT:* Read these two quotes:

'Ugh, I knew it,' Jack groaned as they turned both keys simultaneously and the door opened with a soft *click*. 'I knew he'd make it so we had to *cooperate*, or something. That's so Uncle Jove.' (p 82)

AND

'It's not supposed to be about having a good time, though, is it? We have a job to do. We're supposed to be working hard and making ourselves useful and doing some *good* in the realm!'

'We're THIRTEEN.'

'I asked Gavin Squires if I could join the Beastly Division and you know what he told me?' Thaddea barrelled on. 'He said we had to start proving ourselves if we want to join the big kids. All of us. We have to prove ourselves as a *unit*.'

'I don't care what Gavin Squires said!'

'Well, maybe you should,' she spat. 'Since out of all of us, *you're* the one who's got the most to prove. *Wundersmith*.' (p 235)

Is cooperation essential in overcoming challenges?

*DISCUSSION POINT:* As the series has progressed, Morrigan has grown in her confidence: 'the sensible voice in Morrigan's head seemed to be getting quieter by the day. Some days she could scarcely hear it at all.' (p 101) In this third book, what incidents reveal how much she has matured?

*DISCUSSION POINT:* Read these two quotes:

'*Small sparks make big fires.*' (p 334)

AND

'Now is not the time to be small!' he roared. 'Where is the Morrigan Crow who reignited the dead fireblossoms? The girl who brought down the Ghastly Market, who conducted a glorious symphony of death in the Museum of Stolen Moments? Where is *that* Morrigan Crow? Bring her back!' (p 472)

How do these quotes relate to Morrigan's actions in this novel?

*DISCUSSION POINT:* 'She had to make the other choice instead. The hard choice.' (p 410) When Morrigan signs the contract (pp 515–17) has she set herself on a course which will prove even more challenging than what has come before?

## POLITICS AND BUREAUCRACY

*DISCUSSION POINT:* In this series, the novelist enjoys satirising and criticizing government bureaucracy, for example: 'As Elder Wong called their names, representatives from the Unusual Engineering & Infrastructure Advisory Board, the Architectural Anomalies

Association, and the Gobleian Library all stood up from their seats and waved, acknowledging brief applause.' (p 33)

OR

'For more than one hundred years the Republic and the Free State have been at an impasse, with little communication and no cooperation in either direction. Even if I could persuade *my* party to do the right thing – and I'm not saying I won't try – there's no guarantee Steed and *his* government would come to the table. Once upon a time, when I was a young idealist –' She paused to raise one sardonic eyebrow in Morrigan's direction. '– I'd hoped to change things. I've been trying for years to seek an audience with Steed. Even so-called enemy nations should have an open dialogue, but he's been utterly unwilling to engage. I'm afraid I can't imagine the Hollowpox has changed his attitude.' (p 423)

OR

Even a teaching hospital comes in for a bit of satire: 'Nurse Tim managed their comings and goings with a stoic resignation that suggested this was all merely business as usual – making sure the sorcery scholars sterilised their healing amulets, dimming the lights for the clairvoyant who came to check how Morrigan's aura was mending, and so on.' (p 158)

OR

'Could Steed *really* open the border to Squall? Certainly he could stand down the Ground Force, the Sky Force, the Stink, the Stealth, the Royal Sorcery Council, the Paranormal League and every other organisation that watched over the borders. But what about the ancient magic of Nevermoor that supposedly kept Squall out? Would it still matter, would it *work* without all that other help? Morrigan had no way of knowing.' (p 453)

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Discuss how bureaucracy is portrayed in this novel.

## HUMAN FRAILITY & PREJUDICE

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Read and discuss the following two quotes:

'Because often, Miss Crow, telling people they are at risk creates a different, sometimes even greater risk. People are dangerous when they're frightened. Remember that.' (p 40)

AND

'Darling, you know better than anyone, people hate what they are afraid of, and they are *most* afraid of what they don't understand. Wunimals are still something of an enigma, I suppose, and therefore some people see them as a threat.' (p 172)

What do they suggest about human nature?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Read and discuss the following two quotes:

'“Dogwun. Rubbish. If it's got four legs, a wet nose and a tail – it's a dog. In my day, we called things by their real names and none of this horsewun, rabbitwun, lizardwun nonsense. I'm sick of having to be so *respectful* all the time. Dogwun,” he finished.' (p 297)

AND

““We don’t ignore bigotry, Jack,” said Fenestra. “That’s how cowardly bigots turn into brave bigots.”” (p 299)

Discuss prejudice as one of the topics raised in this novel.

## JOURNALISM AND ETHICS

*DISCUSSION POINT:* The article about Morigan’s powers (pp 364–5) is a satire of the sort of headlines which appear in the tabloid press. It seems ludicrous but we read such journalism every day. Discuss the way such stories are framed to obscure rather than to reveal the ‘truth’.

*DISCUSSION POINT:* ‘Laurent St James is out there talking about you all day, every day, and if we don’t respond, we are letting him control the narrative. You don’t know how this works. Nor does Captain North. But I do. The more you hide from these people, the more they want to hunt you.’ (p 393) How does one ‘control the narrative’ in journalistic discourse?

*DISCUSSION POINT:* ‘Wunimal Shock at Nevermoor Opera Horse!’ (p 171) ‘Shock jock’ journalism relies on such eye-catching headlines, employing word play and jokes. Read some of the headlines in a range of newspapers and discuss how they work.

## FORCES OF GOOD AND EVIL

*DISCUSSION POINT:* Read these quotes:

‘After what happened in Courage Square, when there were no more Wundersmiths to protect people against Squall and his monstrous army . . . there was a brief, very dark period when it seemed he had won. That he’d conquered Nevermoor. And in that time, *Wundersmith* became synonymous with Ezra Squall, who had himself become synonymous with evil. A Wundersmith became a monstrous thing – something to be feared instead of loved and admired.’ (p 225)

AND

‘The Wundrous Society’s purpose now is to protect Nevermoor – and the greater Free State – from the corrupt and dangerous creations of Wundersmiths past. From the chaos that still thrives here. The chaos we ourselves allowed into this city, through our weakness and our failure to act in time.

“We must right our past wrongs,” boomed Elder Quinn’s disembodied voice. “We must close old wounds, even if the scars remain.”” (p 26)

What do these quotes explain about human nature’s battle between good and evil?

*DISCUSSION POINT:* ““It was an extermination,” he said. “It wasn’t supposed to be for Nevermoor, it was for the Republic, but she saw an opportunity to use it to force her way into the Free State.”” (p 456) How often do governments employ such shocking tactics in order to suppress or invade their neighbours? Examine some of the diplomatic and confrontational actions of contemporary leaders in this context.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Wunder is a metaphor for energy and power. What do these novels suggest about the importance of energy in the battle between good and evil forces?

## DEALING WITH A VIRUS OR PANDEMIC

**DISCUSSION POINT:** 'If we could at least prevent some of the attacks before they happen . . . but it's *impossible* because we don't know who's infected or how they get infected. We can't have eyes on every Wunimal in the city.' (p 206) One of the aspects of the current health crisis is that there are so many unknown aspects of Covid-19, which make responses to it a little like guesswork. Compare this comment to public statements being made by government medical officers about Covid-19.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Laurent St James founds the Concerned Citizens of Nevermoor Party: 'Forgetfulness, increased appetite, fidgeting, aggression? That described half of Unit 919 on a good day. How many Wunimals would be wrongly accused of having the pox, Morrigan wondered, when *these* were the symptoms people were watching for? It was that last bit of the poster that really spooked her. *Watch Your Neighbours. Don't Hesitate. Act on Your Suspicions.* It was like these "Concerned Citizens" were just trying to turn everyone against Wunimals Any Wunimals. All of them.' (p 280)

Compare this quote to some of the interstate and international rivalries which have been expressed during the current crisis.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Read and discuss these two quotes:

'As the Hollowpox took hold of Nevermoor, event after event had been scaled back or postponed or, in most cases, altogether cancelled. Jupiter didn't want to put any of the guests or staff at risk, nor could he bear to hurt his Wunimal friends by singling them out and asking them to stay away.' (p 292)

AND

'The Prime Minister, Gideon Steed, took the extraordinary measure of declaring a state of emergency in Nevermoor, and ordered that a sunset curfew be put in place for all Wunimals in the city.' (p 325)

What ethics are challenged by the tough decisions which have been made to deal with the current public health crisis?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Read and discuss these two quotes:

'Jupiter pushed on through the uncomfortable silence. "Is that what you'd like me to do? Turn away some of our friends while welcoming others?"' (p 318)

AND

"*Calm down?*" He stopped in his tracks. "Sofia, do you not see your rights being eroded? I won't just stand by—" (p 327)

In times of stress, do people sometimes forget their former allegiances and values?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** "'A slumber party!" Kedgerie said warmly as he pulled on a pair of bed socks. "The dear old gal knew just what we needed."' (p 449) How is this quote humorously reminiscent of the tendency in recent months for people in lockdown

to rediscover older habits such as eating and baking comfort food, sourdough breadmaking, playing board games and doing jigsaw puzzles?

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY**

Study the writing style employed in this narrative, and examine the following sub-topics:

### **NARRATIVE PERSON, NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE & TENSE**

*DISCUSSION POINT:* This is a third-person subjective account of Morrigan's experiences. How might it have changed had it been written as a first-person narrative?

### **SYMBOLISM**

*DISCUSSION POINT:* What examples of symbolism did you notice in this novel?

### **LITERARY DEVICES & WORD PLAY**

*ACTIVITY:* Find examples of the use of literary devices in this novel, using the table below to identify examples.

<b>Simile</b>	'She stepped through the strange rippling sensation again. The fabric of the world shook itself out like clean laundry.' (p 122)
<b>Metaphors</b>	'Miss Cheery was the only person Morrigan knew who utterly lived up to her name: she was pure sunshine. She was fresh linen, birdsong at twilight, perfectly cooked toast.' (p 3)
<b>Personification</b>	
<b>Word Play</b>	
<b>Other</b>	

*DISCUSSION POINT:* This novelist delights in puns and word play. What examples of such word play did you discover in the novel?

## HUMOUR

**ACTIVITY:** Humour in this series is abundant, for example: after Jupiter suggests that they hold a Golders Night in order to distract the people of Nevermoor from the Sewerfest, 'Morrigan, Hawthorne and Cadence shared a look. It was a very *specific* look of mingled bemusement, horror, exasperation and resignation. The kind of look one reserves for special occasions, such as when you've just learned that trains can come to life and hold other trains hostage, and that you've unwittingly joined an organisation full of people who have for some reason decided to nose into this sort of business, and you don't really feel like getting involved but you're just going to have to go along with it because everybody else is. That kind of look.' (pp 41–2)

OR

The fearsome group of old ladies chasing the leopardwun off the train (pp 71–2) is another hilarious scene.

OR

Hawthorne's mistakes in speaking Dragontongue (p 135).

OR

This parody of petty theatre jealousies: "He's very ambitious, Victor," said ensemble actor Stephen Rollins-Huntington. "Very *driven*, you know. I'm just saying, he'd do anything to get his teeth into a bigger part. No one's quite sure how he got to play 'Horse', to be honest – plenty of people have told me I'd have been a natural for it, and of course I've much more experience in the theatre. What happened there, that's what I'd like to know." (pp 171–2)

OR

"Me? I bring dead things to life." Sofia ran her paw down the page nonchalantly, as if she'd just imparted the most mundane piece of information. As if she'd said, *Me? I make cheese sandwiches.*' (p 189)

OR

Roshni's instructions for entering her Gobleian Libary: 'You must stay with the group *at all times*. You must pay attention, and listen to my instructions, and the instructions of my bookfighters. If we tell you to run, you run. If we tell you to drop to the ground, you drop to the ground. If we tell you not to pat the bunny in the waistcoat, then *trust me* – you do NOT want to pat the bunny in the waistcoat.' (p 246)

OR

"Did you just see that bloke with a *pitchfork*?" Hawthorne's voice had jumped up half an octave, his eyes grown wide. "Who even *owns* a pitchfork? I don't even know what a pitchfork is *for*!" (p 348)

Identify techniques by which humour is provoked. Add quotes to the following table:

<p><b>Sarcasm</b></p>	<p>'she enjoyed the jolly, showy man in red Jack liked to call an "elf-enslaving home invader"' (p 58)</p> <p>"Will you be conquering all of Nevermoor at once, do you think?" Arch asked, holding out an imaginary microphone to catch her answer. "Or taking it borough by borough?" (p 212)</p>
<p><b>Irony</b></p>	<p>"And – and I could cut out your liver with a SCALPEL!" This last, nervy declaration came from the most unlikely source. "Anah!" Morrigan cried in shock. "Well . . . I could," Anah insisted, and there was only the tiniest tremor in her voice. "In sterile conditions, obviously, and only if they were under a general anaesthetic." (p 45)</p>
<p><b>Exaggeration</b></p>	<p>Dame Chanda Kali's reaction to the news of Juvela De Flimsé's coma' (pp 86–7) is greatly exaggerated...</p>
<p><b>Black Humour</b></p>	
<p><b>Satire</b></p>	<p>'<i>Good Morning Nevermoor</i> with Alby Higgins, we're discussing the issue on everyone's radar this morning. Is there really a new Wundersmith, or is it all a hoax? Let's take some calls from our listeners—' (p 369)</p>

## STRUCTURE

The structure of the story can be analysed in terms of key narrative features used to engage the reader's attention and to shape the work:

a) *Strong beginnings and endings to chapters* are one way of structuring a narrative, for example:

*Beginning:* 'They came from everywhere. Swarming out from the gaps between books, crawling up from storm drains and pouring from shelves in a monstrous, chittering tidal wave of wings and eyes and legs . . . so many legs.' (Ch 20, p 263)

*Ending:* She was instead watching Griselda, who turned to the boy with a warm smile and said, 'Excellent question, Mr Squall.' (Ch 16, p 215)

Which other opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?

b) *Suspense* is the key to any narrative's structure. For example: 'Was that such a ridiculous idea? There *used to* always be nine, after all – that's what Elder Quinn had said. Could there be seven others out there somewhere? Could one of them be the jolly man in a red suit who brought presents at Christmastime?' (p 74)

What other questions provided suspense in this novel?

c) *Using a 'framing story or idea'* makes a narrative more cohesive but sometimes can be used as a foil to trigger a major surprise or turning point in the action. Morrigan's cursedness lay at the heart of the first novel, but her unknown powers as a Wundersmith were at the heart of the second. In the third, she faces her old demon, Ezra Squall, but also learns from other Wundersmiths and gains in her powers. The framing story is the virus Hollowpox which she must defeat, an action which leads to unexpected consequences in future.

Discuss the use of a framing narrative in this novel.

## SETTING

*DISCUSSION POINT:* Description in setting can be evoked via a complex range of literary devices. What devices did you identify in such descriptions?

*ACTIVITY:* Choose a passage that vividly describes any locale in this novel. Discuss the passage with the class.

## CHARACTERS

### Major Characters:

**At the Hotel Deucalion:** Morrigan Crow, a Wundersmith; her patron/sponsor, Jupiter North, the 'Great and Honourable Captain Sir Jupiter Amantius North, Esquire.' Who is 'a Witness. He sees things.' (Bk 1, p 21); Jack – or John Arjuna Korrapati (p 48) who is a witness like his uncle, Jupiter, and attends Graysmark School for Bright Young Men; Fenestra, a Magnificat and housekeeper; Kedgereee Burns, concierge; Frank, a dwarf vampire; Dame Chanda Kali, 'a Grand High Soprano and Dame Commander of

the Order of Woodland Whisperers'; Martha, the housemaid; Charlie McAlister, the chauffeur. **Morrigan's fellow members of Unit 919:** Archan Tate, a pickpocket; Anah Kahlo, a healer, whose patron is Sumati Mishra; Cadence Blackburn, a mesmerist, whose patron is the nasty Baz Charlton; Francis Fitzwilliam, a chef, whose patron is his aunt Hester Fitzwilliam; Hawthorne Swift, a dragonrider (and Morrigan's best friend), whose patron is Nancy Dawson; Lambeth (Lam) Amara who 'was, in fact, the Princess Lamya Bethari Amati Ra, of the Royal House of Ra, from the Silklands in the state of Far East Sang.' (p 15) She is a short-range oracle; Mahir Ibrahim, a linguist whose patron is Miss Mulryan; Thaddea (No-Retreat of Clan) Macleod, a fighter; Miss Marina Cheery, conductor for Unit 919;

**And**

Ezra Squall, alias Mr Jones, the evil Wundersmith.

**Minor Characters:**

**At Wunsoc School:** Dulcinea Dearborn and Maris Murgatroyd, the 'shapeshifting' Scholar Mistresses for the School of Mundane and Arcane Arts, who also become Rook Rosenfeld, Scholar Mistress for the School of Wondrous Arts; Heloise Redchurch, a bully, and the leader of *The Charlton Five*; 'Representing the Bestly Division, Gavin Squires of Unit 899.' (p 34) The three esteemed members of the Wunsoc's High Council of Elders – Elder Gregoria Quinn, a woman whose fragile appearance Morrigan knew to be extremely deceptive; Elder Helix Wong, a serious, grey-bearded man covered in tattoos; and Elder Alioth Saga, a large talking bullwun; Holiday Wu from the Public Distraction Department (p 36). **Sub-Nine Academic Group (Basement Nerds):** Conall O'Leary, Morrigan's *Opening a Dialogue with the Dead* teacher (p 106); Sofia, a foxwun; Ravi, a teenager. **Hawthorne Swift's family:** mother, Cat; father Dave' the eldest of the family, his sister Helena who 'was completing her fifth year of study at the Gorgonhowl College of Radical Meteorology, a school situated on a tiny island off the coast of the distant Sixth Pocket in the eye of a perpetual cyclone,' (p 63); his older brother Homer, who 'had taken a vow of silence for all but one day of the year,' (p 74); and baby sister Davina (baby Dave). **Gobleian Library:** Roshni Singh, 'youngest librarian in Gobleian history' (p 244), and Miss Cheery's friend; Colin, an Osttrichwun bookfighter (Wunimal) at the Gobleian Library. **Wunimals:** Juvela De Flimsé, the leopardwun; Brutilus Brown, a bearwun; The moosewun tenor Theobold Marek (p 160). **Wondrous Society Teaching Hospital:** Nurse Tim; Dr Lutwyche; Dr Bramble. **Government:** Maud Lowry, 'President Wintersea, leader of the Wintersea Party.' (p 418); Prime Minister of Nevermoor, Gideon Steed; Guiscard Silverback, Opposition Leader, Nevermoor; Laurent St James, founder of the Concerned Citizens of Nevermoor Party. **Nine Wundersmiths of Squall's generation who Morrigan meets in the Ghostly Hours:** Griselda Polaris. Rastaban Tarazed. Decima Kokoro. Mathilde Lachance. Brilliance Amadeo. Owain Binks. Ezra Squall. Elodie Bauer. Odbuoy Jemmity. (See also Squall above). **Morrigan's Family:** Wolfram and Gunthram Crow, and Morrigan's stepmother Ivy and grandmother Ornella also appear briefly.

**ACTIVITY:** Draw up a character chart and find key quotes that give a clear picture of any-of these characters, and isolate events that demonstrate their natures. Then write a brief character study of the person using the quotes and events to illustrate the points made in your summary.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Which character was most intriguing and why? Which character would you like to have heard more about?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Nurse Tim is one of the most hilarious and memorable characters in this novel. What makes him so memorable?

## GENRE

This novel contains features of both the **fantasy and mystery genres**:

**A. Fantasy as a genre has several recurring features** [See Jane Mobley's 'Toward a Definition of Fantasy Fiction' in Bator, Robert, *Signposts to Criticism of Children's Literature*, Chicago, ALA, 1983, pp. 249–260]. As in the notes on *Nevermoor* and *Wundersmith* teachers might examine each of these features in relation to this novel, as below:

a) It relies on **creating convincing and entertaining detail in creating a 'secondary world'**. There are many examples of such detail in this and its two prequels, for example, when Unit 919 watch the video of their inauguration a year earlier and then Elder Quinn describes the creatures who had attended, she explains their various features: Vools, trees of the Whinging Wood and slinghous. (pp 27–28)

OR

'Morrigan had heard of the Nevermoor Scaly Sewer Beast, but she'd never seen it before, and truthfully, she'd never been certain it was real. The image was of a strange, yellow-white serpentine creature with transparent eyelids covering milky red eyes. Its bulbous belly hung low to the ground and it had six lizard-like legs ending in long, sharp claws. Its scales were rough and patchy, and entirely absent in random spots, revealing raw pink skin underneath. It had a long, powerful-looking tail that snapped back and forth in a threatening fashion. Its jaws opened wide to reveal a mouth full of far too many sharp curving teeth to be reasonable, and a forked, blackish-blue tongue.' (p 35) (The breeding season brings on the annual Sewerfest during which the Beastly Division calls on volunteers to help get rid of these creatures.)

OR

"GoldersNight," Holliday echoed, and her expression grew thoughtful. She tapped a finger against her mouth. "There's a thought... what's it been, twelve years since the last one?" "Fourteen, I believe," said Jupiter. "Spring of Seventeen in the Age of Poets. A Wunderground train had gained sentience and was holding the other trains hostage underground. It required an extraordinary distraction.'" (p 41)

OR

'To her endless frustration, Morrigan still knew very little about the Wretched Arts. But the knowledge she had, she treasured. The Wretched Art of Nocturne. The summoning of Wunder. *Singing to make it so*. And the Wretched Art of Inferno. The creation and manipulation of fire.' (p 56)

OR

Wunimals and Unnimals. (p 69)

OR

'A ghostly hour is a little parcel of time that has been plucked from the annals of history, to be witnessed and observed in the present day, in the exact same place.' (p 125)

OR

The peculiar capacity of Miss Dulcinea Dearborn to become Miss Maris Murgatroyd is another fantasy detail in Books 1, 2 and 3: 'Morrigan swallowed, picturing the Arcane Scholar Mistress warping into her ice-cold Mundane counterpart, Ms Dearborn. The

transformations were unscheduled and unpredictable – like a roll of the dice. If you sought out one, you were just as likely to get the other.’ (p 96) But in this third novel they actually morph into a third person: ‘Rook Rosenfeld. Scholar Mistress for the School of Wondrous Arts.’ (p 100) Later, Morrigan learns that there are many more inside her: ‘Have you ever seen a set of nesting dolls, Wundersmith? You open up one, and there’s another inside her, and another inside *her*, and another . . .’ (p 198)

OR

‘She’s the grown-up, Mog, she should have known better than to take a bunch of thirteen-year-olds into a pocket realm. Bad things can happen in liminal spaces.’ Morrigan looked up from her badly butchered toast. ‘What’s a liminal space?’ ‘A sort of . . . inbetween. A threshold between one place and another. Tricky Lanes are another.’ (p 276)

*DISCUSSION POINT:* Discuss these details with students and invite them to comment on those they found most enticing and why they like them. Then invite them to come up with their own fantasy details which could conceivably form part of the world created here.

b) **Essential Extravagance** or spectacle is another aspect of the fantasy genre. There are many scenes in this novel that are lavish in detail, for example:

The fact that the rooms in the Hotel Deucalion can transform themselves according to the season and to their whims. (pp 51–2)

OR

The fact that Morrigan's bed can transform into something else every night. (pp 79–80)

OR

The indoor ice-skating rink which suddenly appears on the ninth floor of the Hotel Deucalion on Christmas morning. (p 82)

OR

The Gossamer-Spun Garden: ‘It wasn’t so much a garden, as a thousand different gardens. Or a thousand different drawings of a garden, from a thousand different imaginations, rendered in three dimensions by a thousand different artists. There were trees that grew up to the ceiling, bearing fruit of silver and gold, and rainbow vines that moved like snakes. There was a meadow of wonky sunflowers that grew high above Morrigan's head, and a fairy-sized garden with funny little red toadstools.’ (p 192)

OR

The Gobleian Library: ‘This was Nevermoor, but not. The streets were just the same. Courage Square was there, with its golden fish-statue fountain in the middle. All the buildings were the same, and the street signs and gaslights and benches. Even the post boxes were plotted out exactly as they were in the normal Nevermoor. But the square was empty of people. The streets and buildings were eerily silent. The fountain had no water in it. The trees had no birdsong, no leaves moving gently in the breeze. There was no breeze. The air was still and cool. The sky still hadn’t changed from that dusky grey-blue. And instead of people, birds and breeze . . . the library-city was filled with books.’ (p 248)

OR

'One by one, down both sides of the drive from Proudfoot House to the gates of Wunsoc, dozens of long-dead trees roared into life. The flames arched overhead to form a canopy above the two clashing groups, who stilled and fell silent at the spectacle. After more than one hundred years of extinction, the fireblossoms had returned.' (p 353)

OR

'He turned back to Kedgeree. "Now, do we have a status update on the Grand Sulk?" The *Grand Sulk* was what he'd had taken to calling the Deucalion's current, rather strange state. Ever since they'd closed the place down, things in the hotel had started going a bit *weird*. Just little things at first; rooms you'd expect to find in one place would show up somewhere else entirely. Or some ornate wallpaper replaced with bare brick walls.' (p 358)

OR

'The Kindling. The Hearth. *Inferno*.

Could this be one of the Wondrous Divinities Elder Quinn had talked about, all those months ago when Unit 919 had first entered the Gathering Place? She'd said the Wundersmiths were gifted above all others, *chosen by the Wondrous Divinities themselves, the ancient deities who watched over our realm*. Morrigan had thought about these deities, but hadn't ever imagined they were real people. It *certainly* hadn't occurred to her that one of them might be a large talking bonfire.' (p 403)

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What other 'extravagant' details made this an enticing fantasy world for you?

c) **Poetic quality** is evinced in the language used in this novel, for example:

'That had been her second favourite moment so far, after the cloud of twinkling fireflies the Yule Queen had conducted to fly above Courage Square like a murmuration of starlings, a hypnotising dance of light.' (p 59)

Townsend has also revealed that the name 'Nevermoor' derives from Edgar Allen Poe's poem 'The Raven' in which the word 'Nevermore' appears a number of times.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What other scenes were described poetically in this book?

d) **Multidimensionality where time and space overlap**, for example:

'It was the strangest sensation.

Like she was made entirely of water, and she'd somehow . . . rippled.' (p 119)

OR

'Tempus is the manipulation of time in various ways – moving through it, recording and preserving it, looping it, shrinking it, stretching it—' (p 127)

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Where else does time and space overlap in this novel?

e) **A Spirit of carnival** enriches fantasy which is a 'playful form kin in its structures to ritual and dance.' (Mobley, in Bator, 1983, p 257) But note, too, that this carnival spirit can be dark or grotesque, as well as light, for example, 'Frank had chosen his "Sunset Gala"

theme to celebrate the end of summer and usher in the autumn chill. The lobby had transformed from floor to ceiling into the most beautiful sunset Morrigan had ever seen ... seemed to grow.' (pp 293–4)

*DISCUSSION POINT:* What scenes in this second novel were particularly evocative of the Carnavalesque?

f) **Mythic dimension** and the inclusion of archetypes, for example, The 'Morrigan' is a figure from Irish mythology and her name means great queen or phantom queen. She is also associated with war and fate and with foretelling death or victory in battle. The Battle of Christmas Eve between Saint Nicholas and the Yule Queen (p 50) held in Courage Square and witnessed by thousands also derives from mythology. (pp 59–62)

*DISCUSSION POINT:* What other archetypes or myths were referred to in this novel?

**B.** There are also elements of the **Mystery Genre** in the clues, red herrings, disappearances, false identities, and other tropes of mystery included in this series.

*DISCUSSION POINT:* What other features of the mystery genre did you discover in this novel?

## WRITING TASKS

*ACTIVITY:* Write an acrostic poem using the letters in 'Hollowpox'.

*ACTIVITY:* Read the text of the poster which appears on the Proudfoot Station (pp 201–2) warning the public about Hollowpox. Write a text for a similar sign warning the public about a deadly virus.

*ACTIVITY:* Write a letter as if it were written by Jupiter to Morrigan while he is away on one of his frequent working trips, explaining his activities.

## VISUAL LITERACY

*ACTIVITY:* Create a graphic novel interpretation of an incident in the novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

*ACTIVITY:* Design a new cover for this book.

*ACTIVITY:* Create a book trailer for this novel. [See **Bibliography.**]

## FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'For many years,' Elder Quinn's voice echoed around them, 'the Wondrous Society has had one mission. One unified, secret purpose, expressed in two discrete yet equally important tasks. We call this purpose, for want of a grander title, Containment and Distraction.' (p 20)
2. 'They're the *Stealth*, they didn't stop for a lovely chat.' Morrigan and Jack exchanged a look. If the elite, highly secretive Wondrous Society Investigation Department was involved, something weird was *definitely* going on.' (p 177)
3. 'When the disease – or the *Hollowpox*, we're calling it, for want of a better name – when the Hollowpox leaves the body,' he continued, 'it seems to take almost everything with it. It wouldn't necessarily be obvious to anyone who isn't like me, who isn't a Witness. But they're not *just* comatose, they're . . . sort of . . . *empty*. No sense of self, no brain activity. Completely unresponsive. We remain hopeful that these effects may be temporary, but right now it's impossible to know for sure.' (p 184)
4. 'The thing about numpties, Mog, is that they can always find plenty of other numpties to believe their numpty nonsense. You know what they say: you're never more than six feet away from a numpty.' (p 205)
5. 'Rumours and inaccuracies spread like wildfire, until nobody knew what to believe.' (p 281)
6. 'Fen, you're a *smuggler*?' Morrigan didn't know why she was surprised. She knew the Magnificat well enough by now to realise she was capable of pretty much anything. Fen casually clawed at the rug. 'We prefer the term "rescue ring".' (p 310)
7. 'It's dreadful of Steed to arrest people for something that shouldn't be a crime. It's only going to make people more frightened.' (p 328)
8. She felt hopeful. And she couldn't really say why, because nothing had changed. Though that wasn't altogether true. Something was changing. *She* was changing. She felt more like a *real* Wundersmith than ever before, and that knowledge made anything seem possible. It cleared her worried head just a little, and gently nudged her shoulders straight. For the first time in days, she felt . . . calm. (p 334)
9. Maud steepled her fingers together and held them to her lips, looking thoughtful. 'I'm not unsympathetic, Morrigan. It's a terrible and dangerous disease, but a decision like this – to offer aid to a state that considers itself our enemy – must be made by my entire government, and I'm afraid the Wintersea Party is something of a dragon. A big, weighty old beast that can be difficult to reason with and impossible to steer. They'll never agree to help the Free State without some sort of quid pro quo. A deal,' she clarified, noting Morrigan's look of confusion. (pp 422–3)
10. But this wasn't that at all. Instead she felt her personhood ballooning and stretching, as if she had finally been granted permission to take up space in the world. There was nothing frightening about it, not the way it was before. Her powers weren't being hijacked without her knowledge; this was a collaboration. (p 510)

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. **Compare this novel to other young adult fantasy series** such as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, Garth Nix's *The Keys to the Kingdom* series, or Isobelle Carmody's *Obernewtyn Chronicles*. [See **Bibliography**.] This series has already won several major awards and been widely acclaimed. Why do you think it has struck such a chord with readers?
2. **Design a poster to advertise this book.**
3. The **title of this book** refers to the virus. What other title might the book have had?
4. **Debate any of the topics** covered in these notes, or suggested by the novel.
5. Imagine what might possibly happen to Morrigan and her friends and **write a synopsis for the next novel in this series.**

## CONCLUSION

*Hollowpox: The Hunt for Morrigan Crow* is the third novel in Jessica Townsend's exhilarating *Nevermoor* series. Once again we meet our heroine Morrigan Crow, along with her patron, Jupiter North, his nephew (and her friend) Jack, and all who live at the Hotel Deucalion, her old friends, Hawthorne, Cadence and the rest of Unit 919, and their conductor, Miss Cheery, and Mog discovers more about her capacity to 'call Wunder'. We discover more magical details of this inventive fantasy world and learn more about these complex characters. And we meet some new ones such as the foxwun, Sofia, the intrepid librarian, Roshni, Nurse Tim, and the alarming Rook. This sequel will no doubt leave Townsend's readers anxiously anticipating the fourth book in this brilliant series.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JESSICA TOWNSEND** sometimes lives on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland and sometimes in London. She was a copywriter for eight years, and was once the editor of a children's wildlife magazine for Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo. Her pet fascinations include public transport, ancient cities, hotels, opera singers, Halloween, secret societies and gigantic cats – all of which have weaselled their way into *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow*, her award-winning first novel released in 2017. *Wundersmith: The Calling of Morrigan Crow*, the second book in this record-breaking series, was released in 2018. Jessica's first book has won a number of awards including the 2018 ABIA for Book of the Year, Book of the Year for Younger Readers and Matt Richell Award for New Writer of the Year; the 2018 Indie Book Awards Book of the Year and Children's Category; the 2017 Aurealis Award for Best Children's Fiction; the 2018 Waterstones Children's Book Prize for Younger Fiction and was named a CBCA notable book. *Hollowpox: The Hunt for Morrigan Crow* (2020) is the third novel in the series.

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## Other Non-Fiction and Website Teaching Resources:

'Book Trailers' *Insideadog* <<http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers>>

'Book Trailers for Readers' by Michelle Harclerode

<<http://www.booktrailersforreaders>>

'Book Trailers – Resources: Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network'

<<http://idtl.net.au/book-trailers.php>>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright** operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006). In 2011 she was recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, in 2012, of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award.