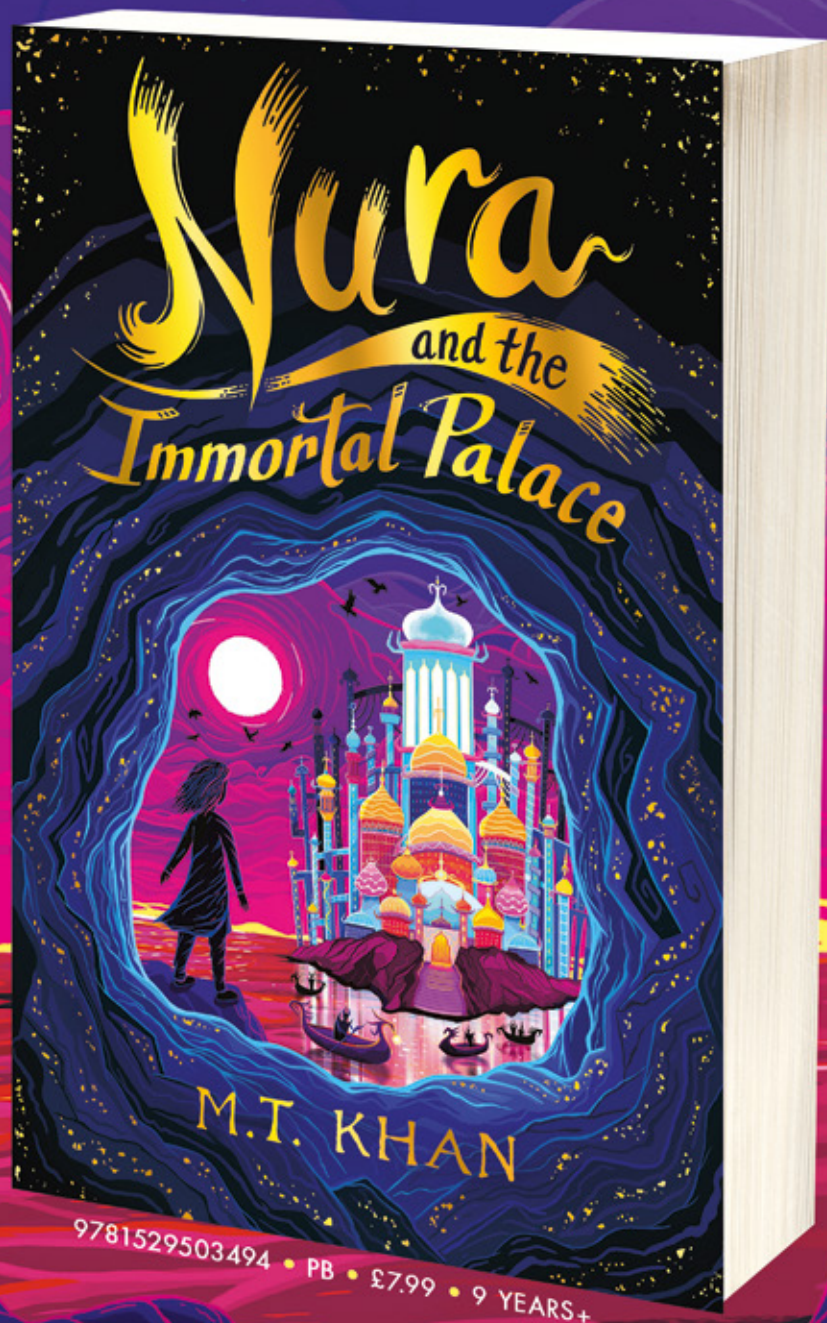


TEACHERS' NOTES

"Magical and luminous"

JASBINDER BILAN



"A twisty, atmospheric tale with a fierce protagonist" JENNIFER BELL

"Gorgeous and atmospheric" XIRAN JAY ZHAO



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BOOKS

  WalkerBooksUK  @MaedaKhan



*These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.*

These notes have been written with children in Years 2–4 in mind, but this book could be read to younger children with a curiosity for geography or the environment, as well as with older children as a stimulus for research or their own writing.

## Before You Start:

- Share the title of the book (without showing the front cover) and challenge pupils to predict what the book may be about. Share ideas and discuss any similarities in predictions. Gauge what pupils understand by the word ‘Immortal.’ Discuss different types of stories and predict if this will be:

Adventure	Sci-fi	Horror	Mystery
Romantic	Comedy	Myth	Historical

- This book deals with the issues of child labour where the two main characters (Nura and Faisal) are forced into mining this sparkling dirt that is called mica. Mica is a real mineral and is mined in India, Madagascar and Brazil. The ‘Author’s Note’ at the back of the novel explains this in more detail. Depending on the age and experience of your pupils, it may be appropriate to share the ‘Author’s Note’ as a reading lesson before the novel is read. The author also shares some of her own personal experiences in this section too.
- Before reading the book, it may be beneficial to pre-teach some vocabulary that is specific to the culture of the main characters. Pupils may benefit from visual images too of the following:

Mica	Rupees (currency)	Gulab jamun (sweets)	Laddu (sweets)
Pink mithai (sweets)	Dupatta (clothes)	Sweatshop (place)	Lahore and Karachi
Sherwani (wedding clothes)	Lehnga (clothes)	Shalwar kameez (clothes)	Mines

- Faisal is one of the main characters in this book. From the opening chapter it is revealed that he has a stammer/ stutter. Please consider this when reading the book – explain with sensitivity for pupils who may also have a speech impediment.
- Education is explored in this book in many ways – create a chart with the word ‘Education’ and track the different perspectives whilst reading.

## Reading Notes:

- Tracking the characters of Nura and Faisal throughout the book would be a great opportunity to teach the pupils inference skills. M.T. Khan is a genius with dialogue and uses this tool to scaffold and illustrate characters explicitly.
- Throughout reading the book, focus on and revisit some of the following questions:
  - How does the relationship between Nura and Faisal change throughout the book? What words would you use to describe their relationship?



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- Who is the leader – Nura or Faisal?
- What does family mean to Nura throughout this book?
- What does ‘trust’ mean in this book?
- What is the price for education?
- Is Nura brave or foolish?
- Does Faisal show great courage or great stupidity?
- How does M.T. Khan create tension and suspense?
- Do you ever feel angry or frustrated by Nura or Faisal?
- What is the purpose of the character the Craftsman?
- Is the festival of Eid al-Adha significant? Explain your answer.

■ Here is a brief summary for each chapter of the book:

Chapter Number and Title	Main points	Characters introduced	Any other information
1) ‘Sparkles in the Dirt’	12 years old Mining in narrow shafts Always hungry! Works from sunrise to sunset Finds the mica – biggest in weeks	Nura Faisal Aroofa Sadia Ahmed	Horror stories of children who don’t come back ‘Demon’s Tongue’
2) ‘The Taste of Truth’	Set in Meerabagh 200 rupees a day (can buy 5 pencils) Mother works in a sewing place Nura buys gulab jamun – Maa tries to return them	Mr Waleed Maa	Children have never been to school Nearly Eid al-Adha Maa tries to protect Nura from her work conditions Nura and Faisal disagree about spending the money
3) ‘Stars Staring Down on Us’	Live in a two-room mud hut with a wooden roof Nura has 3 younger siblings Maa wants Nura to stop working in the mines and go to school Maa recounts a story from their father (Baba) Baba is dead – he dies in the mines Maa is worried Nura will have the same fate	Adeel (age 8) Kinza Rabia	Explanation of how Eid will be celebrated Explanation of jinn – invisible spirits born of fire/ exceptional at trickery Qareen is a type of jinn – ‘constant companion like your own shadow’ Illegal for children to work



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<p>4) 'Dig a Little Deeper'</p>	<p>Nura was 7 when Baba died</p> <p>Ahmed always 'wins' – greatest gain</p> <p>Legend of '<i>The Demon's Tongue</i>' (a shimmering crystal and chest full of gold) dating back to his Baba's time</p> <p>Faisal tries to help Nura and gets trapped</p>	<p>Schoolgirl on the way</p>	<p>Meets a schoolgirl – questions the value of education</p> <p>Faisal tries to advise and care for Nura</p> <p>Nura digs too deep – are there voices?</p> <p>Nura is unsure if he is hallucinating</p>
<p>5) 'Nothing at All Only a Name'</p>	<p>Five children are missing</p> <p>4/5 children are not found – was it because Nura dug too deep?</p> <p>Faisal is still missing</p> <p>Nura goes back inside the mine</p> <p>Nura finds the sea</p>		<p>Nura reflects and recounts her past with Faisal as she digs</p> <p>Nura cannot swim but does not drown in this pink water</p>
<p>6) 'The Shadow That's Always With Me'</p>	<p>Water changes colour and tastes spicy</p> <p>Boats have creatures in that talk to Nura</p> <p>Creatures refer to Nura as 'weak human'</p> <p>Nura is female – constant companion</p>	<p>Nura's qareen</p>	<p>Nura's qareen claims to have invited Nura</p> <p>Nura remembers Maa telling her not to trust Jinn</p> <p>The qareen explains that Nura is in the 'realm of Jinn' and has been invited to the Sijj Palace'</p>
<p>7) 'Look Below the Surface'</p>	<p>The docks are busy</p> <p>Nura's qareen explains that tonight will be fun</p> <p>Nura is still looking for Faisal</p> <p>Her qareen reveals that the palace is a hotel for jinn</p> <p>Nura asks about The Demons Tongue Shahmaran Dura has no knowledge</p>	<p>Dura</p> <p>A parrot</p>	<p>Songs echo around Nura as she enters the palace</p> <p>Nura's qareen is revealed to be called Dura</p> <p>A parrot calls Nura to come and play</p>



8) 'Out of the Mines and into the Fire'	<p>Endless Eating Competition</p> <p>Shahmaran – Queen of Serpents</p> <p>Nura sees Faisal and suggests they leave</p> <p>Faisal wants to stay for the food</p> <p>Nura rubs syrup on Shahmaran's scales so she cannot breathe</p> <p>Nura and Faisal win the competition</p>		<p>Those who eat slowly are ejected into the water as a punishment</p> <p>Shahmaran is half snake so is eating with two mouths!</p> <p>All of the jinn have magical parts</p>
9) 'Sultana'	<p>Nura and Faisal are crowned Sultan and Sultana of Splendour – awarded a pendant</p> <p>Arrive at the casino</p> <p>Nura and Faisal win lots of tokens</p> <p>Nura is washed; her hair is cut and make up is done by jinn</p>		<p>Nura wears lehnga for the first time</p>
10) 'Dance for Me'	<p>Nura enters the ball as Sultana of Splendour</p> <p>Jinns start to sing</p> <p>Faisal is dressed up too</p> <p>The Painted Boy offers a prize – his sherwani, wedding clothes – for the best dancer</p> <p>The Painted Boy is revealed as the son of the owner of the Sijj Palace</p>	<p>The Painted Boy</p>	<p>Jinn dance bhangra to win the prize</p> <p>Faisal wants to sit the dance out and go home with their new clothes</p> <p>Nura thinks winning the sherwani will make them millionaires</p> <p>Nura and Faisal agree to be part of the dance</p> <p>Nura wants to dance with swords</p> <p>One of The Painted Boy's horns is cut off</p>



<p>11) 'The Trickster and the Fool'</p>	<p>Nura and Faisal are escorted to the owner's office</p> <p>They are taken to Matter ward</p> <p>Faisal works out that all is not what it seems here in Matter ward</p> <p>Faisal is acting differently – too calm</p> <p>Mirza asks for Nura's legs</p> <p>Dura reveals that if they can trick a human to working in the hotel, they become a patron!</p>	<p>The Painted Boy's owner</p> <p>Raisal – Faisal's qareen</p>	<p>The Painted Boy's name is revealed as Mirza</p> <p>Nura reflects on what her Maa told her about jinn</p> <p>Nura and Faisal's friendship is tested</p> <p>The owner reveals that Nura needs to work her debts off (to repay the horn)</p> <p>Nura learns that Faisal is Raisal and that Dura has tricked Faisal</p> <p>Nura wonders where Faisal is</p>
<p>12) 'Curiosity Captured the Mortal'</p>	<p>Nura discovers that she is in the Time ward – known as the working quarters of the hotel</p> <p>Nura finds Faisal – they check what they said at their first sunset to be sure it is each other</p> <p>Nura discovers all the missing children are here</p> <p>Nura is not sure whether to trust the Craftsman</p> <p>The Craftsman whispers that everyone there (including jinns) is still a child</p>	<p>The Craftsman</p>	<p>Some children reveal that they have been here 40-60 years</p> <p>Nura reflects on her maa asking her to stop mining and wonders how they will get out</p> <p>The Craftsman explains that the children have 3 days to leave the Palace before Eid is finished – however if they do not leave they will stop aging and stay for eternity (also their memory will vanish)</p>
<p>13) 'Jinn Say, Jinn Do'</p>	<p>Nura and Faisal are now dressed in plain grey shalwars and gloves</p> <p>Shahmaran arrives for the feast</p> <p>Nura overhears that Mirza is getting married</p> <p>The jinn seem to ignore the human children as they serve them – Faisal explains that they are invisible to the jinn</p> <p>The jinn raise a toast to the Demiurge</p> <p>Shamaran reveals that the Demiurge founded the palace</p>		<p>Eid al-Adha is explained</p> <p>Aroofa explains that the invisibility wears off if there is skin on skin contact – justifying why they wear gloves</p> <p>Nura tells the others to distract the jinns – Aroofa puts a hair in the cream</p> <p>Nura steals the gulab jamuns and Faisal plants them on a guest</p>



14) 'Collision Curse'	<p>The children reflect on their memories of eating at home with siblings</p> <p>They reflect on the real meaning of Eid</p> <p>Faisal and Nura are on cleaning duty</p> <p>They jump into the water and end up back inside the Sijj Palace</p>		
15) 'A Coward's Kryptonite'	<p>Nura and Faisal are back in the working quarters</p> <p>Nura discovers that the Craftsman is teaching the jinn children</p> <p>Faisal reveals there is a chore to clean the owner's office</p> <p>Nura discovers portals</p> <p>Faisal reads that the Demiurge is on a work trip</p> <p>Nura and Faisal are punished by Majoon – clean 100 furnaces</p>	Majoon – the owner of the Sijj Palace	<p>Discussion around what education means – depending if you are rich/poor</p> <p>Nura and Faisal have one more day to escape</p>
16) 'Those Who Are and Those who Become'	<p>Nura realises that she misses working in the mines</p> <p>Aroofa claims that Sadia does not remember her – she has lost her memories</p> <p>Nura is angry with Faisal for not lying to the owner – Nura thinks they have lost too much time</p> <p>Nura and Faisal argue over whose fault it is that they are here</p> <p>The Craftsman asks Nura to set the chandelier up</p>		<p>The Craftsman reveals that the Time ward can shift and contort time – causes memories to fade and people never to age</p> <p>Philosophical conversation between Nura and the Craftsman</p>





17) 'Endless Cycle'	<p>Sughal helps Nura with the chandelier</p> <p>Dura and Raisal are there</p> <p>Mirza arrives as the VIP</p> <p>Mirza threatens Raisal</p> <p>Nura answers Mirza's question and is ordered to remain whilst the others are sent away</p>	Sughal	<p>Nura hears how the jinn children Dura and Raisal have also experienced pain and loss</p> <p>Nura realises that the jinn children are being used just like the human children are by contractors in the mines</p>
18) 'Betrayal or Betrothal'	<p>Mirza and Nura argue</p> <p>Mirza explains why a jinn cuts their horn – one is outdated when a soldier cut a horn off to give to their general and the other reason is that lovers cut off a horn as a betrothal</p> <p>Mirza insists that Nura marry him</p>		<p>Nura's conscience is challenged – Mirza tries his best to persuade her</p> <p>Faisal shows a different side to himself defending Nura</p> <p>Mirza squeezes Faisal until his eyes turn red</p>
19) 'When Earth Meets Fire'	<p>Mirza is inside Faisal's body – jinn possessing a human</p> <p>Nura threatens to cut Mirza's body with scissors – he taunts her that jinn don't bleed</p> <p>She threatens to cut his other horn off if he doesn't leave Faisal</p> <p>Mirza reveals that the Craftsman is the Demiurge</p>		<p>Nura battles with her conscience about what 'greed' actually means</p>
20) 'As Being Is to Becoming So Is Truth to Believe'	<p>Faisal tells the Craftsman that they know he is Mirza's uncle/ the Demiurge</p> <p>The Craftsman shows Nura and Faisal his original blueprint plans for the Sijj Palace</p> <p>Nura wants to destroy the Sijj Palace</p>		<p>The Craftsman reveals his plans for a harmonious world that were scrapped</p>
21) 'It Was, It Is, It Shall Be'	<p>The Craftsman has a plan – initiated by Faisal – to use the portals and bomb the Palace</p>		<p>Nura dares to dream about buying gulab jamun from Mr Waleed!</p>





22) 'Perceive to Perform'	Faisal and Nura use the intercom to order all children – jinn and human – to the working quarters  They share the plan to destroy the hotel  Raisal is a key player who persuades the jinn children		Nura thinks that she hears her father saying, ' <i>Become better than me...</i> '
23) 'Where There's a Will, There's a Way'	Faisal and Nura light the flames and fires  Faisal thanks Nura for saving him as they watch the flames flicker between them		What does Faisal want to say to Nura?
24) 'The Fool and the Trickster'	Nura is alone, trying to find her way out  Nura meets Dura  Nura hears the clock strike 11 – she has 30 minutes to get to the centre of the vaults  Nura recites verses from the Quran and Dura falls to her knees		Nura reflects on how hard her Maa works
25) 'All Thoughts Must Be Mortal'	Nura comes face to face with the owner  Nura detonates the bomb  She battles her conscience whether to save the owner and does so for The Craftsman		
26) 'One and Continuous'	Everyone is free  The Craftsman reveals his plans to build a school  The Craftsman gives Nura a map with an X marking a reward for her to find		
27) 'Dirt in the Sparkles'	Nura and Faisal dig in the mines at the spot indicated by the map  They find a box with a golden key inside and a note  Nura and Faisal are reunited with their families and vow to build a school		

- Explore M.T. Khan's deliberate choice of language and discuss the impact on the reader. Choose some examples when appropriate to discuss the impact of a writer's choice of words on their readers. You might explore some examples together, such as:



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Chapter	Extract	Impact on the reader (you)
1	<i>'My stomach growls. I wonder if a tiger lives in there with how hungry I always get.'</i>	
1	<i>'There's only one truth in this world: everyone's got a hungry monster in their stomach that roars if they don't satisfy it.'</i>	
2	<i>'The sky no longer bleeds reds and oranges, but deepens to a dark muted blue, beckoning the shops of the market to switch on their dizzying lights.'</i>	
2	<i>'When night unfurls its fingers and rakes through Meerabagh...'</i>	
2	<i>'But she doesn't mirror my excitement.'</i>	
3	<i>'The hard lines of her face have softened, brows tilted and she looks at me like I'm a baby bird that tried to fly for the first time but instead flopped to the floor.'</i>	
5	<i>'My heart'ss beating so fast I think it might grow wings and fly away.'</i>	

### Revisiting the story as a whole:

- Invite the children to explore the main human themes in this book. Give the pupils time to work together and list the themes. if needed, share some prompts with children, for example:

Friendship	Loyalty	Greed	Education
Children vs Adults	Reality vs Magical	Betrayal	Illusion
Trust	Family	Success	Resilience
Leadership	Love	Sacrifice	Money/Wealth

- As education is explored in this book in different ways revisit the chart completed whilst reading the book. Discuss and recap different perceptions of education throughout the book. Display the Craftsman's quotation from chapter 26, ***'Educating people – I believe that's the best way to keep chaos in check.'*** Explore what this means in the context of this book and then globally as a message to the world.
- The role of the Craftsman is a complex one – revisit sections of text where he is introduced and discuss what the purpose of his character was. Share some more of his words with the pupils, for example, ***'But sometimes,' he sighs ruffling my hair, 'if you dig hard enough, you can find sparkles in the dirt, can't you?'*** (chapter 26) Discuss this in the context of mining mica and then challenge pupils to apply this more universally to life. Repeat with some more examples and explore him as a:
  - Father figure
  - Role model



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- Voice of reason
  - Moral compass
  - Social conscience
  - Link between the past; present and future
  - Realistic voice
  - Optimist
  - Pessimist
  - Friend or foe?
- Exploring Qareen – first introduced in chapter 3 – ‘*constant companion*.’ Revisit the text and discuss the similarities and differences between Nura and Dura and Faisal and Raisal. Are pupils frightened, entertained or comforted by this idea?

### After reading:

- There are a multitude of writing opportunities related to this book:
  - Writing the next chapter of the book – pause at pivotal points and try to imitate M.T. Khan’s style
  - Diary entries for characters at specific points
  - Character/ setting descriptions
  - Speeches in role as jinn – Mirza
  - The Craftsman’s final speech
  - A letter from Dura to Nura or Raisal to Faisal
  - A sequel ... 5 years later
  - Poetry describing moving through portals (supported with art work)
  - Poetry explaining the jinn
  - Non-fiction reports researching and exposing child labour
  - Letters or speeches to MPs/councillors regarding child labour in 2022
  - Song lyrics to inspire world change related to child labour
- Imagine this book has been turned into a film/ stage production – who would play the parts of Nura and Faisal? What about the other characters? Which special effects would be needed? What about props? Choose a scene to plan out and direct.
- This could lead to a wide array of drama activities.
- In art, create collages or murals to represent some of the rooms/ scenes from the book
- Re-read sections where clothes are described and give pupils materials to create different items of clothing – shalwars etc...
- Bring gulab jamun and laddu for pupils to taste and empathise with Nura’s love of sweets!

### Other titles to support exploration of themes from the book:

- ‘*Trash*,’ Andy Mulligan
- ‘*Holes*,’ Louis Sachar
- ‘*Tins*,’ Alex Shearer
- ‘*Children Who Changed the World*,’ Marcia Williams
- ‘*The Boy at the Back of the Class*,’ Onjali Q Raúf
- ‘*We are all Born Free*,’ Amnesty International

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