

Activities and Resources for

# The Lost Child of Chernobyl

A Graphic Novel by **Helen Bate**



Published by  
Otter-Barry Books,  
April 2021



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**The Lost Child of Chernobyl** tells the fictional story of a young child lost in the forest in April 1986 at the time of the Chernobyl disaster, and discovered nine years later by two sisters, Anna and Klara.

It's also the story of these two women, who like many real older people, refused to leave their homes in the 'Forbidden Zone' to be re-housed in a city.

As well as telling a fascinating story, the book offers many ways towards learning about and discussion of social, environmental, geographical and historical topics.

Above all it deals in issues central to PSHE education. In these Notes we have set out to cater for the full 7-11 age group, with varying levels of information and challenge, and lots of different activities, including discussion, polls, art and creative writing.

# Front Cover

Four things are shown on the cover: trees, a fire, animals, and a child.

**Look and tell** What do you think this picture is telling us?

There are a number of things a graphic novel cover has to do. Can you number them in order of importance, from 1 to 5:

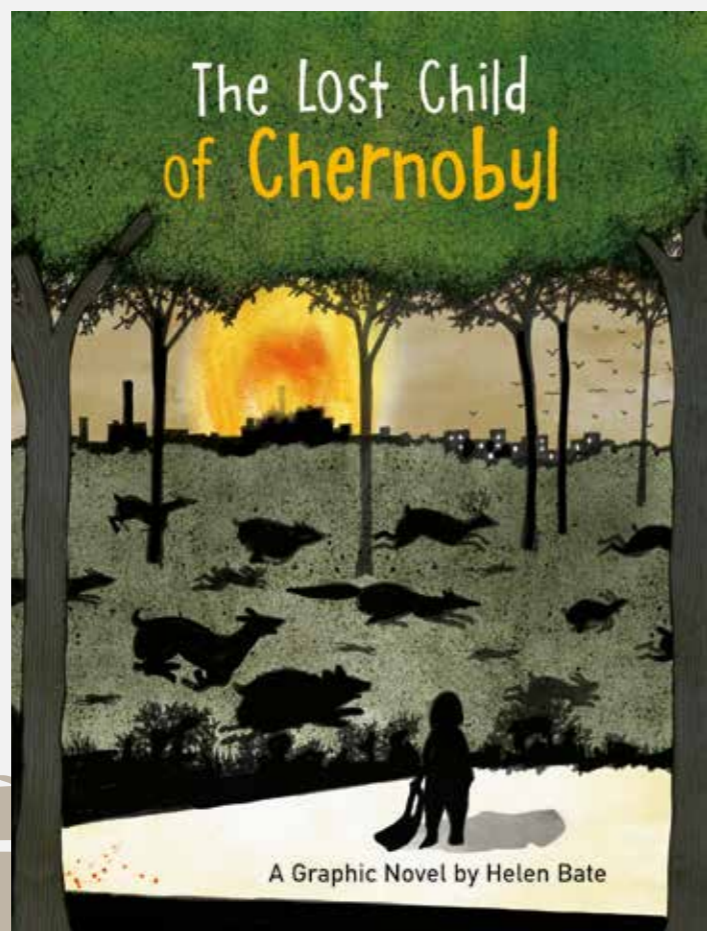
Give author's name

Give the book's title

Show the style of illustration

Give a hint of what the story is about

Make you want to open the book and see more



## Endpaper map

The Chernobyl disaster happened in the country of Ukraine, near the border with another country, Belarus.

**Find**

Both these countries are in Europe. Find them on a large-scale map of Europe.

## Title Spread

In 'Background to the Story' Helen Bate tells us about the event that starts off the story.

**Count**

How many years is it since the Chernobyl disaster?

## Pages 6-7

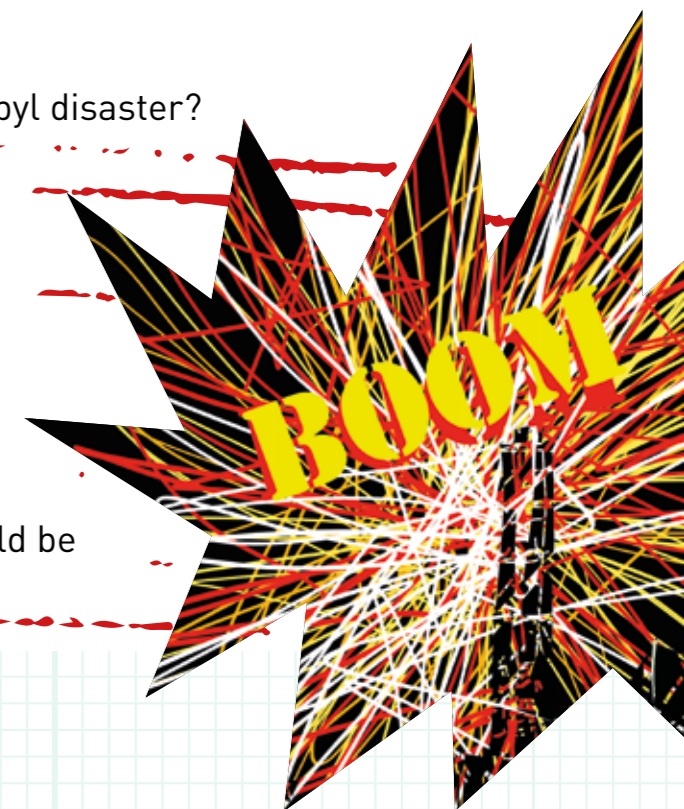
Helen shows the explosion both in colours and in one word.

**Words**  
○○ ○○

Can you think of other words that could be used to show a tremendous noise?

**Draw**

your version of a huge explosion.





## Pages 8-9

Anna and Klara decide to stay on despite the danger of sickness from radio-active fall-out.

**\* I-Spy** Are there differences between the ways the humans and animals react to the explosion?

### Performance

Two pupils can be Anna and Klara, the others are villagers who are obeying orders to leave. They ask why Anna and Klara are staying when it is unsafe. Anna and Klara give their reasons.

**Poll** Two votes could be taken on whether the children agree:

- Did Anna and Klara have the right to stay if they wanted to?
- Were Anna and Klara right in what they decided to do?

The results might be different!



## Pages 10-11

**Write** a short news story about the car accident, and the child's disappearance.

Anna and Klara are discovering evidence of radio-active fall-out in their yard.

### Find out

Do you know what radio-active fall-out is? Make a list of the signs that Klara and Anna see.



**\* I Spy** Anna and Klara have a pet bird. Do you what species it is? (Clue: It is well-known for its cleverness).







## Pages 12-13

People living in the countryside round Chernobyl are being evacuated.

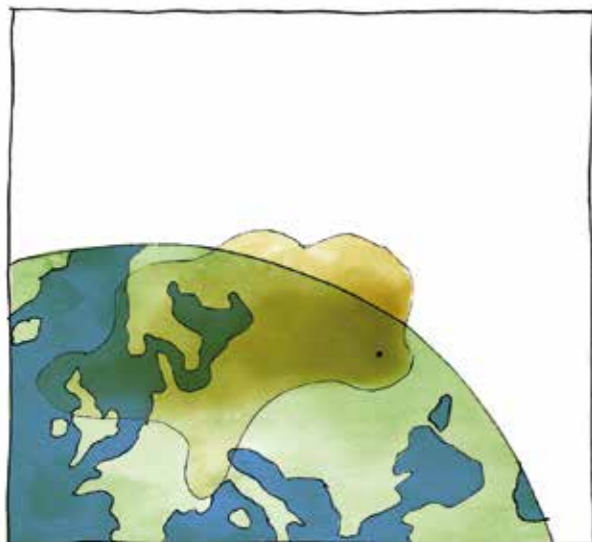
**Words** What does evacuation mean?

900 900



**Imagine** What sort of happenings might lead to evacuation?

**Write** a letter from one of the children, saying what it was like to have to leave their pets behind, or how they feel about having to leave their home for ever.



### Map and measure

The globe image on page 13 shows the extent of westwards contamination. Create a map of the same area. Measure how far the radiation spread (as far as North Wales). Make a note of ways in which it spreads: wind, water, rainfall; but also from people removing objects, plants, produce etc.

## Page 14-15

Anna and Klara refuse to leave their home and won't let the soldiers shoot their animals. The real-life women who stayed behind were known as 'the Babushkas of Chernobyl'. The Russian word *Babushka* means both an old lady or granny, and also the kind of headscarf that Anna wears.

**Find out** more about babushkas.

900 900



**Think** Why do you think the soldiers were ordered to shoot the animals?

### Draw

Anna facing the soldiers.



### I-Spy

The black and yellow sign is a danger signal. Do you know what it warns against? Can you think of other danger signals?



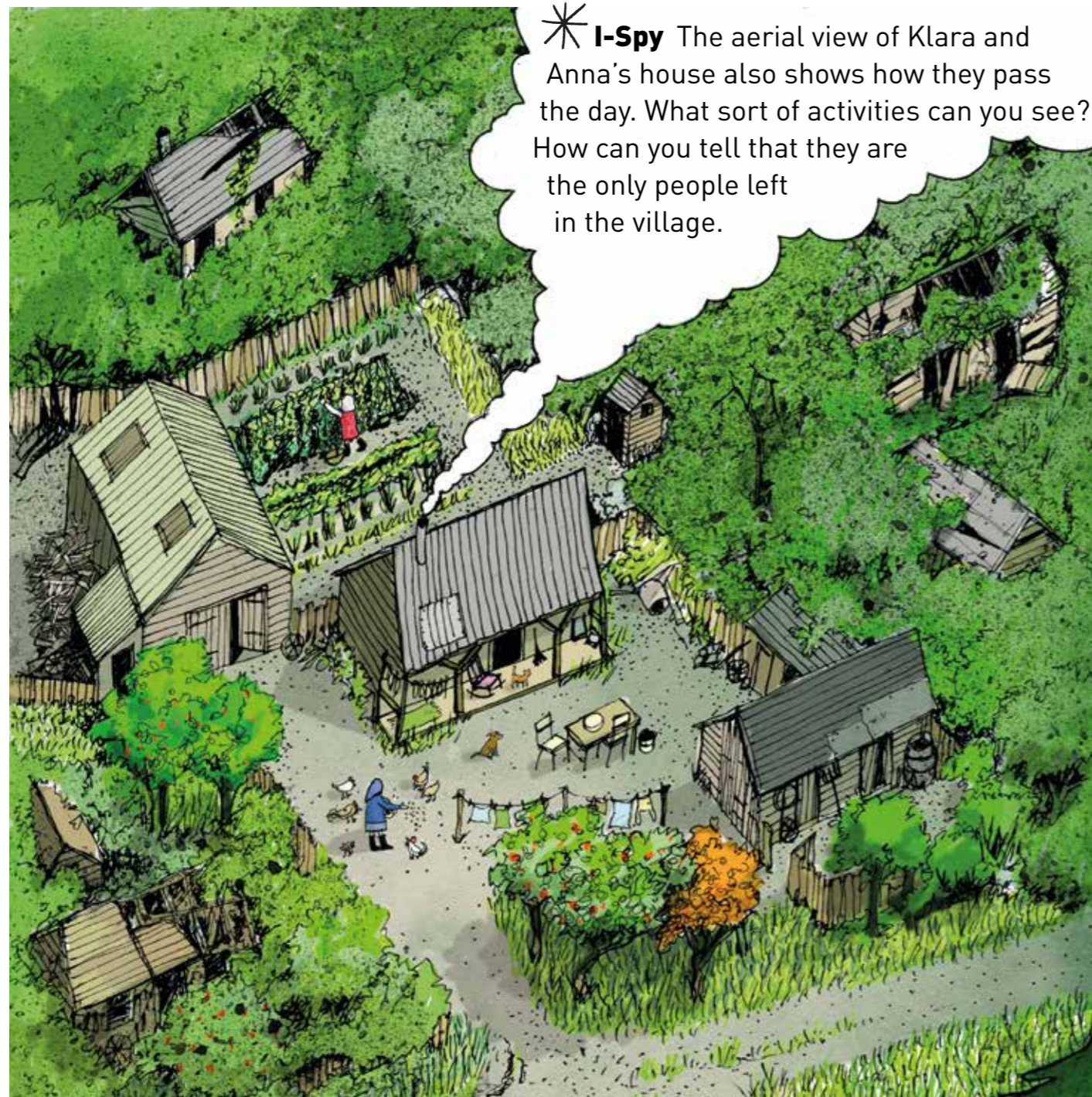


# Pages 16-17

\* **I-Spy** What kind of animal is looking at the abandoned machines?

**Find out** what other animals might live in the forest.  
 900 900

**Imagine** Some of the abandoned dogs miss their owners. But their puppies have never seen people. Do you think their puppies would be friendly to people?



\* **I-Spy** The aerial view of Klara and Anna's house also shows how they pass the day. What sort of activities can you see? How can you tell that they are the only people left in the village.

# Pages 18-19

Strange things are happening ...

**Explain** Look at the pictures and explain in your own words to the others what's going on.

**History** "The day they took Father away". Klara and Anna have lived through very bad times. In the 20th century Ukraine was devastated by war and famine. They are brave and self-reliant but have many bad memories. See also pages 15 and 40.

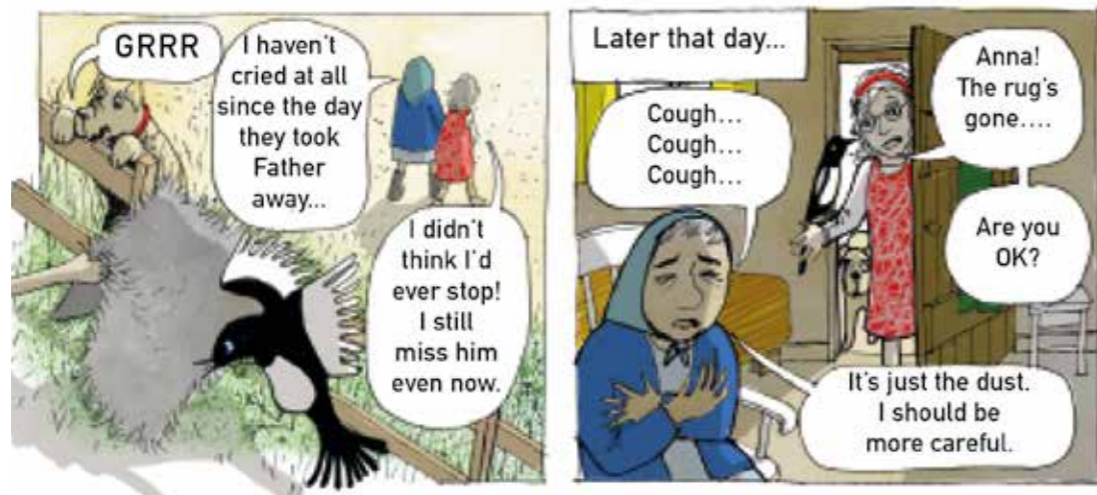
\* **I-Spy** How many things 'disappear' on this and the next spread?





## Pages 20-21

- \* **I-Spy** Have you noticed how Anna begins to cough and keeps on coughing? What might be causing her cough?



## Pages 22-23, 24-25

Anna and Klara's visitor is a "wild child" – one brought up by animals, not people.

**Poll** Take a classroom poll:  
'Do you think a young child could grow up among wolves? YES / NO'

**Imagine** what it would be like to be such a child. Would it think of itself as a sort of wolf? Remember this is a **story**. In good stories, authors use their imagination to interest and excite you, and make you think. The idea of a "wild child" does exactly that.

**Write** Suppose **you** needed to survive in the forest! What sort of skills would you need to learn? Make a list of survival instructions.



\* **I-Spy** What sort of things do Anna and Klara have to teach the child?

**Think** Why does the child take the dog's collar off after the bath? The story doesn't tell you if the lost child is a boy or a girl. The author has chosen not to say.

**Imagine** Can you think of a reason why she doesn't say?

**Discussion** Does it matter whether the child is a girl or a boy?



# Pages 26-27



## Explain

Klara has a clever idea to help the child settle in. Tell the others about it.



## Imagine

Why do you think the child did not learn to speak?

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# Pages 28-29

**I-Spy** The child says only three words to Anna and Klara. Keep a look-out for the other two.



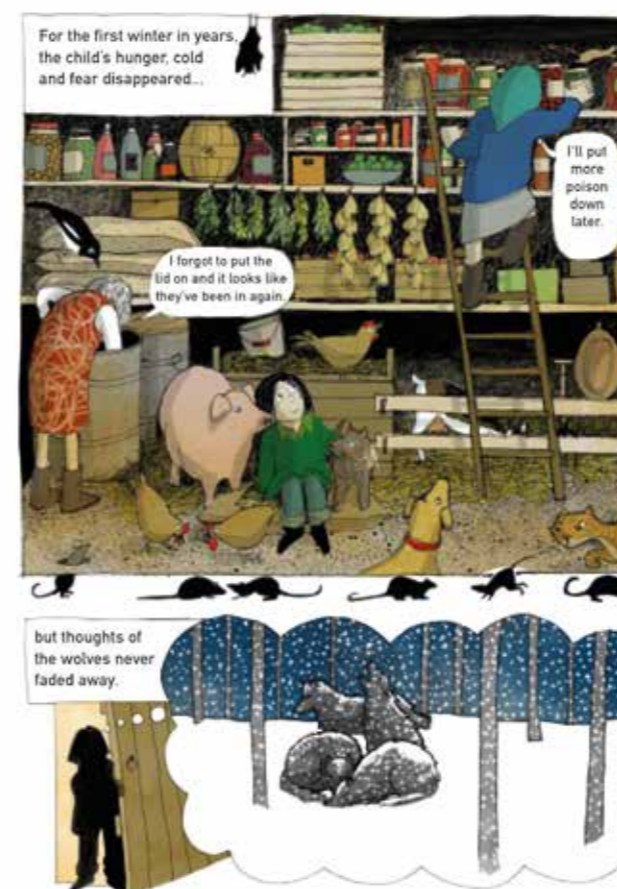
# Pages 30-31

## Discuss

Klara says the child belongs in the forest. Anna says they must take it to the city. Which would you agree with, and why?

## Think

Anna and Klara are sisters and they are kind and loving. But they are two different people. Test your people skills by noting the ways in which they are different, in two columns headed ANNA and KLARA. (For example, which might be 'More Sympathetic' and which 'More Practical').





# Pages 32-33

No electricity or gas, no shops, no deliveries – Anna and Klara must provide everything for themselves. That's called 'being self-sufficient'.

**Write** down what sort of things they need to keep in their winter storehouse.

**Discuss** Are there ways in which we can be more self-sufficient?

**Make a list** of the different countries our food comes from.



**Make a list** of what we could eat and drink if all of it was grown and produced in this country alone.



# Pages 34-35, 36-37

The child now lives with the babushkas and is saying 'Goodbye' to the wolves and the forest.

**Imagine** why the child takes Klara with her and not Anna.

**Write** a short poem or sentence that expresses what the child is feeling.

**I-Spy** What does the child find on the ground?





# Pages 38-39

**Think** Why does Klara give the child a baby tree?

**Discuss** Anna notices that the Spring floods are worse than usual. Can you suggest any reasons why this might be?



# Pages 40-41

They sleep in the shelter of a fallen tree.

**Words** Do you know a single word for a bad dream?  
○○○○○○

**Discuss** What is Anna remembering in her dream? Do you think she had a happy childhood (see also page 18-19)?

**Draw** Anna and Klara and their brother when they were your age.



**I-Spy** The man in the cottage – what does he do for a living? Is he a friendly type? Do you think he cares for the forest and its animals?



# Pages 42-43

**Names** 1 Pripjat is a "ghost town". Why do you think it is called that?

•••••

**I-Spy** What signs can you see that no-one lives there any more?

**Names** 2 Mischa can be a boy's or a girl's name.

•••••

**Discuss** Who is Tizzli? What are Mischa's feelings about being home?



# Pages 44-45

**Think** Anna and Mischa have to go through a barbed-wire fence. Which side is the fence really made to keep people on? Mischa has never seen a train.

**Describe** a train to someone who has never seen one.

**Find out** if people still work at Chernobyl.

•••••





# Pages 46-47

**Imagine** Another child talks to Mischa, not knowing Mischa doesn't speak. How would you describe Mischa's expression?

**I-Spy** Why might the lost child's father be carrying two candles?



**Find out** about the memorial in Slavutych which remembers the people who died in the explosion and in helping to put out the fire and stop further radiation.

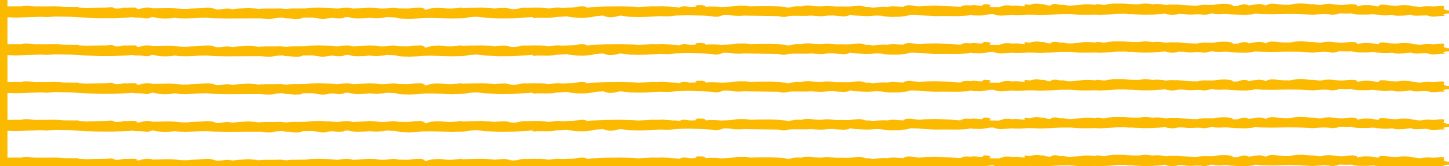


# Pages 48-49

**Explain** Using just the faces and not the speech bubbles, tell what is happening on this spread.

**I-Spy** Look at the different expressions on the faces. They show what each person is feeling.

**Describe** Find a single word to describe each face (e.g. tired, happy, sad ...)





# Pages 50-51

Mischa's father lives in a city, Slavutych. People were moved there from Pripjat.

**Imagine** Does Mischa like city life?

**Make a list** of ways Mischa's father tries to help Mischa settle in a high-rise flat.



**Discuss** why they don't really work.



Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months...



# Pages 52-53

They move out into the country, to a safe area.

**Make a list** of ways their new home is different from Anna's village on page 17.



**Think** What does their guide mean when he says "if the land's left alone the forest returns." What would happen if your local park was locked up and people could not go in?





# Some projects from the whole book

## A Review?

*The Lost Child* is a graphic novel, in which the pictures tell the story along with text bubbles. Write a review of the book to tell others what you think about it. You might include:

- 1 **Illustration style** – what did you like or dislike about it.
- 2 **Information** – did you get good information about the Chernobyl disaster and how people reacted to it? Did anything puzzle or surprise you? Is there anything you'd like to learn more about?
- 3 **Connections and Patterns** – does the story remind you of anything? Have you read any other stories about children growing up alone in the forest ... or jungle?



## Your Own Graphic Novel?

A spread of two pages, just picture frames, no text, about being lost in the wilderness and being befriended by an animal. Think about possibilities:

**Setting:** Dark Forest, Hot Desert, Other?

**Character:** How old? Any change in appearance?

**Feeling:** Their face can show them scared/sad/happy/tired/worried.

**The animal:** Is it a real one or an imaginary one? Is it bigger or smaller than your human? Can you change how it looks, from scary to kind? (Look at images of real animals, to help).

**Time:** How long is the action – one day, or ninety years? How would you show that time is passing? Day to night? Summer to winter?

**Colour:** Think how you will use colour in your drawing. It can help change the mood. If you want it to be scary just use black and white, or strong, darker colours. If you want it to be cheerful, use brighter colours.



## Or try some of these

**NEWS** Write a news report or a blog entry about the Chernobyl disaster. Create a fact-file about its continuing effects.

**POEM** Find a picture in the book that really attracted you, and make a poem from it.

**LETTER** Suppose you went to Ukraine and met Mischa in the new village. Write back to a friend, describing the meeting.

**ENERGY SOURCES** Fossil fuels (coal and oil), nuclear reactors, wind farms, water power and the Sun are our main sources of energy. Scientists are exploring other sources, like hydrogen gas. Make a diagram showing these, with little pictures (domes, factory chimneys/windmills/waterwheels etc) and list underneath the good and not-so-good features of each.



# Other useful resources

*Voices from Chernobyl*, by Svetlana Alexievich, Dalkey Archive Press, 1997, has many eyewitness accounts from those involved.

A documentary film, *The Babushkas of Chernobyl*, was made by Holly Morris in 2015. Extracts from it can be seen on Youtube.

There are many websites featuring Chernobyl today, Chernobyl tourism and the remarkable safety shield over the destroyed reactor, including [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dh1bv9fAxiY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dh1bv9fAxiY)

## \* **On the continuing effects**

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/581972/eprsBRI\(2016\)581972EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/581972/eprsBRI(2016)581972EN.pdf)

## \* **On children living with wild animals**

*Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* by Michael Newton. Faber, 2002

<https://www.history.com/news/6-famous-wild-children-from-history>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/feral-children>

## \* **On Rewilding**

[www.truenaturefoundation.org](http://www.truenaturefoundation.org)

[www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/explore-rewilding](http://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/explore-rewilding)

## \* **On Nuclear Energy**

There are numerous websites which look at the pros and cons of nuclear energy. Here are just two examples:

[www.timeforchange.org](http://www.timeforchange.org)

[www.environmental-conscience.com](http://www.environmental-conscience.com)