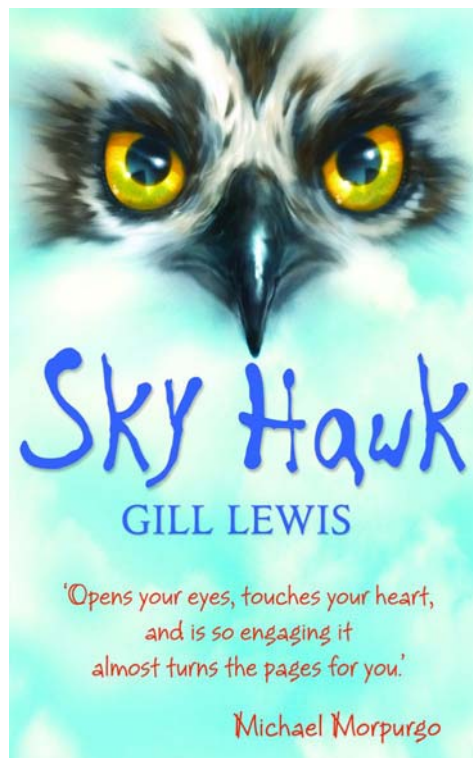


# The World of Sky Hawk

**Ideas for exploring Gill Lewis's novel with pupils  
in Years 5, 6, 7 and 8 (P5, P6 and S1)**



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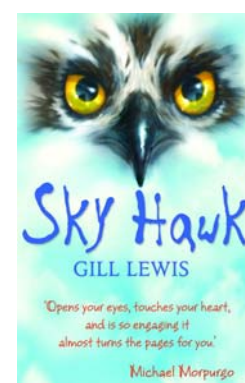
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## Introduction

*Sky Hawk* by Gill Lewis is an exciting and moving adventure story in which children who are passionate about the natural world use their friendships both at home and across the world to safeguard a very special bird: Iris the osprey. It would be ideal as a class reader for upper primary or lower secondary pupils, as a text for a reading group or the focus of a project for pupils transferring to secondary school. It encourages children to think about issues such as

- humans' relationship with rare wild birds and our responsibility to care for them
- how communities can make links and help each other
- how caring about something can help children recover from loss.

To follow are ideas for using the book to spark research, creative arts and discussion.



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## Synopsis

11-year-old Callum enjoys life on his family's sheep farm in the Scottish Highlands; he loves mountain biking, fishing and having adventures with his friends, Euan and Rob. A local girl, Iona, shows him an osprey's eyrie on his father's land, which she has been watching from a neighbouring tree. They agree to keep the location a secret because osprey eggs are known to attract thieves. But Callum's friendship with Iona, whose family is isolated in the local community, creates tension between the boys and Callum is torn by divided loyalties.

A female osprey lays three eggs in the eyrie but is trapped and wounded by a fishing line. With the help of Hamish, a warden from a neighbouring nature reserve, Callum and Iona rescue her and one of her three eggs hatches a chick. Iona, a gifted artist, charts the female's development in an illustrated diary and they call her Iris after the Greek goddess of the wind and sky. Hamish and Callum's father help them to build a proper tree house to observe the ospreys.

Soon after tragedy puts an end to Iona and Callum's friendship, Iris sets off on her long flight south to West Africa, leaving her mate to tend the chick. Hamish tags her with a GPS device so that Callum and his classmates can track her on her journey. When Iris is lost and injured in the inland mangrove swamps of the Gambia, Callum is able to organise her rescue through an email friendship with a 10-year-old girl, Jeneba, who is waiting for an operation on her legs in a Gambia hospital. After Jeneba's doctor friend has helped Iris set off on her flight back to Scotland, Callum's village contributes to a public campaign to pay for Jeneba to come to the UK, where a surgeon has agreed to do her operation for free. Jeneba reaches Scotland in time to join Callum in welcoming Iris home.



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## About the author

Gill Lewis is a former vet. She completed an MA course at Bath Spa University in Writing for Young People MA where she won a prize for the most promising writer of her year. *Sky Hawk* is her first novel.

Meet Gill:

**Q: What inspired you to write *Sky Hawk*?**

A: The people and animals I have met during my job and travels as a vet.

**Q: What do you think people will say about this book?**

A: If someone could take one thing from this book, I hope it would be an understanding that the actions of an individual can make a huge difference to the world around us.

**Q: What is your favourite holiday destination?**

A: Cornwall. I love Cornwall at any time of year. It's steeped in history and magic and has amazing wildlife too.

**Q: What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?**

A: The mind is like a parachute...it only works when it is open.

**Q: What is your favourite children's book?**

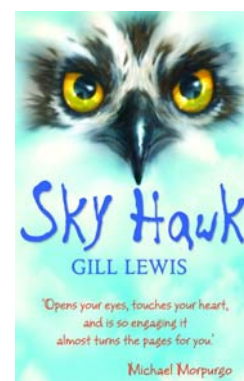
A: *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo

**Q: What is your favourite food?**

A: I have a definite weakness for chocolate.

**Q: What makes you laugh out loud?**

A: People in silly costumes



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# The world of *Sky Hawk*: themes for exploring Gill Lewis's novel



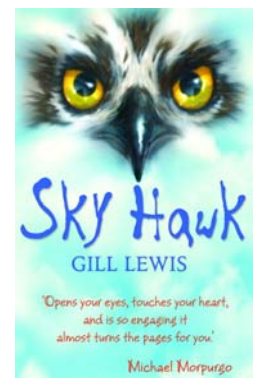
## 1. The osprey's story

Read about osprey on the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds website at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/youth/learn/migration/stories/ospreys.asp>

The RSPB uses the same satellite tag system as Hamish to follow the osprey's return journey of more than 4,000 miles each way from West or South Africa to Scotland and northern England, where they breed.

According to the RSPB, they arrive in the UK in late March and April and leave in September and October. Their flight south for the winter takes an average of 45 days.

- **Display** Create a timeline for Iris the osprey and Callum, Iona and Jeneba showing events over the year in which the action of *Sky Hawk* takes place, which begins and ends when Iris arrives on Callum's farm.
- **Display** Follow Iona's example and draw or paint ospreys or other birds of prey, or other wild birds if you are not lucky enough to live near somewhere where you can observe birds of prey.
- **Research** A family photograph reveals that ospreys have nested on Callum's farm since at least 1905—use the RSPB website and others to find out how osprey numbers have declined over the past century.
- **Display/write/talk** What messages does the book give us about how to treat any wild birds, especially rare ones? Give examples of some dangers to wild birds that humans can reduce or avoid. Design and produce flyers, posters or other visual aids to get your points across and present your ideas to the class or a school assembly.



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## 2. Amazing journeys



Through following the migration of Iris the osprey, Callum makes a journey he would never be able to make in person because birds can reach places that humans can't reach.

From around the middle of the book, short sections in italics describe Iris's journey as Gill Lewis imagines she experienced it, including her point of view of humans.

**Write** Imagine another animal making a journey (this could be a pet, or another wild animal). Give the animal a reason for making the journey and a time limit and describe the people and places they encounter on the way.

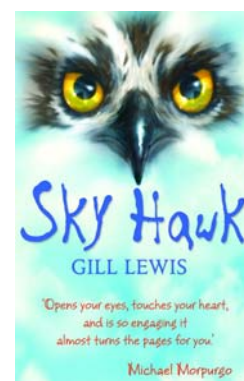
Callum's friends and family also make journeys over the course of the story, either in terms of distance travelled or in something they have learned about the world or how they have changed their opinion of something.

**Write/talk/think about:** Describe the various kinds of journeys made by

- Iris
- Callum
- Jeneba
- Rob
- Graham (Callum's brother)

How does Iona help Callum and his friends on their journeys?

**Display** Combine maps, artwork and Google Earth images to depict Iris's journey from Scotland to the Gambia.



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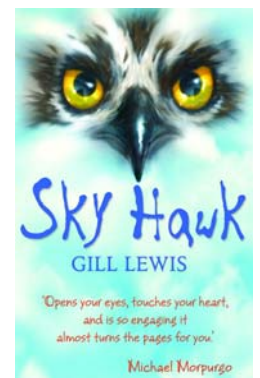
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### 3. Technology



Hamish, the nature reserve warden, uses the latest technology to track Iris's route to West Africa. Find other examples of how:

- Technology helps us learn about animal life.
- Technology brings humans together in ways that help animals.



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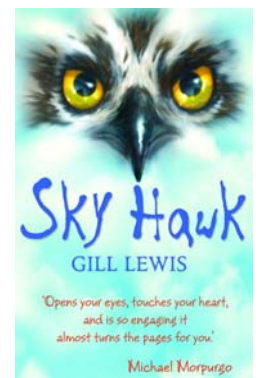
## 4. Friendships



Callum has strong friendships with both boys (Rob and Euan) and girls (Iona and Jeneba).

Some questions to **write/talk/think about**:

- Are girls' and boys' friendships different? if you think they are, how are they different?
- Why do the boys find Callum's friendship with Iona difficult?
- How does Callum's friendship with Rob and Euan change over the course of the book?
- Why does Callum find it difficult to be honest about his friendship with Iona? Why does she get upset with him?
- What helps Callum and Jeneba to form a strong bond long before they meet?



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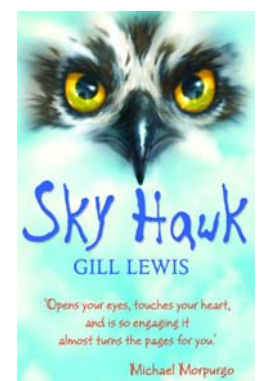


## 5. Communities



Sky Hawk is set in two communities in the Scottish Highlands and the Gambia. Some questions to **write/talk/think about** in relation to both Hamish's home and Jeneba's.

- What is it like living in each place for a young person? What is enjoyable and what might be difficult?
- What is it like living in each place for older people? Compare how Jeneba's community in the Gambia treats its village elder (the marabout) to how Callum's community treats Mr McNair.
- What sort of jobs do the adults do in the two places? What sort of issues might make their lives harder?
- How are the humans' lives in the two places affected by living creatures and in particular by the osprey, which Jeneba's community calls the kulanjango? What beliefs do they have about the birds?



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