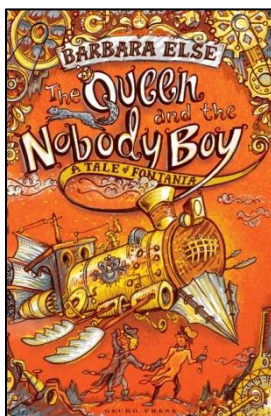


***The Queen and the Nobody Boy***

by Barbara Else

**Synopsis**

Hodie is the unpaid odd-job boy at the Grand Palace in the Kingdom of Fontania. Fed-up, he decides to leave and better himself. The young Queen, 12-year-old Sibilla, is fed-up too. Sick of gossip about her lack of magical ability, she decides to run away with Hodie, whether he likes it or not. Their adventures take them right into the heart of enemy territory where they stumble upon not only a corrupt emperor and rebels, but also allies, lost family and friends, in the most unlikely places. They brave storms, wind-trains, enemy soldiers and poisonous toads. However, throughout it all, their and their allies' strength, determination and courage, finally allow them to unravel the secrets of The Ties, save the dragon-eagles, and help find their true positions and the elusive magic that the Kingdom of Fontania so desperately needs.

**Author**

Barbara Else is the author of six adult novels, and is one of New Zealand's most respected writers.



She is a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to literature, and has worked as a university tutor, editor, and freelance author. Her third children's novel, *The Travelling Restaurant*, has won several prominent awards. Barbara lives in Wellington, New Zealand. (Visit her blog at [www.TalesOfFontania.com](http://www.TalesOfFontania.com))

**Themes**

This adventure story about greed, rebellion, and finding allies in the most unlikely places, deals with several themes, such as bravery, power, trust, love and true purpose. The theme of bravery is evident from the start of the book as Hodie and Sibilla both decide to leave the familiar and embark on a journey full of unknown challenges and adventures. Many characters display not only bravery, but also perseverance, in order to overcome obstacles and adversity.

The themes of trust and loyalty are also illustrated throughout the book. Hodie and Sibilla must learn to trust themselves, each other, and an assortment of allies, to get out of many dangerous dilemmas. Loyalty, to friends, leaders, country and family, is tested by a multitude of characters, such as, Lu'nedda, Allana, Murgott, Emperor Prowdd'on, Hodie and Sibilla as they wrestle with the question of who deserves their loyalty.

Many characters also learn about the complexity of family and love. Hodie learns how his mother sacrificed her happiness for his safety and finally comes to forgive her, Lu'nedda discovers how parental love cannot always be assured and Sibilla learns that love of her country will enable her to continue and succeed in her role as Queen of Fontania.

Another theme evident in the book is the ability of greed and power to corrupt. This is particularly evident in the actions of Emperor Prowdd'on as he rules by fear and wages war on Fontania. The lengths people will go to be free of such corrupt power is seen in the actions of the rebels.

One of the major themes of the book is the need to discover and accept your true purpose and place in the world. This drives the action of the book as Hodie and Sibilla finally accept and claim their roles in the future of the Kingdom of Fontania.

**Activities**

1. Before reading, discuss the title, cover illustration and genre.
2. The book is full of dramatic, highly-descriptive, suspense-filled action sequences, particularly chase and escape scenes, for example, the escape from Um'Binnia (pp. 231-239) and escaping the toad attack (pp. 285-288). Choose an action sequence from the book. Study the language the author uses in the sequence and write a dramatic, suspense-filled action sequence of your own about something that has happened to you. Present your sequence in either a comic strip or a movie storyboard format.
3. As the book progresses Hodie and Sibilla discover that some other characters have surprising and hidden depths, such as Lu'nedda and Dardy. In pairs, make a chart, listing the positive and negative qualities of five of the main characters and find examples from the book of when they display these qualities. Discuss if, and how, these characters change and develop throughout the book? Which characters did you like/dislike the most? Why?
4. Based on character descriptions from the book draw a portrait of one of the characters, for example, Allana (pp. 156-157) or Lu'nedda (p. 171). Then write a description of yourself and/or one of your classmates.
5. Hodie first sees the Um'Binnian crest on the side of a wind-train (p. 70). Later Allana tells him Emperor Prowdd'on invented the crest himself to show 'how wonderful he is, how regal and dazzling' (p. 183). Do you think this symbol is an accurate representation of his true character? If not, what symbol would? Research the history and meaning of crests. Draw the Um'Binnian crest, then design and draw a crest which represents one other character from the book. Create a crest for yourself and/or your school.
6. The book is full of strange creatures and unusual machines, for example, the bridge-troll (p. 60), the zoo animals (p. 187), the poisonous toads (p. 261), the magical dragon-eagles (p. 301) the Um'Binnian wind-trains (p. 84) and Jasper's spy bird (p. 58). Choose one of the creatures or machines listed above or create your own. Write, illustrate, design and bind a children's adventure book based on your choice.
7. Hodie steals Murgott's poetry book. Choose one of the subjects mentioned in the notebook to compose a poem (p. 214). Recite the poem to your class.
8. The author uses personification to describe elements of nature, for example, 'The leaves of the forest grizzled at him. The wind slapped him in a bad temper' (p. 297). Write a descriptive paragraph using personification about other forces of nature.
9. What figure of speech are the following words examples of 'clatter and jangle' (p. 71)? Find five more examples from the book. Write a poem which includes the words.
10. There are many vivid similes in the book, for example, 'Murgott's scowl was as black as the bottom of the ocean' (p. 107) and 'Gree'sle stood like an icicle of fright' (p. 287). Find some more similes from the book.
11. The back cover blurb states that the book is about 'Hodie's Journey (In Five Parts All About Bad Choices)'. In groups, create a timeline of the main choices Hodie makes in the book. Discuss whether or not you think his choices were in fact bad and what the pros and cons of the choices he made were, based on the subsequent outcomes. Compare your thoughts with the other groups in your class. Do you agree/disagree with their findings? Why/why not?

12. Hodie and Sibilla leave behind the Kingdom of Fontania and its monarchy and travel to Um'Binnia which is ruled by 'a vain and cruel emperor' (p. 106) who is attempting to stave off a rebellion. On their journey to Um'Binnia they meet a political ogre who would prefer a system of democracy rather than rule by either an emperor or a monarchy (p. 120). Do you agree with the ogre? Why/why not? Compare and contrast these methods of rule using examples from both the book and reality to show any similarities and/or differences. Create a power point demonstration of your findings.
13. The book deals with the ability to believe in and to see magic. Divide into teams to debate the following from the book: 'Maybe magic was simply science that was still to be explained' (p. 282).
14. The cover illustration, chapter openings and colour maps on the inside covers are by artist Sam Broad. What do you like/dislike about them? Design your own illustrations for two of the chapters, as well as a new cover.
15. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the children's page of your favourite magazine, newspaper or website.