

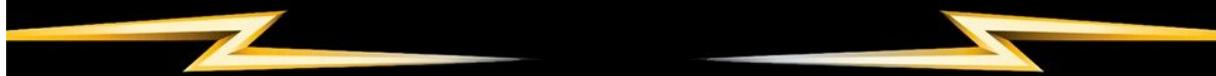
Thomas  
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HIS DAD IS THE WORLD'S  
GREATEST DETECTIVE  
HIS MOM IS A MYSTERY  
ONLY HE CAN SOLVE

# *the* ZIGZAG *kid*

A FILM BY VINCENT BAL



## ***What Nono, The Zig Zag Kid***

### **Teacher Resource Package**

**Prepared By: Susan Starkman B.A., M.Ed**

#### **Synopsis**

***Nono, The Zig Zag Kid/Nono Het Zigzag Kind***

**Country of Origin:** Netherlands

**Release Year:** 2012

**Original Language:** Dutch, French and English with English subtitles

**Director:** Vincent Bal

**Runtime:** 95 minutes

**Themes:** Coming of age, family relationships, illusion vs. reality

**Grade Recommendation:** 5-7

Nono wants to be like his father - the best police inspector in the world - but he constantly gets in trouble. Two days before his Bar Mitzvah, he is sent away to his uncle Shmuel, who is supposed to get him back on track. However, during the train ride, Nono gets one last chance to prove himself. Together with master-burglar Felix Glick - an old acquaintance of his father, he stops the train and enters a world of disguises, chases, French chansons and Zohara, a mysterious woman whose secrets will change Nono's life forever.

#### **Context**

*Nono, The Zig Zag Kid* is adapted from the novel by acclaimed Israeli writer David Grossman. He is the author of numerous works of fiction, nonfiction, and children's literature. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker* and has been translated into thirty languages around the world. He is the recipient of many prizes, including the French Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, the Buxtehuder Bulle in Germany, Rome's Premio per la Pace e l'Azione Umitaria, the Premio Ischia-- International Award for Journalism, Israel's Emet Prize, and the Albatross Prize given by the Günter Grass Foundation. The original novel is written in Hebrew where Nono travels from his home in Jerusalem to Haifa.

With regard to adapting his novel into a film, Grossman told the director that “you have to betray the book and be loyal to the movie...If you will be loyal to the movie you will also be loyal in a way to my writing. Because if the director is loyal to the book, he will create a literary movie. I hate literary movies. Movies should be “movie movies.” (<http://www.nonohetzigzagkind.nl/>)

#### **Focus Question/Activity:**

What does Grossman mean by having to “betray the book and be loyal to the movie?” Read the novel on which the film is based. What changes have been made? Why do you think that the director made this changes? Do you think that the film version is as good as the novel? Why/Why not? Provide evidence to support your response.

## Ways Into the Text

### Introducing Students to Film Narrative

In the language of film, narrative is the term used for storytelling. It refers to the way the different elements of a film are organized to make a meaningful story. Narrative structure refers to the way the plot unfolds during the course of the film. The basic elements of a film narrative are story, plot and characters. *Nono, The Zig Zag Kid* is a story about a young boy on a quest to find out more about his family history and why no one will talk to him about his mother. The plot revolves around the way Nono and Felix piece together clues that lead to Nono discovering the truth about what happened to her. Each of the characters they meet along the way adds something to the way the story unfolds.

A narrative timeline refers to the pattern of events that a film follows. One of the basic timelines that can be applied to many films (including *Nono, The Zig Zag Kid*) consists of five main parts:

1. We meet the characters and see where the film is set
2. Something bad happens to the “good” character
3. The good characters try to restore order despite the bad characters trying to foil their efforts
4. The good characters prevail
5. Everything ends happily ever after

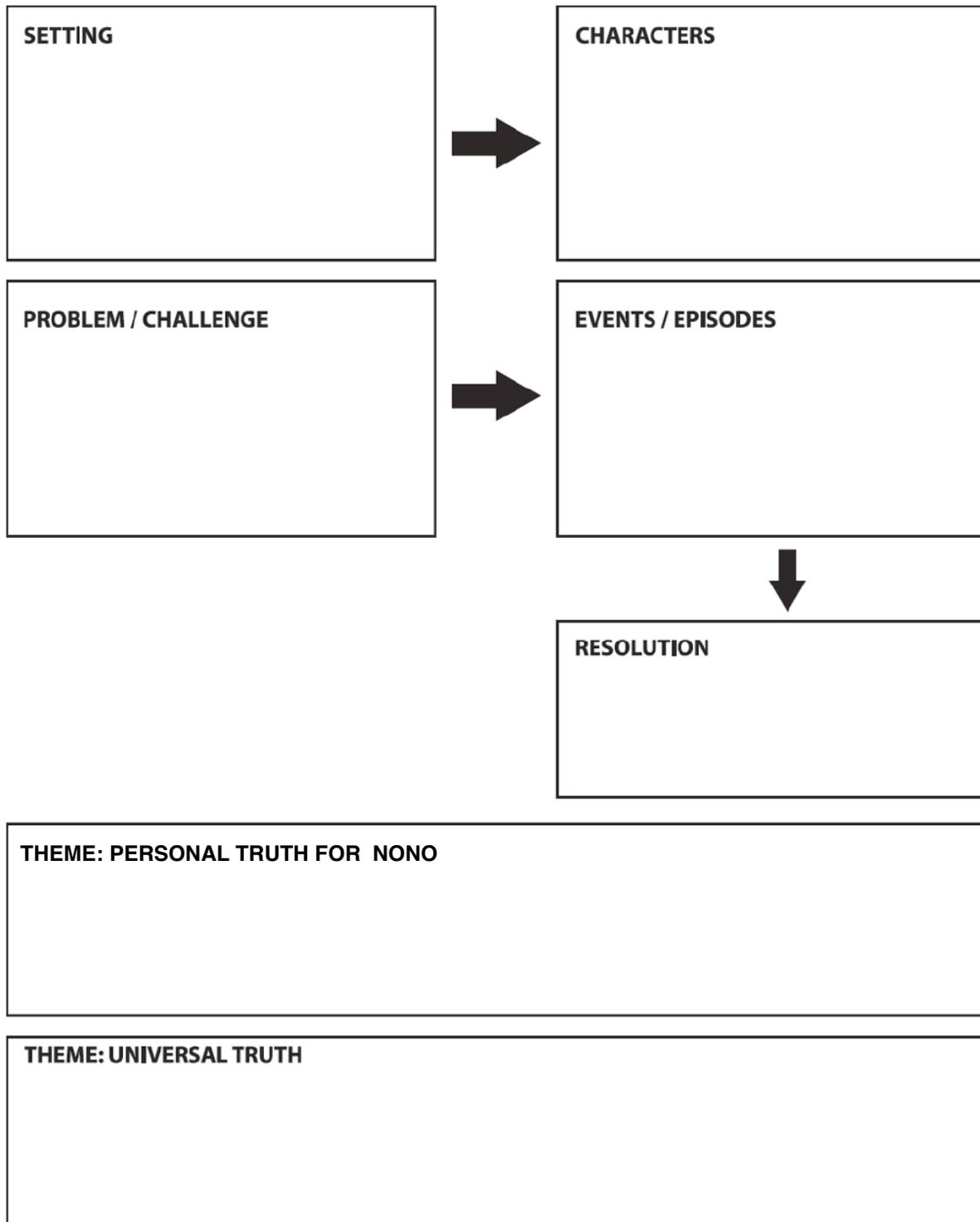
Finally, the purpose of most narratives is to convey a particular theme or moral. By the end of the film, the main characters learn a personal truth that helps them grow as people and, by extension, the viewers learn a lesson that they can apply to their own lives.

In order for students to better understand the idea of film narrative, teachers could ask them to draw a story map that illustrates the above-mentioned narrative elements. Students can fill out the story map template that appears on the following page.

Story Map for *Nono, The Zig Zag Kid*

Teachers can also find an online story map template at:

<http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/storymap/>



## GENRE

Film narratives can be sorted into different categories known as genres. Films in a particular genre share certain characteristics that audiences can immediately identify. For example, when we see characters wearing a Stetson hats and gun belts around their waists, we can be fairly certain that the film is a Western. The story lines of genre films also follow conventions that alert us to the type of film we are watching. Romantic comedies, for example, usually follow the pattern of a boy meeting a girl and, after a series of elaborate complications, marrying and living happily ever after. We can often identify the genre of a film just by looking at the costumes. Dramatisations of literary works such as *Little Women* rely on the conventions of period costumes and period sets to convince audiences of the realism of the time in which the film is set. Finally, certain themes and values are associated with particular genres. Action films can be identified by heroes (or superheroes like Batman and Spiderman) who are able to single-handedly conquer their foes. These characters represent the value of good conquering evil and they offer the viewer hope that a solution can be found to some of the troubles that exist in our own world.

At the beginning of *The Zig Zag Kid*, Nono describes his father as “the best inspector in the country” and tells the audience that he has tried to be just like him since he was three years old. This alerts us to the fact that the film will likely belong to the detective genre. Before viewing the film, teachers could get their students to consider some of the features of this genre by asking the following questions and putting their responses up on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper:

1. How many detective films/TV series can you name?
2. How many famous detective characters can you name?
3. Do the detectives that you know share any particular personality traits?
4. Do the plots of the detective films follow any particular pattern?
5. What are some of the conventions associated with detective films? (e.g., “red herrings”, false clues that mislead the viewer)

After watching the film, teachers should ask students how the film follows the conventions of the detective genre and how it differs. For example, unlike most detective films, the “bad guys” in this film are not bad at all. Nono’s dad only wants to protect Nono from the truth about his mother but, in so doing, he is depriving Nono of the right to know who he is and where he comes from. Nono’s determination to discover the truth pits him against his father for much of the film even though his love for his father is unwavering. Felix, on the other hand, spends much of the film helping Nono and, as such, he is viewed as one of the “good guys”, though his background as a master thief would suggest otherwise. The blurring of distinctions between “good guys” and “bad guys” in the film is a topic that teachers can discuss with their students after viewing the film.

## **Related Activities:**

1. Take the plot of *Nono, The Zig Zag Kid* (finding out the truth about Zohara's death) and rewrite the script for a different film genre (e.g. science fiction, romantic comedy or a western).
2. Look at the movie posters that appear in the film listings section of your local paper. Try to identify the genre of each film. What are some of the signs that allow you to identify the kind of film it is?
3. Choose a film genre that you like. Create the title of a film and a poster to promote it. Can your classmates identify the genre?

## **THEMES**

*Nono, The Zig Zag Kid* explores a number of themes, any one of which can be used as a springboard to classroom discussion. Below is a brief list of some of the major themes with accompanying questions.

### **Coming of Age**

Throughout the course of the film, Nono travels not just from Holland to France, but also from innocence to experience. It is no coincidence that the action of the film takes place just three days before Nono's bar mitzvah, the religious rite of passage from childhood to manhood. During those few days, Nono transforms from a naïve boy who wants to be just like his father to a cunning detective in his own right, able to outsmart both his father and grandfather. He also learns to question his father's over-protection and insist on knowing the truth about his family history.

### **Questions**

1. Write a brief character sketch of Nono at the beginning of the film and one of him at the end of the film. How do the two descriptions differ?
2. List the specific events in the film that teach Nono important life lessons.
3. How is Nono's growing maturity reflected in his relationship with Felix and his father?

### **Illusion vs. Reality**

In addition to the practical skills that Nono learns from his inspector father, he inherits a keen imagination from his mother. In the film, this is depicted through scenes of "magic realism" where the audience is unsure whether what they are seeing onscreen is really happening or if it is just happening in Nono's imagination. After viewing the film, teachers should discuss the way the film blurs the distinctions between reality and fantasy and have students explore the reasons why the director chose to do this.

## Questions

1. How does the reality of Nono's jump from the roof with the umbrella differ from the way that he imagines it? How do the events in the opening bar mitzvah sequence foreshadow Nono's bar mitzvah at the end of the film?
2. Draw a list of all of the scenes that take place in Nono's imagination. Are there any scenes where it is hard to tell if the action is taking place in Nono's mind or in real life? Why do you think that director chose to confuse the audience in places?
3. Felix takes Nono to the chocolate factory where his parents first met. Rather than tell him what happened there, he gets Nono to imagine the way his parents met and fell in love. Why did the director choose to do this rather than play the scene as a flashback to the past? Do you think having it done through Nono's imagination is an effective technique? Why/why not?

## Family Relationships/Self-Identity

One of the main themes in the film is Nono's struggle with his identity as an individual and in relation to the people he loves, namely his father, Gaby and later, Felix and Lola. At different points in the film, he wavers between anger and admiration towards these characters and casts them as either heroes or villains in his quest to become his own person. By the end of the film, Nono comes to realise that both his parents and his grandparents are flawed individuals but they all have his best interests at heart. He also learns that biology is not destiny and although he has inherited some personality traits from his parents, he is ultimately his own person and not doomed by "the curse of Zohara" as his aunt warned.

## Questions

1. How does Nono's relationship with his father change over the course of the film?
2. Why does Nono blame his grandparents after he finds out that his mother committed suicide? What allows him to forgive them?
3. Why is Jacob so reluctant to marry Gaby? Why is Nono so keen to have his father marry her?

## CHARACTERS

Close analysis of the characters in the film and the relationships that develop between them provide teachers with the opportunity to utilise *Nono, the Zig Zag Kid* in the context of character education. In particular, the film can be used as a vehicle to explore issues of family relationships, the importance of honesty and learning to deal with tragedy. Below is a brief outline of main characters with some guiding questions that can form the basis of a class discussion.

### Nono Feierberg

At the beginning of the film, Nono wants to be just like his father whom he regards as the best inspector in the country. Although he would like to know more about his mother, he does not openly press his father on this issue, knowing that the subject is too painful for Jacob. By the end of the film, Nono learns to challenge his father's authority as part of establishing an independent identity for himself. Students can trace the evolution of Nono's journey to selfhood by working through the questions below:

### Focus Questions:

(Responses must include specific examples from the film)

1. What is Nono's attitude towards his father at the beginning of the film? evidence to
2. How does Nono react to the prospect of being sent to his Uncle Shmuel's? Why does he decide not to pull the emergency brake on the train and run back to his father and Gaby?
3. Why does Nono agree to play along with Felix and pretend to be a sick boy named Michael who just wants to see the inside of a locomotive? What is his reaction when Felix shoots a gun?
4. Why does Nono not let on that he realises that the man who is his teacher is really Felix Glick, the master criminal? Why does Nono think that his father hired Felix to train Nono to be a detective?
5. What is Nono's reaction to seeing a headline in the paper about how he had been kidnapped by Felix? Why does Nono hang up on his father and return to Felix knowing that his father did not hire Felix?
6. How has Nono's relationship with Felix changed after Nono returns to the apartment?
7. What is Nono's reaction to finding out that Felix and Lola are his grandparents? How do they differ from Nono's father in the way that they treat Nono? In what ways are they the same as Nono's father?
8. What is Nono's reaction to finding out that his mother committed suicide? Why does he blame his grandfather? What allows him to forgive his grandfather and convince his father not to arrest him?
9. How does Nono's bar mitzvah speech reflect the way he has matured over the course of his adventure with his grandparents?

### **Jacob Feierberg**

Still haunted by his wife's suicide, Jacob has been unable to move on with his life. Rather than dealing with his pain, he represses it by refusing to even mention Zohara to anyone. Though he clearly loves Gaby and is happy for her to play the role of wife and mother, his previous experience with marriage makes him too fearful to commit to Gaby formally. Having married Zohara on an impulse, Jacob becomes overly cautious about making a similar mistake when it comes to falling in love. Moreover, he is determined to shield his son from ever experiencing the same kind of pain. To that end, he refuses to answer any of his Nono's questions about his mother thereby depriving his son of information that is crucial to his emotional development. Through Nono's adventure with Felix, Jacob also grows emotionally and learns to deal with his past.

### Focus Questions:

(Responses must include specific examples from the film)

1. What is Jacob's reaction to his mother's claim that Nono has "bad blood" and suffers from "the curse of Zohara"?
2. Why does Jacob insist on referring to Gaby as his "secretary" even though Nono realises that they are a couple and would be happy to have Gaby as his step-mother?
3. What made Jacob fall in love with Zohara in the first place?

4. Felix tells Nono that Jacob and Zohara were “the worst possible match.” Why was their marriage doomed to failure from the beginning?
5. What is Jacob’s reaction to finding out that Gaby was the one who was responsible for Felix and Nono meeting? Why does he react this way?
6. Why does Jacob allow Nono to convince him not to arrest Felix? How does this reflect his emotional growth?
7. Why does Jacob decide to run after Gaby? What made him change his mind about the way she set up the meeting between Felix and Nono? Why is he finally able to commit to marriage?

## **Gaby**

Jacob’s long-suffering secretary/girlfriend and mother figure to NoNo, Gaby initially comes across as insecure and submissive. However, it is Gaby who finally takes a stand against Jacob’s refusal to deal with the past by writing an anonymous letter to Felix that brings him and Nono together at last. Moreover, without directly telling Nono anything about his mother, she does indirectly tell him about his grandparents through her stories of the master thief Felix and the famous singer Lola Ciperola. By the time Jacob realises how much he depends on her, it is almost too late, but Nono comes to the rescue by helping his father make a grand romantic gesture that she can’t refuse.

Focus Questions:

(Responses must include specific examples from the film)

1. Why does Gaby agree to pretend to be only Jacob’s secretary when even Nono knows that she is his girlfriend?
2. What qualities does Gaby share with Zohara? In what ways are they different?
3. What finally pushes Gaby to take matters into her own hands and lead Nono to the truth about his past?
4. Are Gaby and Jacob a better match than Zohara and Jacob were? Why/why not?

## **Felix and Lola**

Nono’s grandparents are his link to finding out the truth about his mother and understanding her personality. Colourful and famous, they provide Nono with excitement and adventure but, like their daughter, they lack the stability that Nono needs as a young boy. Nono is initially seduced by them, but when he finds out that his mother committed suicide, he blames them for being bad parents and turns against them. It is only after Felix gives Nono the silver harmonica that his mother saved for his bar mitzvah, that Nono begins to understand that Zohara was responsible for the choice that she made. By the end of the film, Nono has been able to put his grandparents in perspective and he is the one who convinces his father not to arrest Felix.

Focus Questions:

(Responses must include specific examples from the film)

1. How do Felix and Lola help Nono (and us) to understand Zohara’s personality? What personality traits did she share with her parents?
2. Do you think that Nono will stay in touch with his grandparents? Why/why not?

### Related Activity

Draw a character sketch of each of the characters listed below, by filling out the character traits listed in the left-hand column:

	<b>Nono</b>	<b>Jacob</b>	<b>Felix</b>	<b>Lola</b>	<b>Gaby</b>
General Appearance					
Facial Expressions/Mannerisms					
Clothing					

## Symbols and Motifs

*Nono, The Zig Zag Kid* offers teachers the opportunity to introduce students to the way that filmmakers use symbols and motifs to convey certain ideas to their audiences. While a symbol refers to a specific object that represents a certain abstract idea, a motif denotes a recurring theme. Below is a list of symbols and motifs that appear throughout the film. Students should fill out the grid, identifying the scenes in the film where they appear (context) and commenting on their significance.

<b>Symbol/Motif</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Zig zag charm		
Red Shawl		
Harmonica		
Escape/chase scenes		
Bar Mitzvah		

### Classroom Activity: Film Review

Write a film review of *Nono, The Zig Zag Kid*. Use the chart below to think about the qualities of a film that you need to consider when writing a review.

Criteria	Rating 5=Great, 1=Poor					Comments
Story Elements	5	4	3	2	1	
Dialogue/Screenplay						
Overall level of suspense						
Emotional impact						
Overall interest level						
Message of the film						
Character Elements						
Character believability						
Character development						
Development of relationship between Nono and Jacob						
Development of relationship between Nono and Felix						
Technical Elements						
Cinematography						
Music						
Special effects						

## References

ReadWriteThink

<http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/storymap/>

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