



Unnecessary Drama

NINA KENWOOD

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Credit: Lian Hingee

Nina Kenwood is an award-winning author living in Melbourne. Her debut YA novel, *It Sounded Better in My Head*, won the Text Prize and was a finalist for the American Library Association's William C Morris Award, a CBCA notable book, as well as being shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, the Queensland Literary

Awards, the Russell Prize for Humour Writing, the Indie Book Awards and the Australian Book Industry Awards. *It Sounded Better in My Head* has been published in six languages, and optioned for film.

SYNOPSIS

Brooke has been looking forward to the independence of moving away from her rural home and into a sophisticated Melbourne share house. But on her first night Brooke has a rude shock when she wakes to find a mouse in her room. And that's not the only rude shock that coming her way.

When Brooke discovers that one of her housemates is Jesse, her once-best-friend-turned-worst-enemy, she's tempted to just pack it in and go home. But she refuses to sacrifice her newfound freedom for the boy who hurt her in high school. So she does what she always does, makes a plan, and commits to staying away from any unnecessary drama. But that turns out to be easier said than done when Brooke realises that a) making friends is hard, b) Jesse is actually a nice guy and c) Brooke is not cut out for just taking things in her stride. Although Brooke finds herself warming to Jesse, she's not sure if she can forgive the way he broke her trust and destroyed their friendship.

When Brooke, Jesse and their third housemate, Harper, are out one night, Brooke finds herself face to face with an ex, and in the heat of the moment pretends that Jesse is her boyfriend. But is it pretending when there's obviously a spark? Brooke feels as though things are spiralling out of control, and when her lively and unpredictable sister shows up to stay, and it looks as if she's interested in Jesse, Brooke can feel it all falling apart.

Unnecessary Drama is a big-hearted love story about finding yourself and learning to let go.

BEFORE READING

1. Write a letter to your future self at nineteen—where do you think you'll be then? Who will matter to you? What would you like to remind yourself of?



- How would you feel living with new people for the first time? Make a list of three 'rules' that would be important to you to be able to live with other people.
- Unnecessary Drama* is an example of a romance novel—what are some of the features of this genre? Use this knowledge to make some predictions about what might happen in the book.

WHILE READING

- What happened to destroy Brooke and Jesse's friendship? Why did they each act the way they did?
- Compare the way that Brooke reacts to the mouse to the way that Amber reacts. What does this tell you about their characters?
- Why does Brooke feel anxious about the housewarming party? How do the events of the party align with her expectations?
- How does Brooke manage her anxiety? What other ways are there to manage anxiety?
- Describe Brooke's relationship with Tristan. Why did they break up? Why does she want to impress him when they see each other?
- Does Brooke get along with her dad? How does she feel when he cancels their dinner?
- Reflect on a time that someone broke your trust, or a friendship ended. What happened? How did it make you feel? Did you work things out? If not, what would have to change to mend the relationship?
- How did Brooke expect to fall in love? How does it actually happen? What is she looking for in a relationship?
- How does Brooke feel when Jesse goes on a date with Amber? Why doesn't she just tell him how she feels?
- What revelation does Brooke have about her writing that makes her story better?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

- Jesse obviously regrets the way he behaved towards Brooke in high school, but she makes very strict rules to keep him out of her life when they move in together. Should Brooke maintain her resolve or should she be open to starting over? How does what happens at school affect friendships and relationships beyond high school?
- How does Brooke describe her role within her family? How does she feel about it? Discuss the sequence of events that make her snap when Lauren comes to stay.
- Brooke says that Jesse's best and worst trait might be 'that he's so confident in his likeability and

charm he thinks hearing his worst traits will be entertaining'. (p. 107) Do you agree with her? Why does he find it entertaining, when Brooke finds something incredibly stressful? Where does Jesse's confidence come from? Is he confident about all aspects of his life?

- Do you think Brooke would describe herself as someone easy to get along with? Why/why not? Read chapter seven closely, and discuss some of the challenges Brooke has when trying to make friends.

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- Unnecessary Drama* is about characters just out of high school, starting to define their identities against increased freedom and independence. Make a list of some of the characteristics of this kind of novel—what do you expect from stories written for young adults? Think about the narrative style, point of view, and the ending. What other ways might you describe or categorise the style of this novel? Why?

THEMES

Independence

- How does Brooke feel when she moves in with Harper? What is she happy about? What is she worried about?
- What does independence look like to you? Do you see this reflected in the book? What does independence mean to Brooke? To Jesse? To Lauren? How are they similar and different?
- How does anxiety impact the amount of independence Brooke allows herself?

Trust

- Brooke doesn't trust Jesse—why not? How does he prove that she can trust him again? Discuss what makes us trust someone, and reflect on a time that someone has broken your trust.
- How does it feel to be distrusted? How do you think Lauren feels when Brooke tells her how to behave when she comes to stay?
- When Jesse is telling Harper about Tristan, he says 'I never trusted him'. (p. 121) Why do you think this is? Brooke defends him, calling Tristan 'completely trustworthy' because of his work with at-risk youth. Can they both be right? Is Tristan's work with at-risk youth a good example of trustworthiness? Why/why not?

Identity

- At the beginning of the book, Brooke describes herself as a 'person who prepares'. (p. 2) Does she see this as a good thing or a bad thing? How is this challenged or changed over the course of the story?
- How does fear shape the way that Brooke sees herself? Make a list of some of the things she's afraid of. What do you think she's really afraid of?



3. How does being away from her family give Brooke the chance to explore new facets of her identity? What other influences shape who we are?

RESPONDING

1. Watch this video on the shape of stories (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ>) Draw the shape of this story. Use the shape (or structure) you've drawn to write a love story of your own.
2. Do all romance stories need a happy ending? Write an alternative ending to the story. Is it still a romance novel? Why/why not? Compare your ending with others from your class.
3. Throughout the book, Brooke tries to keep everyone happy but sometimes this means keeping her real feelings to herself. Imagine that her dad did show up to dinner, and write a conversation between them where she tells him how his behaviour makes her feel.
4. Read the blurb of the book as a class. As a group, discuss the purpose of a blurb and the information it needs to contain. Write your own blurb for the book that summarises the story, and captures the tone of the book for possible readers, without revealing the ending. Write another blurb for the story you mapped out in activity 1.