



# Goodbye Stranger

## REBECCA STEAD

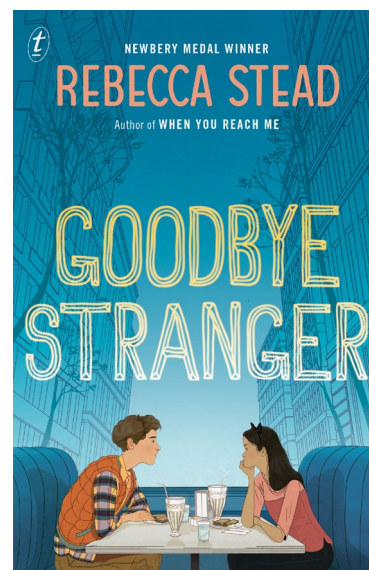
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RECOMMENDED SCHOOL YEAR LEVEL: 6–8

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### TEXT’S TEACHING NOTES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

- ▶ Text’s teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ Students can record their responses in writing through reading journals, online discussions or verbally in classroom discussions.

<b>Strands</b>	LA – Language LT – Literature LY – Literacy
<b>Modes</b>	W – Writing L – Listening R – Reading S – Speaking
<b>General capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Literacy</li> <li> Intercultural understanding</li> <li> Personal and social capability</li> <li> Information and communication technology</li> <li> Critical and creative thinking</li> <li> Numeracy</li> <li> Ethical behaviour</li> </ul>
<b>Cross-curriculum priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Sustainability</li> <li> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</li> <li> Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia</li> </ul>

### SYNOPSIS

‘You must have been put on this Earth for a reason little girl.’ (p.4)

After a near fatal accident, Bridge is told that she must have survived for a reason. The trouble is she hasn’t worked out what the reason is. Her best friends are changing. Emily has discovered boys, sport and popularity. Tab has causes of her own to defend. But, their friendship bound by one rule - no fights! They don’t even seem to mind when Bridge decides to wear cat ears to school. At least Tab’s sister Celeste, Bridge’s brother Jamie and her new friend Sherm seem sure of their place in the world, but looks can be deceiving. In the course of a year, they learn about trust, betrayal and the danger of modern technology. Is their friendship strong enough to survive the perils of being a teenager in a modern world?

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born and raised in New York, Rebecca Stead worked as a lawyer before turning her hand to writing after having children. Stead was the winner of America’s oldest award for children’s literature, the Newbery Medal, for her second novel *When You Reach Me*. *Goodbye Stranger* is her fourth novel.



**BEFORE READING**

1. What guidelines would you suggest teenagers follow when using social media and online communication? (ACELY1704) R W LY
2. Hold a class debate on the topic 'Modern communication is a curse'. (ACELY1731) S L LY
3. Research laws about social media, sex-tint and bullying. As a group, discuss where the line should be drawn in what is acceptable. (ACELY1704) R LY
4. Consider what your relationship on each issue with your friends is based on. What connections do you have? How are you different? Is there a rule that you all agree to that ensures your friendship survives (that rule could be one that hasn't been stated or recorded, but you just accept as a group). Write a letter to a friend explaining your friendship. (ACELY1704) W LY

**WHILE READING**

1. 'The question stayed in her head where it circled.' (p.3) What literary device does the writer use in this phrase. What does it imply? Find another example in the novel (e.g. p.17) (ACELA1553) R LA
2. What do the cat ears represent for Bridge? Why do you think she chooses to wear them? (ACELT1627) R LT
3. How does the narrative voice in the novel change between the chapters 'The Cat Ears' and 'Valentine's Day'? (p.7 to p.10) (ACELT1643) R LT
4. How has Bridge's accident affected the people around her? Remember to include people outside her family as well as family. You could create a chart with Bridge at the centre and plot the other character on it, including their response to the accident. (ACELT1627) R LT
5. What does the narrator mean when she says 'The whole world is hot lava.' (p.22)? (ACELT1627) R LT
6. Emily refers to The Berperson, Tab's English teacher, as a 'wacko'. (p.28) Do you agree? What are some of the positive things that Tab has learned from her teacher? (ACELT1812) R LT
7. What events in the novel suggest that the world is a more dangerous place for young people? Consider the intruder drill specific to schools in the United States (following several school shootings) (ACELT1812) R LT
8. Why do you think Sherm writes letters to his Nonno without sending them? (ACELT1627) R LT
9. Emily explains her mother's belief that most people only connect to each other through a small proportion of things, but they don't realise they have many more things that are not connected. (p.53) Does it matter how many things you have in common with your friends? (ACELT1635) R LT

10. Bridge tells Sherm the riddle of the two brothers who want to get into heaven (p.72-3, p. 261-2) What is the message in the riddle? How is it relevant to the characters in the novel? (ACELT1627) R LT
11. Why is Celeste's anonymity important when we read her story? (ACELT1627) R LT
12. 'Those are Vinny's words, stuck in your head along with so much else of her.' (p.94) What does this line suggest about Vinny's influence? (ACELT1627) R LT
13. As you read the novel, develop a timeline to help determine time and place of the events for each character. For example, Celeste's story happens on one day, but it is told throughout the novel. (ACELT1627) R LT
14. What choices do the characters make in the novel? For example, Sherm's choice of whether to tell the school about the photo of Emily. Which choices would you say were good choices and which were bad choices? (ACELT1627) R LT

**CHARACTER**

1. Create a character chart. Include visual images as well as the details of each character, their traits and their relationship to others. For example, images around Sherm could be a worn wallet, stars and letters. (ACELT1627) R LT
2. Rank the characters based on whether you empathise with them. Do your feelings about each character change at different stages of the novel? For example, how do you feel about Emily before and after the photos were sent? Does your own experience influence the way you feel about a character? (ACELT1627) R LT
3. Which character is the most mature among Bridge and her friends? Explain your choice using evidence from the novel. (ACELT1627) R LT
4. If you were to choose an image to represent each character what would it be? For example, Bridge might be the cat ears or a VW Bug. Create a poster for that character which includes a representation of them, symbols related to them and three key quotes. (ACELT1768) R LT
5. Which characters surprise you? Why? (ACELT1627) R LT

**STYLE AND STRUCTURE**

1. While Bridge is the main character in the novel, her story is not the only one. Map out the different stories in the novel. Whose story you relate to the most? Why? (ACELT1627) R LT
2. What is the significance of the chapter headings? Consider the repetition of 'Valentine's Day'. (ACELT1627) R LT
3. Why is the chapter that tells us of the meeting between Sherm and Bridge two years later important?



Create a similar chapter for one or more of the other characters. Imagine what are their lives and relationships are like two years on. (ACELT1627)

✳️ R LT

- List 5 key moments in the book. Explain why you chose these moments? What makes them important? (ACELT1627) 📖 ✳️ R LT
- Celeste appears in Bridge's story as a peripheral character but her own story is told in the Valentine's Day chapters. Why do you think the author chose to tell both stories? (ACELT1627) 📖 ✳️ R LT

## THEMES

### Love and friendship

- At the start of the year, Bridge and her friends are asked to explain love for an assignment. How would you explain love? What do you think about Bridge's explanation? Write your own version. (ACELT1635) ✳️ R W LT
- Compare the different types of friendships in the novel. For example, how is the friendship between Celeste and Gina different from the friendship that Jamie has with Alex? (ACELT1627) ✳️ R LT
- 'Best friends. You remember the happiness of that.' (p.81) What factors change the relationships between friends in the novel? (ACELT1635) ✳️ R LT
- Do you think liking someone is the same as loving someone? Do you always have to like someone you love or love someone you like? (ACELT1627) ✳️ R LT
- Which friendships are the strongest in *Goodbye Stranger*? Justify your choice. Explain what you think makes that friendship strong. (ACELT1635) ✳️ R LT
- Is friendship more important than your own values? What ethical choices are the characters faced with in the novel? (For example, Bridge's decision to help Em take photos or Sherm's decision to tell the principal about Em's photo). What decision would you make if you were faced with the same choice? (ACELT1635) 📖 ✳️ R LT

### Identity

- 'She could wake up every morning and put on eye makeup, the way Em did. She could do more with her hair and wear something other than T-shirts. But she knew she wouldn't—that stuff would feel like more of a costume than the one she'd worn last night.' (p.114) What does this tell us about Bridge's self image? (ACELT1627) 📖 R LT
- How important are names to the characters in the novel? Consider why Bridge and Vinny change their names. (ACELT1627) ✳️ R LT
- Which characters are secure with their image? What makes this evident? (ACELT1635) ✳️ R LT
- Bridge gives the impression that she isn't concerned about what others think about her. Do you think this is true? Does she do anything in an attempt to change her image? (ACELT1627) ✳️ R LT

- What does the title of the novel, *Goodbye Stranger*, indicate about identity? (ACELT1635) 📖 R LT

### Social media and digital communication

- Compare the way that Sherm and Bridge communicate face to face as to the way some of the characters in the novel communicate via text message. (ACELT1627) 📖 R LT
- What message does the novel send readers about the use of social media and digital communication? (ACELT1812) ✳️ ⚖️ R LT
- Emily and Patrick learn that their private communications are not private. Were they naive to think this? Is the risk to privacy just a symptom of modern communication? (ACELT1635) ✳️ ⚖️ R LT
- Create one of the character's Facebook pages (not a real online page, but a made up one). Consider the messages that students might send to each other. What would Bridge's Facebook page look like compared to Emily's page? You could pair up with a friend and take on the persona of different characters to do this. (ACELY1746) 📖 ⚖️ 📱 R W LY
- Create a poster for the school that warns students about the risks of social media and digital communication. (ACELT1635) 📖 ⚖️ 📱 R W LT

### Guilt and forgiveness

- Explain how some characters carry a sense of guilt about their actions. Do you think that guilt is justified? Create a table with cause and effect as headings. Document the various events, indicating the possible cause and the ultimate effect. (ACELT1635) 📖 ⚖️ R LT
- What steps do characters take to put things right and relieve their guilt? Do you think they did the right thing? (ACELT1627) ✳️ R LT
- How does Sherm feel about his grandfather? How do you know? Find evidence to support your view. (ACELT1627) ✳️ R LT
- Is Emily too quick to forgive Patrick or accept his innocence? Write a brief response from the point of view of three different characters (You could include Emily or Patrick.) (ACELT1643) ✳️ R LT
- Is it always possible to forgive someone for betraying your trust? Do all the characters in the novel deserve forgiveness? (ACELT1635) ✳️ ⚖️ R LT

### Change

- Why are memories important to the character in the novel? Consider Bridge's memory of the accident, Sherm's memories about his grandfather and Celeste's memory of her friendship with Vinny. (ACELT1627) ✳️ R LT
- 'Sherm became aware of the sound of the radio in the kitchen and the smell of his grandmother's coffee, and beneath that, he felt his grandmother's satisfied presence, which never changed.' (p.135) How important is family when change occurs?



What other examples can you find in the novel to illustrate the importance of family when change occurs? (ACELT1635) ⚙️ R LT

3. What evidence is there that the teenagers in the novel are growing up? Consider the connection that Bridge and Jamie have with the elf story (p.26, p. 252) (ACELT1627) ⚙️ R LT
4. Every generation has its own challenges. What could the school do to deal with the changes that confront the students at the school? (ACELT1635) ⚙️ R LT
5. Choose two characters and consider how they change from when we first meet them in the novel to the end. Choose quotes or events that reflect their change over time. What creates that change? (ACELT1642) 🎓 R LT
6. In dot point format, plot the changes in the girls' lives throughout the novel. Which changes strengthen their friendship and which ones threaten it? Is it possible for a threat to strengthen their relationships? (ACELT1627) 🎓 ⚙️ R LT

## RESPONSE

1. *Goodbye Stranger* suggests that all events in our life alter us in some way. Discuss. (ACELT1627) ⚙️ R LT
2. Friendships can only survive if you accept people as they are. Do you agree? Support your answer using the novel to provide evidence. (ACELT1627) ⚙️ R LT

3. The school principal has considered the lessons learned by Emily and Patrick after the photo incident and decides to have them prepare a presentation for younger students about online and digital safety. Prepare their presentation. This could be an oral presentation, but you could also create a short film, a power point or a booklet. (ACELT1773) 🎓 📺 R W LT
4. Growing up can be painful but the lessons we learn are worth the struggle. How does *Goodbye Stranger* demonstrate this? (ACELT1627) ⚙️ R W LT
5. Dilemma—on a card write down a dilemma that young people might face. For example, witnessing a friend do something unkind to another person. Put your dilemma cards in a pile and take it in turns to read them out. As a group, discuss what you would do in the situation and what you would advise other people do. (ACELT1635) 🎓 ⚙️ ⚖️ S L LT
6. 'Body in motion. Body always in motion.' (p.67) Explore the way that constant motion and change are evident in the novel. (ACELT1627) ⚙️ R LT
7. Put yourself in the shoes of one of the minor characters, such as Sherm's Nonna or Nonno, Vinny or Adrienne. Create a chapter where they are the focus or write a chapter from their point of view. For example, you could write Nonno's reply when he gets all of Sherm's letters or you could write about Adrienne's experience at school. (ACELT1643) 🎓 ⚖️ R LT