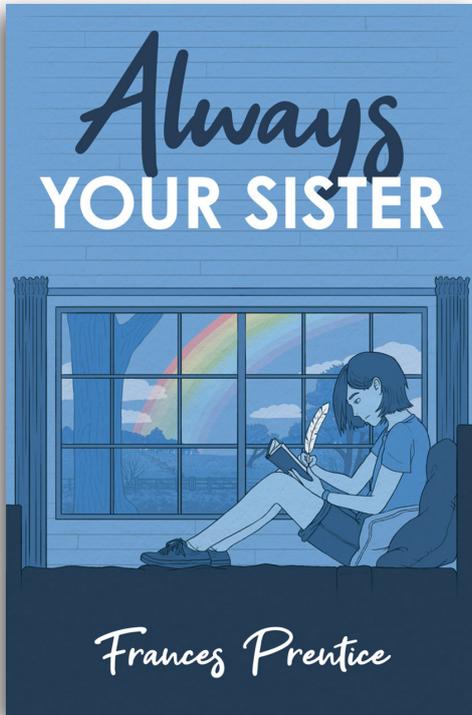

Teachers' Notes



ALWAYS YOUR SISTER

Frances Prentice

ISBN: 9781761112065

Reading level: 13+ years

BOOK SUMMARY

Dear Noah, I miss you so, so much.

Living on a farm Millie has a lot going on. Life as a pre-teen brings big, mixed feelings, but with friends, family and the school chaplain she just might make it through.

Millie's baby brother, Noah, was stillborn 4 years ago. She writes to him in heaven, confiding her anxieties when her parents announce they are going to have another baby. Millie is both excited and scared.

What if this baby dies like Noah did? What if something happens to her mum?

As Millie learns to take life day-by-day, she finds that even in storms there are sometimes rainbows.

THEMES

- Anxiety ▪ Courage ▪ Resilience ▪ Stillbirth ▪ Friendship ▪ Family ▪ Drought ▪ Rural Life ▪ Changes/Coming of Age

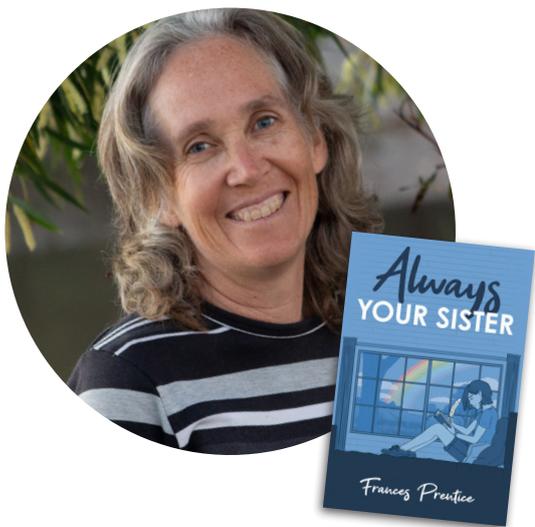
This book contains elements of Christian faith and chaplaincy.

CONTENTS

Book Summary.....	1
Themes.....	1
About the Author.....	3
Characters.....	4
Other Characters.....	5
Discussion Questions & Classroom Activities.....	6
Classroom Activities.....	8
Suggested Creative Activities.....	11
Key Curriculum Areas.....	12

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Frances Prentice is available for author talks and workshops. Contact Rhiza Edge for more information.

Always Your Sister Teachers' Notes can be used in schools (independent learning, small groups, and whole classes); at home with caregivers; and as part of mental health support programs facilitated by counsellors, psychologists, children's charities, etc.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Frances Prentice is a mother of six in her fifties, with three adult children, two young children and an angel baby. She has been an avid reader all her life and discovered a love of writing when she was only eight years old, when she vowed that one day she would become an author. Her favourite subject at school was English and she often wrote poetry and journaled in her teen years. Her passion in communication led her to become a Speech Pathologist and later a teacher, advisory teacher, learning support teacher, tutor and phonics instructor. She is currently developing her own phonics and handwriting programs. Under the pen name, Kip Aider, she mentored and helped four young students to create their own professionally self-published junior chapter book, *Guinea Pig League: Captured!*, launched in Book Week 2024. She is currently working with another group of four eleven year olds to create their own middle-grade fantasy fiction novel.

Frances has written a teen novella, *Holding Back*, also set in a rural area about a homeschooling family who do campdrafting. This will be published later in 2025 by Rhiza Press as part of the Rhiza Shorts set of novels.

AUTHOR NOTES

Frances grew up in city, coastal, and country environments and appreciated aspects of all three. Her father was a keen ex-scout who often took her family camping, giving her an appreciation for nature and the environment. She now resides with her grazier husband and young home-schooled children on a cattle property in south-eastern Queensland, Australia, where they regularly have campfires and appreciate the wide star-filled skies. Over the past eighteen years their family have experienced good and bad years on the farm, and they are familiar with the drought conditions Millie's family experienced in the book. They have a dog, cats, chooks, guinea pigs and a vegetable garden as well as a herd of cattle.

In 2008, Frances' family experienced the same loss as Millie's family. Millie's stillborn brother, Noah, is based on Samuel David, who was stillborn at 27 weeks gestation. The family found their faith was a great help and solace to them as they worked through their grief. Frances went on to have two more children, five and eight years later, in her early forties. These were her rainbow babies. When she was having her last baby, at age 43, she shared the maternity wing of a small rural hospital with a sixteen year old first time mum. Talking to a young friend of the teen mum gave her an insight into the prevalence of teen pregnancies in their small rural town, and led to the inclusion of Jasmyn in the book, with her baby, Willow Ivy.

Frances has a daughter who had the same dreams as Vicky, to study music at the Conservatorium in Brisbane, and thanks to the mentorship of some amazing music teachers, went on to achieve this dream. Her older children attended a local school where they all had leadership roles, either house or school captains. So many of the themes in this book were drawn from Frances' personal life experiences, but the characters themselves and the story is a work of fiction.

Back when Frances was eight, she promised herself she would one day be an author. However, she thought she should wait until later in life, so she had sufficient life experience to draw upon. Now is the time to write.

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CHARACTERS

'Millie' Walker - Amelia Walker (protagonist)

Millie is a creative, caring, and thoughtful 11-year-old girl who is deeply affected by the loss of her infant brother, Noah. She is artistic and enjoys drawing and playing guitar. Millie has a deep concern for others and worries about their well-being, but she is also anxious about her own feelings and the world around her. Despite this, she often takes on the role of caring for her family and shows maturity beyond her age. She finds comfort in drawing, and has a knack for solve people's problems. Her sensitive nature allows her to notice and understand the grief of those around her, including her sister Vicky, and her parents. Millie is a kind soul always looking for ways to help and support others and isn't afraid to speak out in order to bring people together and help the healing process.

Noah Walker (deceased baby brother)

Noah died four years ago as an infant. However, his impact on his family was large and he's never been forgotten. The Walkers still mourn his loss, and the reader gets a sense of him and his legacy through Millie's letters to him.

Stan Walker (Dad)

Stan is a hardworking and protective father who loves his family deeply. He is a farmer who works tirelessly to provide for them, often taking on extra jobs to meet financial needs and rises early to tend to their farm. Stan's calm and dependable presence provides a strong foundation for his family, and he is always there to support them, especially when times are tough. Despite his quiet nature, Stan is affectionate and thoughtful, showing his love through actions rather than words. He shares the domestic load, helping with chores around the house and takes great pride in his caring of their animals. His silent grief over the loss of Noah shows his deep emotional struggle, even if he doesn't express it openly.

Pam Walker (Mum)

Pam is a kind, gentle, and wise mother who has a great sense of humour and is deeply caring towards her family. While she often feels tired due to the demands of her work as a nurse, she is always there for Millie and Vicky, offering comfort and support. Pam's pregnancy adds another layer of challenge to her already busy life, but she remains considerate of her family's needs. Her affection for Millie is tender and ever present. Despite the weight of her responsibilities, Pam finds joy in the small moments with her daughters and continues to be a strong force in their lives.

Vicky Walker (Older Sister)

Vicky, Millie's older sister, is a hardworking and mature teenager who often puts others before herself. As a Year 10 student, she juggles school, music, and extracurricular activities with determination and discipline. Vicky is a talented pianist, singer, and dancer, but that doesn't stop her from pitching in with helping around the house or lovingly supporting Millie. While she appears outwardly confident, Vicky struggles with her own grief over the loss of Noah, though she hides it well. She is aware of the pressures of growing up and often worries about her future, especially her exams and aspirations to pursue music. Vicky often steps up to take charge, especially when her parents are unavailable. Millie and Vicky's relationship is strong and full of support and love.

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OTHER CHARACTERS

Emma Abraham (Friend)

Emma is a sensitive, gentle and sweet-natured girl who often seeks to please others. She is a good student and tries her best to be a good friend. Emma's family is financially secure, but she still has anxieties such as public speaking. Emma is an only child and she sometimes feels lonely and self-conscious, especially in social situations. Emma challenges herself when she runs for school captain. Emma's friendship with Millie is an important one, as Emma helps Millie overcome her anxieties. Emma's quiet strength and generosity make her a valuable friend.

Charlie Macalister (Friend)

Charlie is full of energy, courage, and a bit of self-doubt. She is outdoorsy, athletic, and good at math, but she struggles with her self-confidence, particularly in comparison to her more responsible and hardworking friends like Emma. Charlie is not afraid to be herself, even if it means doing things impulsively, like making bold decisions or jumping into activities. She is playful and enjoys joking around with Millie. Despite her energetic and confident exterior, Charlie sometimes feels overshadowed by her friends and family. She is also sensitive to her family's financial issues and the struggles of being in a large household. Charlie is also a good friend to Millie, providing both light-hearted fun and strong support when in need.

Mr. Macalister (Charlie's Dad)

Mr. Macalister is a practical and down-to-earth man who works hard to support his family. He often shows a more negative outlook on life, especially when it comes to changes or new ideas, like Charlie's suggestion to build a raised garden. He is more concerned with the everyday realities of life, such as work and family responsibilities, and sometimes struggles to see the potential for positive change. Mr. Macalister is a contrast to Millie's father, Stan, whose more optimistic and "can-do" attitude shapes his family's outlook on life. Despite his gruff demeanor, Mr. Macalister cares for his family. This is shown through his actions around his son Liam's teen parenthood situation and through his support for Charlie's idea for a garden project, albeit over some time.

Liam Macalister (Charlie's brother) & his girlfriend Jasmyn 'Jas'

Liam is Charlie's older brother and he is dating a girl called Jas. Jas has left school early as she and Liam are teen parents. Jas's relationship with her mother has broken down, and she feels isolated and unsure of how to cope with her new responsibilities. The young couple now live with Charlie's family. Jas struggles with exhaustion from caring for her infant, Willow, and is often overwhelmed by the demands of motherhood. Despite her tough exterior, Jas is vulnerable, and her self-doubt shows when she admits to not coping well with the constant care needed for her baby. Jas's journey is one of learning to balance the demands of motherhood with her own well-being, and she represents the struggle of young parents navigating the complexities of life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

STILLBIRTH

1. How did it affect Millie having a stillborn brother? How did it affect her other family members (sister/parents)? How did they cope with the stillbirth?
2. How does it affect them now, 4 years afterwards?
3. How did they deal with it at the time?
4. How does stillbirth affect families differently?
5. How do different people grieve stillborn children?
6. How has the attitude to stillbirth changed over the years? What used to happen in the past?
7. What are some other ways people can acknowledge stillborn children?
8. Has anyone you known been affected by stillbirth or death of a baby or young child (if willing to share)?
9. How is it different dealing with stillbirth compared to death of a living child or an older adult?
10. If the baby is a boy, will it 'replace' Noah? (p.178) Whatever your answer may be, justify why you chose that response.

ANXIETY/COURAGE/RESILIENCE

1. Which events make Millie anxious?
2. What/who helps her with her anxiety and how do they help?
3. What things does she do to lower her anxiety?
4. How does Millie become more resilient?
5. What sort of things cause other people to feel anxiety?
6. What are some other strategies for dealing with anxiety?
7. What are some other symptoms of anxiety?

FRIENDSHIP

1. What friendship issues does Millie face?
2. How can she be a good friend to both Charlie and Emma?
3. Why does she like both girls even though they are so different to each other?
4. Is Millie friends with her sister? What does she like or dislike about her sister?
5. How does her relationship with her friends and sister change over time?

FAMILY

1. What is Millie's family like?

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2. How is this different to Emma's and Charlie's and Jasmyn's families?
 3. How does her family support each other?
 4. What are the challenges they face?
 5. How do they support each other through those challenges?

DROUGHT & WATER CONSERVATION, RURAL LIFE

1. how does the drought affect Millie's family? What is the impact on her and Vicky?
2. How does drought affect farmers?
3. How does it affect livestock?
4. How does it affect rural families?
5. If the farmers are affected by drought how does that affect the towns they live near?
6. What are ways of conserving water?
7. What is an issue that affects your community like drought affected Millie?
8. How does living on a farm affect Millie and her choices? For example, having friends over.
9. What are the pros and cons of living on a farm compared to living in a town?
10. How does living in a town compare to living in a city? What are the pros and cons of both?

SUBPLOT - STUDENT LEADERSHIP

1. Why does Emma choose to try and become a student leader?
2. Why does Charlie go for student leadership?
3. Why do you think Millie doesn't want to become a student leader?
4. Would you choose to go for a student leadership position?
5. If you have been a student leader, what was it like? What the pros and cons of student leadership?

SUBPLOT - TEEN PREGNANCY

1. What is Charlie's family's attitude towards Jasmyn's pregnancy?
2. What is her mum's attitude towards her pregnancy? How does that change over the book?
3. Does Millie go too far in asking Jasmyn's mother (Mrs Jones) to change her thinking about the baby?
 - What conflicts is Mrs Jones experiencing – Ch. 14 pp 118-121
 - a) List her feelings and concerns.
 - b) List Jasmyn's feelings and concerns.
 - How does the situation resolve? (Ch 15)
 - What are Jasmyn's responses?

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This has further applications in the study of Year 7 and up Health and Personal Development as a subject.

Potential further applications:

- Talking about the pros and cons of - responsible attitudes to sex, abstinence, safe sex, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and infections.
- Talking about group peer pressure around sex and other potentially harmful activities such as drinking and recreational drugs.
- Discussions about what pregnancy really means - bringing a new life into the world and the responsibility of caring for that life and raising a baby/another human being.

SUBPLOT - FAITH

1. Where is faith mentioned in the book?
2. Do you think Millie's family were helped by their faith when dealing with Noah's death? How did their faith help them?
3. What other forms of faith are there?
4. How do different religions view death?
5. How does belief in a higher power help when things happen that are beyond your control?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ANXIETY ACTIVITY FOR ALL

Millie is anxious about her mother: *My mind's swirling and I can feel my heart thumping in my chest; I'm almost trembling. I can't go to class like this. I'm worried I'll burst into tears.'*

The chaplain reminds her of the strategy to 'ground herself' in an anxiety attack: (pp. 167 - 168)

This is the **5, 4, 3, 2, 1 things method** that Millie uses to ground herself, calm, and refocus.

- See (5 things) - 5 things you can see
- Hear (4 things) - 4 things you can hear
- Feel (3 things) - 3 things you can feel
- Smell (2 things) - 2 things you can smell
- Taste (1 thing) - 1 thing you can taste

Imagine you are feeling scared or panicky. Look around the room. Think for a moment. Then try the **5, 4, 3, 2, 1 things method** yourself. Write them down as you go. How do you think this might help if you are feeling anxious?

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Discuss – share in class

- i. What tricks or strategies do we use to calm down?
- ii. What is the benefit of things like 'Calm down corners' and 'safe spaces'?
- iii. Have you ever had to use a 'safe space'?
- iv. What are some of the other techniques you've heard of but never tried before? Share with others and discuss.
- v. Try researching breathing methods like box breathing or star breathing.

ENGLISH ACTIVITIES

- Millie writes to Noah. Copy the style and look of her letters. They are written by hand, not typed on a computer. Write a letter or card to someone who helps you in life. Tell them some of the things you are doing in life – and tell them some of the things they do that help you. Thank them and send your love.
- You can also write a letter either to someone you know who died OR a sympathy note to someone who has lost a family member.
- Find a stage in the novel where a mobile phone helps connect people. Who owns the phone? Who uses it, and for what purpose? What is the outcome? Give the page number.
- Find examples of points in the story where one character thanks or shows appreciation for help or kindness of another or pays back that favour or kindness. Find the words used and use quotation marks around the words. Note the page(s) in the novel. **E.g.** Millie sits colouring in a picture of a window while Chappy Leeann listens to her and helps Millie let go of her sadness. *I flip through to a picture of a stained-glass window* (p.31).
- Write a speech as to why you would be a good student leader OR why you don't want to be a student leader.
- Interview a family member or friend about their beliefs, religious/spiritual or otherwise, and write a description of these without judgement.
- **Discussion:** Have a debate on whether it is better to live in a farm or on town? Debate whether it is better to bring up children in the country or the city.
- **Descriptive writing:** What does 'highset' mean? What does 'dismountable' mean? Why might the office building be 'lowset' rather than 'highset'? Australian school buildings and routines are very different from those in France, Algeria, Scotland, Zambia and other countries. Describe your school building so a visitor from overseas would know what to look for.
- **Descriptive writing:** If Millie's family were unable to go to a supermarket, what meal they could prepare from their own farm? List the items. Say how they would be cooked or served.
- **Discussion:** What makes Charlie change her thinking about baby Willow? How does her behaviour in the family change? Does this help others in the home? How? **E.g.** On Millie's next visit:

Charlie shows love and care for Willow, and baby seems happier. 'a little sharp, white tooth clearly poking through her bottom gum as she giggles' (p.144)

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Jasmyn's mum has helped her to get into TAFE to study, with support and has promised to help babysit while Jas does assignments (p.145)

'Jas is beginning to look like her sporty self again' (p. 145)

- **Justification:** Look online, or in your nearest bookshop. What books would you choose for Millie's dad? For Vicky? For Millie herself? For yourself? For a loved one? Why did you make those choices?

HEALTH ACTIVITIES

- List the things that cause you to feel anxious and the symptoms you have of anxiety.
- Discuss when to get help with anxiety and who can help.
- Describe one of your friends, and write down why you like being friends with them. Describe yourself and what you think others value in you as a friend.
- Draw your family. If there are angel babies in your family, you could include these (maybe with a halo) and rainbow babies (with a rainbow over their head). Maybe make a border around your family picture of the things you share as a family that are unique to your family (eg. a football scarf if you are all supporters). What are the things that draw you together as a family, or what do different family members enjoy?
- **For older students: Research teen pregnancy.**
 - i. What are the statistics?
 - ii. Is teen pregnancy more common in rural or city environments?
 - iii. If there is a difference, why might this be?
 - iv. What are the statistics for young girls that have abortions compared to those who keep their babies?
 - v. Is this different in rural vs city environments?
 - vi. How have these numbers changed over time?
 - vii. What factors influence whether young girls keep or abort their babies?
 - viii. What factors affect whether young girls choose to have intercourse while still growing up, before leaving school, before marriage?
 - ix. What happened to young girls historically who got 'into trouble'?
 - x. How has that changed these days?
 - xi. What is the attitude towards teen pregnancy in your family, your community and your country?
 - xii. How is that different in other cultures?

GEOGRAPHY & SCIENCE ACTIVITIES

- Research drought. Which areas of your country/state are most affected by drought? What are the impacts of drought on those communities?

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- Discuss water conservation and have your own poster competition for water conservation or another issue that is more relevant to your current community/situation.
 - **Create:** Create a nature guide for Toowoomba hospital visitors.

VISUAL ARTS ACTIVITIES

- **Create:** Draw and label a picture of 'your' school for an international visitor. Include the grounds if you wish. You may draw it from any viewpoint: **e.g.** from above (a design layout), or as seen from a field or road (as seen by the human eye).
- **Create:** Design a poster for the following slogan: "*a promise of better things to come*" (p.39). You may use images or words or both.

SUGGESTED CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY: POEM - ALL I/WE WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS...

- Make a list of some of the 'important things' in your life...
1. Think of the scents, sounds and feelings you have connected with those things. List them.
 2. Bring them together so that they flow inside an outline. The outline or shape could look like a human being, or a picture of a place, a car, a flower a pet or a building. Your teacher may have other ideas too.
 3. Make some of the words bigger than others. Use different styles of writing, different colours.
 4. Read your poem/image to a friend in class.
 5. Share the group's designs and discuss – are some similar? Do any work in interesting and unusual ways? Could they be combined as a mural or large painting?

ACTIVITY: WRITE A RECIPE

- Write a recipe for a thick shake using your favourite fruits, vegetables or grains and liquid(s).
1. List the ingredients (amounts) and any equipment that is needed
 2. Describe the steps or method of making the drink
 3. Give it an appetising name
 4. Write an advertising slogan for your drink. **E.g.** Rosella sparkle – adds dazzle to your day!

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

CURRICULUM V9

YEAR 7

English, Civics

AC9E7LE01	AC9E7LE02	AC9E7LE03	AC9E7LE05
AC9E7LE06	AC9E7LA03	AC9HC7K04	AC9HC7S03

YEAR 8

English, Civics

AC9E8LA02	AC9E8LE01	AC9E8LE02	AC9E8LE03
AC9E8LE05	AC9E8LY05	AC9E8LA03	AC9E8LY01
AC9E8LE04	AC9E8LY03	AC9HC8K05	AC9HC8S03

YEAR 9

English, Civics

AC9E9LA05	AC9E9LA07	AC9E9LA08	AC9E9LE02
AC9E9LE03	AC9E9LE04	AC9E9LE05	AC9E9LY04
AC9E9LY08	AC9E9LY05	AC9HC9K05	AC9HC9K06

YEAR 10

English

AC9E10LA03	AC9E10LA04	AC9E10LA06	AC9E10LA09
AC9E10LE02	AC9E10LE03	AC9E10LE04	AC9E10LE05
AC9E10LE07	AC9E10LY04	AC9E10LE06	

CURRICULUM 8.4

SENIOR SECONDARY

English

Always Your Sister can be used as a text for Years 11 and 12. It can be used in English, Literature and Essential English. The applications can include the intersection of history, culture and language as well as the genres of science fiction and history. Character arcs and motivations can also be observed.

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