
Teachers' Notes

GRACE THE AMAZING

Aleesah Darlison

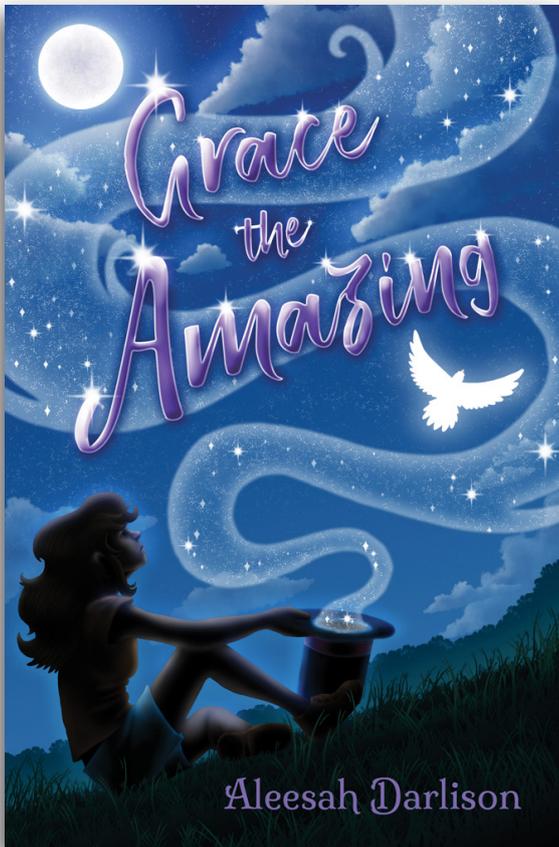
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Reading level: 8 to 12

BOOK SUMMARY

Grace Marshall is eleven years old. She's curious, precocious, and eccentric. Her only true friend is her art teacher, Pamela. When Grace discovers that Pamela is dying, she embarks on a journey to find a cure for Pamela using miraculous magic. While doing so she asks the big questions about life, love, friendship, and death.



THEMES

Family • Friendships • Anger Management • Neurodiversity • Mental Health •
Magic • Illness and Loss • Grief • Teachers and Education • Spirituality

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**Aleesah Darlison is available for author talks and workshops.
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Grace the Amazing 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



Aleesah Darlison is an award-winning author of over 65 books for children. She is well-known for her books that empower children and champion the cause of animals and the environment.

Aleesah has won or been shortlisted for many awards including the Book Excellence Awards, the Environment Award for Children's Literature, the CBCA Awards, the Speech Pathology Book of the Year Awards, and WAYBRA.

Aleesah has written numerous creative fiction and non-fiction titles for the educational and commercial markets, including the *Super Sloth Series*, the *Endangered Animal Tales Series*, *Emerald*, the *Green Turtle's Tale*, *Our Class Tiger*, *Puggle's Problem*, *Fox and Moonbeam*, *Netball Gems*, and the *League of Llamas Series*.

Discover more at: www.aleesahdarlison.com

AUTHOR NOTES

As a child, I went to a small country school which I absolutely loved. I had a special bond with one of my teachers who taught me over several years. Her name was Pamela. She had the same last name as me. Her husband's name was the same as my father's. She attended night-time TAFE courses in a room beside where my mum attended sewing classes, which I often accompanied her to. Pamela and I had a lot in common.

Pamela encouraged me in so many ways and I have many fond memories of being in her class. I distinctly recall that Pamela would get migraines and would have to lie down some afternoons. In our small school back in the seventies, there were no substitute teachers that to help out, so Pamela would ask me to read to the class.

When I was in about Year 4, Pamela left. She wrote a few letters to me after moving ... then we lost touch. I still have my writing books from when I was in Pamela's classes. These books carry my little stories and anecdotes in lead pencil, my drawings in coloured pencil. They also carry the ticks of approval and comments in perfect blue pen, hand-written by Pamela. At the end of one book she wrote, 'And I hope you treasure this book for a very long time.'

I have kept it.

I do treasure it.

Not just for the naïve stories I wrote as a child, but because it carries the comments of a teacher who was so special and encouraging to me. Over the years, I tried searching for Pamela to reconnect, combing the internet, websites, and social media platforms in an attempt to find her. To no avail.

It wasn't until many years later – perhaps 30 years had passed – when I returned to my little country primary school to conduct author talks when I spoke to another teacher who had been at the school when I was a child ... and who was still a casual teacher there all these years later.

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As we sat in the staff room of the old teacher's cottage, she told me that Pamela had passed away from breast cancer many years ago, not long after she left my school. Not long after she wrote her last letter to me. Pamela never mentioned anything, ever, in her letters to me that she was unwell. But looking back now I realise she was saying goodbye. I only wish I'd known, but I also know that she was protecting me, which is why she never told me the truth.

So this story truly is one from the heart, my heart. It comes from my childhood and springs from a special bond between student and teacher. A bond I will forever remember and cherish.

Grace the Amazing is a story about the special bond between students and teachers ... and it's so much more. The main character, Grace, is precocious and curious. She may be little, but she has big emotions and a million burning questions that demand answers. The most important thing she learns is that sometimes one person in your life can make a huge difference.

The book deals with issues of family, friendship, finding yourself, mental health, love, loss, animals, brilliant teachers who can change your life, and everything in between. I hope you enjoy reading *Grace the Amazing*.

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

Throughout this book Grace has to face some challenging moments in her life - she struggles with her behaviour and the way others view her, her own feelings, her mental health, and the death and loss of someone important to her. All of these situations are relevant for young people to grapple with as they navigate the world, and to examine the ways in which they might face and deal with these difficult situations.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes.

YEAR FOUR

English, Humanities and Social Science, Health and Physical Education

ACELT1605	ACELT1603	ACELY1692	ACELY1675
ACHASSI077	ACHASSI081	ACHASSK072	
ACPPS033	ACPPS037	ACPPS038	

YEAR FIVE

English, Humanities and Social Science, Health and Physical Education

ACELT1608	ACELT1609	ACELT1610	ACELA1525
ACHASSI094	ACHASSI099		
ACPPS051	ACPPS060	ACPPS057	

YEAR SIX

English, Humanities and Social Science, Health and Physical Education

ACELT1613	ACELY1709	ACELY1801	
ACHASSI127			
ACPPS051	ACPPS057	ACPPS060	

YEAR SEVEN

English

ACELT1619	ACELT1620	ACELT1622	ACELT1621
ACELT1803	ACELY1722	ACELT1625	

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TEACHING POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

This book may be used in whole class, small group or independent learning activities in schools.

Please note, the following suggestions and activities are suited to a variety of year levels spanning Foundation to Year 6 primary aged children. Some activities may be applicable to early secondary school students, as well.

KNOWLEDGE AND LITERAL UNDERSTANDING

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Show the cover to the class and ask the students what they think the book might be about.
2. Read the back cover blurb. Does this give them more of an idea of what the book could be about?
3. Ask the students if they recognise the title (or a similar title) from a famous song.

AFTER-READING QUESTIONS

1. What are the students' first impression of Grace? And does that change from the beginning of the book to the end?
2. What things does Grace learn over the course of the story?
3. How do her relationships change?
4. Do students have any suggested strategies for how Grace might deal with her anger and other big emotions?
5. What are some important ways in which Grace has learned about herself or the world around her?
6. There are a lot of relationship themes and issues in the book. Choose one relationship and try to describe it.
7. What are some of the ways which Grace feels different to other people, or feels misunderstood by others?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- What words would you use to describe Grace's relationship with her brother, Jet?
- Do you have a parent who works away? How does it make you feel when they go away?
- Can you describe Fromelles's personality? Why is he a good friend to Grace?
- How is Emma a good friend to Grace?
- Describe how you're a good friend to others.

ANGER MANAGEMENT

- What is anger management?
- Discuss how anger can appear and how it might be difficult to manage. In what ways can we do things to help regulate our anger?
- How does Grace cope with her anger? How does she learn to work through it and manage it?

NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodivergent is a word to describe the way people's brains can be different. It is a type of biodiversity (living creatures being different in lots of ways). People who are neurodiverse might have autism, ADHD, tourettes, dyspraxia, dyscalculia or dyslexia. 30 to 40 percent of Australians are neurodiverse! (According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics) [This video is for children about neurodivergence. And the sequel.](#)

- Do you know anyone with neurodiversity in your life? How do they think or react differently to how you do? How are they the same?
- How does Grace appear neurodivergent? In what ways does this make things more difficult for Grace? And in what ways does it make her unique?
- What are some of the ways in which we can be understanding and supportive of those with neurodivergence? How does this manifest in the people in Grace's life, like her teacher?

MENTAL HEALTH

- Can you describe what mental health is?
- Does everyone have mental health?
- Is it important to take care of our mental health? In what ways can we look after our mental health?
- Does mental health stay the same throughout our lives, or change depending on the situation?
- How does Grace face her own mental health? What changes in her life impact on her mental health?
- What does Grace do to make her mental health improve? How is she supported to do this?
- Is it important to talk to someone about our feelings and our struggles? Why or why not?

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MAGIC

- Have you ever wished you had a magical ability? What would you use it for?
- Do you think magic could ever work?
- Could the use of magic be a coping tool to deal with things in our lives?
- Instead of using magic, what other ways could you help someone who is unwell?

ILLNESS AND LOSS

- Who is ill in Grace's story? How are they ill?
- When someone is ill in our lives how might that make us feel? How did it make Grace feel?
- While dealing with our feelings how should we be sensitive to the feelings of the person who is ill?
- What are some ways we can prepare for the loss of someone we care about? What things can we do to work through our feelings after they're gone?
- When we're having strong feelings, like those when we lose someone, what are ways of accepting and managing them? Try writing out the strong feelings you last had and what you did. Discuss these in small groups and whether your strategies helped you and what you could do differently next time.
- How did Grace work through her emotions in the book? Do you think they were the right choices or should she have done things differently?

TEACHERS AND EDUCATION

- Have you ever had a favourite teacher? Why were they a good teacher and why did you like them?
- Consider Grace's teacher, Pamela. What are some of the reasons that Grace liked her? Did you also like her? Why?
- What are the things that are important in a teacher? What are the things a teacher can do that can help you learn?
- Teachers do a lot in our schools and our communities. What are some of the ways we can support them and show our appreciation?
- Change can be hard. How does Grace learn to work with a new teacher? What does she learn in order to connect with someone new?

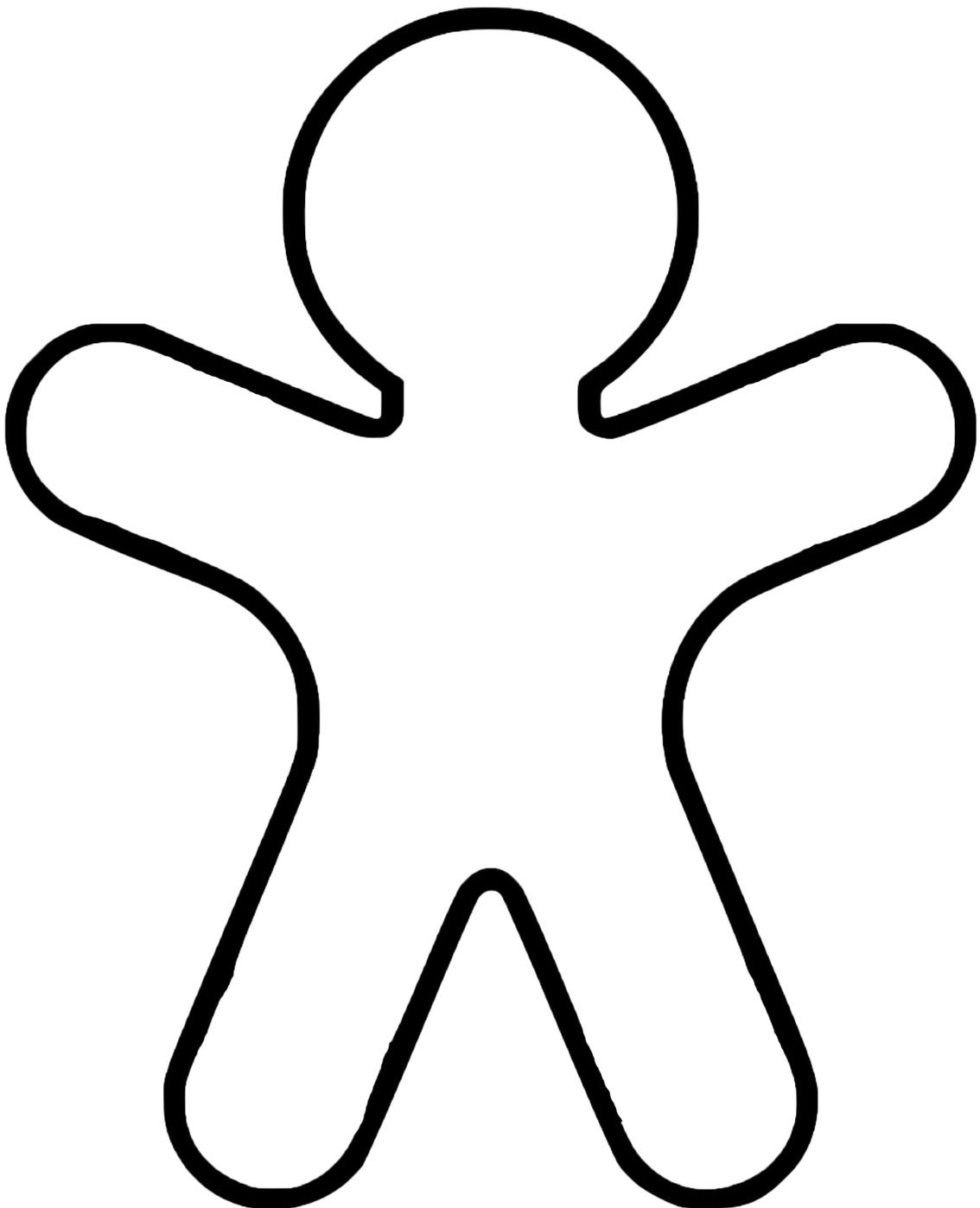
SPIRITUALITY

- Grace has a deep spirituality. How can someone's beliefs help them in a time of loss or upheaval?
- It can be important to respect people's spirituality and beliefs. In what ways can we respect someone and their spirituality?

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GRIEF

- Some of the emotions you can experience through grieving include: sadness, disbelief, frustration, anger, shock, anxiety, longing, relief, guilt, fear, panic, confusion, numbness, or feeling nothing at all. Can you take one of these emotions and describe what it's like and why you might feel that way after losing someone?
- Sometimes young children don't realise that certain things can be forever. And sometimes older children can lose interest in doing things they used to love doing. Both of these things are normal. What are some ways we can support each other when we go through grief?
- Using markers or pencils fill in the image below to describe how you're feeling, e.g. if you feel like crying, you can colour in the eyes in a sad colour, or if you're feeling happy you can colour in the mouth in a happy colour. There can be more than one feeling at a time.



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ACTIVITIES

ANIMALS

- Do you have a favourite Australian animal? Create a poster for the animal, draw it and write down 5 facts about it. You can research how to feed and care for baby native animals.
- Draw a picture of a guinea pig. Label its key anatomical features.

CREATIVITY

- Grace and Pamela both love art. How do you best like expressing yourself creatively? Using that method of creation - music, writing, or art - create a presentation for the class.
- Visit your local art gallery to see what types of artwork they have on display. Write about your favourite exhibit or art piece and describe it to the class or in a small group.
- Find and listen to the song, Amazing Grace. Then print out the words to read.
 - What do you think the song is about? Who wrote it and how old is the song? Why was the song written?
 - Why do you think Grace thinks the song might be about her?
 - How do you feel when you listen to the song?

NETBALL

- What are the benefits of playing netball? Why is it important to work in a team?
- Create a netball team of your own. Name it and choose uniform colours. Talk about how you would approach working as part of that team.
- Besides netball, what are some team sports that Grace could play? List a couple of sports and discuss as a small group what your favourites are and why.

SELF CARE

Using [this chart](#) as a guide choose some self-care activities to try this week. Self-care is an important part of checking in with our emotions and maintaining our own mental health.

Some explanations for these choices: *Red is for Intense Emotions, Yellow is for Elevated, Green is for Calm, Blue is for Low.* [Source](#).

- **Use an "angry box"** - Help children build an "angry box" filled with items that they can use to safely express their anger. Items may be: a pillow to yell into, newspaper to shred, empty plastic bottles to stomp on, bean bags to throw, bubble wrap to pop, a timer to set for doing jumping jacks.
- **Smell the flower, blow out the candle** - Ask children to imagine they are smelling a flower on the inhale and blowing out a candle on the exhale. They can hold a finger up in front of their mouth and nose as a prompt.
- **Move** - Do 5 jumping jacks or push-ups.
- **I spy** - Invite children to "Find 5" things of certain groupings ("Find me 5 red things" "Find me 5 soft things"), then drop the number down to 3 ("Find me 3 things that are orange").
- **Dance party!** - Invite children to dance out anger, sadness, happiness, or whatever they are feeling in the moment.
- **Take the stage** - Pull out puppets, stuffed animals, or dolls and ask children to tell you a story about what they are thinking and feeling.
- **Music** - Play a calming song and invite children to slowly sit or lie down to listen.
- **Cosy Corner** - Create an area in the classroom or at home that kids help design with comforting items.

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