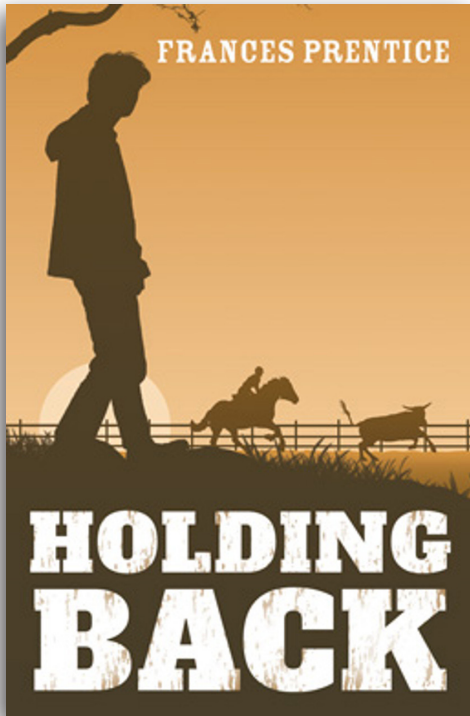


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# Teachers' Notes

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## HOLDING BACK

Frances Prentice

ISBN: 9781761112546

**Reading level:** reading age of 10+, interest age 12+.

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### BOOK SUMMARY

Nick's life revolves around his family farm, homeschooling and campdrafting events. It has always seemed like enough, but now Nick's not so sure.

His sister has no trouble making friends wherever she goes, but Nick has always held back. Is it too late to start getting a social group of his own?

After joining his sister at the local swim squad, Nick discovers his competitive drive. Will he find someone to connect with too? Will his newfound confidence help him at the next campdraft?

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## THEMES

• Social awkwardness • Self-confidence • Growing Independence • Forming Friendships

Home schooling versus traditional schooling • Acceptance and tolerance of others

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

*Holding Back 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

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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 has 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 (including her own homeschooled son) to create their own middle-grade fantasy fiction novel.

Frances has also written a middle-grade fiction book, *Always, Your Sister*, which is also set in a rural area, and was published in early 2025 by Wombat Books. This book explores the response of an eleven year old girl to her family's loss of a stillborn child and her mother's subsequent pregnancy. It is a gentle tale, exploring how she is supported by a chaplain, her school friends and family to deal with her anxieties. It is a celebration of life, even in the midst of the hardships experienced in drought-stricken rural Australia.

### AUTHOR NOTES

Frances and her grazier husband live on a cattle property in south-eastern Queensland, Australia, and she is currently homeschooling her two youngest children. Homeschooling has brought her into contact with families with diverse lives and hobbies, including a family who has spent many years campdrafting. This family generously shared their experiences and knowledge of campdrafting with Frances to inform her manuscript.

Growing up, Frances also spent a year in a swimming squad and has experienced many school swim carnivals, although neither she nor her children were as successful as she allowed Nick and Kathy to be in this novel.

The challenge of developing social confidence and strong peer friendships is a universal one. It is harder for some than others, but all go through ups and downs with this. Frances was keen to explore this in greater depth and give young people the confidence to keep looking for their people. It is such a blessing to have good friendships, creating a network of support that lasts for a lifetime. Frances has a few really good friends that are there for her in good times and bad, and she believes this is important for everyone.

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# OVERVIEW

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## MAIN CHARACTER

**Nick** is a shy 15-year-old boy who's most comfortable on horseback, first seen competing in a campdraft competition at a country fair. He wears jeans and a cowboy hat and rides his trusted horse, Thunder. Despite being a skilled rider, Nick struggles with social anxiety and finds it difficult to connect with others his age. He is homeschooled alongside his younger sister and has no close friends. His mother's well-meaning but loud and public encouragement often leaves him red-faced with embarrassment.

Nick is introverted and sensitive, preferring quiet, familiar routines over crowds or conversation. He often feels like an outsider and finds it easier to communicate with animals than people. His sister Kathy, confident and accomplished in both campdrafting and swimming, only adds to his sense of falling behind.

By the end of the story, Nick begins to find his own voice—not through loud declarations, but through quiet acts of bravery. He takes small but meaningful steps to connect with others, especially when he realises he's not as alone as he once thought.

Nick's Strengths	Nick's Weaknesses
Sensitive and Empathetic: Nick has a deep understanding of animals and a quiet emotional intelligence.	Painfully Shy: He avoids social situations and struggles to speak up, even when he has something important to say.
Hardworking and Disciplined: Years of farm work and horse training have made him responsible and capable.	Lacks Confidence: He often compares himself unfavourably to others, especially his younger sister.
Deep Loyalty: Once he forms a bond, he is fiercely loyal and dependable.	Easily Embarrassed: His mother's attention or any spotlight can leave him flustered.
Independent: Used to working and learning alone, Nick is self-sufficient and capable.	Socially Isolated: Homeschooling and rural life have limited his chances to make friends or practice social skills.

## OTHER CHARACTERS

**Mum (Jan)** is energetic and deeply involved in her children's lives, often juggling volunteering at the fair, running the refreshment tent, and driving Nick and Kathy to events. She's warm and well-meaning but tends to talk over Nick and unintentionally highlight his awkwardness. She worries he's lonely but doesn't always know how to help him open up.

**Dad (Harry)** is a quiet, steady presence who works the campdrafting gate and prefers action over words. He has a calming influence on Nick and shares a love of horses with him.

**Kathy**, Nick's 14-year-old sister, is outgoing and confident, both in the saddle and at swim club in town. She's used to success and doesn't seem to struggle with shyness the way Nick does. Though close in age, the two siblings are quite different, and Nick sometimes feels like he's standing in her shadow. Still, she cares about him and wants him to be happy, even if she doesn't always understand how to help. At the

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start of the novel Nick considers Kathy his best and only real friend.

## RURAL LIFE AND COMPETING

**Campdrafting** is at the heart of Nick's world. It's a key part of rural community life, where families gather at local shows, travel long distances with horse floats, and compete across different age levels. The sport connects families and fosters a sense of identity—but it can also highlight differences in wealth, confidence, and social ease.

**Cameron Lochard** is Nick's age but seems worlds apart. His family is noticeably wealthier, with polished gear, newer horses, and a more confident presence.

**The MacDonald Family** include **Stella, Stephanie, Sophie** and little brother **Spike**. The sisters are striking figures at the show with their long blonde hair and coordinated riding shirts. They're keen riders and fairly competitive. Two sisters compete in the Juvenile section, while the youngest one rides in the same Junior division as Kathy. Spike, their younger brother, is a stocky, cheeky presence who seems more interested in having fun than competing seriously. Though Nick assumes they attend regular school and come from a more 'normal' background, he later learns that the MacDonalds are also homeschooled. This realisation challenges his assumptions.

**Swimming** offers another competitive outlet—especially for Nick's sister Kathy, who is a standout member of the local swim club.

**Karen** is Nick's trainer. On Nick's squad are **JJ, Tony, Ness** and **Mia**. JJ's mum, **Tanya**, runs the Swim Squad.

**JJ** is a strong swimmer. He goes to school in town. According to Nick's sister, Kathy, he 'thinks he's something.' JJ doesn't seem happy about his mother noticing Nick's swimming potential. JJ is offered a challenge by Nick when Nick feels JJ's being standoffish. He takes on the challenge and shows great character when he has to share the new club record with Nick.

**Tony's** parents are farmers like Nick's family. He has scruffy hair and a big grin, eager to shake hands with Nick when they first meet. Tony is quick to reassure Nick when Nick seems nervous or unsure. Tony is also awkward in making friendships and worries after Nick's behaviour that Nick doesn't like him. Nick takes the plunge when his family visits Tony's farm and the two become friends as they go on a motorbike ride together.

It is through Nick's interactions with these new swim squad kids that Nick finds himself becoming part of a group.

## RURAL LIFE

In *Holding Back* rural life is reflected as deeply community-oriented, with a strong emphasis on contribution and shared responsibility. Everyone is expected to "muck in," whether it's helping out in the kitchen, working on the farm, or supporting local events like shows and campdrafting competitions. There is an expectation that work on the farm (re-roofing sheds, caring for animals) takes place alongside school work and sports interests. Dads often work late and get up early on the farm, rear animals and tend to them, and may butcher them as well. Dads also participate at shows, in fairs and at campdrafting where they help with the gate, the whips and the timing. Mums are more likely to help out with the food.

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## MESSAGE OF THE NOVEL

*Holding Back* explores what it is like to grow up, find your place, and take the first brave steps toward independence and connection. Through the story of Nick—a quiet, homeschooled fifteen-year-old who feels out of step with his peers—it examines the concept that social confidence isn't something you're born with. Instead, it's a skill you can learn, just like riding a horse or swimming a new stroke. It also encourages readers to value progress over perfection. Whether it's mastering a campdraft pattern, learning a new swim stroke, or finding your first real friend, success comes through patience, resilience, and the willingness to try (and try again). Furthermore, it highlights how building skills and being part of a team can foster real confidence. Shared goals and experiences offer a safe, supportive space to grow—not just as an athlete or student, but as a person. Lastly, it explores parents place in a teen's life. That, though sometimes embarrassing, they mean well.

## WHAT IS CAMPDRAFTING?

Campdrafting is a uniquely Australian horse sport that combines riding skill, cattle handling, and quick thinking. It's popular in rural communities and often a big part of local shows and country fairs.

Here's how it works:

- The rider selects one beast (usually a steer) from a small group in a yard called the "camp".
- They show control by turning the beast a few times in the camp.
- Then they guide it into the open arena, riding it through a set course that includes figure-eight turns around pegs and finally through a gate made of two pegs.
- The goal is to do this smoothly and in under 45 seconds!

Riders are judged out of 100 points based on:

- i. Cut-out (how well they control the beast in the camp)
- ii. Horse work (how well the rider and horse work together)
- iii. Course (how accurately they complete the pattern)

Campdrafters can be split up by horse experience, such as a Maiden (a horse who has never won) or a Novice (a horse with one win in a certain class) or by age of rider. A Junior status is for ages 8 to under 13. A Juvenile status is for those 13 to under 17.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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### GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What are the signs that Nick is shy or feels awkward socially at beginning of the novel? Pinpoint the events and his choices that help him to become more confident interacting with his peers.
- How do we see Nick changing in terms of independence from his parents over the course of the novel. Which events show us how he is growing up? (Compare earlier to later.)
- Do you think Nick is socially awkward because he is homeschooled? What is the evidence for and against that point of view?
- What does Nick like about home schooling? Do you think it would be better for him to go to school or be home schooled?
- Describe the personalities of the main characters: Nick, Kathy, Stephanie, Sophie, Stella, Spike, Tony, JJ, Mia, Ness. What are the aspects of their personalities that would make them good friends? What some aspects of their personalities that might make it more challenging to be their friend (if any)?
- What are the pros and cons of homeschooling vs traditional schooling?
- What did you learn about the sport of Campdrafting from this novel?
- How did joining the swimming squad help Nick?
- Are all homeschooled students shy or awkward? What evidence can you find in the novel?
- What aspects of farm life do you think you would enjoy? What would you find challenging?
- What are things you might miss out on living in a rural or remote area?
- What are some examples of how Nick became more independent over the course of the novel?

### SOCIAL AWKWARDNESS

1. Why does Nick find it so hard to talk to the other kids at the country show, even when they wave or seem friendly?
2. How does Nick react to his mum trying to involve him with the “out-of-towners”? Why do you think he feels this way?
3. What does Nick mean when he says, “in books everyone has a best friend”? How does this reveal his feelings about his own social life?
4. Why do you think Nick chooses to sit alone in the stands? What does his reaction to Spike and the MacDonald girls suggest about how he sees himself?
5. What does Nick’s “face flaming” moment in the warm-up ring reveal about his social confidence? Is it the same as shyness?
6. How does Nick interpret Sophie’s encouragement? Why might he hesitate to follow her?
7. What role does “keeping busy” (e.g. rubbing down his horse) play in helping Nick manage social discomfort?

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8. Why does Nick feel so self-conscious about joining the swim training, even though he's a good swimmer?
  9. What does Nick's reaction to Tony's friendly greeting show about his comfort level in new social groups?
  10. How does Nick manage interactions during the training session? What signs show he finds socialising more difficult than swimming?
  11. Why might Nick choose to wait in the car rather than stay and watch Kathy?
  12. How does Nick's reaction to his mum talking to Tony's mum show his discomfort with others managing his social life?
  13. Why does Nick feel weird about adults trying to help with friendships?
  14. What do you think about Tony's fear that he came on "too strong"? Have you ever felt that way after meeting someone new?
  15. How does Nick's awkwardness show even in his brief conversations (e.g. "Good race")?
  16. In Chapter 9, Nick cringes when he has to rely on his mum to contact Tony's mum. What does this reveal about Nick's feelings of social awkwardness? How does his decision to take the initiative and phone Tony's mum change the situation?
  17. In Chapter 10, Nick feels nervous about going on the motorbike ride with Tony. Why do you think he feels this way? How does he overcome this social awkwardness by agreeing to ride despite the challenges?
  18. In Chapter 11, Nick notices JJ's lack of confidence as he seems distracted. What does this suggest about how social awkwardness might affect people differently, even in a group?
  19. How does Nick's growing confidence in later chapters (like buying his own phone) help him overcome his past awkwardness and take charge of his social life?

## SELF-CONFIDENCE

1. What are some clues that Nick lacks confidence in social situations and in campdrafting?
2. Nick compares himself to Cameron and assumes Cameron is wealthy and successful. How might these assumptions affect Nick's self-esteem?
3. Kathy doesn't succeed in her round, but still congratulates Stella. What does this show about her confidence and sportsmanship?
4. Why does Nick feel so foolish after choosing the wild steer, and then embarrassed again after the lazy one? How much of his confidence is tied to performance?
5. Why do his mum's dry comments about the steers sting more than Sophie's encouragement helps? What does that say about how Nick processes feedback?
6. What does Nick's final toast with the ginger beer show about how he feels at that moment? Has his confidence shifted at all?
7. How do Kathy's reactions to success and failure in competition compare to Nick's? What can we learn from her?
8. What makes Nick begin to consider trying something new like swim squad?

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9. How does Nick's performance at training (e.g. being behind in the race, nearly beating a record) affect his confidence?
  10. Why is Nick more comfortable helping with the ropes than joining in conversation?
  11. How does Nick respond when Tony reassures him after his slow start? What does this say about how he sees himself?
  12. What moments in this chapter show that Nick is starting to believe in himself more?
  13. How does Nick feel when he becomes part of a group at swim training?
  14. What does it mean when Nick grins at Tony and joins in the teasing about the race?
  15. Why might tying the club record be such a big deal for Nick?
  16. In Chapter 9, Nick takes the initiative to phone Tony's mum instead of waiting for his mum to do it. What does this action tell us about Nick's developing self-confidence?
  17. In Chapter 10, Nick feels nervous about the motorbike ride but pushes through and tries his best. What role does his self-confidence play in helping him push past his fears?
  18. How does Nick's feeling of pride about his chest hair and buying his own jeans in Chapter 12 illustrate his growing self-confidence and maturity? How does this compare to his earlier experiences?
  19. When Nick performs well in the campdrafting competition in Chapter 12, he feels proud of his achievements. How does this showcase his increasing self-confidence in both himself and his abilities?

## **GROWING INDEPENDENCE**

1. Nick's mum encourages him to mix with others as part of his homeschooling plan. Why might she see this as important for Nick's development?
2. What does Nick's reaction to his new jeans, and to his mum cheering loudly, say about how he is beginning to see himself as separate from his parents?
3. How do Nick's and Kathy's behaviours at the event show the different ways they are growing up?
4. What are some early signs that Nick is starting to develop more independence? (Think: cooking breakfast, taking the dogs out, planning his schoolwork.)
5. Why does Nick abandon his chores to ride with Kathy? What does this choice say about his priorities at this point in the story?
6. How do small actions (like toasting his sister or joking about waking up late) reflect a growing comfort in who he is?
7. What do you notice about how Nick interacts with his parents as he begins to make more of his own decisions?
8. How does Nick begin to make his own choices in these chapters, even if they are difficult for him?
9. What do his decisions to try swimming and promise to come back for Kathy's next competition show about how he is maturing?
10. How is Nick managing the balance between depending on his parents and trying to handle things on his own?

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11. Why is his choice to leave early (even though he swam well) still a sign of progress?
  12. Why does Nick stop his mum from talking to Tony's mum again? What does this show about how he's changing?
  13. Is it a sign of maturity when Nick decides to talk to Tony himself?
  14. What choices does Nick make in this chapter that show he's becoming more confident socially?
  15. How do his interactions shift from relying on adults to managing friendships on his own?
  16. Nick decides to buy his own phone in Chapter 9. What does this decision symbolise about his journey towards independence? How does it show that he is starting to take responsibility for his own life?
  17. In Chapter 12, Nick's ability to welcome and host his friends during the campdrafting competition is a significant display of independence. How does this change from earlier in the novel when he was more reliant on his family?
  18. Nick learns to iron his own shirt and take care of his appearance in Chapter 12. What other small acts of independence does he demonstrate in this chapter? How do these actions contribute to his overall growth?
  19. How does Nick's experience in learning to manage his social life, like buying treats for his friends, reflect his growing independence?

## FORMING FRIENDSHIPS

1. Why do you think Nick finds it difficult to imagine being friends with the other kids, even when they are friendly?
2. What steps (if any) does Nick take to try to connect with others in these chapters? What holds him back?
3. How do Kathy and Stella's conversations contrast with Nick's silence? What does this suggest about how friendships start?
4. What social clues does Nick struggle to read in these chapters? How does this affect his ability to form friendships?
5. What does the brief interaction with Sophie suggest about a possible friendship? What's holding Nick back from responding?
6. What do you think makes it easier or harder for Nick to relate to girls versus boys his own age?
7. How might his relationship with Kathy be both helpful and limiting in terms of making new friends?
8. What does Tony's friendliness suggest about the kind of friendships Nick might be able to form if he keeps showing up?
9. Why does Nick have trouble responding to kindness? How do you think Tony feels about Nick's quiet reactions?
10. Kathy helps Nick by naming the other teens. What role might she play in helping Nick connect with others?
11. How does Nick's small promise to support Kathy next week build trust in their relationship?
12. How does Nick show that he wants to be friends with Tony and JJ in this chapter?

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13. What makes it easier for Nick to start talking with Tony?
  14. How does a shared interest (like sport or farm life) help people form connections?
  15. How do we see the group begin to bond? What signs are there that these friendships might grow stronger?
  16. In Chapter 9, Tony invites Nick to visit his farm. How does this invitation play a role in helping them form a friendship? Why does Nick initially feel awkward about the idea?
  17. In Chapter 10, Kathy encourages Nick to bond with Tony by suggesting they go off for a ride. How does Kathy's awareness of Nick's need for friends reflect her role in helping him connect with others?
  18. In Chapter 11, Nick and JJ develop a camaraderie during the medley relay. How does the shared goal of winning help strengthen their friendship?
  19. How do Nick and Mia's friendship evolve in Chapter 12? How does their shared interest in campdrafting and their conversations help them connect better?

### **HOMESCHOOLING VS. TRADITIONAL SCHOOLING**

1. How does homeschooling influence Nick's ability to mix with other kids? What challenges and advantages might it bring?
2. Nick believes other families are very different from his. How does this affect the way he sees himself in social settings?
3. What might be some ways homeschooled teens, like Nick and Kathy, learn social skills outside a school environment?
4. How does Nick feel about being homeschooled? What are the benefits he sees? What are the challenges?
5. Why does Nick assume others see homeschooling—and even things like not drinking soft drinks—as “weird”?
6. How does Nick's daily routine (e.g. flexible morning, working with animals, practical chores) differ from traditional school life?
7. Do you think Nick's life gives him different strengths than kids who go to school? In what ways?
8. How does Nick's homeschooling background affect the way he sees the other teens in the swim squad?
9. Why might Nick feel out of place, even though he is close in age to the others?
10. How does Nick's concern about what the mums might say reflect the small, close-knit world he comes from?
11. Do you think Nick's skills (e.g. independence, practical thinking, resilience) from homeschooling help or hurt him in social settings like swim squad?
12. How might Nick's homeschooling background make it harder (or easier) to connect with others?
13. Why is it significant that Nick feels “part of the group” at last?
14. What new things is Nick learning that might not happen in a traditional school setting?
15. In what ways do kids like Tony, JJ, Ness, and Mia seem different to Nick? Do these differences matter?

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16. Nick's family lives on a farm, and his social interactions are more limited compared to kids from urban environments. In Chapter 9, how does Nick's experience of calling Tony's mum and arranging to visit her farm reflect the differences in socializing for those who are home-schooled versus those who attend traditional schools?
  17. In Chapter 12, Nick introduces Mia and Stephanie to life on a farm, teaching them about farming terminology. How does this moment of cultural exchange highlight Nick's unique perspective as someone who has grown up on a farm and may have a different educational experience from those in traditional schools?
  18. In Chapter 11, the swimmers are preparing for a regional competition. How might the skills and experiences they are gaining through extracurricular activities like swimming and campdrafting relate to the way that homeschooling can offer more personalized learning experiences?
  19. How do you think Nick's life on the farm influences his personal growth compared to children who attend a traditional school? Do you think it has helped him develop different strengths or challenges?

### ACCEPTANCE AND TOLERANCE OF OTHERS

1. Nick assumes a lot about Cameron and the MacDonald family based on their appearance and gear. Why is it important not to judge others too quickly?
2. Kathy loses but still congratulates Stella. What does this show about her character and her acceptance of others' success?
3. What are some signs that Nick might be starting to notice how his own judgments or shyness are holding him back from understanding others better?
4. How does Kathy show acceptance of others' success when she loses to Stella? What does this say about her character?
5. How does Nick's assumption about how others see him (e.g. weird or different) affect his openness to social opportunities?
6. What small acts of kindness or understanding are offered to Nick by others (like Sophie)? How does he respond?
7. How does Nick's empathy—for Kathy, for the dogs, and even the cattle—shape the reader's view of him?
8. How does Tony's kindness help Nick feel accepted, even if Nick can't quite show it?
9. Nick starts to make an effort with others, even when it feels awkward. Why is that important?
10. How might JJ's reaction to Nick becoming a strong swimmer hint at future tension? How should Nick handle this?
11. How does Nick's promise to cheer for Kathy next time show a growing awareness of what others need from him?
12. How does Nick misunderstand JJ at first? Why is it important to consider how others might be feeling?
13. What do you think of JJ's sportsmanship when they tie? What kind of character does that show?
14. Why is it important that everyone ends up supporting Kathy in her race?
15. How does the group dynamic shift when the kids start to see each other's strengths?

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- 16.** In Chapter 9, Nick feels awkward when he has to rely on his mum to make arrangements with Tony's mum. How does his ability to take initiative and call Tony's mum reflect a growing sense of self-reliance and acceptance of others' differences?
  - 17.** In Chapter 10, Nick seems to hesitate before going on the motorbike ride because he worries he won't be as good as Tony. How does this internal conflict relate to his struggle with accepting himself and others? How does he manage to move past this?
  - 18.** In Chapter 11, JJ shows signs of being less confident than before. How do Nick's friends respond to his vulnerability? How do they show tolerance and understanding toward him, despite his earlier behavior?
  - 19.** In Chapter 12, Nick interacts with Mia and Stephanie, explaining aspects of farm life that they don't understand. How does Nick's patience and willingness to explain things reflect an attitude of tolerance toward people who come from different backgrounds or experiences?



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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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### CHAPTER 3: PERCEPTION OF SELF

#### Discussion:

Nick doesn't believe he is shy at all. However, he blushes. Our body does that, gives away hidden feelings. We may not even realise we feel shy, or attracted to others. This can cause awkwardness and embarrassment/blushing.

- Why do you think Nick doesn't realize he is shy, even though he blushes?
- Have you ever experienced blushing, or another physical reaction, when feeling nervous or shy? How did you feel in that moment?
- Why do our bodies sometimes "give away" our emotions without us realising?
- Brainstorm and list different emotions that cause physical reactions in our bodies (e.g., shyness, nervousness, excitement, anger, attraction, embarrassment).

#### Writing activity: Three Sentence Story

Add three sentences to one of the starters below. You can write from your own experience or as 'someone else.'

- i. AWKS! The last thing I needed was to start blushing right at that moment...
- ii. Ha! Of course I can... (name the skill – e.g. ride a horse, climb a tree, ride a bike, skateboard, climb that, do a handstand), I said...
- iii. I thought I had the place all to myself for the afternoon...

### CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH

What do you know about the Eastern Brown snake, or any Brown snakes?

Here are two websites. [Website 1](#) and [Website 2](#).

Find three others and save them to your desktop/laptop. Then gather five facts about Eastern Brown snakes that you think are interesting. Write them down. Be ready to share them with the class. Here are some starting points:

- Habitat, lifespan, behaviour, what they eat, how poisonous are they?
- Are they found in towns as well as in the country?
- How to identify an Eastern Brown snake?
- What should you do if you find a snake in your garden or home?
- How can you avoid being bitten? (apart from never going to Australia or staying indoors forever!)
- What to do if you are bitten?
- Are there any harmless snakes that could be mistaken for a poisonous one?

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## CHAPTER 6: A GOOD LIFE

Consider the following about rural living:

- What are the good things about living out in the country?
- What are the downsides?
- What are the good things about life in the town or city?
- What are the downsides?

### Activity: Writing – A List Poem or Song

Write a song or 'list poem' listing the good things and or bad things about life in either the country or city.

One clever technique for writing a list poem is to list all the good things and end with one bad thing. Or the other way round. This creates a 'sting in the tail' or 'reversal' at the end of the poem. List poems can be funny or serious.

[Resource: How to write a list poem \(text section – video not recommended\)](#)

[Resource: Writing a list poem \(Mrs Jones\)](#)

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: "INSIDE NICK'S HEAD" – UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL AWKWARDNESS

Students will explore social cues, emotional reactions, and communication challenges through character analysis and creative thinking. They'll reflect on how people (like Nick) may struggle with social situations—and how that can be managed with empathy and growth.

### Part 1:

Ask students to respond to this journal prompt in their notebooks or on paper:

- Have you ever felt awkward or unsure what to say in a social situation? What did you do? How did it turn out?

### Part 2:

Group Task: Discuss and answer.

- What emotions do you think Nick is feeling throughout chapter 6?
- What is Tony trying to do? Is he successful?
- What are signs that Nick is trying... even if it doesn't look like it?
- How does Nick's avoidance behaviour show his discomfort?
- What would you say to someone like Nick to help them feel more included?

### Part 3:

Bring the class back together to discuss:

- What did you learn about social awkwardness by stepping into Nick's shoes?
- What are some simple ways we can help people feel more at ease in awkward moments?

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- How can we tell the difference between someone who's unfriendly and someone who's just nervous?

## CHAPTER 7: CRINGE MOMENTS

### Art Activity

In groups, list ideas for a cartoon of: 'Those awks things mums/dads/aunties/carers say and do'

Using any software package, or using pen/pencil other materials, create a single moment cartoon of one of those 'cringe' moments. Share and discuss the cartoons.

### Writing: Feeling Vulnerable (Imagined and Real)

Here are some fears we can have and how it interacts with our feelings of vulnerability:

- We fear the outside world will judge our loved one (we become aware of their vulnerability)
- We fear others will judge us (aware of our own vulnerability)
- We close off to protect our self and those we love

Using these as prompts to consider around social awkwardness and vulnerability do the following:

- Write a diary entry about an awkward moment. What happened? How did you cope with the situation?
- Write the 2 minute script for a TIKTOK on surviving AWKS moments.

Discuss the following:

Internet and social media mean that we can be:

1. open to sharing, building friendships, trusting, having fun, laughing together
2. at risk of being judged laughed at or bullied/teased/mockd

How can we manage worries caused by our Internet use?

## CHAPTER 8: SETTING BOUNDARIES AND BUILDING CONFIDENCE

In Chapter Eight of the novel, Nick experiences a personal breakthrough when he tells his mum not to discuss his social life with Tony's mum. This moment allows him to set a boundary that helps him take control of his relationships and feel more confident. In the same vein, this activity will give students a chance to reflect on moments when they've felt uncomfortable with others talking about them or intervening in their lives, and to practice communicating their boundaries clearly.

Class Discussion:

Let's reflect on the idea of personal boundaries.

- What does it mean to set a boundary? Why is it important?
- What are some examples of boundaries in different settings (e.g., friendships, family relationships, school). For example, personal space, privacy, or deciding what topics are comfortable to discuss.

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- How can we embrace the idea that setting boundaries is a healthy way to ensure respect for one's needs and feelings.

Contextual Reflection:

Relate the theme of setting boundaries to Nick's breakthrough in the novel. Discuss the moment when Nick asks his mum not to talk about him with Tony's mum. What did it take for Nick to make that decision? How did it help him take control of his situation?

## **CHAPTER 8: TAKING INITIATIVE**

Let's discuss the theme of taking initiative, as seen by Nick working on his own relationships.

- What does it mean to take initiative in a social situation?
- What is it like stepping out of one's comfort zone?
- How it can lead to personal growth?
- Relate this to Nick's actions in the chapter. Why do you think Nick's behavior has changed? What made him decide to go over to the group?
- How do you typically feel when you're faced with a challenge or teasing? What is a healthy way to respond?

Discuss the Teasing:

- Explore how Nick handles JJ's teasing and how Nick's reaction compares to JJ's behavior.
- How does Nick maintain his composure even when JJ mocks him?
- What would have been a negative way to respond to teasing or mockery? What made Nick's response positive?
- Why do you think Tony intervenes and tells JJ to shut up?

### **Taking Your Own Initiative**

Here are some scenarios for taking initiative. Choose one and in a group discuss how you would handle the situation and in what ways you could take initiative.

- Scenario 1: You are at a school sports event, and someone teases you about your performance. How do you take the initiative to respond confidently and not let the teasing affect your mood or actions?
- Scenario 2: You want to join a new group of friends, but you're nervous about talking to them. How do you take the initiative to approach the group and introduce yourself?
- Scenario 3: You've been working on a skill (e.g., drawing, writing, or a sport) and someone mocks you for not being good at it. How do you respond confidently and stay motivated to improve?

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## CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION

### Reflection Questions:

- What does Nick's rather mean response show of HIS feelings or attitudes?
- Does it show JJ's a bit insecure? Defensive?
- Or is this boastful challenge by JJ a normal part of the camaraderie of being a sportsperson, such as egging your mates on to compete? A dare?

## CHAPTER 9 - TAKING INITIATIVE AND GROWING INDEPENDENCE

In pairs, have one student act as Nick and the other as Tony's mum.

The student playing Nick should practice making the call to Tony's mum, asking if he can visit and trying to make small talk. Emphasize Nick's nervousness at first, but also his growing confidence in taking initiative.

After the role-play, have the students discuss:

- How did it feel to take the initiative and make a call?
- What might Nick's decision to make the call symbolize in terms of his personal growth?
- Switch roles and repeat the exercise.

### Activity 2: Discussion – Buying a Phone

- How does Nick's ability to make this purchase reflect his personal growth?
- At what age do students think it's appropriate to buy something independently? Why?
- Have students share any experiences they've had with gaining independence through purchases or decisions.

## CHAPTER 10 - VISITING TONY'S FARM AND BONDING WITH FRIENDS

### Activity 1: Compare and Contrast – Life on a Farm versus Life in the City

In groups, students will list the differences and similarities between Nick's life on the farm and Tony's life (or their own lives if they come from a different background).

Focus on:

- Daily routines (e.g., working on a farm vs. city activities)
- How they would feel in the same situation as Nick and Tony
- What skills or knowledge are unique to each lifestyle?

Afterward, groups will present their findings and discuss how these differences shape the characters' personalities and relationships.



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### Activity 2: Writing a Letter – Nick to Tony

- Write a letter from Nick to Tony, after their day at the farm. In the letter, Nick should reflect on the day's events: the motorbike ride, the swimming in the dam, and how it felt to bond with Tony.
- The letter should also express any emotions Nick might have had (e.g., nervousness, excitement, or appreciation for Tony's friendship).
- When finished, you can read their letters aloud, focusing on the emotions and reflections that come with growing friendships.

## CHAPTER 11 – SWIMMING COMPETITION AND TEAM SPIRIT

Set up a group relay competition in class. Students will divide into teams and create a challenge that requires each person to contribute to the group effort. This could be a trivia quiz relay, a physical activity (like passing a ball without using hands), or a creative task (building something together).

Discuss how each team member's contributions were important for the success of the group, just like how each swimmer in the relay team contributes to the overall win.

Discussion prompts:

- How do you feel about working in a team?
- How did teamwork help Nick's group in the competition?
- What are some challenges that arise when working in a team, and how can they be overcome?

### Activity 2: Character Reflection – JJ's Growth

Write a short reflection on JJ's character development.

Focus on how JJ's behavior shifts from being initially confident to becoming somewhat insecure, especially in his relationship with Nick.

In your reflection try and explore:

- What causes JJ to become distracted and less confident?
- How does his interaction with Nick during the relay help to build their relationship?
- How does JJ's character show that even confident people can struggle with insecurity?

## CHAPTER 12 – CAMPDRAFTING AND NICK'S GROWTH

Try journaling about a time you felt a sense of accomplishment, like Nick does during the campdrafting competition.

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You can reflect on:

- What was the task or achievement?
- How did you feel before and after completing it?
- What did you learn about yourself in the process?

Afterward, students can share their experiences in small groups, discussing how accomplishment and personal growth are related.

### **Activity 2: Group Discussion – The Role of Friendship in Competition**

Hold a class discussion about the role of friendship in Nick’s campdrafting experience.

Questions for discussion:

- How do Nick’s friends support him during the competition?
- How do Nick’s relationships with Tony, Mia, and others influence his performance?
- In what ways can friendships help us perform better in challenges or competitions?
- Encourage students to consider how their friends motivate or challenge them to do better in their own lives.

### **Activity 3: Creating a “Growth Timeline”**

Create a timeline on a large sheet of paper or whiteboard.

You can work in groups and mark important moments in Nick’s journey, starting from Chapter 1 through to Chapter 12.

Each group should write a short explanation of how these events contribute to Nick’s overall growth in areas like independence, self-confidence, and friendships.

Groups can then present their timelines, discussing key moments that were pivotal in Nick’s development.

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

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### CURRICULUM V9

#### YEAR 8

##### English

**AC9E8LE03** - explain how language and/or images in texts position readers to respond and form viewpoints

**AC9E8LY01** - identify how texts reflect contexts

**AC9E8LY05** - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring, questioning and inferring to interpret and evaluate ideas in texts

**AC9E8LE04** - identify intertextual references in literary texts and explain how the references enable new understanding of the aesthetic quality of the text

**AC9E8LY03** - analyse and evaluate the ways that language features vary according to the purpose and audience of the text, and the ways that sources and quotations are used in a text

#### YEAR 9

##### English

**AC9E9LA08** - analyse how vocabulary choices contribute to style, mood and tone

**AC9E9LA02** - understand how evaluation can be expressed directly and indirectly using devices such as allusion, evocative vocabulary and metaphor

**AC9E9LE04** - analyse texts and evaluate the aesthetic qualities and appeal of an author's literary style

**AC9E9LY01** - analyse how representations of people, places, events and concepts reflect contexts

**AC9E9LY03** - analyse and evaluate how language features are used to represent a perspective of an issue, event, situation, individual or group

**AC9E9LA01** - recognise how language empowers relationships and roles

**AC9E9LE02** - present a personal response to a literary text comparing initial impressions and subsequent analysis of the whole text

**AC9E9LE03** - analyse how features of literary texts influence readers' preference for texts

**AC9E9LE05** - analyse the effect of text structures, language features and literary devices such as extended metaphor, metonymy, allegory, symbolism and intertextual references

##### Civics and Citizenship

**AC9HC9K06** - the influence of a range of media, including social media, in shaping identity and attitudes to diversity

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## YEAR 10

### English

**AC9E10LA01** - understand how language can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people

**AC9E10LE06** - compare and evaluate how “voice” as a literary device is used in different types of texts, such as poetry, novels and film, to evoke emotional responses

**AC9E10LE05** - analyse how text structure, language features, literary devices and intertextual connections shape interpretations of texts

**AC9E10LE04** - evaluate the social, moral or ethical positions represented in literature

**AC9E10LE03** - analyse how the aesthetic qualities associated with text structures, language features, literary devices and visual features, and the context in which these texts are experienced, influence audience response

**AC9E10LY03** - analyse and evaluate how language features are used to implicitly or explicitly represent values, beliefs and attitudes

**AC9E10LE07** - analyse and evaluate the aesthetic qualities of texts, for example, analysing and evaluating the use of literary devices.

**AC9E10LY01** - analyse and evaluate how people, places, events and concepts are represented in texts and reflect contexts

**AC9E10LA02** - understand that language used to evaluate, implicitly or explicitly reveals an individual's values

## CURRICULUM 8.4

### SENIOR SECONDARY

#### English

*Holding Back* 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 culture, health and language. Character arcs and motivations can also be observed.