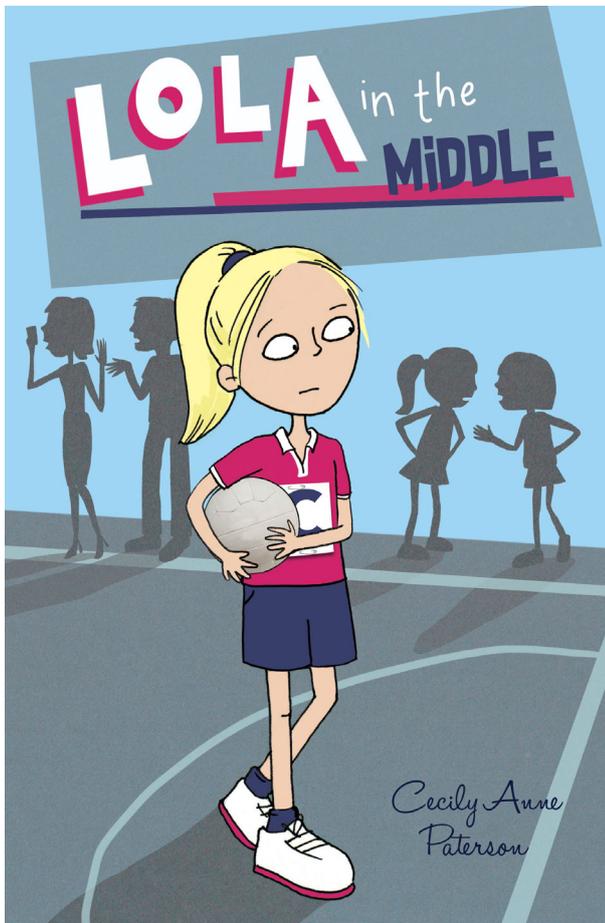


# Teaching notes



## Lola in the Middle

Cecily Paterson

ISBN: 978-1925563900

Recommended retail: \$16.99 paperback

Reading level: Age 10+

### **Book summary**

Lola is always in the middle on the netball court. But she's in the middle in life too – stuck in the middle of fighting parents and arguing friends.

When Lola's netball team looks like they might be in the State Finals, Lola steps up as captain. But she has bigger problems when the doctor says that she might have to stop playing netball altogether.

Lola feels like she's losing from all sides. Can she ever stand up for herself? Or will she always be stuck in the middle?

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## Why study this book?

*Lola in the Middle* provides jumping-off points for discussion with students about friendships, resilience, leadership, teamwork, setbacks and conflict resolution. It also brings diabetes up as a topic to address, providing a point of identification for students who are familiar with the condition, and an introduction to those who have no experience with it. This book addresses fear, truth-telling and courage. It's an excellent resource with which to highlight the character attributes of respect, responsibility, effort, resilience and teamwork, which are often promoted in the classroom or put forward as school values.

## Themes

- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Truth-telling
- Responsibility
- Fear and courage
- Friendships
- Relationships



## About the author

Cecily Anne Paterson grew up as an Aussie kid in Pakistan where she went to boarding school in the Himalayas for five years. With her family, she lived in Kangaroo Valley for ten years, right opposite Kangaroo Valley Public School, the location for *Lola in the Middle*, *How Not to be Popular*, and *Smart Girls Don't Wear Mascara*.

Paterson's stories are about girls and their friendships, helping them to discover their voices, understand their relationships and feel they are not alone. Her books have been shortlisted and won places in both the Sparklit and CALEB writing awards, and her first YA novel *Invisible* was a semi-finalist in the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award in 2014. Get news about Cecily Anne Paterson's books and writing workshops at [www.cecilypaterson.com](http://www.cecilypaterson.com). She welcomes emails from readers and replies to all.

## Author interview

### 1. Where did the idea for *Lola in the Middle* come from?

*Lola in the Middle* is based on true circumstances; the Year Six girls from the tiny Kangaroo Valley Public School really did make it to the NSW State Finals for netball, coached by Mariella. This was an unheard-of achievement for such a small school in the Shoalhaven. I had to add a setback or two for poor Lola of course, otherwise a story isn't really a story. With help from the real Mrs Robinson, who really does have the condition, I gave her Type 1 diabetes (which has been increasing globally for some time).

### 2. What does it mean for a young person when they feel stuck?

When young people and children feel they have no choices and no agency in what happens to them, it's an easy path from there to depression and anxiety. In this story, Lola feels stuck between her warring parents and her sniping friends. From her point of view, all she can do is keep the peace ... which she does very well. But it soon becomes apparent that simply making everyone feel better addresses none of the issues. I wanted to show young people who feel like this that they can find their courage and be brave enough to speak the truth.

### 3. Why do you think nurturing leadership in young people is important?

All of us have tremendous capacity for leadership, but not all of us have a Mariella who believes in and encourages us (albeit with some tough love) to step up. Nurturing leadership is as much about teaching the theory of respect as it is about giving young people an opportunity to put these things into practice. I love team sports (and its many equivalents) for this reason. Kids have to work towards something bigger than themselves with other people, whether they feel like it that day or not. When each young person truly commits to the team, the magic happens.

## Questions and reflections

1. Lola feels like she's stuck between her friends Tash and Indi, who are never able to get on.
  - What are the ways she tries to make the situation better?
  - Do you think she should do something different?
  - What would you do in her situation?
2. What is it about Mariella that makes her a good coach?
3. Think about Tash and Indi. Where would you put them on a scale of 1–10 for:
  - resilience?
  - respect?
  - effort?
  - teamwork?
  - Where would you put yourself on the same scale?
4. Lola is a reluctant leader. She doesn't want to be captain of the netball team, but Mariella insists. What is it about Lola that Mariella thinks would make her a good captain? What does she still need to learn?
5. When Lola is diagnosed with diabetes, her friends aren't very understanding. If you were in Lola's situation, how would you hope your friends would react? If you were one of Lola's friends, how might you have reacted to her news?
6. Lola's parents are arguing a lot. Can you identify what the main issues are between them? What do you think might help them solve their problems?
7. When Lola's parents talk to each other, Lola's mum gets angry and her dad tries to make jokes and make everyone feel better without addressing the problems. What could they do differently? Which person are you more like?
8. Tash and Indi finally start to get on better when two things happen: they have to work together to save Lola and they have to put their personal feelings aside for the sake of the team. Can you identify the main areas of conflict between Tash and Indi?
  - What could each of them do differently?
  - What would they have to change about themselves to finally become friends?
9. Lola realises in the end that by 'keeping the peace', she has not been a true team player. What characteristics do you think a great team player has to have?

10. Thinking about everything Lola went through in the story, what did she learn about:
- resilience?
  - responsibility?
  - effort?
  - respect?
  - teamwork?
11. *Lola in the Middle* was based on a true story. The Kangaroo Valley Public School netball team really did make it to State Finals for netball. Discuss:
- If you base fiction on a true story, what would you need to be careful of?
  - Would you have to write everything exactly how it happened?
  - Which parts do you think the author took from real life, and which are made up? (You might like to write to Cecily Paterson with your ideas. She'll let you know if you are correct or not).

## Activities

### Writing tasks

- Writing task I [Looking at point of view]: Take a scene from the book where Lola interacts with Tash and Indi (we suggest either the first chapter, where they play the adventure game, or the scene in the bush, when Lola passes out). Write a version of what happens from either Tash's point of view or Indi's point of view.
- Writing task II: Lola is often scared, fearful or nervous during the story. Create a list of words or phrases the author uses to show the readers when Lola is feeling this way. Using similar language, write a short piece about a time you were scared.
- Writing analysis I: Read the chapter where Lola and Mrs Robinson are waiting for the results of the netball game to come in. Even though Lola is not playing the game, the chapter is full of tension. Can you identify what the writer has done with words, sentences and paragraphs to create tension?
- Writing analysis II: Every scene in a book is put there deliberately by the author. Perhaps it is there to help build a character, or to move the plot forward. It might have a symbolic meaning or foreshadow what's to come. Read the first chapter of *Lola in the Middle*. Why do you think the author began the story with an adventure game? If you had only read the first chapter, could you predict what might happen?

## Key curriculum areas

### Year 5 English

ACELA1501  
ACELA1505  
ACELA1508  
ACELT1609  
ACELT1610  
ACELY1698

### Year 6 English

ACELA1517  
ACELA1518  
ACELA1523  
ACELT1613  
ACELT1615  
ACELY1801

### Year 7 English

ACELA1517  
ACELA1518  
ACELA1523  
ACELT1613  
ACELT1615  
ACELY1801

### Year 8 English

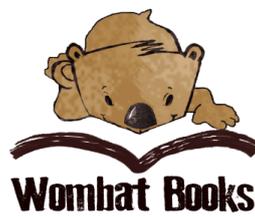
ACELA1541  
ACELA1542  
ACELA1545  
ACELT1628  
ACELT1629  
ACELY1730

### Years 5 and 6 HPE

ACPPS051  
ACPPS052  
ACPPS054  
ACPPS055  
ACPPS056  
ACPPS058  
ACPPS059  
ACPMP064  
ACPMP067

### Years 7 and 8 HPE

ACPPS071  
ACPPS074  
ACPPS075  
ACPMP083  
ACPMP086  
ACPMP087  
ACPMP088



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