



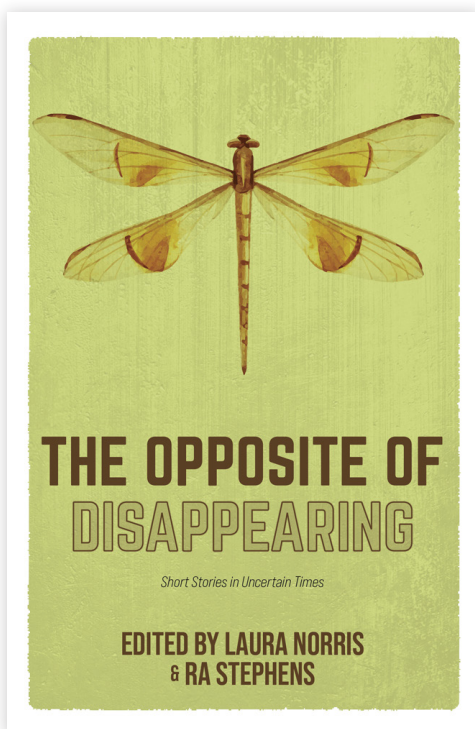
# TEACHING NOTES

## The Opposite of Disappearing

Edited by Laura Norris and R.A. Stephens

ISBN: 9781761110290

Reading Level: 14+ years



A homeless boy walks the city in search of a prized possession.

A couple wakes to a day where the sun refuses to rise. Two housemates, reeling from the loss of their friend, are saddled with the care of a pot plant. A new student attempts to include herself in the worst known environment: a new school. A girl, lost in time, adapts to the new normal.

These fourteen short stories explore connectivity, resilience, grief and the small ways to navigate the uncertainties of life.

### Themes

- Grief and loss • Relationships • Friendship
- Courage/Resilience • Responsibility • Anxiety • Identity

## Discussion Questions & Classroom Activities:

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. a) Who are the most developed characters in the collection? Do we understand what these characters want, and how the story's conflict stands in their way?  
b) Can you tell if the characters in the collection are round or flat characters? Why? The following can be reviewed for information about round and flat characters: [Britannica](#) [Youtube](#)
  - Ask students to complete the following table after choosing a story from the collection to review:

Character	Round	Flat	Justification

2. Choose a story from the collection. What are key elements and signifiers that help to convey the main message or theme of your chosen story?
3. Did you relate to any specific short story in this collection?
4. How do you think editors would have planned this collection and the order, can you see any relation between the stories?
5. Do any of these stories make you think about the current anxiety of the situations in the world? Do you relate to any? If you were challenged to write a story with the theme of "Opposite of Disappearing" what would it make you write? Try writing this.
6. How do the different landscapes of the various stories demonstrate about the theme of said story?

Story	Key features of this setting	What this represents about the theme

### THEMES

#### ***Grief and Loss (Perennial, Paper Crowns, Silencing the Storm)***

1. Have you ever lost someone that you care about? Did you know what to do? How did you cope?
2. What aspects of grief do you recognise from the characters in *Perennial*? What motions do they go through?
3. In *Silencing the Storm*, what do you think about the way that her mother portrays her grief over her daughter having been missing?

### ***Relationships (Izzy's Swing, Silencing the Storm, Uplifted)***

1. Jolie places a lot of importance on her romantic relationship, saying it is the one good thing she had, do you think this is healthy? Do you think she places great importance on this because of her lack of a good relationship with her mother?
2. In *Uplifted*, Sukie and her father's relationship is eventually healed. What do think are good ways to resolve family conflicts like this? Have you ever been angry at your parents for a decision they've made that you've felt helpless about? What did you do? If you were in Sukie's position, how do you think you would have reacted?

### ***Friendship (Silencing the Storm, Between Spaces)***

1. Have you ever been betrayed by a friend or friends? How did you handle it? Did you also want to run away like Jolie did? Do you think running away is helpful? Why, why not?
2. In *Between Spaces* Darcy shows kindness towards Tiger, offering some light in the dark. Discuss ways in which you might show kindness/empathy to your peers. How might you know if somebody at school is struggling in their personal life? What would you do if you suspected someone was struggling at home or was living in a dangerous situation?

### ***Courage/Resilience (Izzy's Swing)***

1. Have there ever been things that seem simple but have taken a lot of courage to do? What are they?
2. Do you think Izzy would have been able to gather the courage to return to school without Eva? Do you think that it took a lot of courage for Eva to take her sister back to school?
3. How do you give yourself courage?
4. The stories in this collection all touch upon themes of resilience and connectivity. How do the characters in *Between Spaces* display resilience? How does connecting with others provide hope and/or healing? Can you think of a time when you've had to face your fears or show courage or resilience? What helped you (friends, family, talking to a trusted person, creative outlets?)

### ***Responsibility (Paper Crowns, Izzy's Swing, Silencing the Storm)***

1. In *Paper Crowns*, Cleo is meant to be looking after Jesse when he goes missing. Do you think Cleo is responsible for him going missing? Have you ever been in a position where you were responsible for someone and something bad happened? What do you think Cleo will be feeling?
2. What do you think about Eva having to take Izzy to school? Do you think Eva thought the responsibility was a burden?
3. The world Jolie lands in has undergone technological and social development. What we see as societal norms today might be far different to those of the future and Jolie experiences this in her journey. What societal norms have changed for the main character? (Think about the differences in pace of her new life, the media scrum outside, the development of the town, the technological advancements, the changes in fashion and behavioural expectations, etc).
4. The story is somewhat open-ended, with Jolie choosing to follow her own path and head back into the tunnel. As a writing exercise, continue her story from here. Where will she end up now? Will she

go back in time or forward again? If she goes forward in time, will she discover a whole new set of societal norms and technological advances? What might those be and how might she react to them? Or, will she go back in time and right past wrongs?

### **Anxiety (*Izzy's Swing, Paper Crowns, Wallpaper, Silencing the Storm, Escape, Almost*)**

1. There are different types of anxieties that the characters have, do you relate to any of them in particular?
2. What do you think are good ways for the characters to work on their anxieties? Where do you think these anxieties stem from?
3. Why do you think communication is a common anxiety? Do you think you have anxieties about communicating with others? Do you find that there are particular types of communication that are particularly difficult?
4. Have you ever felt unnoticed or lonely in amongst other people? What can you do to engage people in situations like that?
5. Choose a story. How did this story relate to you or not relate?
6. In *Escape* why is Kate so nervous at the start of the story? Provide evidence to support your answer.

### **Identity (*The Opposite of Disappearing, Wallpaper, Silencing the Storm, Lines for Luca*)**

1. There are a few characters that are perceived a certain way by the main character, but are later identified as to being different from that impression. Why do you think this is? What do you think shapes our perception of others?
2. In *Silencing The Storm*, the author takes the protagonist Jolie Wyndham from her normal world to a future reality where she struggles to adapt. She sees her friends and family in a whole new light and comes to some harsh realisations about her life and about her past behaviour. Do you think she has grown in this process? In what ways?
3. Jolie yearns for the past, having had her previous life abruptly severed. She finds out that her father has passed away and that her mother and best friend, Cleo, resent her for her disappearance. Essentially, she's at a crossroads. She writes letters to make amends for past wrongs and decides to step forward into the unknown. Is she doing the right thing by walking away to find a better reality, or do you think she should stay and work with the reality she's in? Which path would you choose and why?
4. What are your thoughts on homelessness?
5. Does *Lines for Luca* prompt you to look at homelessness differently? In what way?
6. The next time you see a homeless person, what questions will you ask yourself?
7. The following extract is from *The Opposite of Disappearing*: 'This is how Iris wants to be seen: the right way, on her own terms.' (p. 14) Why is Iris' desire to be in control of her own appearance so important to her?
8. Iris often finds herself on the periphery in social situations, due to her self-consciousness. Explore how this impacts her role in her friendship group.
9. 'How strange to think she's spent a lifetime at war with herself, treating her body like a specimen, prodding and dissecting, focused so long on what it should be, that she'd forgotten what it could do.'

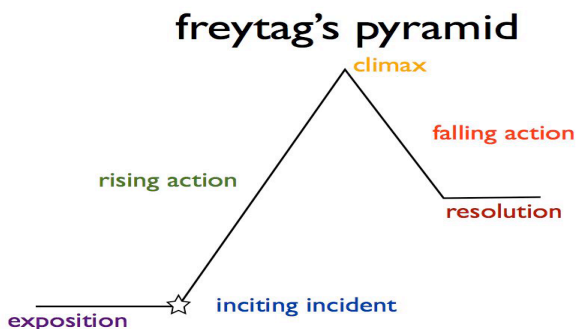
(p.19) Iris experiences a change in thinking when she realises she has judged her body on its aesthetic appeal, rather than its physical capabilities. Consider how her body image struggles are influenced by modern beauty standards, and ask students to reflect on a time when they had similar feelings.

- Choose a story and complete the following table to explore how the characters' view themselves, and how this differs from how others' see them. Which version is more accurate?

Character	How they see themselves	How others see them

## NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND PLOT

- Choose a story. Why do you think the author chose to narrate this story through different perspectives?
- Find an alternative viewpoint or 'gap' in the story and write 500-1000 words. Consider the narrator's motivations and backstory. How will these things influence their voice?
- Identify different plot points in the narrative, using the following diagram and descriptions. Discuss differences of opinion in the class.



### [Diagram Source.](#)

Exposition: Introductory information to establish the setting and provide background information about the characters.

Inciting incident: A moment or event that acts as the catalyst for the rising action in the story and causes a significant change in the protagonist's life.

Rising action: Events and choices that drive the action towards the climax. The rising action often involves making allies, friends and enemies; encountering setbacks; and finding solutions or partial-solutions to problems.

Climax: The moment of greatest tension in the story, where the protagonist is tested and the deeper truth of their identity

is revealed.

Falling action: Events that follow the climax and portray its aftermath to lessen the narrative tension.

Resolution: The ending of the story, which often establishes a 'new normal' for one or more characters. Resolutions may involve various degrees of happiness or sorrow; involve a plot twist; or feature a level of ambiguity. However, resolutions usually stay true to the overall tone of the narrative and suggest how the protagonist has changed, even if they do not neatly tie up all the loose ends.

### Rule of Three

Students could look at literary devices used within the story. Can they spot anywhere where lists of three things are used - the rule of three is that things that are grouped in threes are inherently more satisfying than two or four or five. This story begins with a three ideas: bare feet, tangy taste, man-sized kites. The next sentence has soaring kites, climbing higher, skilfully cruising. The next sentence: alighting, running, lowering nose of glider.

### Using Senses to Describe

Students may also look at the way the story alludes to the senses to capture the reader's imagination, beginning in the first line with touch, taste and sight. Taste is a tricky one to incorporate - ask the students to try writing sentences where they use taste to draw the reader into a story, or smell. Smells provoke very strong memories for people. Students could be asked to write a descriptive paragraph using one or more of the senses to describe the events in each paragraph. Frances uses the sense of hearing in the paragraph to show how 'loud' the silence was when she and her Dad were not speaking - 'I kept eating, and so did Dad, the sound of our chinking spoons and chewing unnaturally loud.'

### Show don't Tell

Students could analyse how the story is told through action and dialogue rather than through a simple description. For example, the second section could read:

'I remember the day Dad told me we had to go and live in the country. I was really upset and couldn't understand why he would choose to take me away from the beach I loved.'

Instead we see the story unfold and we feel what the protagonist is going through - we know her thoughts, we feel her brother's spikey hair and see him being excited, we feel the lump in her throat and see her father through her eyes.

### First person vs third person

Look at the way the story is written in the first person. Have the students ever written a story in first person - often we write in third person. What are the pros and cons of this? Frances often likes to write in first person because you can see

the story through one person's eyes and know exactly how they are feeling. The downside is that you can't know what other character's are feeling so well as you can only know what your main character knows.

### Past tense vs present tense

This story is written in past tense as a recount, but Frances has also written a story in present tense (her middle grade fiction novel). This is very challenging and hard to maintain as we naturally slip into past tense. The students could be asked to write a paragraph of a story in past tense, then rewrite it in present tense and see how it alters the feel of the story. Present tense is more immediate and you don't get to have the same amount of reflection/hindsight that you do with past tense, but it can make the story feel more exciting as you feel like the author doesn't know what is going to happen next. (I'll let you in on a secret - sometimes the author doesn't know exactly how a story is going to unfold and they are enjoying finding out as much as the reader! It is good to have a basic idea so you know how the story arc will work, but sometimes the story will change as you get to know your character's and you decide to do things differently than you planned to be true to what you think they would do.)

### Metaphors and similes

Look at the literary device of metaphor - 'it was the eager body of a bird perched, ready to fly.' This was Frances' favourite line in the story and was also positively commented on by the editor when she submitted it. Students can be encouraged to find their own metaphors for ordinary things to make them seem extraordinary. For example - the steam coming off the coffee cup was..., She clumped down the path, a\_\_\_\_\_. (Not like a, but just a.... When we use like a something that is a simile but metaphors where you just say something is something can be even stronger.

### Character development and emotional response

Using an example from Frances Prentice: When the story was being edited, one thing that Frances had to add was more description of how the character was feeling, some pauses for her to process what was going on. One line that allowed for this was 'The silence in the kitchen expanded until we seemed as far away from each other as the clouds above the earth.' Encourage students to explore character's reactions in an interesting way with interesting descriptions - don't state: I felt sad/ happy / excited. Show that by a description like this - comparing your feeling to something you can sense or experience.

## **CREATING THE ANTHOLOGIES**

As mentioned in the foreword *Opposite of Disappearing* was put together as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Used as a way to expand our imaginations and focus on connections we can make the stories were chosen for their unique voices.

1. What was your favourite story from the collection and which one did you most connect with?
2. Would you have guessed that this collection was born out of the COVID-19 pandemic? Why or why not?

## CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES

Write your own short story. Use some of these tips from editor Lynne Stringer.

A lot of people think writing a 50,000-word novel is a monumental task, but believe it or not, it can be a lot harder to write a short story than a long one. It requires an idea that you can hold in your hand.

A short story is a story from 1000–7500 words. Finding a story idea that can fit into that word count can be tricky because, in a short story, you have to do the same thing you have to do in a full-length novel. You need to have an introduction, complication and resolution, and the story should feel complete or the reader will leave it feeling dissatisfied.

Here are a few tips that might help you as you experiment with writing a short story.

1. Try and find a simple idea

This can be trickier than it sounds, but a simple idea will take fewer words to tell, thereby reducing the word count. This comes back to what I said in the first paragraph about an idea you can hold in your hand. The more compact your story is, the shorter it can be, but it can still be intimate, entertaining and engrossing. A simple idea doesn't mean boring.

2. Only do what you must to set the scene

There's always a temptation when writing any story to include loads of backstory and description to set the scene. Even in a full-length novel, too much of this can be a problem, but certainly in a short story, if you include a lot of that, you won't fit in your plot. Try to be as lean as possible without resorting to telling the story instead of showing it.

3. Cut down the number of characters

The more characters you have, the longer your story will be as you introduce them all and establish their place in the story. Try and limit the number of characters as much as possible. It will leave more space for the plot.

4. Make sure there's a reason for every sentence

Everything you include in your story must have a valid reason for being there. Don't be afraid to be brutal or to experiment with removing something to see if the story works without it. Often you'll be surprised how well your story stands without that part you thought was indispensable. The good thing about this is it will teach you to be lean and clean with all your writing, which will make the pace faster and more engaging.

5. Start strong, end strong

Make sure your opening sentence and paragraph hook the reader, preferably by making them aware of the stakes immediately. Also, make sure you end strongly with an entertaining climax that's fast-paced. A lot can be forgiven in a story that ends well, so work on making that ending as good as it can be.

All these tips will serve you well no matter what kind of writing you do, but they're all good starting points if you're interested in short story writing. And remember, the more you write, the more skill you'll develop, and you'll become a better writer as a result.

For more inspiration you can read these blog posts by the authors of *Crossed Spaces*:

[Penny Jaye](#), [Jennifer Horn](#), [Rosanne Hawke](#), [Jo Hart](#), [Adele Jones](#), [Janeen Samuel](#), [Lynne Stringer](#), [Geraldine Borella](#), and [Jennie Del Mastro](#).



## FURTHER NOTES

Our new collection - [Dust Makers](#) - comes out later this year.

*Dust Makers is a collection about our impact on the world around us. With a focus on simple sustainability, care for the environment and for each other, these stories consider the impact we have on the spaces we live in and the legacy we leave for the future. We want it to be about our consideration of what is around us and what we leave for the future. We want the stories to be contemporary, historical or futuristic with consideration of the impact we make on our environment and on one another.*

*Edited by Penny Jaye and RA Stephens*

We have a [new submissions open](#) if you'd like to submit something for consideration.

## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

<b>ACEEN004</b>	<b>ACEEN005</b>	<b>ACEEN007</b>	<b>ACEEN009</b>
<b>ACEEN011</b>	<b>ACEEN018</b>	<b>ACEEN020</b>	<b>ACEEN021</b>
<b>ACEEN022</b>	<b>ACEEN024</b>	<b>ACEEN025</b>	<b>ACEEN027</b>
<b>ACEEN028</b>	<b>ACEEN034</b>	<b>ACEEN035</b>	<b>ACEEN038</b>
<b>ACEEN039</b>	<b>ACEEN040</b>	<b>ACEEN041</b>	<b>ACEEN042</b>
<b>ACEEN043</b>	<b>ACEEN044</b>	<b>ACEEN059</b>	<b>ACELA1550</b>
<b>ACELA1551</b>	<b>ACELA1552</b>	<b>ACELA1553</b>	<b>ACELA1556</b>
<b>ACELA1557</b>	<b>ACELA1560</b>	<b>ACELA1561</b>	<b>ACELA1562</b>
<b>ACELA1566</b>	<b>ACELA1564</b>	<b>ACELA1569</b>	<b>ACELT1633</b>
<b>ACELT1635</b>	<b>ACELT1636</b>	<b>ACELT1637</b>	<b>ACELT1640</b>
<b>ACELT1641</b>	<b>ACELT1643</b>	<b>ACELT1644</b>	<b>ACELT1771</b>
<b>ACELT1772</b>	<b>ACELT1773</b>	<b>ACELY1742</b>	<b>ACELY1743</b>
<b>ACELY1744</b>	<b>ACELY1745</b>	<b>ACELT1774</b>	<b>ACELT1814</b>