
Teachers' Notes



SKIN

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BOOK SUMMARY

When a tiny freckle on Lexie Collins's cheek turns out to be a rare kind of melanoma that requires surgery, she is left with a big, ugly scar across one cheek. She had just earned a spot in the state finals for public speaking, but with the scar, her confidence has vanished. She doesn't even recognise herself anymore.

Mum and Dad keep reminding Lexie how lucky she is that she didn't need further treatment. But Lexie doesn't feel lucky at all. She suddenly feels ugly, unsure of herself and different from all her friends. She doesn't want to be seen—let alone speak—in public ever again.

But when a chance encounter turns into an unexpected friendship, Lexie's feelings about her scar—and herself—slowly begin to change.

THEMES

- Coming of Age • Friendships • Self-Esteem • Self-Image • Self-Confidence • Self-Image • Ambition • Resilience and overcoming obstacles • Family Relationships • Courage • Bullying

Rhiza Shorts are a list of teen novellas for busy teens or reluctant readers. Each book has an easy to follow stand-a-lone story based on topics struggles and interests that teens are face today. When so much is going on in day-to-day life it can be hard for teens to pause and take some time to rest and focus. With that in mind, our authors have tailored their stories to help focus busy minds and support readers with writing strategies that keep them engaged. The extra spacing and shorter length of these books was specifically chosen to allow readers to turn the pages quickly, giving them a strong sense of achievement as they work through the book. We crafted these titles to make them an ideal choice for all readers from struggling or reluctant readers to busy teens just looking for a quick yet impactful read. A good reader might pick up each story in a short session, while a less enthusiastic reader might still find something accessible. Each story is available in multiple formats (print, eBook and audiobook) so any reader can find the best version that suits their individual needs.

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**Deborah Kelly is available for author talks and workshops.
Contact Rhiza Edge for more information.**

Skin 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



Deb Kelly is a multi-award winning, internationally published author of picture books, junior fiction and middle grade. Her book *The Thing About Oliver* (2019) won the Australian Association of Family Therapists Book of the Year, was shortlisted for Speech Pathology Australia's Book of the Year and the Children's Book Council of Australia's (CBCA) Book of the Year in 2020, and was included in the NSW school curriculum in 2023. Her picture book *Me and You* (Penguin Viking) won Speech Pathology Australia's Book of the Year award (3-5 year olds) in 2017.

Deb visits schools, libraries and festival events (including Newcastle Writers' Festival and Sydney Writers' Festival) to share her books with children. Many of her books are included in Premier's Reading Challenge lists around Australia. She is a Role Model for Books in Homes and reviews children's books for Reading Time magazine. She is currently studying speech pathology with a focus on literacy.

Deborah's books with Wombat Rhiza include the *Ruby Wishfingers* series, *The Thing About Oliver*, *Little Horses* and *Skin*.

AUTHOR NOTES

The inspiration for *Skin*:

When my daughter was ten, we discovered a freckle on her cheek that had come up very quickly. After having it biopsied by our GP it turned out to be a spitzoid nevus, a kind of pre-melanoma that was very rare, occurring only in childhood and which had nothing to do with sun exposure. We were told that if left it would likely develop into a potentially life threatening melanoma, so we elected for surgery.

Apart from being painful physically, the surgery left a large wound on her face which took a long time to heal.

This is what Sakura (now 17) had to say:

'...it seemed so small and insignificant. But to me it felt like a slap in the face. My world was rocked. I couldn't understand why people weren't as upset as I was and got mad every time someone told me how lucky I was... I didn't feel lucky or happy as every time I looked in the mirror, I felt like I was going to be sick. Eventually I realised the scar was just one part of my story and began to see it in a more positive light.'

Most teenagers grapple with self-esteem and body image issues. These have been magnified in recent times by social media. *Skin* is a reminder that our worth extends far beyond our surface appearance and that all of our experiences- especially the difficult ones- build resilience and strength of character that shape who we are.

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OVERVIEW

MAIN CHARACTER

Lexie Collins is a talented public speaker competing in a state final in Sydney, with hopes of reaching the national final in Canberra. Although she has a strong personality, she struggles with vanity and pride, often judging others based on appearances. Lexie is particularly bothered by bullying, especially towards a girl named Moira, but initially stays quiet about it because she wants to fit in.

After undergoing surgery for early cancer, Lexie feels insecure about her looks and tries to hide her facial scars with bandages. When her parents and doctors prevent her from using bandages for health reasons, she resorts to using sticky tape and toilet roll instead.

Inspired by her younger sister's kindness toward a child with dwarfism and Moira's bravery in dealing with her own scars, Lexie decides to change her public speaking topic. By the end of the story, she becomes an advocate for those who are different or face challenges, embracing her role as a champion for the 'damaged'.

Lexie's Strengths	Lexie's Weaknesses
Friendly and Fair: Lexie cares about treating others justly and wants everyone to be treated fairly.	Judgmental: While she wants to be fair, Lexie can be critical of others' appearances, including those of Moira and Miss Anderson.
Kind and Caring: She takes responsibility for her younger twin siblings, showcasing her nurturing side.	Preoccupied with Appearance: She is overly focused on her looks and societal acceptance, which can lead to insecurity.
Affectionate: Lexie expresses love and affection towards her family and their dog, Peach.	Pride and Success-Driven: Lexie's desire for success can make her seem self-centred.
	Retreats into Self-Pity: When faced with her own scarring, she tends to hide away, which can intensify her feelings of isolation.
	Self-Absorbed: Lexie often overlooks how her worries affect her family, particularly her mother.

OTHER CHARACTERS

Mum (Jenny) is supportive and has arranged time off work to help Lexie during her competition in Sydney. She is affectionate and loves to share hugs, but she also stands firm against unfairness, reacting strongly when Lexie makes a hurtful comment about Moira.

Dad (Peter) is a caring and supportive figure who often tries to lighten the mood with humour. He is attentive and involved, maintaining a calm demeanour to reassure Lexie during difficult moments.

Harley, Lexie's little brother, is calm and enjoys keeping secrets. **Stella**, her little sister, is lively and

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unpredictable but also kind. She loves making potions in yogurt pots, believing they provide magical courage and bravery. Each day, Lexie walks to pick up the twins from primary school, finding it challenging to keep up with them, especially since they have to cross busy roads, which worries her.

Peach is their small whippet dog, timid and scared of the twins' energetic behaviour. During moments of distress, Peach represents a safe haven for Lexie, helping to ease her feelings of vulnerability and isolation.

Jess is Lexie's best friend, who spends a lot of time on her phone sharing funny photos. While Jess finds **Sarah** entertaining, her friendship with Jess creates some tension for Lexie.

Moira has red, scaly skin and feels very isolated due to bullying from her classmates.

Toby is a bully who pushes past Moira and calls her 'mangy' in Chapter 1. He also mocks Lexie by calling her 'Loo roll face' in Chapter 17 but later apologises in Chapter 22.

Sarah tries to pull Lexie and Jess apart. She is sneaky in her unkindness, undermining Lexie among her friends. Her behaviour is particularly hurtful as she is often pleasant enough to Lexie's face but talks about her behind her back, trying to monopolise Jess's friendship.

Miss Anderson (Miss A.) is the head of English and Lexie's teacher, described as smart and stylish but wearing too much makeup.

MESSAGE OF THE NOVEL

The novel conveys the message that while beauty is often seen as superficial, it significantly impacts our sense of belonging and acceptance in society. It highlights the challenges faced by individuals who don't conform to societal norms—such as those who are scarred, disabled, or simply different—leading to bullying and unkindness.

SYMBOLISM

- **Lexie's Scarring:** Represents the internal and external struggles of self-acceptance and societal pressure. Her attempt to hide her scars symbolises the desire to fit in and the fear of judgment.
- **Moira's Condition:** Serves as a symbol of vulnerability and the consequences of bullying, illustrating how society often marginalises those who are different.
- **Potions Created by Stella:** Symbolise hope, courage, and the idea that kindness and bravery can come from unexpected places, reinforcing the theme of inner beauty and strength.

INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCE

The reference to **Hephaestus (Hephaistos)**, the Greek god of fire and craftsmanship, illustrates the idea that even divine beings can face bullying and exclusion due to physical differences (Hephaestus was often depicted as physically imperfect). His ability to create beautiful and significant works despite his challenges serves as a powerful reminder that true worth and beauty lie in talent, creativity, and character, rather than mere appearance. This connection reinforces the novel's themes of resilience and the value of individuality.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

COMING OF AGE & BULLYING

1. When you are focused on something, do you become 'single-minded'? Is it harder to see the bigger picture when you're young or have other worries? Why might that be?
2. Is Lexie actually being excluded by her peers?
3. Is Lexie justified in her reading of Sarah's actions and insincerity?
4. How can Lexie overcome the feelings she's currently dealing with?
5. In what ways are her behaviours worsening the situation?
6. Could she talk to someone or get help to manage her feelings?
7. How does Lexie's reluctance to take family photos reflect her journey toward self-acceptance and maturity?
8. In what ways does Lexie's experience of exclusion from her friends signify a pivotal moment in her coming-of-age journey?
9. Think about Lexie's situation in the bathroom. Have you ever been in a situation where you overheard someone talking about you?
10. How does Lexie's decision to withdraw from the public speaking competition reflect her journey toward self-discovery and maturity?
11. In what ways does Lexie's anger and distress about her appearance signal a key moment in her coming-of-age experience?
12. How does the interaction between Moira and Lexie represent a pivotal moment in their coming-of-age journeys?
13. In what ways can understanding the concept of inner beauty help teens navigate the challenges of growing up?
14. In what ways does Lexie's reflection on her speech about sustainability indicate her maturation and shifting priorities?
15. How does Lexie's contemplation of unkindness in the world contribute to her understanding of empathy and social responsibility?
16. Why do you think Toby targets Lexie in maths class when she is alone? Does his behaviour stem from personal insecurities, societal beliefs, or a combination of both? How do these factors contribute to the dynamics of bullying in the classroom?
17. How does the situation with Toby illustrate the dynamics of bullying in a school setting?
18. Why do you think some comments, like Toby's, can be perceived as funny even when they are hurtful? How does this affect the victim?
19. How does Lexie's decision to change her presentation topic reflect her growth and evolving self-awareness?
20. In what ways do the pressures of adolescence affect Lexie's ability to express her feelings and opinions,

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especially in front of Miss A?

21. How does Lexie's decision to change her presentation topic reflect her personal growth and understanding of herself?
22. In what ways does the journey to Sydney symbolise Lexie's transition into a more confident version of herself?
23. Why do you believe Toby felt compelled to apologise?
24. Do you believe that Lexie has an adjusted sense of priorities now compared to the beginning of the story?

FRIENDSHIPS

1. Why was Moira being bullied?
2. Why do you think Sarah comes up and pushes between Lexie and Jess, only to say mean things about Moira?
3. One of the heartbreaks in life can be losing a friendship. Teen friendships have a huge impact on our lives, and a lost friendship can be deeply distressing. Sometimes we outgrow one another, and sometimes we don't know what has gone wrong. Is it possible for three people to be equally friendly? Why might this be? How can we avoid or reduce tensions in a group?
4. Was Lexie being over the top about this 'life-ruining' decision her mum made to take her to the doctor instead of letting her go to the beach with Jess? Why might it have felt so important to Lexie?
5. How did Jess going to the beach with Sarah instead make Lexie feel? Was Lexie justified in this feeling?
6. Can we have feelings even if they aren't justified or rational? What should we do if we have feelings like that?
7. How does Lexie's diagnosis impact her thoughts about her friendship with Jess and her tensions with Sarah?
8. What does Lexie fear she might lose in her friendships as a result of her medical situation?
9. How does seeing Jess at the beach make Lexie feel? Is it solely because Jess is there without her, or is it because of who Jess is with?
10. Why do you think Lexie refused to go downstairs to see her friend Jess?
11. What was Jess expecting when she came to Lexie's house?
12. How would you feel if you were Jess and Lexie did not come downstairs to see you?
13. Could Lexie have done something to smooth things over with Jess, or is the responsibility on Jess to repair their friendship?
14. How does the absence of communication from Jess and Sarah influence Lexie's feelings about her friendships?
15. What does Lexie's struggle to connect with Jess on their walk to school suggest about her state of mind?
16. In what ways do Lexie's interactions with Jess and Sarah reflect the complexities of teenage friendships?

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17. How does Lexie's decision to hide away from social interactions indicate her struggle with her friendships and connections?
 18. In what ways might Lexie's feelings of embarrassment impact her relationship with Jess and her other friends?
 19. How does the bond formed between Moira and Lexie highlight the role of friendship in supporting personal growth?
 20. What can we learn from their conversation about the importance of being authentic in friendships?
 21. What does Lexie's questioning of Jess's loyalty suggest about their friendship dynamic?
 22. How can Moira's presence in class provide an opportunity for Lexie to reconsider her relationships with both Moira and Jess?
 23. How does Lexie's relationship with Moira influence her confidence as she prepares for her presentation?
 24. What role does friendship play in Lexie's ability to cope with bullying and insecurity, particularly during moments like maths class?
 25. What does Moira's supportive message, 'Be like Hephaestus,' reveal about her character and her friendship with Lexie?
 26. How do Lexie's interactions with Jess and Moira highlight the complexities of friendships during difficult times?
 27. When Lexie is in the bathroom, she meets Callie, who also had surgery for her cleft palate. How did connecting with someone in a similar situation affect Lexie?

SELF-IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM

1. Have you heard of eczema before?
2. Lexie says her skin is perfect and she's so glad she doesn't look like Moira at the beginning of the book. That is, until her freckle turns out to be cancer and she has to undergo surgery, leaving a scar. What does this say about Lexie's self-image and perception of beauty?
3. Why does Lexie feel like it's a big deal to miss out on going to the beach with Jess?
4. Would you also dismiss a spot on your face?
5. In what ways does Lexie seek attention after her operation, and what does this reveal about her self-image?
6. How does Lexie's reaction to the diagnosis of a 'spitzoid nevus' reflect her feelings about her appearance and self-image?
7. What impact does the fear of potential scarring have on Lexie's confidence and how she views herself?
8. How does social media impact Lexie's feelings about her scar?
9. Did anyone's comments or reactions affect Lexie's self-esteem and self-confidence in her appearance?
10. Is Lexie behaving differently due to her changed appearance?
11. Is it human nature to care about how we appear to others? What does it mean to connect to your appearance? Is appearance a facet of our identity, and how does that link with our self-esteem and

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self-confidence?

12. How does Lexie's decision to wear a bandage impact her self-image and confidence?
13. What do Lexie's reactions to her appearance, especially in public settings, reveal about her self-esteem?
14. How does Lexie's perception of others' reactions (like pity) affect her self-worth?
15. How does the surgeon's advice to avoid bandages affect Lexie's self-image and feelings of vulnerability?
16. What do Lexie's thoughts about Josh's reaction and the whispers from her peers reveal about her self-esteem?
17. How does Lexie's disappointment over the cancelled BBQ and the lasagne dinner highlight her feelings about her situation?
18. In what ways does the idea that 'beauty is only skin deep' challenge societal standards of beauty?
19. How can discussions about self-acceptance and inner beauty affect one's self-esteem? Consider both the positive and negative ways.
20. How does Lexie's use of the toilet paper bandage symbolise her feelings about her appearance and self-worth?
21. What does Lexie's inner conflict about her scar reveal about her current self-image?
22. How does Toby's comment about Lexie's appearance affect her self-esteem? Why do you think it impacts her so strongly?
23. In what ways does Lexie's perception of herself change throughout the chapter, especially in relation to her new topic and her interactions with others?
24. What does Lexie's choice of topic—appearance and difference—say about her own struggles with self-image?
25. How does the presence of the bandage symbolise Lexie's internal conflict regarding her appearance?
26. In what ways can being around someone who understands you help your self-esteem and self-confidence? Why do you think that is?
27. What did Lexie achieve once she had faith in herself and let herself be who she is without shame or fear?
28. How has Lexie's self-perception changed throughout the course of the novel?
29. Has Lexie's idea about beauty changed?

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

1. Does Lexie owe anyone an apology for her behaviour throughout the book?
2. Has the writer 'hit the nail on the head' with how parents and teens act around one another? Have you noticed different ways of thinking between teenagers and parents?
3. Why are there such differences?
4. How does Lexie's mother respond to her need for attention, and what does this say about their relationship?
5. What role does empathy play in the way Lexie's mother cares for her after the operation?

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6. How do Lexie's parents react to her diagnosis, and what does this reveal about their concerns for her?
 7. In what ways do the parents' reassurances help Lexie cope with her fears, despite their own anxiety?
 8. Are family's words more impactful or less impactful than those of friends or strangers? Why do you feel that way?
 9. How does Lexie's relationship with her mother evolve through their interactions surrounding the cake and the dinner with family?
 10. What role do the twins play in Lexie's feelings of embarrassment, and how does this affect her family dynamics?
 11. How do Lexie's parents' reactions to her distress show their support and understanding of her struggles?
 12. What significance does the cancellation of the dinner with the aunts have on Lexie's emotional state and her perception of family support?
 13. How does Stella's support for Maisy reflect the importance of kindness within family dynamics?
 14. What role does Lexie's mother play in helping Lexie feel more comfortable with her identity, especially regarding the planned BBQ?
 15. How does Lexie's mother's anxiety while driving reflect the dynamics of their relationship, particularly in stressful situations?
 16. In what ways does support from her family contribute to Lexie's confidence as she prepares for her presentation?

COURAGE, RESILIENCE, OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

1. How does Lexie's experience with her first medical issue challenge her perception of discomfort?
2. What can Lexie learn about resilience through this minor operation and her reaction to it?
3. How does Lexie demonstrate or fail to demonstrate resilience in the face of a shocking diagnosis?
4. In what ways could Lexie have found the courage to cope with her fears about the future and her health in the earlier chapters, rather than shutting people out?
5. Have you or a close friend or family member had an overnight hospital stay? Think about that time and write down what you remember from the experience. Describe your feelings, the sights, the sounds, and the myriad of people and jobs going on around you.
6. What about hospitals makes them different from homes?
7. Are there elevated feelings in hospitals? Why might that be?
8. How does Lexie's choice to hide in the bathroom during art class show her emotional state when suffering unkindness and mocking? Could she learn from this?
9. What can Lexie learn from Moira's self-affirmation, and how might it inspire her to find courage in her own challenges?
10. Moira stands up for Lexie. Is it hard to stand up to a bully? In your opinion, is it harder to stand up to someone you like or someone you dislike?
11. How does Lexie's reaction to her parents' attempts to console her demonstrate her struggle with

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resilience in the face of adversity?

12. What does Lexie's contemplation of her sister's "magic bravery potion" suggest about her desire to find courage?
13. What does Moira's friendship with Lexie reveal about the importance of courage in overcoming personal challenges?
14. How can conversations about courage help individuals feel more empowered in their own lives?
15. How does the story of Hephaestus inspire Lexie and Moira in their own struggles?
16. In what ways does Lexie's decision to remove her bandage reflect her growing courage to face her insecurities?
17. How does Lexie's reaction to Toby's comment reflect her struggle to overcome challenges related to her self-image?
18. What strategies could Lexie employ to build resilience in the face of teasing and social pressure?
19. What does the phrase "Be like Hephaestus" mean in the context of overcoming challenges and embracing one's differences?
20. How can Lexie embody courage as she faces the audience with her new topic, especially after her experiences with bullying and self-doubt?

AMBITION

1. How does Lexie's concern about her upcoming presentation reflect her ambition despite her health challenges?
2. What role does Lexie's desire to maintain her normal activities, like going to the beach, play in her sense of ambition and normalcy?
3. How does Lexie's decision to throw away her speech reflect her internal conflict regarding her ambitions and self-doubt?
4. What are the implications of Lexie's reluctance to participate in the public speaking competition for her future aspirations? How does this reflect a difference in her mindset at the start of the novel compared to her inclination to withdraw later?
5. How does Lexie's choice to save her email withdrawing from the competition reflect her internal conflict regarding her ambitions and her current fears?
6. What implications does her withdrawal from the public speaking competition have for her future aspirations and self-confidence?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 1: EXPLORING EMPATHY

Empathy Mapping:

1. Provide each student with a large piece of paper divided into four sections: **Feelings, Thoughts, Actions, and Consequences.**
2. Ask students to create an empathy map for Moira, considering:
 - **Feelings:** How might Moira feel about being bullied?
 - **Thoughts:** What thoughts might run through her mind during these experiences?
 - **Actions:** How might her experiences influence her actions or responses?
 - **Consequences:** What are the potential consequences of bullying for both the victim and the bystanders?
3. After completing the maps, have students share their insights in pairs.

Reflection:

- Ask students to write a brief paragraph reflecting on a time they witnessed or experienced bullying. How did it make them feel? What actions, if any, did they take? What could they do differently now?
- Conclude with a class discussion about the importance of empathy and supporting those who are bullied.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Discussion Prompt Questions:

1. Do your parents or elders use different names for you at home? Consider formal versus informal names, or names that relate to specific roles or situations.
2. When you hear your full name, do you feel it often means you're about to be reprimanded?
3. Do your friends have nicknames for you? Discuss the significance of nicknames and how they can linger throughout our lives.

Textual Reference:

- Highlight how Lexie's mother adopts a formal tone when addressing her, particularly when correcting her behaviour:
 - **Quote:** "Moira Carpenter does not have mange. She has severe eczema that is difficult to manage and, I'd imagine, quite painful to live with. I don't want you talking about her – or anyone else – like that ever again, do you hear me?"

Character Reflection:

- After the confrontation, Lexie retreats to her room, decorates her space with her achievements, and changes into summer clothes, indicating her desire to distance herself from the situation.

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- Discuss Lexie's relief at not resembling Moira, contrasting her own 'perfect' skin with the emergence of a freckle, which represents both an imperfection and a potential threat.

TENSIONS IN FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

Discussion Prompt Questions:

1. Reflect on the emotional impact of losing a friendship during adolescence. How can this be particularly distressing?
2. Discuss the idea that sometimes friendships evolve or fade; why might this happen?
3. Can three people be equally friendly within a group dynamic? What challenges might arise?
4. Explore strategies to avoid or reduce tensions within friendship groups.

Key Takeaway:

- Emphasise that teen friendships are vital to personal development and can significantly affect one's emotional well-being. Understanding and navigating these dynamics is crucial for fostering healthy relationships.

IDENTITY AND CONNECTION MISHMASH

Collage Creation:

- Each student will create a collage that represents their own identity and the dynamics of their friendships. Encourage them to consider the following:
 - **Images:** Find or cut out images that symbolise how they see themselves, their friendships, and their unique qualities.
 - **Words:** Include words or phrases that resonate with their identity or experiences, such as their name, nicknames, or adjectives that describe them and their friends.
 - **Quotes:** Integrate some of the quotes from Chapter 2, such as Lexie's thoughts or her mother's comments about Moira, to reflect on how language influences perception.

CHAPTER 3: THINGS PARENTS DO! EEEW! (BUT WE LOVE THEM ANYWAY)

Activity: List Creation

1. **Lexie's List:** Lexie writes her list of the things that have gone wrong today and her biggest concern for tomorrow.
2. **Dad's List:** Lexie's dad writes his list of things he's concerned about at home.
3. **Peach's List:** Peach the dog writes a list of all the things he's worried about and why he's hiding under the table.

Comparison Activity:

- Compare your list with others who chose the same character.

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CHAPTER 4: MEAN THINKING

Quote: "Lexie glared at Mum as they walked across the car park. On Monday, when the results came back normal, Mum had better apologise for ruining the school holidays."

Activity:

1. **Lexie's Concerns:** List the things that Lexie thinks are very important or worrying at this point.
2. **Mum's Concerns:** List the things that her mum is thinking about or worried about.

CHAPTER 5: HOW TO BUILD TENSION IN A STORY

Overview: Notice how the tension builds as we, the readers, know something is wrong, but Lexie has no concept of what is coming.

The Steps:

1. Dr Gibson rang earlier (there has been no discussion about what he said).
2. Dad has stayed off work.
3. The twins have been sent to stay with 'Aunt Layla and Jo'
4. At first, Lexie is flattered. She feels important.
5. "We need to talk to you about something important, without being interrupted!"
6. Lexie is excited and a little flattered at the idea of a grown-up conversation with her parents.

Discussion Questions:

- How does building tension make a story more interesting?
- At what point was the tension at its climax?

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION - BRAINSTORM

1. Use a large sheet of paper and pens as a group.
2. Brainstorm and write words related to the following:
 - Smells
 - Sights
 - Sounds
 - Colours
 - New words
 - Feelings about the doctors, clinic, vaccinations, operations.

Reflection Questions:

- How do these experiences build an idea of Lexie as a person?
- How do these words build our understanding of the situation?
- In what way do these impact the rising tension of the scenes?

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CHAPTER 5: ASSUMPTIONS VS REALITY

Assumption 1:

Lexie thinks her mum and dad may be going to tell her that they are going on a holiday together. Her parents didn't want the twins to get too excited, so they'll keep it to just the three of them.

The Reality:

"It's not a regular type of freckle, Lexie."

"But you're going to be fine," Dad said firmly.

Assumption 2:

They've taken it out now, so I can go on as normal.

The Reality:

Her parents tell her that she will need surgery.

Assumption 3:

Excitement about an 'operation' means an overnight stay in hospital. Friends could visit me! "Jess would have felt bad for going to the beach without her. She would have visited – maybe even brought Lexie a present."

The Reality:

Lexie will have day surgery, indicating that although it's potentially a serious illness, the treatment is still 'minor'.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do Lexie's assumptions differ from reality? Are the realities worse? Does the reality disappoint Lexie or make her happy?
2. Why do you think Lexie is behaving in this way? Would you also act like this if you were in her shoes?
3. Does Lexie deserve some grace for her behaviour, or could she handle things differently? What do you think would be the best way to approach this situation?

CHAPTER 6: SUN SMART DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After looking at the Sun Smart Handout complete the discussion questions below.

1. Personal Experience
 - Have you been taught about the importance of using sunscreen? At what age did you first learn about it?

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2. Importance of Sunscreen

- Why is it essential to wear sunscreen? Share your thoughts on its significance.

3. Barriers to Use

- What reasons do people give for not wearing sunscreen? How do you feel about those reasons?

4. Application Techniques

- What is the best method for applying sunscreen? How often should it be reapplied to ensure effective protection?

5. Tanning Trends

- Review the quotes and information provided regarding tanning.
- Break into small groups to discuss the complex history of tanning and how perceptions have shifted over time.
- Explore what influences your generation's ideals about tanning. Is there societal pressure to tan? If so, where does it originate?
- Consider the role of social media, celebrities, and advertising in shaping contemporary views on tanning.
- Reflect on your generation's relationship with tanning: Do you align with current beauty ideals surrounding it?

CHAPTER 7: FEELING YOUR FEELINGS

Reflection on Feelings:

Consider the following questions and fears to determine what feelings might be impacting Lexie's thoughts as she prepares for surgery:

- What if the anaesthetic didn't work?
- What if she woke up in the middle of the surgery?
- What if she felt pain and couldn't tell them?
- What if she died?
- Chewing her fingernails is a sign of...
- Her jewellery and everything else she has on, besides underwear, has to be put in a tray.
- Hospital gowns 'gape at the back' and that's mortifying.
- Her mum turns away for her to get changed.
- A nurse with the kindest smile inserts a drip and says it will be 'a tiny sting.'
- They're just prepping the theatre.
- Lexie's bed is wheeled through double doors and into an even colder operating theatre.
- "I want you to start counting backwards from ten," as they put her to sleep.

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-
- In the recovery room, a wave of nausea rose.

Group Discussion - Hospital Stay

As a group, discuss the following scenario:

You have a close friend who needs to pack a bag before they go to hospital for a minor operation. They will be staying overnight, possibly for more than one day.

What do they need to pack?

Write a list together.

CHAPTER 7: TECHNOLOGY

Create a Poster:

Using any graphic design software package, create a poster to inform an 8-year-old child about what to expect when going into hospital for a small operation and an overnight stay.

Consider the following stages of the hospital stay:

- Arriving
- Being in hospital
- The morning of the operation
- Going to theatre
- Coming round from anaesthetic
- Looking after a small operation wound with stitches

CHAPTERS 10 & 11: DEBATE

Class Debate:

Divide the class into two groups.

- **Group 1:** Defend the point of view that Lexie's actions are self-pitying.
- **Group 2:** Argue that her actions are understandable.

Statements

Activity: True or False

Consider the following statements and label them as 'true' or 'false' (or Not Applicable):

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-
- Lexie is rejecting friends because of her anxiety and unhappiness.
 - Lexie is being difficult at home, sulking, unhappy, angry, withdrawing.
 - Lexie is unpleasant to be around.
 - Lexie is being judgemental.
 - Lexie is hurt by Jess' actions.
 - Lexie is reacting reasonably to Jess' behaviour.
 - The teens at Lexie's school are bullying Lexie.
 - Lexie's scar is not a big deal.
 - Lexie is overreacting.
 - Lexie is underreacting.

Reflection:

If you could not label something as either true or false, explain why. What other viewpoints or nuances are present that the statement is dismissing?

CHAPTER 12: CONTEMPLATION

Activity: Email Reflection

Consider Lexie writing an email withdrawing from the public speaking competition, but only saving it as a draft.

1. **Motivation:** Why do you think Lexie felt compelled to write the email?
2. **Decision:** What prompted Lexie to only save it as a draft and not send it?
3. **Evaluation:** Do you think Lexie made the right choice? Would you have done the same thing? Why or why not?

What Might Happen If:

- Lexie sent the email to Miss Anderson?
- Lexie told her parents she didn't want to go to Sydney to present for her school in the State Public Speaking competition?

Reflection: Would people understand Lexie's feelings and decisions, or would they criticise her?

CHAPTER 13: RESEARCH SELF-PERCEPTION

Activity: Understanding Self-Perception

1. **Research:** Look up the three major components of self-perception.
2. **Description:** Describe each component's definition in your own words.

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-
3. **Personal Reflection:** Which component is the most important to you in your daily life now?

CHAPTER 14: SKIN DEEP

Biology/Research Activity

1. **Diagram Creation:** Research and prepare a diagram showing the layers of the human skin. You may use digital or hand-drawing/labelling methods.
2. **Guidelines Research:** Gather simple, clear guidelines on one aspect of caring for your skin during the teen years (e.g. cleaning the skin, protecting yourself from the sun, dealing with acne or blackheads, caring for the skin, exercise, moisture, and diet).
 - **Resources:** [Nemours Tips for Taking Care of Your Skin \(Teens\)](#)
3. **Presentation Preparation:**
 - Capture a digital image of the diagram you have created.
 - Write simple, clear notes on skin care, using short sentences suitable for a young audience.
 - Insert your diagram and notes into an informative four-slide presentation for teenagers (use any package, such as PowerPoint or similar) on taking care of your skin.

CHAPTERS 15 & 16: RESEARCH: HEPHAESTUS

1. **Who is Hephaestus?**
 - Explore the identity and significance of Hephaestus in mythology.
2. **Multiple Versions:**
 - Investigate whether there is only one version of his story or multiple interpretations.
3. **Purpose of His Story:**
 - Discuss the purpose of Hephaestus' story in mythology. What did he represent?
4. **Contemporary Lessons:**
 - Reflect on what we can learn from his story today. Depending on the version, what is the main takeaway?
5. **Attitudes Toward Disabilities:**
 - Examine what antiquity says about 'lameness' and other 'defects.' How have attitudes towards disabilities and physical differences changed over time?

CHAPTERS 15 & 16: UNCOMFORTABLE FEELINGS

Discussion

1. **Turning Point for Lexie:**
 - Layla says to Lexie: "Do you think that if we helped people to understand the things that made them

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uncomfortable, they might not be so mean?"

- Does this represent a turning point for Lexie? What does she realise after hearing Layla say this?

2. Impact of Awkwardness:

- How does feeling awkward or uncomfortable lead people to say things that are unkind or even cruel?

3. Personal Experiences:

- Have you ever been in a situation where you met someone new who represented something you had never encountered before? How did you handle the social awkwardness? If you haven't experienced this, how would you approach it?

4. Broader Situations:

- In what other situations, besides a physical scar or disability, might someone feel awkward or uncomfortable due to a lack of understanding or uncertainty about how to respond?

CHAPTER 18: EXPLORING IDENTITY AND RESILIENCE

Writing and Reflection:

Hephaestus had a difficult start in life but found his own place in the world of the gods.

Reflection Questions:

1. What makes you unique, special, different, or good?
2. What values do you aspire to embody and share with others?
3. What fears or doubts might hold you back from being your best self? Consider the influence of wanting to fit in with others whose values may not align with your own.

Word Cloud Activity:

- Create two word clouds:
 1. Positive Attributes: Compile a list of words that reflect your strengths and positive qualities.
 2. Fears and Doubts: Gather a list of words that represent your fears, doubts, and feelings of weakness.

Art Project: Shield of Strength

In groups of 3 to 5, design a shield using materials like bark, paper, card, fabric, or even a projected image on a wall.

Instructions:

1. Inside the shield, write your positive attributes and values using strong colours and bold text.

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-
2. On the outside of the shield, list your fears, doubts, and weaknesses using lighter text that appears fragile or easily broken.

This visual representation will symbolise your inner strength and the external challenges you face.

CHAPTERS 19, 20 & 21: EXPLORING SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Objective:

To explore how difficult experiences can shape our identities while also evoking mixed feelings.

Prompt: In what ways can a person embrace and accept themselves even when they have mixed emotions about a difficult experience that has altered who they are?

Individual Reflection:

- **Option 1:** Write a short paragraph responding to the above prompt. Consider a specific event in your life that fits this theme.
- **Option 2:** Write down a list of difficult experiences that you or someone you know has faced (e.g., becoming disabled, experiencing trauma, or living with a scar). For each experience, note the positive aspects it has brought to your identity (e.g., resilience, empathy, strength) and the negative feelings associated with the event (e.g., loss, fear, sadness).

Discuss and Share:

In groups of 3-4, students will share their reflections, discussing how they navigate feelings of self-acceptance alongside complex emotions. Have a few groups share key insights from their discussions with the whole class.

If Option 2 is chosen, consider the following:

1. How do you feel about the person you are now compared to before the experience? (Or how does the person you wrote about feel to the best of your knowledge?)
2. Can you celebrate the strengths you've gained while acknowledging the pain of the past?
3. How can we support each other in embracing our complex identities?

POSSIBLE AREAS FOR DISCUSSION - FURTHER DEVELOPMENT:

'Overheard in the Bathroom': The novel includes episodes where girls reveal their thoughts, say cruel and unkind things about others, or confront one another in school or public toilets.

- Is this true to life?
- Why are public/social area toilets the setting for gossip, revelations, and moments of conflict?
- A bathroom/toilet context is a common feature or trope in horror movies, often highlighting our vulnerability and anxieties around privacy.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Science

AC9S10H03 - analyse the key factors that contribute to science knowledge and practices being adopted more broadly by society

AC9S10H04 - examine how the values and needs of society influence the focus of scientific research

CURRICULUM 8.4

SENIOR SECONDARY

English

Skin 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, science and language. Character arcs and motivations can also be observed.

BEING SUN SMART

Note for Teachers: This topic and research in this area may cause anxiety among students. They may encounter images of early melanoma and become concerned about their own skin or that of their parents, including simple moles or birthmarks. However, it is crucial to address this important health topic, especially for Australian students, given the current beauty industry and the findings that young men are less likely to use sunscreen.

FACTORS INFLUENCING SKIN TANNING TRENDS AND SKIN CANCER RATES

Heliotherapy and the Health Narrative

In the early 20th century, sunlight was used in medical treatments for conditions like tuberculosis, leading to a cultural association between sun exposure and good health. This concept, known as heliotherapy, reinforced the idea that a tan not only signified beauty but also robust health.



Cultural Shift in Attitudes Toward Sun Exposure

Social attitudes about sun protection transitioned dramatically during the early 20th century. While earlier decades emphasised skin health and avoidance of sun exposure (especially sunburn and sun damage), by the late 1920s, publications began promoting the aesthetic appeal of tanned skin. A 1929 Harper's Bazaar article provocatively posed the question, "Shall We Gild the Lily?" indicating a growing fascination with the "art" of tanning. This cultural shift paved the way for tanning to become a mainstream beauty ideal.

Coco Chanel's Impact on Tanning Trends

The trend for tanned skin gained significant momentum after fashion icon Coco Chanel was photographed with a sun-kissed glow following a 1923 trip to Cannes. This image contributed to the perception that tanned skin was a marker of wealth and leisure, linking it with affluence and an active lifestyle that included sun-filled vacations and sporty attire.

Historical Class Associations with Skin Color

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, labourers who worked outdoors developed tanned skin, while the upper class, who often stayed indoors, maintained a paler complexion. As societal roles shifted and wealthier individuals began to vacation in sunny locales, tanned skin transformed into a status symbol, embedding this ideal deeply into Western consciousness.

In contrast, many cultures in Asia and Africa still favour lighter skin, often due to colonial influences and socio-economic factors. Light skin is associated with wealth and status, as historically, labourers worked outdoors and developed tans while the affluent remained indoors. This preference has given rise to a modern skin-lightening industry, which can be harmful due to the use of toxic ingredients like mercury.

The Tragic Case of Zoe Panayi

The importance of taking skin concerns seriously is underscored by the story of Zoe Panayi, a 26-year-old who died from melanoma skin cancer after two doctors dismissed her worries about a mole, suggesting cosmetic removal instead. This highlights the need for greater awareness among healthcare providers regarding the potential seriousness of skin changes, particularly in young individuals, as many may be incorrectly perceived as seeking treatment for vanity.

The dismissal of a mole is reflected in the narrative of *Skin*, where it is Lexie's mother who insists she get her mole checked out, and Lexie herself underestimates the seriousness of it, especially due to her age.

Alarming Skin Cancer Rates in Australia

Australia faces one of the highest skin cancer rates globally, with about 2 out of 3 Australians likely to be diagnosed with some form of skin cancer in their lifetime. Non-melanoma skin cancer, particularly basal cell carcinoma (BCC), is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in Australia, with over 1 million treatments administered each year. While exposure to sunlight is necessary for vitamin D synthesis, which is essential for bone health and overall well-being, doctors now recommend obtaining this nutrient through diet and supplements rather than excessive sun exposure.

Geographical Influence on UV Exposure

The Southern Hemisphere receives about 15% more UV radiation than the Northern Hemisphere due to a combination of factors, including clearer atmospheric conditions and population demographics with a higher percentage of fair-skinned individuals. This unique geographic positioning increases the prevalence of skin cancer in countries like Australia and New Zealand.

Seasonal Variations in UV Intensity

The Earth's elliptical orbit means that Australia is approximately 1.7% closer to the sun during its summer months. This proximity, combined with the southern hemisphere's clearer skies, results in an additional 7% increase in UV intensity, further elevating the risk of skin damage during these months.



While the depletion of the ozone layer has been linked to increased UV exposure, studies suggest it has not significantly influenced skin cancer rates in Australia. The Montreal Protocol has been effective in addressing ozone depletion, but the overall impact on skin health remains a complex issue that requires ongoing public education and awareness.

Universal Vulnerability to Sun Damage

Many Australians possess fair skin types that are ill-suited for the high UV levels typical of their environment. This mismatch leaves skin particularly vulnerable to DNA damage from sun exposure, necessitating heightened awareness and protective measures against skin cancer.

Contrary to common misconceptions, individuals of all skin tones can suffer from sun damage and skin cancer. The idea that only fair-skinned individuals are at risk is misleading; everyone can develop skin cancer, and the cumulative effects of UV exposure can result in long-term skin changes, making protection vital for all.

SUN SAFETY GRAPHICS

Protect yourself in **five ways** from skin cancer



SLIP



SLOP



SLAP



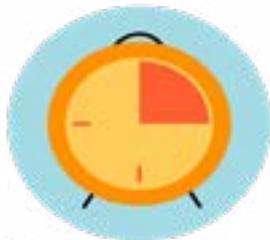
SEEK



SLIDE

Cancer Council Australia.

SUN SAFETY



**Stay out of the sun
from 10am-4pm**



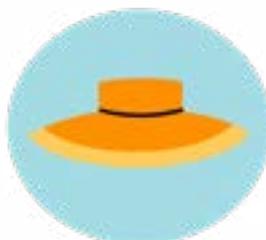
**Drink 2 to 3 litres
of water a day**



**Sunglasses with
100% UV Protection**



Seek shade



**Wear a wide
brimmed hat
and protective
clothing**



**Sunscreen that is:
broad-spectrum,
water-resistant
and SPF50 or above**

Wombat Rhiza 2024 (using information from Cancer Council Australia).

- Apply a generous amount of sunscreen 20 minutes before you go outside and again every two hours.
- Check your sunscreen's expiry date.
- Sunscreen should be part of your daily routine when the UV Index is forecast to be 3 or above.
- UV radiation is at its highest between 10 am - 4 pm.
- When UV levels are 3 or above, most Australians get enough vitamin D with just a few minutes of sun exposure while completing day-to-day tasks such as walking to the local shops.
- Tops and pants of at least 3/4 in length or more is best as protective clothing.
- The free SunSmart app tells you the sun protection times for your location and provides current UV levels.

REFERENCES

- Martin, J. M. et al. (2009). Changes in skin tanning attitudes: Fashion articles and advertisements in the early 20th century. *American Journal of Public Health*, 99(12), 2140–2146.
- Refinery29. (2021). Analysis of Coco Chanel’s influence on tanning trends.
- Cancer Council Australia. (2022). Statistics on skin cancer rates in Australia.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- SunSmart Video: Suitable for children of all ages “When you cover things, they last longer. Same goes for you.” SunSmart Victoria

[Watch Here](#)

- ABC Sciency: How does sunscreen work

[Watch Here](#)

- Why do we have to wear sunscreen? - Kevin P. Boyd

[Watch Here](#)

- What is sunburn: The science behind radiation damage

[Watch Here](#)

UNDERSTANDING DISCOMFORT AND STIGMA

In this activity, we will explore the factors that contribute to discomfort and stigma around visible differences, analyse behaviours in social interactions, and develop strategies for fostering empathy and understanding.

ELEMENTS OF DISCOMFORT OR STIGMA

- **Anxiety in Unstructured Social Situations:** Discuss how awkwardness can arise in unfamiliar interactions.
- **Social and Cultural Conditioning:** Explore norms that favour familiarity and similarity.
- **Fear of Mortality or Vulnerability:** Consider how physical changes can trigger existential fears.
- **Hierarchical Attitudes:** Analyse which differences are viewed as more acceptable and why.
- **Outdated Moral Beliefs:** Reflect on beliefs that wrongly associate visible differences with personal flaws.
- **Anxiety About Interaction:** Discuss fears of being perceived as rude or intrusive.
- **Visibility, Severity, and Permanence:** Examine how acceptance of differences varies based on their nature.

RESPONSES TO DISCOMFORT

- **Avoidance:** Looking away or avoiding eye contact.
- **Nervous Laughter or Fidgeting:** Coping mechanisms that may exacerbate awkwardness.
- **Overcompensation:** Attempts to be overly kind or normal.
- **Silence:** The tension that arises from struggling to communicate.
- **Curiosity and Questions:** Navigating the fine line between interest and insensitivity.
- **Empathy and Connection:** Seeking deeper understanding and building connections.
- **Self-Reflection:** Using the encounter to examine personal biases.

GROUP READING AND DISCUSSION

- Which factors do you find most relevant to your own experiences or observations?
- Can you think of examples from your life or media where these factors are present?
- How do you feel about the different responses people have in uncomfortable situations? Are they understandable?

CLASS DISCUSSION

Consider the following prompts during your discussion:

- How do you feel about the interactions portrayed in the text *Skin*?
- Are the behaviours of other teens understandable? Could they have handled things differently?
- How can you recognise if someone is feeling awkward in social situations? What strategies can you use to address those moments?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Write a brief reflection on the following prompts:

- Describe a situation where you felt uncomfortable or witnessed discomfort around visible differences. What did you observe?
- How could you apply what you learned today to create a more inclusive environment in your school or community?

If you feel comfortable, you can share your reflections with the class.

Remember: Understanding and empathy are key to navigating social interactions! If in doubt, ask yourself how you would like to be treated.