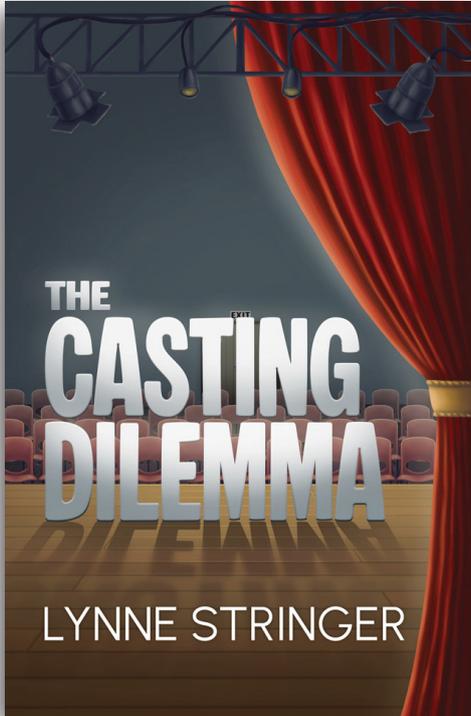


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# Teachers' Notes

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## THE CASTING DILEMMA

Lynne Stringer

ISBN: 9781761113246

**Reading level:** reading age of 12+, interest age 14+

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### BOOK SUMMARY

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Kate wants to be an actor but when she looks in the mirror, she doesn't like what she sees.

How she longs to be like Ashleigh Monahan, a girl in her grade, who has the perfect looks for the lead role in the musical, *Last Chance for Millie*. Not only that, Ashleigh has all the talent required to play the part.

Kate is sure that the teachers don't believe in her. And while her parents and friends support her, is it enough to make her believe in herself? Or will she decide not to even try?

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## THEMES

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Self-esteem & Body image • Confidence & Courage • Overcoming Obstacles • Family & Friendship

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**Lynne Stringer is available for author talks and workshops.  
Contact Rhiza Edge for more information.**

*The Casting Dilemma 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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Lynne Stringer has been passionate about writing all her life, beginning with short stories in her primary school days. She began writing professionally as a journalist and was the editor of a small newspaper (later magazine) for seven years, before turning her hand to screenplay writing and novels.

Lynne is the author of *The Verindon Trilogy*, a young adult science fiction romance series released through Wombat Books, and *Once Confronted*, a new adult contemporary drama. Lynne also wrote *The Verindon Alliance*, a prequel to her trilogy, in 2020. *The Verindon Conspiracy*, released in 2022, is a sequel to her trilogy.

Her most recent speculative fiction release is *Keeper of the Archives*, a dystopian story set in Earth's future. She has a novella in the Rhiza Shorts series, *The Casting Dilemma*, to be released in 2026.

### AUTHOR NOTES

When I was three years old, I decided I wanted to be an actor. This was something that stayed with me throughout my childhood and teenage years, and beyond. I appeared in only one musical at school (*Annie Get Your Gun*), where I was part of the chorus, but I regularly performed in musicals, plays and skits in the church I attended at the time. In my early twenties, I was involved in the young adult drama group at church, and we performed often. I loved the meaty parts that gave me something different to do, something that pushed me.

However, this didn't translate to me having the confidence to try and make acting my career. Like Kate, my assessment of my looks made me sure that trying to become a 'real' actor would be an uphill battle. I also knew there would be a lot of compromise if I took this road. So I decided that I liked writing stories more than appearing in them. Yes, I'm a control freak!

If you love to perform but struggle with your looks or think that it's all too hard, I hope Kate's story will inspire you to find a way forward. If it's what you really want to do, you can find a way to make it work, even if it means your dream morphs a little. I love acting because it tells stories, and I'm still doing that now in my writing. My creative dream lives on.

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## OVERVIEW

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### MAIN CHARACTER

**Kate** dreams of becoming an actor and hopes to win the lead role in the school musical, *Last Chance for Millie*, written by fellow student Jane Hammond. Kate loves the musical and has read the script dozens of times, memorising every line and song. Her passion for performing partly comes from her grandfather, who was an opera singer. Despite her talent, however, Kate struggles with strong self-doubt.

Kate believes her appearance will prevent her from succeeding in the performing arts. She has inherited her father's large nose and worries that it makes her unattractive. When she compares herself to Ashleigh Monahan, confident, talented and admired by many students, Kate becomes convinced she would need cosmetic surgery to succeed as an actor.

Although Kate performs brilliantly at auditions, Ashleigh is cast as Millie. Kate overhears a conversation suggesting that Ashleigh suits the role visually, reinforcing her fear that appearance matters more than talent. Instead, Kate is offered the smaller role of Sophia, which she accepts despite her disappointment.

Throughout rehearsals, Kate faces dismissive looks from Ashleigh. When Ashleigh becomes ill shortly before the performance, Kate is asked to take over the role of Millie. The experience is uncomfortable, with the other lead actors treating her coldly. Ashleigh's return makes Kate quit. When she is offered the chance to take over for Jane only two days before she gives it a go with the support of her friends Tash and Michael, her father, and eventually Ms Whitney. This all forces Kate to rethink the harsh way she judges herself.

Kate's Strengths	Kate's Weaknesses
Talented performer: A strong singer and dedicated actor who knows the musical inside out.	Negative self-image: Focuses heavily on perceived physical flaws.
Determined: Refuses to give up her dream of performing.	Self-doubt: Struggles to believe in her own ability.
Hard-working: Memorises the script and music with dedication.	Comparative: Constantly measures herself against Ashleigh.
Resilient: Continues participating despite disappointment and criticism.	Sensitive to judgement: Teasing and rejection deeply affect her confidence.

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## OTHER CHARACTERS

**Ashleigh Monahan:** Ashleigh is Kate's main rival for the role of Millie. She is confident, talented and admired by many students. Kate describes Ashleigh as having a perfect nose, golden curls and the appearance of someone who seems made for the lead role. Ashleigh's confidence and strong singing ability make her a natural performer, but her scornful glances and dismissive attitude toward Kate increase Kate's insecurities. Ashleigh represents the kind of comparison that can undermine self-esteem.

**Tash:** Tash is one of Kate's closest friends and a constant source of encouragement. She works on stage design for the musical and plays an important role behind the scenes. Tash's father is a boxer, and she has learned how to box as well. When Jake Marlin teases Kate, Tash is quick to defend her. Tash also has a gift for saying exactly what Kate needs to hear when her confidence falters. Her words of encouragement help Kate find the courage to continue pursuing her dream.

**Michael:** Michael is another close friend who supports Kate throughout the musical. He contributes to the production by sketching costume designs for the characters. Michael is thoughtful and creative, researching historical fashions so the costumes reflect the musical's 1919 setting. Although he is realistic about the casting decisions, Michael strongly believes in Kate's talent. His friendship reminds Kate that she is valued for more than how she looks.

**Jake Marlin:** Jake is a student who teases Kate about her appearance. His comments reinforce Kate's insecurities and highlight how bullying can damage a person's confidence. Jake represents the kind of negative voices that young people often encounter when they are already struggling with self-esteem.

**Trent Jacobs:** Trent plays Major Clarkson, the soldier whom Millie falls in love with in the musical. Kate initially feels nervous acting opposite him because he is widely considered one of the most attractive boys in the school. When Kate later takes over the role of Millie, Trent's stiff and reluctant behaviour in their romantic scenes increases her insecurity, making her feel even more self-conscious about her appearance and her place in the production.

**Jane Hammond:** Jane is the student who wrote *Last Chance for Millie*. She originally wrote the role of Millie with her friend Ashleigh in mind, and strongly associates the character with her. When Kate later takes over the role after Ashleigh becomes ill, Jane's behaviour becomes noticeably cold and unsettling, adding tension during rehearsals and performances.

**Mr Graham:** Mr Graham is one of the music teachers responsible for the musical. He recognises Kate's strong singing ability and preparation during auditions. Although he ultimately agrees with the casting decision to give Ashleigh the lead role, he ensures Kate receives an important part and encourages her to continue developing her talent.

**Ms Whitney:** Ms Whitney is the other teacher directing the musical and plays the piano during rehearsals. At first, Kate believes Ms Whitney judged her harshly because of her appearance. Later, Ms Whitney reveals that she once struggled with similar insecurities when she was young. She shares a photo album from her own performing career, showing the many different roles she played and explaining how costumes and characters allowed her to express herself creatively. Through these conversations, Ms Whitney helps Kate understand that actors do not need to look perfect to succeed.

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## THE SCHOOL MUSICAL

The school production at the centre of the story is *Last Chance for Millie*, written by student Jane Hammond.

The musical is set in Brisbane in 1919. It follows Millie, an eighteen-year-old living in her mother's boarding house with her siblings after their father was killed in World War I. The family struggles to survive financially. When Millie falls in love with Major Clarkson, a wealthy soldier, their relationship faces opposition from his parents because of Millie's poverty.

The musical combines emotional storytelling with songs that express the characters' hopes, struggles and relationships. For Kate, performing in the production represents an opportunity to prove her talent and pursue her dream of becoming an actor.

## APPEARANCE, MEDIA AND SELF-IMAGE

A major theme of *The Casting Dilemma* is the pressure young people feel to look a certain way. Kate frequently compares herself to actors, celebrities and classmates, believing she does not meet the standards of beauty she sees around her.

These comparisons lead Kate to consider cosmetic surgery as a way to change her appearance and improve her chances of success in the performing arts.

Through conversations with her father and Ms Whitney, Kate begins to question these beliefs. Ms Whitney explains that many performers succeed not because they fit a single standard of beauty, but because they bring unique qualities to their roles.

The novel encourages readers to recognise how unrealistic expectations about appearance can affect confidence, and how learning to value personal strengths can help overcome these pressures.

## MESSAGE OF THE NOVEL

*The Casting Dilemma* explores themes of self-esteem, confidence and perseverance. Kate's journey reflects the challenges many young people face when comparing themselves to others and worrying about how they look.

Through her experiences in the musical, Kate learns that talent, passion and determination matter far more than physical appearance. She also discovers the importance of supportive friendships and mentors who encourage her to believe in herself.

Ultimately, the story reminds readers that confidence grows through experience and self-acceptance. By recognising their own strengths and refusing to let comparison define them, people can pursue their dreams with courage.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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### GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Why is performing in the school musical so important to Kate?
2. How does Kate's opinion of herself change throughout the story?
3. What role do other people play in shaping Kate's beliefs about herself?
4. What challenges does Kate face during auditions and rehearsals?
5. How do the casting decisions affect Kate and her confidence?
6. Which moment in the story do you think is the turning point for Kate? Why?
7. What message do you think the story is trying to share with readers?

### SELF-ESTEEM & BODY IMAGE

1. How does Kate describe her own appearance compared to how she describes Ashleigh? Why might these descriptions be so different?
2. Why does Kate believe she cannot play the lead role, even though she clearly has the talent?
3. Kate thinks she might need cosmetic surgery to succeed as an actor. What pressures or beliefs lead her to think this way?
4. Kate compares herself to actors, celebrities and other students. How can comparing ourselves to others affect our self-esteem?
5. Kate's father talks about edited images and AI creating unrealistic beauty standards. How might this influence young people today?
6. Kate believes appearance matters more for girls than boys. Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. What are some healthy ways people can build a more positive self-image?

### CONFIDENCE & COURAGE

1. What fears does Kate have about auditioning for the musical?
2. When does Kate show courage during the story? Give specific examples.
3. How does performing on stage affect the way Kate sees herself?
4. Ms Whitney shares stories from her own acting career. How does this conversation influence Kate's thinking?
5. Do you think confidence comes before success, or can success help build confidence? Explain your answer.
6. Kate initially wants only the lead role. How does her attitude toward performing change during the story?
7. Why is it sometimes difficult for people to believe in their own abilities?

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## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

1. What challenges does Kate face from other students, such as Jake Marlin or Ashleigh?
2. How do teasing, rivalry and negative comments affect Kate's confidence?
3. When Kate takes over the role of Millie, some students react coldly. Why do you think this happens?
4. How does Trent's behaviour when Kate takes over the lead role affect her confidence?
5. Some people say the best way to deal with bullying is to ignore it. Do you think this is always helpful? Why or why not?
6. What strengths help Kate continue pursuing her goal despite setbacks?
7. What advice would you give someone facing similar challenges to Kate?

## FAMILY & FRIENDSHIP

1. How do Kate's friends Michael and Tash support her throughout the story?
2. Tash defends Kate and often encourages her. Why are supportive friends important when someone is struggling with confidence?
3. What role does Kate's father play in helping her understand body image and self-belief?
4. Why might Kate hesitate to talk about her grandfather being an opera singer?
5. How does Jane Hammond react when Kate takes over the role of Millie? Why might she feel this way?
6. How can encouragement from family and friends influence someone's confidence and decisions?
7. How does Kate's relationship with the people around her change by the end of the story?

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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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### WATCH A MUSICAL

A musical is a play that includes songs to help tell the story and express characters' emotions.

Ask your teacher to select a musical for the class to watch. After watching, discuss how the songs helped develop the story and characters.

Discussion questions:

- Which was your favourite song in the musical?
- What did the song add to the story or the character performing it?
- How did the music help convey the emotions of the character singing?
- Did the song change or move the story forward? How?

### STAGE A PLAY

Working in groups, create and perform a short play (also called a skit). Your teacher may divide the class into groups or guide the class through the activity together. Each group can either:

- Write their own short script, or
- Use an idea provided by the teacher.

Practise performing your skit and present it to the class, or to other classes in your grade. After the performance, discuss:

- What did you enjoy most about performing?
- What challenges did you face when acting or presenting your ideas?
- How did working together help the performance?

### ASSESS YOUR STRENGTHS

Kate struggles with self-confidence in *The Casting Dilemma*. This activity encourages you to reflect on your own strengths.

1. Write down some of your strengths and weaknesses.
2. Think about ways you could improve your weaknesses or develop new skills.
3. Consider how friends, teachers, or family members could support you in achieving your goals.

Set a goal to work on one of your weaknesses during the term. At the end of the term, revisit your list and reflect:

- What progress did you make?
- What helped you improve?
- What goals would you like to set next?

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# KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

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## CURRICULUM V9

### YEAR 7

#### English

**AC9E7LE03** – Explain how language features and literary devices influence audience response.

**AC9E7LY01** – Analyse how texts reflect contexts.

**AC9E7LY05** – Use comprehension strategies to interpret and evaluate ideas in texts.

### YEAR 8

#### English

**AC9E8LE03** – Explain how language and/or images position readers to respond and form viewpoints.

**AC9E8LY01** – Identify how texts reflect contexts.

**AC9E8LY03** – Analyse how language features vary according to purpose and audience.

**AC9E8LY05** – Use comprehension strategies to interpret and evaluate ideas in texts.

**AC9E8LE01** – Explain the ways ideas and points of view represent the values of individuals and groups in literary texts.

**AC9E8LE05** – Analyse how language features and literary devices create meaning and effect.

#### Visual Arts

**AC9AVA8C01** – Generate, document and develop ideas for artworks.

#### Health and Physical Education

**AC9HP8P03** – Examine how roles, decision-making and levels of power influence relationships.

**AC9HP8P05** – Investigate strategies to promote inclusion and respectful relationships in communities.

### YEAR 9

#### English

**AC9E9LE01** – Analyse representations of people and places in literary texts.

**AC9E9LY01** – Analyse how representations of people, places, events and concepts reflect contexts.

**AC9E9LY03** – Analyse and evaluate how language features represent perspectives.

**AC9E9LE02** – Present a personal response to a literary text comparing initial impressions and subsequent analysis.

#### Drama (role-play activities)

**AC9ADR9D01** – Develop performance skills to communicate roles and characters.

**AC9ADR9C02** – Rehearse and refine drama to unify dramatic meaning.

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## **YEAR 10**

### **English**

**AC9E10LA01** – Understand how language can empower or disempower people.

**AC9E10LE04** – Evaluate the social, moral or ethical positions represented in literature.

**AC9E10LE03** – Analyse how aesthetic qualities influence audience response.

**AC9E10LY03** – Analyse and evaluate how language features represent values and attitudes.

## **CURRICULUM 8.4**

### **SENIOR SECONDARY**

#### **English**

*The Casting Dilemma* 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 visual arts, health and performing arts. Character arcs and motivations can also be observed.

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## PERFORMANCE THROUGH THE AGES WORKSHEET

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Recitals and public performances are a tradition in many cultures. From school events to religious ceremonies, from village storytelling to talent nights, people have always come together to watch others perform. These moments remind us that art and self-expression are part of being human.

A public performance is any event where people present music, poetry, drama, dance or storytelling to an audience. These performances might be large or small, formal or informal—but they all involve sharing something creative with others. Recitals are one type of public performance, often used to show growth and learning, especially in music, drama and dance. Programs often have recitals at the end of the year.

### ANCIENT GREECE - THEATRICAL FESTIVALS

Ancient Greek theatre was performed during festivals to honour the god Dionysus. Thousands would gather in large amphitheatres to watch tragedies and comedies that explored human nature, politics and relationships.

### AFRICAN ORAL TRADITIONS - GRIOTS AND STORYTELLING

In many West African cultures, griots were historians, poets and musicians who told the stories of their people through spoken word and song. These performances passed on knowledge from one generation to the next.

### VICTORIAN PARLOUR PERFORMANCES - HOME RECITALS

In 19th-century Europe, especially among middle-class families, young people were expected to perform for guests in the parlour. These home recitals helped show good upbringing, education and artistic skill.

### 20TH CENTURY - SCHOOL RECITALS AND TALENT SHOWS

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as public education systems grew in Europe, America and Australia, schools began placing more value on well-rounded education. This meant teaching not just reading, writing and maths, but also the arts—like music, drama and public speaking.

Teachers and principals believed that performing in front of others helped students develop confidence, learn to speak clearly, express themselves creatively, gain experience in public speaking and take pride in their learning and progress.

As a result, schools started hosting end-of-term or end-of-year recitals, where students could show what they had learned. These events were often attended by parents, teachers and other community members.

Early school recitals included music recitals, poetry recitations, drama readings or short plays and speech and debate nights. These recitals were often held in school halls, churches or community spaces. These events were both a celebration of learning and a chance to bring communities together.

Just like Kate in *How to The Casting Dilemma*, students today might feel nervous about performing—but many find that the experience helps them grow in ways they didn't expect.

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## QUESTIONS

1. What might be some reasons schools still hold music recitals or performances today?
2. What do all these performances—from ancient Greece to modern schools—have in common?
3. How do performances help people connect with each other, both in the past and today?
4. What would be lost if people stopped performing or sharing their stories in public?
5. Why do you think performing—whether it's singing, acting, or storytelling—continues to be important in modern life, especially for young people?

Research performances and the role of music in performance. Come up with one version of musical performing and share its importance—bards, orchestras, opera are all some examples.

Write what you discovered here.