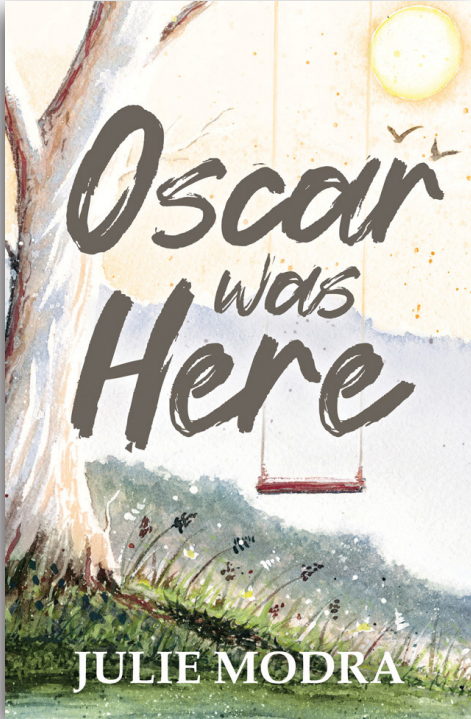

Teachers' Notes



OSCAR WAS HERE

Julie Modra

ISBN: 9781761113512

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

BOOK SUMMARY

One summer. One friendship. One story that changes everything.

When 13-year-old Milo is sent to spend the summer holidays with his grandmother on the outskirts of a quiet town, he meets Oscar—a boy who has a serious heart condition, a dog-eared copy of *Prince Caspian*, and an imagination as vast as Narnia itself.

When Oscar is bullied, Milo must find the courage to be the friend he's always wanted to be. And when the summer holidays draw to a close, Milo faces the hardest battle of all: saying goodbye and believing that life—like the best stories—never truly ends.

THEMES

Relationships • Kindness & Empathy • Courage & Personal Growth

Identity & Belonging • Loss & Hope • Imagination

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

Oscar Was Here is a heartfelt middle-grade novel that explores friendship, belonging, kindness and resilience. Through Milo and Oscar's developing relationship, students can examine themes of empathy, inclusion and personal responsibility, while considering the impact that words and actions can have on others. The novel provides opportunities to discuss bullying, family relationships, loss and hope, encouraging emotional literacy and self-reflection. References to *The Chronicles of Narnia* support the exploration of intertextuality and the role stories play in shaping identity, understanding experiences and building connections. The rural Australian setting offers opportunities to explore place, community and aspects of Australian life, while the relatable characters encourage students to reflect on their own relationships, choices and values.

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**Julie Modra is available for author talks and workshops.
 Contact Rhiza Edge for more information.**

Oscar Was Here 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



Julie Modra grew up in the NSW town of Taree and the idyllic seaside community of Forster-Tuncurry. Her beloved grandmother was an Indigenous woman from the Worimi Nation on the NSW coast. Julie later settled in the bayside area of Redland City, Brisbane, with her husband and three daughters.

A trained secondary English and History teacher, Julie has more than a decade of experience in teaching and curriculum writing. She has also worked as a sessional tertiary lecturer teaching Western Literary Tradition and Australian Literature, where she immersed herself in her love of English literature and poetry. Julie is a graduate of the Australian Writers' Centre and is currently studying a Master of Creative Writing at Macquarie University. She champions other writers in their creative pursuits by facilitating writing workshops and manuscript workshopping.

Julie writes hope-filled middle-grade and teen fiction, as well as adult fiction in the inspirational, literary, and historical fiction genres, which are often infused with romantic elements. Having experienced extreme domestic violence as a child, and later walking through her middle daughter's battle with cancer and the loss of her first husband to cancer, she aims to write stories that are full of heart and carry messages of hope.

When she is not writing, Julie procrastinates by sewing garments to wear, camping off-grid in nature with her wonderful husband Brian, serving as a musician in her local church, watching her backyard chickens while sipping tea, spending time with family, and looking after her precious grandchildren.

Visit juliemodra.com to learn more about Julie and her books, or follow her on Facebook (Julie Modra Author) and Instagram [@juliemodra.author](https://www.instagram.com/juliemodra.author)

AUTHOR NOTES

I wrote *Oscar Was Here* because I wanted to shine a light on the harm bullying can cause and the powerful difference kindness and friendship can make. At the heart of this story is a simple message: everyone deserves a friend. I hope readers come away remembering that both small and large acts of kindness can mean the world to someone. When I was growing up, my home life was very difficult, so I was a target for bullying at school. Unfortunately, years later, one of my daughters also experienced bullying because of disabilities she developed after surviving cancer. Her treatment left her severely deaf and the cancer left her with permanent mobility challenges. Watching her experience bullying while also dealing with these difficulties was heartbreaking for me as her mother. This is represented in the reactions of Neena when she hears about poor Oscar being bullied and when Oscar's mum, Natalie, tears up when Milo visits Oscar and offers friendship. It is every mother's hope that her children will feel safe and grow up with good friends who will support them and treat them kindly.

The character Milo was inspired by my young grandson. While writing, I imagined the kind of teenage boy I hope he grows up to be—kind, brave, and willing to stand up for others. It is already clear that he will be very sporty and his dad played soccer and supports Chelsea Football Club, so that had to make its way into the story too!

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Neena is also a little bit like me, although I think she's probably much cooler. One of my favourite lines is when Milo thinks she is 'more likely to celebrate crazy ideas than most people'. I hope my own grandchildren will say that about me one day.

The scene with Hattie the rescue chicken is special to me as well. I have my own flock of chickens and care deeply about animal welfare.

I also particularly loved weaving references to *The Chronicles of Narnia* series into the story. Those books have meant a lot to me, and it was exciting to see how perfectly they fit with Milo and Oscar's journey. The revelations Milo has at the end of the story about the Pevensie children and Oscar was a surprise to me and totally unplanned. I really hope Milo's revelations are a great encouragement to readers when needed.

I am proud of this little story, and the characters now have a special place in my heart. I hope Milo and Oscar's journey of friendship encourages readers to enjoy great books, use their imaginations, and most importantly, use kindness as a superpower.

TEACHING POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

KNOWLEDGE AND LITERAL UNDERSTANDING

COMPREHENSIVE READING

BEFORE READING

1. Examine the cover of *Oscar Was Here*. What details do you notice? What do they suggest about the story?
2. Read the title. Who do you think Oscar is, and why might the phrase “was here” be significant?
3. Read the blurb. What do you think Milo will learn during his summer with his grandmother?
4. Have you ever formed a friendship with someone very different from yourself? What made the friendship work?
5. The blurb mentions Prince Caspian. What role do you think books and imagination might play in the story?

DURING READING

1. What are Milo’s feelings about spending the summer with his grandmother at the beginning of the novel?
2. What are your first impressions of Oscar? What details help shape these impressions?
3. How does Milo’s friendship with Oscar begin?
4. What challenges does Oscar face throughout the story?
5. How does Milo’s relationship with Ruby change as the story progresses?
6. What role does Neena play in Milo’s life?
7. How does the rural setting influence the events of the story?
8. What clues suggest that Milo is beginning to change as a person?
9. What predictions do you have about Milo and Oscar’s friendship?
10. Which scene has been the most memorable so far? Explain your answer.

AFTER READING

1. How has Milo changed from the beginning of the novel to the end?
2. What qualities make Oscar an important friend to Milo?
3. How does Ruby contribute to the story and Milo’s personal growth?
4. What role does kindness play in the novel?
5. How do books and imagination strengthen Milo and Oscar’s friendship?
6. Why do you think the author chose a rural Australian setting for the story?
7. Which character did you find most interesting? Support your answer with examples from the text.

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8. What message do you think the author wants readers to take away from the novel?
 9. Which moment in the story had the greatest emotional impact on you? Why?
 10. Would you recommend this novel to other readers your age? Explain your reasons.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from Milo's first-person perspective rather than Oscar's?
2. How does the rural Australian setting contribute to the mood and themes of the novel?
3. In what ways does the author encourage readers to feel empathy for Oscar?
4. Which scene had the greatest emotional impact on you? Why?
5. What message do you think the author most wants readers to remember after finishing the novel?

RELATIONSHIPS

1. The novel's central message is 'Everyone deserves a friend!' What does this message mean to you? How does the story support this idea?
2. Who do you think benefits most from the friendship between Milo and Oscar, or do they benefit equally? Explain your reasoning.
3. How does Milo's relationship with Ruby change throughout the novel? What events contribute to this change?
4. How do Milo's relationships with Oscar, Ruby and Neena help him grow as a person?
5. Why do you think strong relationships are important during difficult times?

KINDNESS & EMPATHY

1. How does Neena demonstrate kindness throughout the story?
2. Why do you think empathy is important when building friendships and communities?
3. Oscar's heart condition affects what he is able to do. How does Milo learn to be considerate of Oscar's needs?
4. Why is it important to think about how our words and actions affect others?
5. Can a small act of kindness make a big difference? Use examples from the novel to support your answer.

COURAGE & PERSONAL GROWTH

1. Milo regrets not standing up for his friend Zane in the past. How does this experience influence the choices he makes later in the story?
2. Why do you think it sometimes takes courage to be kind?
3. Ruby chooses to become involved in the conflict with the bullies. What might have motivated her actions?
4. Are there any characters who make mistakes and later make better choices? What do these moments

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reveal about personal growth?

5. How does Milo change by the end of the novel? What lessons has he learned about himself?

IDENTITY & BELONGING

1. At the beginning of the story, Milo feels unable to be completely himself. What is he hiding, and why?
2. How do Milo's views about friendship change throughout the novel?
3. Why is a sense of belonging important for young people?
4. Which characters in the novel struggle with belonging, and how do they respond to those challenges?
5. What helps Milo become more comfortable with who he is?

LOSS & HOPE

1. Milo experiences several forms of loss throughout the novel. How do these experiences shape him?
2. What advice does Milo's mum give about grief, and why is it significant?
3. What realisation helps Milo find hope after Oscar's death?
4. How does the novel balance sadness with hope?
5. Why do you think memories remain important after someone is gone?

IMAGINATION

1. Books and stories play an important role in Milo and Oscar's friendship. Why do you think they connect through stories?
2. How does imagination help Oscar cope with the challenges he faces?
3. Why do you think the author included references to *The Chronicles of Narnia* throughout the novel?
4. How does the reference to *The Last Battle* deepen the meaning of the ending?
5. In what ways can stories help us understand ourselves and the world around us?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

REFLECTION JOURNALS

Write a journal entry using one of the following prompts:

- a) What qualities make a good friend? Which of these qualities do you already demonstrate, and which would you like to develop?
- b) What makes you unique? Write about a quality, interest or experience that is important to who you are.
- c) What helps people remain hopeful during difficult times? Reflect on strategies that help people cope with challenges.

DIARY ENTRY

Write a diary entry from Milo's or Oscar's point of view after their trip to the hill.

BULLYING IN STORIES

Many books, films and television shows explore bullying and peer conflict. Choose a story you know and compare how bullying is portrayed in that text and in *Oscar Was Here*. How do the characters respond, and what lessons do they learn?

CHARACTER AGENCY

Character agency refers to a character's ability to make their own choices, take direct action and influence the plot. Rewrite part of the story by showing how Milo might have addressed the bullying situation without Ruby's help.

ALTERNATE PERSPECTIVE

Rewrite or perform a scene from Ruby's point of view. How does she see the events differently from Milo?

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Choose a character from *Oscar Was Here* or another story who is experiencing loss or hardship. Write a letter offering encouragement, advice or support.

RURAL AUSTRALIAN STORY

Consider details of rural Australian life from the novel, or from your own experiences. Use these as inspiration to write a short story set in a similar location. You may choose to explore themes such as friendship, belonging, kindness, courage, hope or family.

BIRD STUDY

Create an artwork of a bird or birds in flight. Research local native birds and use photographs as reference.

SETTING MAP

Draw and label a map of the novel's setting using clues from the text.

HOT SEATING

Take turns becoming Milo, Oscar, Ruby or Neena. Classmates ask questions and the character must answer in role.

FAMILY PROBLEM-SOLVING

Milo and Ruby's relationship improves throughout the novel. Create a role-play, comic strip, slideshow or short video that shows siblings or family members working through a disagreement in a positive way.

COMMUNITY KINDNESS

Think about different people in your community, such as younger children, elderly neighbours, new students or volunteers. In a small group, create a list of practical ways you could show kindness, support or encouragement.

RURAL AUSTRALIA

Find evidence in the novel that suggests the story is set in rural Australia. Research a rural Australian town and create a fact sheet comparing it to the setting in the book.

NARNIA CONNECTIONS

Research *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Create a poster explaining why these books are important to Oscar and Milo's friendship.

ACTS OF COURAGE

Working in small groups, identify moments of courage shown by different characters. Present your findings to the class and explain how these actions influenced the story.

STORIES OF LOSS AND HOPE

Many stories explore grief, resilience and hope. Choose a text such as *Coco*, *Inside Out*, *Big Hero 6*, *Grace the Amazing* or *Bridge to Terabithia* and compare it with *Oscar Was Here*. How do the characters cope with loss, and what gives them hope?

FRIENDSHIP TIMELINE

Create a timeline showing how Milo and Oscar's friendship develops throughout the novel. Include key moments that strengthen their relationship.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

YEAR 5

English, Health & Physical Education, Visual Arts

AC9E5LE01 - identify aspects of literary texts that represent details or information about historical, social and cultural contexts in literature by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors

AC9E5LE02 - present an opinion on a literary text using specific terms about literary devices, text structures and language features, and reflect on the viewpoints of others

AC9E5LE03 - recognise that the point of view in a literary text influences how readers interpret and respond to events and characters

AC9E5LE05 - create and edit literary texts, experimenting with figurative language, storylines, characters and settings from texts students have experienced

AC9E5LY05 - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning to evaluate information and ideas

AC9HP6P04 - describe and demonstrate how respect and empathy can be expressed to positively influence relationships

AC9HP6P05 - describe and implement strategies to value diversity in their communities

AC9AVA6C01 - use visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to plan and create artworks that communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

YEAR 6

English, Health & Physical Education, Visual Arts

AC9E6LE01 - identify responses to characters and events in literary texts, drawn from historical, social or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors

AC9E6LE05 - create and edit literary texts that adapt plot structure, characters, settings and/or ideas from texts students have experienced, and experiment with literary devices

AC9E6LY05 - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning, and to connect and compare content from a variety of sources

AC9E6LY06 - plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts whose purposes may be imaginative, informative and persuasive, using paragraphs, a variety of complex sentences, expanded verb groups, tense, topic-specific and vivid vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and visual features

AC9E6LE03 - identify and explain characteristics that define an author's individual style

AC9HP6P04 - describe and demonstrate how respect and empathy can be expressed to positively influence relationships

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AC9HP6P05 - describe and implement strategies to value diversity in their communities

AC9AVA6C01 - use visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to plan and create artworks that communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

YEAR 7

English, Health & Physical Education, Visual Arts

AC9E7LE01 - identify and explore ideas, points of view, characters, events and/or issues in literary texts, drawn from historical, social and/or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors

AC9E7LE03 - explain the ways that literary devices and language features such as dialogue, and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts

AC9E7LE05 - identify and explain the ways that characters, settings and events combine to create meaning in narratives

AC9E7LE07 - create and edit literary texts that experiment with language features and literary devices encountered in texts

AC9E7LY05 - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring, questioning and inferring to analyse and summarise information and ideas

AC9E7LY06 - plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts, selecting subject matter, and using text structures, language features, literary devices and visual features as appropriate to convey information, ideas and opinions in ways that may be imaginative, reflective, informative, persuasive and/or analytical

AC9HP8P04 - examine the roles of respect, empathy, power and coercion in developing respectful relationships

AC9AVA8C01 - generate, document and develop ideas for artworks

YEAR 8

English, Health & Physical Education, Visual Arts

AC9E8LE01 - explain the ways that ideas and points of view may represent the values of individuals and groups in literary texts, drawn from historical, social and cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors

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

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

AC9E8LE06 - create and edit literary texts that experiment with language features and literary devices for particular purposes and effects

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

AC9E8LY06 - plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts, organising and expanding ideas, and selecting text structures, language features, literary devices and visual features for purposes and audiences in ways that may be imaginative, reflective, informative, persuasive and/or analytical

AC9HP8P04 - examine the roles of respect, empathy, power and coercion in developing respectful relationships

AC9AVA8C01 - generate, document and develop ideas for artworks