
Teachers' Notes



STRAY

Rebecca Fraser

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Reading level: 13-17

BOOK SUMMARY

What happens when breaking the rules is the only way to find yourself?

Fifteen-year-old Charli is a girl under pressure. When Year 10 exams push her to breaking point, she rebels—hard. But when a graffiti stunt goes too far and her friend, Nudge, is expelled, Charli is handed one last chance to turn things around: two weeks of community service at Rosevale Animal Rescue Centre.

As Charli bonds with a wary stray cat, she realises that mistakes don't define a person, and that compassion, accountability and courage can exist side by side.

THEMES

- Identity & Personal Growth • Family Relationships & Expectations •
- Peer Influence & Friendship Dynamics • Civic Responsibility •

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**Rebecca Fraser is available for author talks and workshops.
Contact Rhiza Edge for more information.**

Stray 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



Rebecca Fraser lives and writes on Bunurong Land on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. By day she's a Library Officer; by night she writes award-winning fiction for children and adults. Her work has won and been recognised across numerous awards including Adaptable: Turning Page to Screen, The 2023 Readings Children's Prize, Aurealis Awards, Australian Shadows Awards, Ditmars, and Mornington Peninsula Shire Mayor's Writing Award. Rebecca's publications include multiple novels in children's literature, a collection of short fiction, and over sixty short stories, poems, and articles.

Rebecca chairs and participates in panels at festivals and hosts authors 'in conversations' at libraries and facilitates creative writing workshops. She has served on the judging panel of nationally-recognised literary competitions and was the co-founder and a sponsor of a national youth competition Little Stories, Big Idea. She participates in the Australian Author Pen Pals program. Say G'day at www.rebeccafraser.com

AUTHOR NOTES

At the time of writing *Stray*, my son was in Year 11. He and his fellow senior school students were going through exams, and I became interested in how students react and respond to that pressure. While many capably handled the study workload and stress that exams can bring, others were almost crippled with anxiety and the pressure they put on themselves. Some had trouble eating or sleeping, some were studying for long hours, and others were becoming fretful at the prospect of what they perceived to be failure. Charli's character was inspired by these observations combined with a 'what if?' scenario of additional pressure coming from parents with high expectations yet a limited understanding of what their daughter.

Charli's experience at Rosevale Animal Rescue Centre was inspired by my love of animals in need of love, protection, rehoming and rehabilitation. Several years ago, I worked at a boarding kennel and cattery. My experience there formed the basis of the environment Charli finds herself in. The greater part of Rosevale – the barn, fields, and other residents such as the colourful animals – are inspired by Brightside Farm Sanctuary, a real life animal rescue based in southern Tasmania, not far from where my parents live. When Linda tells Charli about Alan's rescue this is based on an event that actually happened. Alan was a lonely, neglected alpaca who lived next to my parent's house. While they fed Alan daily, it was obvious that he needed specialised care, and they called Brightside. Alan lived out the rest of his years happy to be safe, loved, and in the company of other alpacas. (Alpacas have strong herd instincts and suffer from stress and loneliness if kept alone). Animal rescue centres and sanctuaries do amazing work and deserve all the funding they can get.

I love graffiti in the form of artistic and cultural expression. It can be creative storytelling, inspiring, empowering, educational, informational or entertaining. We have many wonderful examples here in Melbourne, as well as commissioned murals, and public 'free spaces'. Many graffiti artists are supremely talented, and I wanted Nudge to be recognised for his ability and vision, as well as his kind heart and courage in his convictions. Nudge also serves as an example to young readers who relate to him, and who might not be as academically inclined as Charli. There are many pathways to success, and our school system isn't necessarily a good fit for all. Be kind. Be brave. Be true to yourself...and always do your best.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What do Charli's thoughts and actions reveal about how she sees herself at the beginning of the story?
- There are various definitions that can be attributed to the word 'stray.' What do you think the title Stray means by the end of the story?
- How does Charli change from the beginning of the book to the end?
- Which adult character has the most positive influence on Charli, and why?
- What role does rebellion play in Charli's attempt to regain control over her life?
- How does Charli respond to the expectations placed upon her? Identify examples from the text to support your answer. Have you ever experienced similar pressures?
- Throughout the novel, Charli experiences physical changes that reflect her emotional state. Identify examples and explain how the author uses these details to communicate Charli's wellbeing.
- What healthy strategies for managing pressure and stress are demonstrated throughout the novel? Which characters model positive coping strategies?

IDENTITY & PERSONAL GROWTH

1. Find three moments where Charli acts differently from how she believes she is expected to behave. What do these moments reveal about her developing identity?
2. Locate an example where Charli begins to see herself differently by the end of the text. What has changed?
3. Nudge is misunderstood at the beginning of the novel. Identify examples where he demonstrates kindness, loyalty or personal growth. How do these moments challenge first impressions of his character?
4. Why did Charli feel more in control of her life when she was getting in trouble?
5. Identify a moment when Charli feels powerless. What actions does she take to regain a sense of control, and are they effective?
6. What are some things that Charli could have done to change her situation before she started breaking the rules?
7. Charli is rebellious in the story but she always feels bad afterwards. Find three moments in the book when Charli felt confident and happy with her decisions. What makes those decisions different from her rebellious ones?
8. Think about how Charli deals with the ever-mounting pressure she's under. What are some healthy ways to manage pressure that you would share with her?
9. How does working with animals help Charli develop empathy and responsibility?
10. Charli's parents go through their own personal and emotional growth when it comes to their relationship with their daughter. Can you identify these changes (e.g. What is their behaviour and communication

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like to Charli at the start and how does this work, compared to how their behaviour and communication is by the end of the story)?

11. Do you think what people think of her is important to Charli? Why/Why not? Identify examples in the text to support your answer.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS & EXPECTATIONS

1. How does the author show the impact of stress and anxiety without directly naming it? Trace the impact of academic stress throughout the novel. Which decisions can be directly linked to the pressure Charli feels?
2. How does Charli's behaviour at home change after her actions at school? What does this suggest about her relationship with her parents?
3. Identify three rebellious actions Charli takes. What motivates each action, and what consequences follow?
4. How do Charli's parents communicate their expectations? To what extent do they understand the pressure Charli is experiencing? Use examples from the text.
5. Identify a passage of dialogue between Charli and her parents where the conversation adds to Charli's anxiety. Can you rewrite it with improved communication that might lead to better outcomes?
6. What could Charli's parents have done to help Charli before she started breaking the rules?
7. How has Charli's relationship with her parents changed from the start of the book to the end of the book? Would Charli describe her parents the same way, or has her perception of them changed?
8. By the end of the novel, Charli's parents are beginning to understand her perspective. Can you provide two examples of this?

PEER INFLUENCE & FRIENDSHIP DYNAMICS

1. In what ways do Rosie, Mia, and Nudge each represent different kinds of friendship?
2. Find an example of a healthy friendship and an unhealthy friendship in the novel. What specific behaviours make the difference?
3. How did Charli know that Mia wasn't a good friend?
4. Which characters demonstrate healthy friendships or relationships? Identify examples from the novel to support your answer.
5. Thinking about the adults at Rosevale Animal Rescue Centre, would you say that they act as mentors or friends? What is the difference? (Can they be both?)
6. Can you find two examples in the novel where a character has stuck by, supported, or forgiven another character, despite their actions?

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

1. What are your views on tagging and graffiti? Discuss whether you believe they are forms of artistic expression, vandalism, or both. Support your discussion with real-life examples where street art has had either a positive or negative impact on a community.
2. Why are rules and policies important in a community or school setting?
3. Locate three examples of symbolism (e.g. graffiti, animals, exams, the rescue centre). What does each symbol represent?
4. Was Charli's punishment (suspension followed by two weeks community service at Rosevale) fair and appropriate based on her actions? Why/Why not?
5. Locate a moment where caring for an animal helps Charli slow down or reflect. Why do you think this interaction benefits Charli?
6. Graffiti can be viewed as both artistic expression and vandalism. How does the novel encourage readers to consider both perspectives?
7. Nudge is both an artist and an activist. What is an activist, and how does Nudge express his beliefs through his artwork? Identify two examples from the novel.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

MURAL ARTIST

Students create and draw their own mural design for the Rosevale Animal Rescue Centre either based on Nudge's artwork, or inspired by their own.

FUNDRAISER

Students imagine they were putting together a fundraiser for an Animal Rescue Centre or Shelter. Students need to think about how best to raise funds from their local community. For example: food stalls or an art sale.

Extension: The best ideas can be turned into reality and the funds raised donated to their local animal rescue or other related cause.

IN CHARLI'S SHOES

Students imagine they are in Charli's shoes. They are to write a letter to her parents from her perspective, explaining how she feels, how their expectations have added to her academic pressure and anxiety, and how she would like them to support her. Students are to think about positive ways to maintain Charli's relationship with her parents while having her needs met.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Students choose an important scene from the novel and rewrite it from the perspective of Nudge or Mia. Students should use clues from the text to infer what the character might be thinking and feeling, and explore how a change in narrator can alter the reader's interpretation of events.

DIARY ENTRIES

Students write a diary entry from Charli's perspective at the beginning of the novel and another at the end. Students should consider how

Charli's thoughts, emotions and outlook have changed, and use language that reflects her growth throughout the story.

GRAFFITI WALL OF SUPPORT

Throughout the novel, Charli is supported by a range of people, including friends, family members, teachers and mentors. Students create a collaborative graffiti-style artwork featuring the names, symbols or messages representing people who support and encourage them in their own lives.

TRY SOMETHING NEW

Throughout the novel, Charli steps outside her comfort zone and experiences new situations that help her grow. Students identify several examples from the text and discuss how these experiences contribute to Charli's development. Students then set a personal challenge by identifying one new skill, hobby or experience they would like to try and outlining the steps needed to achieve it.

ART OR VANDALISM?

Students participate in a class debate based on the statement: 'Graffiti is a legitimate form of artistic expression.' Students should use examples from the novel, as well as real-world examples, to support their arguments. Encourage students to consider different perspectives, including artists, property owners, local councils and community members.

ANIMAL ADOPTION POSTER

Students create an adoption poster for an imagined rescue animal. Using persuasive language and visual elements, students should highlight the animal's personality, strengths and suitability for a new home. Students should consider how both images and words can be used to encourage adoption.

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

CURRICULUM V9

YEAR 8

English, 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

AC9E8LE02 - share opinions about the language features, literary devices and text structures that contribute to the styles of literary texts

AC9E8LA03 - explain how texts are structured depending on their purpose and how language features vary, recognising that some texts are hybrids that combine different genres or elements of different genres

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

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

AC9AVA8C01 - generate, document and develop ideas for artworks

AC9AVA8C02 - select and manipulate visual conventions, visual arts processes and/or materials to create artworks that represent ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

YEAR 9

English, Visual Arts, Digital Technologies

AC9E9LA03 - examine how authors adapt and subvert text structures and language features by experimenting with spoken, written, visual and multimodal elements, and their combination

AC9E9LA05 - identify how authors vary sentence structures creatively for effects, such as intentionally using a dependent clause on its own or a sentence fragment

AC9E9LA08 - analyse how vocabulary choices contribute to style, mood and tone

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

AC9AVA10D01 - experiment with visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to refine skills and develop personal expression

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AC9AVA10C02 - select and manipulate visual conventions, visual arts processes and/or materials to create artworks that reflect personal expression, and represent and/or challenge, ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

AC9TDE10P05 - develop project plans for intended purposes and audiences to individually and collaboratively manage projects, taking into consideration time, cost, risk, processes and production of designed solutions

YEAR 10

English, Civics and Citizenship

AC9E10LA01 - understand how language can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people

AC9E10LA03 - analyse text structures and language features and evaluate their effectiveness in achieving their purpose

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

AC9E10LE04 - evaluate the social, moral or ethical positions represented in literature

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.

AC9E10LA02 - understand that language used to evaluate, implicitly or explicitly reveals an individual's values

AC9HC10S03 - to analyse information, data and ideas about political, legal or civic issues to identify and evaluate differences in perspectives and interpretations

AC9HC10S04 - to evaluate the methods or strategies and outcomes related to making decisions about civic participation

WORKSHEET: SPOTLIGHT YOUR PET!

Name:

Date:



YOUR TASK

Imagine you are creating a profile to help your pet find the perfect home—just like Charli did at Rosevale!

Your pet can be real or imaginary. Your goal is to highlight their personality, show what makes them special, and explain what kind of care they need so they are matched with the right owner.

STEP 1: GET TO KNOW YOUR PET

Answer these questions to help build your ideas:

- What is your pet's name?
- What type of animal are they?
- What do they look like? (colour, size, special features)
- What are their best qualities? (friendly, playful, loyal, calm, etc.)
- What makes them unique or different?
- Do they have any fears, challenges, or vulnerabilities?
- What kind of home would suit them best? (quiet, active, lots of space, experienced owner, etc.)
- What special care do they need?

STEP 2: WRITE YOUR PET PROFILE

Now, turn your ideas into a fun and engaging paragraph.

Remember:

- Use descriptive language to bring your pet to life
- Include both strengths and needs
- Think about how to persuade the right person to choose your pet
- Write in a warm, inviting tone

Your Pet Profile:

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STEP 3: GIVE YOUR PET A HEADLINE!

Write a catchy title to grab attention (just like an adoption ad):

Example: "Meet Luna: The Gentle Giant with a Heart of Gold"

Your headline:

OPTIONAL CHALLENGES

Add a small illustration of your pet.

Include a "Perfect Owner" description.

Share your work with the class and see which pet your classmates would adopt!