



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Secondary
(ages 14+; years 9+)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Ethical Understanding; Critical and Creative Thinking; Intercultural Understanding; Literacy
- **Other learning:** Difference and Diversity

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A beautiful and moving exploration of grief, culture shock, and living with disability, from an award-winning Australian author

THEMES

- Grief
- Mental health
- Disability
- Coping with change
- Student exchange
- Survivor guilt
- Language and other differences between cultures – Canada and Australia

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and Darren Groth

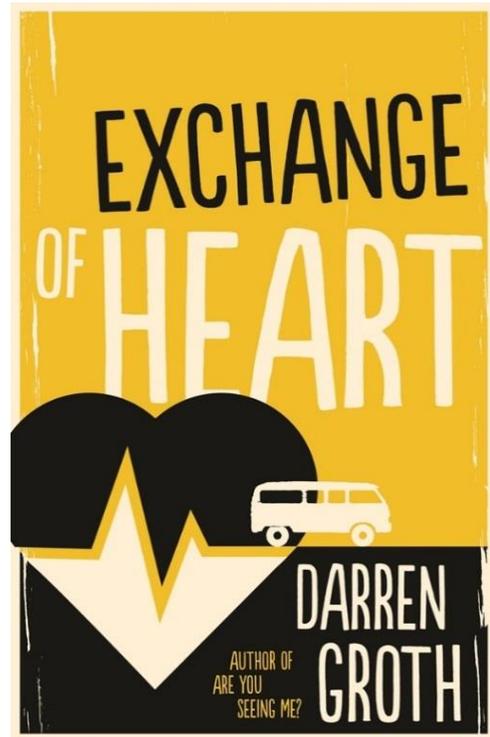
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Exchange of Heart Darren Groth

BOOK BLURB

Since the death of his sister, Evie, Munro Maddux has been stuck.

Flashbacks. Anger. Chest pains. A constant ache in his right hand. And a taunting voice he calls the Coyote. In an act of desperation, Munro heads off on a student exchange to Australia – the country of Evie's dreams.

Forced by his new school to join a volunteer program, Munro discovers the Coyote is silenced in one place: Fair Go, an assisted-living residence in Brisbane's west. Munro gets to know his team of residents: designer Bernie; sleeping refugee Shah; would-be wedded couple Blake and Dale; comic creator Iggy; and self-defence tutor Florence. As this unlikely group shows Munro the sights, Munro's notion of what it means to be a big brother begins to change.

But the burden Munro carries is not so easily cast aside. Will the Coyote triumph? Or can Munro find the fortitude necessary to mend his heart?

'Funny-sad, authentic and uplifting. Groth is a writer who can pivot from heartbreak to humour without missing a beat' – Vikki Wakefield, author of All I Ever Wanted

PLOT SYNOPSIS

'I hope the Hydes haven't got their hearts set on being in a YOLO video. I'm not like all those made-for-TV teens. I'm here because my little sister never made it, and I'm stuck with the fallout of her death. I'm the stand-in big brother and the psycho surviving son. They don't make videos about those guys.' (p. 11)

Munro arrives in Brisbane on an exchange program from Canada. He's trying to escape his grief over the death of his sister, Evie, who had Down syndrome – and, unfortunately, a hole in her heart that caused her death at school almost a year ago. Munro had always been Evie's caring big brother, looking after her and making sure she was safe and protected. Now, he feels as though his reason for living is gone – and that he failed his sister when she needed him most.

In Brisbane, he meets his host family, the Hydes – including Mum Nina, Dad Geordie, and son Rowan, who is in the same year as Munro. The Hydes are friendly and easygoing, and initially Munro thinks they seem *'close, fun, free of the dark clouds that can hang over a family'* (p. 11). As the story progresses, though, he will learn that there has been pain and trauma in their past, too, related to the Brisbane floods of 2011.

Munro starts in Year 11 at Sussex State High, where he meets guidance officer Ms MacGillivray, who encourages Munro to have an '-er word' for the year. Munro chooses 'better'.

He also meets Rowan's friends – Renee, Digger, Maeve and Caro, who seems to like him.

But the problems that plagued Munro back in Canada follow him to Australia – flashbacks; anger that causes him to lash out at others; chest pains; pins and needles in his right hand; and a voice – taunting, barking, biting – that his counsellor calls 'the Coyote'. Munro tries to fit in with Rowan's friends, but after a disastrous evening locked in an escape-room scenario, when Munro accidentally pushes Renee while having a flashback, he is finding it difficult.

Munro finds his solace at Fair Go – an assisted-living residence where he's forced to volunteer by his school. Although he's initially reluctant to be at a place where there might be reminders of his sister and her disability, the five residents he's designated to be a Living Partner with won't take no for an answer, and soon Munro is embarking on the 'Straya Tour' of Brisbane's sights with them. Munro gets to know his team of residents: dogged designer Bernie; sleeping refugee Shah; would-be wedded couple Blake and Dale; comic creator Iggy; and self-defence tutor Florence. As this unlikely group shows Munro the sights, Munro's notion of what it means to be a big brother begins to change.

Because the Coyote is silenced at Fair Go, Munro begins to wag school whenever he can to spend more time there – in particular, trying to break through with Shah, playing 'checkess', a combination of checkers and chess, since Shah has lost his memory of the rules of chess after a traumatic head injury. Things seem to be getting better – for Shah and for Munro.

But when Shah chooses to leave Fair Go without saying goodbye, Munro is left rudderless, bereft of the new sense of purpose he thought he'd found.

With everything seeming to go wrong – including Sussex High and the YOLO exchange program taking action following his truancy and threatening to send him back to Canada – Munro will need to learn some hard lessons before he can begin to heal and move forward. As Kelvin, the manager at Fair Go, tells him, *'things don't stay the same . . . people leave . . . [We] walk side by side with our residents rather than holding their hand.'* (p. 231) But will Munro find the fortitude to take on board the messages he's receiving, before it's too late? Or will the Coyote ultimately triumph?

All Munro wants is to hear Evie's voice again – yet, when he does, it's in the most dire of circumstances.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darren Groth is the author of six novels, including *Kindling* and the acclaimed YA novel *Are You Seeing Me?* He was the winner of the 2016 Adelaide Festival Award for Young Adult Literature and has been a finalist in numerous other prestigious prizes including the CBCA Book of the Year (Australia), the Prime Minister's Literary Awards (Australia), the Governor General's Literary Awards (Canada) and the Sakura Medal (Japan).

Darren is a former special-education teacher and the proud father of a son with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). For fun, he watches *Game of Thrones* with his beautiful Canadian wife and eats Fatburger with his wondrous sixteen-year-old twins. He lives in Vancouver.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Darren says:

Exchange of Heart grew from two story seeds.

The first was Fair Go, the fictional assisted-living residence in Brisbane's west. Fans of my previous novel *Are You Seeing Me?* would recognise that this was Perry Richter's intended destination following his Pacific Northwest adventure with his twin sister, Justine. Fair Go emerged as a source of inspiration post-*AYS*M, not only due to its narrative potential, but because of its nod towards real life.



With my teenage ASD son progressing through high school, consideration of his future living circumstance began eking into my thoughts, and in turn segued with questions fuelling the fictional construct of Fair Go. What sort of place would it be? What values and beliefs would it display? If it were my son's home, how would I want him treated?

The answers were easy. Fair Go would be a generous, supportive environment where the residents had a say in their lives and possessed agency in their journeys. The care-giving it provided would go both ways.

And a hurting protagonist – Munro Maddux, as he became – could find some healing within its warm embrace.

The second seed was the notion of the 'broken heart', both literal and metaphorical. A memory and a question, each from my special ed HPE teaching days, got me started on this theme. The memory was of a student, a cheerful male teen with Down syndrome, whose lips were constantly shaded blue due to an inoperable heart defect. His indelible image set the foundation for the character of Evie Maddux.

The question concerned cardiopulmonary resuscitation – a practice I regularly trained for but thankfully was never required to perform. I wondered then (and sometimes still do now): what would be the personal fallout from performing this life-or-death first-aid? True to the cruel streak on the belly of every fiction writer, I put my protagonist through the terrible ordeal in order to find an answer.

TEXTUAL CONCEPTS

Find out more about textual concepts for learning and how these can be used at different stages at <http://englishtextualconcepts.nsw.edu.au/>.

Connotation, imagery and symbol

- Discuss some of the symbols and motifs used in the story, such as the heart, or the coyote.
- Investigate the Indigenous/First Nations stories of the Coyote. How is the Coyote depicted? How do those traditional views relate to the Coyote's relationship with Munro? Why do you think the voice in Munro's head manifests as the Coyote?

Point of view

- The story is told in first person and in present tense, from Munro's point of view. Is Munro an unreliable narrator? What does he reveal or not reveal about himself, to others in the story and to the reader?
- Try rewriting a scene from another character's point of view, such as Rowan, Caro, Bernie, Shah,

Blake, Iggy or Florence. How would they view Munro?

Representation

- In what ways has language changed over time to be more inclusive of people with disabilities, and to avoid causing insult or offence?
- For instance, why is it so important to Bernie that people don't use 'the R-word' (p. 82)? Visit www.r-word.org and make a list of ways to raise awareness.
- Research the term 'ableist language' and explore some of the alternatives to words that perpetuate ableist ideas or values.
- How might language and the words we choose to use affect how people with disabilities are viewed, and even affect the decisions we make and the actions we take in how we treat those with disability? For instance, consider the different views taken, and language used, by Kelvin and by Blake's father regarding Blake and Dale's pretend marriage (see p. 120 and pp. 232–3).
- What conscious or unconscious biases can be observed in the characters in this book?
- On the other hand, which characters use language that is more inclusive and positive?
- Discuss the place of disability in the diversity represented in YA literature. Why are there fewer disabled characters in YA than persons of colour or LGBTQI characters?
- How does *Exchange of Heart* compare to other YA works featuring disability?

Narrative

- Is the complication or conflict in this story external or internal?
- What events happen to cause the story to rise to a climax, and then resolution? Create an electrocardiogram of the plot, showing the high and low points of Munro's story.
- What plot structures does the author use to tell the story? For instance, when are flashbacks used and how do these give the reader information to deepen Munro's character?
- Other plot structures in *Exchange of Heart* you could explore include Munro talking to Evie in his head, and Munro's dialogue exchanges with the Coyote.
- What values are embedded in the narrative through the details of characters and events, and what is left out?



Code and convention

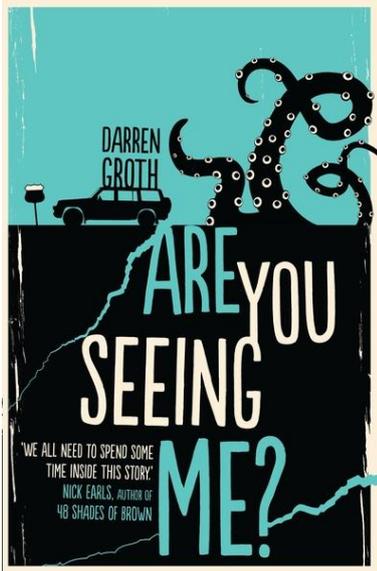
- Consider the way language conveys meaning by its codes (such as spelling and grammar), agreed systems for communicating (such as how we name things and the tone of our voice) and the shared and habitual conventions that help us to find meaning in words. After moving from Canada to Australia, what difficulties does Munro encounter with word usage and how sentences are phrased? Does he ever find it difficult to understand what is being said?
- Can you find other examples of misunderstandings between characters that are caused by the language they choose to use?
- Find some of the terms you'd consider particularly Australian in the story (for example, g'day, wagged, bloke, mate, drop bear). How or why might these words have developed differently to terms used in other countries? Can you find examples of what equivalent terms might be used in other countries?
- Similarly, what terms does Munro use that seem unusual for an Australian listener or reader (for example, 'give'r' (p. 20))?
- The difference between Canadian and Australian English and idiom isn't the only way language conventions and slang are explored in the novel. You could also consider:
 - The language used by YOLO and even its name (see pp. 1–3 in particular), as the organisation tries to seem young and friendly – has it succeeded in this aim? Why or why not?
 - Ms MacGillivray's roller derby slang, and also the language she uses as a counsellor – how does Ms Mac try to soften her language so that she seems to be on the same level as the students, rather than a figure of authority? Has she succeeded?
 - The language used on the basketball court, on pp. 41–45 – what 'street' culture might young people like Trey be trying to emulate?
 - The language used by the residents of Fair Go, especially some of the terms they make up that represent their passions (such as Bernie's use of 'freetard', or Florence's 'flo-jitsu') – why do you think the residents use language as a way to express themselves?

ENGAGING PERSONALLY

- Munro mentions after arriving that his time in Australia will not be the typical student exchange. Check out some student exchange videos – how true does that statement turn out to be?
- Would you like to be an exchange student? Where would you like to go?
- Which Fair Go resident would you most like to meet, and why?
- Map the landscape of Fair Go Community Village, or design your own community village or assisted-living residence, as Munro hopes to do one day. What facilities would you include, and why?
- Mental health is a key theme of the story. Research post-traumatic stress disorder and the concept of 'survivor guilt', and discuss whether these terms might apply to Munro, and to Geordie Hyde, who everyone calls a hero but who has been forced to take permanent medical leave after his experiences. How have their experiences shaped who they are?
- Why is it difficult for Munro to talk to his parents after Evie's death? What might they each do to make it easier?
- Iggy finally allows Munro to see his drawing of superhero Infecto at the end of the story. Draw your own version of Infecto, perhaps using the version below (drawn by Darren's daughter) as inspiration.



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



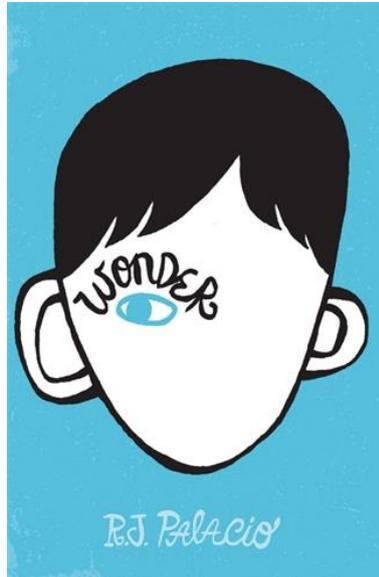
Are You Seeing Me?
by Darren Groth

Twins Justine and Perry are about to embark on the road trip of a lifetime in the Pacific Northwest.

It's been a year since they watched their dad lose his battle with cancer. Now, at only nineteen, Justine is the sole carer for her disabled brother. But with Perry having been accepted into an assisted-living residence, their reliance on each other is set to shift. Before they go their separate ways, they're seeking to create the perfect memory.

For Perry, the trip is a glorious celebration of his favourite things: mythical sea monsters, Jackie Chan movies and the study of earthquakes. For Justine, it's a chance to reconcile the decision to 'free' her twin, to see who she is without her boyfriend, Marc – and to offer their mother the chance to atone for past wrongs.

But the instability that has shaped their lives will not subside . . .



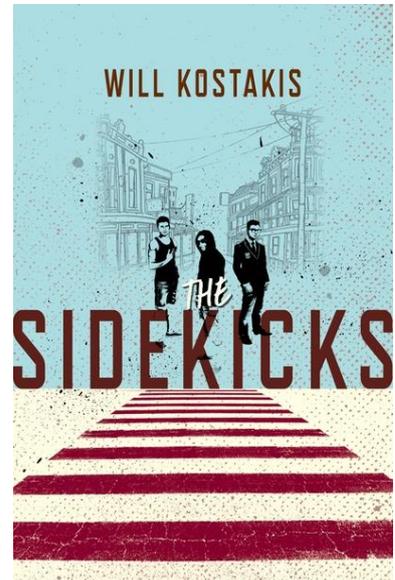
Wonder
by R. J. Palacio

Wonder is the funny, sweet and incredibly moving story of Auggie Pullman.

Born with a terrible facial deformity, this shy, bright ten-year-old has been home-schooled by his parents for his whole life, in an attempt to protect him from the stares and cruelty of the outside world. Now, for the first time, Auggie is being sent to a real school – and he's dreading it.

The thing is, Auggie's just an ordinary kid, with an extraordinary face. But can he convince his new classmates that he's just like them, underneath it all?

Through the voices of Auggie, his big sister Via, and his new friends Jack and Summer, *Wonder* follows Auggie's journey through his first year at Beecher Prep.



The Sidekicks
by Will Kostakis

The Swimmer. The Rebel. The Nerd.

All Ryan, Harley and Miles had in common was Isaac. They lived different lives, had different interests and kept different secrets. But they shared the same best friend. They were sidekicks. And now that Isaac's gone, what does that make them?

Will Kostakis, award-winning author of *The First Third*, perfectly depicts the pain and pleasure of this teenage world, piecing together three points of view with intricate splendour.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Exchange of Heart	Darren Groth	9780143781578	8 +	\$19.99		
Are You Seeing Me?	Darren Groth	9780857984739	9+	\$19.99		
Wonder	R.J. Palacio	9780552565974	7+	\$19.99		
The Sidekicks	Will Kostakis	9780143309031	9+	\$19.99		
TOTAL						

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