



# All the Little Tricky Things

## KARYS McEWEN

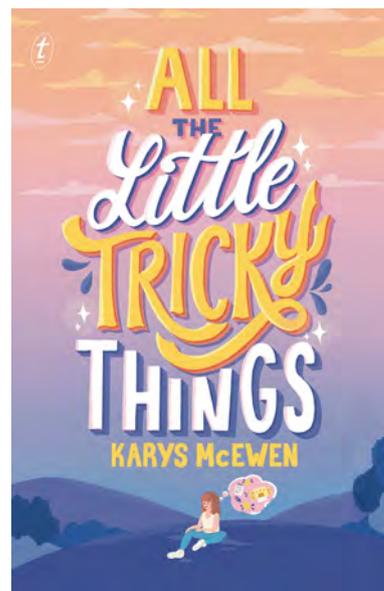
ISBN 9781922458377

RRP AU\$14.99

Fiction

**RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 8+**

Sign up to Text's once-a-term education newsletter for prizes, free reading copies and Australian Curriculum teaching notes [textpublishing.com.au/education](http://textpublishing.com.au/education)



### CURRICULUM GUIDE

*The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.*

*The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning and connect it to an audience, purpose and context. They encompass a range of forms with a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they promote the integration of ICT and life skills.*



Credit: © Adrian Craddock

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karys McEwen is the current president of the Victorian branch of the Children's Book Council of Australia. She is also a school librarian, and she is passionate about the role libraries and literature play in the wellbeing of young people. She has been a

columnist for *Books+Publishing* and her work has appeared in library journals such as *Synergy*, *Incite* and *Connections*. *All the Little Tricky Things* is her debut middle-grade novel.

### SYNOPSIS

Twelve-year-old Bertie has always lived in her best friend's shadow. Claire is sporty, confident, and lucky enough to be starting high school in Merri, the small town where they both grew up. She'll have plenty of friends when she starts high school. Meanwhile, Bertie is going to a fancy private school in the city, where she won't know anyone.

Bertie feels super anxious about all of the changes that are about to take place—at school, in her friendship, even in her body—but there's also a part of her that's curious to discover who she is without Claire.

Because she always has a plan, Claire comes up with a list of eleven tasks for Bertie to complete to prepare her for high school. Some are easy—like going to the city alone—while others are seemingly impossible—make a good first impression at your new school. And while Bertie is trying her best to summon up the courage to complete everything on the list, Claire has started behaving strangely. She's snappy and cold, and seems more interested in hanging out with her new friend, Shiny, than helping Bertie. Bertie isn't sure that their friendship will last the holidays, let alone high school!

Karys McEwen perfectly captures the in-betweens of friendships, school and our own bodies. Bertie is highly relatable, and *All the Little Tricky Things* shows her growing confidence as she figures out who she wants to be in the world, and how to embrace change without losing the people who matter to her.



## BEFORE READING

1. If you are yet to start high school, what do you imagine high school will be like? What are you most worried about? Share your responses in class, and then write a short reflection on what you've discovered by hearing what other people are worried about.  
If you have already started high school, what did you imagine high school would be like? Has it been different from how you imagined? How so? Discuss in small groups.
2. Think about what it means to be a tween, but in the broader sense of the word. What does it mean to be in between places? Perhaps you're between locations (primary school and high school) or friends, or you feel caught between the expectations of one age and the next. Describe one of the in-between places you exist in. What advice would you give looking back, and what questions do you have looking forward?
3. What do you think the title *All the Little Tricky Things* might mean? If this was a book about your life, what are some of the tricky things the writer might explore?

## WHILE READING

1. Why does Bertie feel anxious about going to high school? Do you think things would really be different if she was going to the local school?
2. Why is Bertie wary when she first hears Claire's idea?
3. Why are people intimidated by Claire?
4. Bertie feels as if everyone else is coping just fine with the 'transition into teenagehood' (p. 39). Do you think she's right?
5. What would you add to or change about Claire's list?
6. Why does Claire start being so mean to Bertie?
7. What advice does Shiny give to Bertie about being the new kid?
8. Is Claire jealous of Bertie? Why?
9. Why are Cooper and Tony trying to steal the fairy-floss machine from the show? What advice does Bertie give them?
10. Who does Doris say is the happiest person in Merri? Why? What do you think you need to be happy?
11. Does Bertie need to change who she is to fit in at high school? What are some of the things she comes to accept about herself in the story?
12. What does Bertie say about being in-between at the end of the story? What makes her say this?

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

1. Do you think Claire is as confident as she seems? How do you think she'd describe her feelings about Bertie going away for high school?
2. Bertie says that Claire 'takes up more space in the world' (p. 5). What does it mean to 'take up space'? Do you think this is by choice? What factors can prevent us from taking up space in the world?
3. Bertie describes her life as feeling 'very contradictory' (p. 36). What are some of the contradictions she's referring to? Do you ever feel this way?

### STYLE AND STRUCTURE

*All the Little Tricky Things* is structured around Claire's list of challenges for Bertie. Having a structure like this can help you plan a story in your head, taking away some of the pressure of the blank page. Use one of the tasks on the list to inspire your own short story about coming of age—you could make the story about yourself, or create an entirely new character who is about to start high school.

### THEMES

#### Change

1. Some of the changes that happen in the book are both external (for example, Bertie shaving her legs is a change on her body) and internal (the way Bertie feels about having hair on her legs). Find two other examples of external changes that also reflect internal changes.
2. Apart from her friendship with Claire, what are some of the ways that Bertie copes with her anxiety about change? How do you cope with change in your life?
3. When does Bertie take control of the list? What does this tell you about the ways she has changed since the beginning of the book?

#### Friendship

1. Bertie describes her friendship with Claire as 'unlikely', saying 'we're not as different as the sun and the moon, but we have fewer things in common than would be expected from two girls joined at the hip' (pp. 3–4). Make a list of the differences between Bertie and Claire. Notice which things are superficial, and which are more fundamental differences.
2. Why does Bertie find it easier to make friends with older people? What does she like about these friendships?
3. Is it unfair of Bertie to be so mean to Shiny? How might she have handled her feelings of jealousy differently?



4. What do you think Claire's friendship with Bertie will look like at the end of their first year of high school? Will they still be close? Write a conversation between them that takes place on the last day of their first year.

#### Figuring out who you are

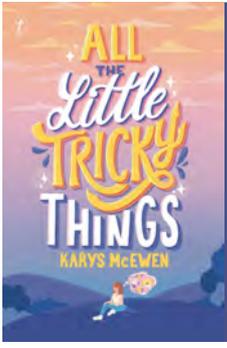
1. What did Bertie learn from studying Respectful Relationships at school? Why does this niggle at her mind when she decides whether or not to shave her legs? Where do pressures to look a particular way come from? Do you think it's easier for Claire? Why or why not?
2. Bertie talks about being 'defined' by her friendship with Claire (p. 36). What does she mean by this? What are some of the other factors that define her?
3. Bertie's mum tells her that Judy Blume's book has a great message for teenagers—to 'grow up in your own time frame' (p. 78). What pressure do you feel to grow up? Where does this pressure come from? What are some of the ways that Bertie sets her own pace to grow up?

#### RESPONDING

1. Bertie and Claire start by asking Tony for advice about high school, but his response isn't very useful. If you are yet to begin high school, collect five pieces of advice from people you know who are in or have completed high school. Compare your collected advice in class, and as a group come up with the ten best pieces to share.

If you have already started high school, imagine you could go back in time and speak to a younger version of yourself. What advice would you give to yourself about starting high school? Compare your collected advice in class, and as a group come up with the ten best pieces to share.

2. 'The empty block at the end of my street is probably the best hang-out spot of the lot. While these places aren't that exciting, they're all we've got, and we make the most of them. It only takes a little imagination to navigate Merri like it's our own secret world and only we have the keys. The empty block isn't just a dusty patch of land; it's a meeting place, a safe haven to share secrets among the tall grass, a blank canvas for whatever projects Claire forces us into next.' (p. 19) Sometimes being between two stages of life allows you to see things differently, including the places you live. How do Claire and Bertie see Merri differently from the adults who live there? Draw a map of your world—what places are important to you? How do you transform them? How is your perception of these places different from that of the adults who visit them?



# Starting High School

List-writing activity for students who are about to start high school



TEXTPUBLISHING.COM.AU

How do you feel about starting high school? Make a list of your worries, and another of the things you're looking forward to. Maybe some things appear on both lists. In small groups, compare your lists, and reflect on the similarities and differences between them. Does it make you feel better to know that other people have similar feelings about change?

## Nervous about:

1.

---

---

---

2.

---

---

---

3.

---

---

---

4.

---

---

---

5.

---

---

---

## Looking forward to:

1.

---

---

---

2.

---

---

---

3.

---

---

---

4.

---

---

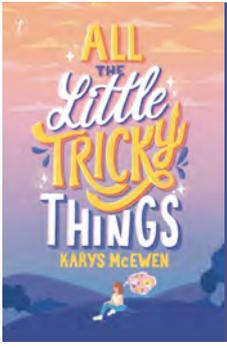
---

5.

---

---

---



# High School Reflections



List-writing activity for students who have recently started high school

TEXTPUBLISHING.COM.AU

Think back to before you started high school. What were you most worried about? Make a list of your worries, and then another list of how you feel about those things now. In small groups, compare your lists, and reflect on the similarities and differences between them. Reflect on the things you were worried about and how they have turned out.

**Before high school, I was worried about:**

1.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**After starting high school, I now know:**

1.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

