



THE BOOK AND BEYOND:

An educator's guide for exploring children's and YA literature



Title: Heartstopper

Author(s): Alice Oseman

Illustrator(s): Alice Oseman

The aim of The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is for your thoughts, questions and notes about different aspects of the book and to consider how you might frame discussion with students.

The book

Physical object

A good size for this format—rectangular vertical. Inside regular, vanilla novel paper stock, notes on the back that it is eco-friendly paper. It is paper back with a soft, velvety feel and appearance (seems to be used frequently in covers at the moment). The title, author name and small leaves are in shiny overlay, for contrast/to stand out.

Design & cover

The cover's impact is in the light and bright colours — soft pastels/mint green/pink. The two hand drawn comic figures fill the whole, there is a whimsical feel due to figures facing away from the reader. The title is located in the bottom third of cover, with a tagline and the author name neatly appearing as a bag brand. Endpapers show a comic version of Alice with a short bio and social media links, helping connect to audience.

Illustration

Black and white ink drawn illustrations—use of panels with hard frames—they sometimes break or bleed into the edges, large speech bubbles and font, close-ups. This style lends to the accessibility, action and immediacy of the story, heightens the impact of the dialogue. Double page spreads—fragmented/stepped out images work effectively to convey short time lapse and concentrated emotions/feeling/crisis.

Characters

Two central characters although the story opens with, and is often from, Charlie's perspective. Charlie is a smart, likeable, slightly highly strung, sensitive Year 10 boy, who is openly gay due to being 'outed' the previous school year. He seems self-reliant—maybe due to that experience and has a supportive sister and family. A keen drummer and good runner, he forms a friendship with Nick, a sporty, rugby-playing, kind-hearted Year 11 boy.

Plot

Plot centres around Nick and Charlie, built up in episodes of moments together. Each character deals with challenges; Charlie—sexual identity in school, breaking from a bad relationship, growing unexpressed affection for Nick. Nick—growing realisation of his feelings for Charlie and confronting his sexuality/feelings/diversity. These obstacles are overcome by their resilience, openness, understanding and help from family and friends.

Setting

Set mainly in and around a UK boys grammar school—'Truham Grammar School for Boys.' Is the name a nod to the boys' self-discovery as men, being true to oneself, which is a central theme? Other settings are the places Nick and Charlie meet—the park, at their homes, at a party—and form backdrops to the main action of their conversation/interactions.

Theme & message

Mainly explores sexual identity/gender diversity in a high school setting:

- Coming out and dealing with homophobia
- Being a bystander or upstander to bullying
- Love, family and friendship (secrecy and privacy)
- Mental health

Language

Colloquial, realistic teen dialogue—including swearing. Much of story in text message, email and social media—to connect/reflect teen communication.

Use of slang terms such as 'chav'—an insult for a loutish lower class male. What are the problems with labelling people with class, race, gender etc?

Mood & feeling

Affirming, portrays and upholds some characters' open-ness, attitudes to changing sexual identity. It deals with a weighty topic/theme, but has a lightness in parts—due to the characters/interactions and the illustration.

Visual language helps signal the mood ie small leaves and flowers around the action frames in Charlie and Nick romantic scenes, or frames drawing out the passing of time for gentleness and calm or to show speed/chaos.

Genre & format

YA graphic novel format.

Genre: Coming-of-age narrative and an LGBTQ+ romance narrative.

It was serialised in web comic format first and published as a graphic novel later. What's the difference when you are reading?

Are there more scenes in the webcomic?

The inquiry

Rich question(s)

This section is for creating and exploring questions that might guide an overall inquiry for a particular book. These questions might be inspired by ideas in the book section and/or personal responses and/or the NZ Curriculum and/or available resources.

What makes a good friend? How do you know if a relationship is healthy or hurtful?

What are stereotypes? How do stereotypes influence how we see the world?

What creates prejudice, and how can individuals overcome it?

How do people express their identity?

How can books/graphic novels/comics be a vehicle for social change?



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Make connections

The aim of The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is designed to help students use the book as inspiration to share, wonder, question, and explore ideas, possibilities, connections, feelings, experiences and other viewpoints — either alone or together.

Personal

Create in illustration/pictures/text message/email

Part of Charlie and Nick's story unfolds through use of text message, email, social media messaging. Encourage students to have a go at recreating an interaction in a comic/zine or in a text or messaging format.

Explore

Check out Alice's website www.aliceoseman.com to find out more about her bio/backstory, and other works, writing and projects.

Review

Find and review Heartstopper in the web comic format serialised with the published version. <https://tapas.io/series/Heartstopper>

Take Action

Nick and others, such as the PE teacher Miss Singh, act as upstanders to the bullying directed towards Charlie. Use the classroom resources available via the Pink Shirt organisation www.pinkshirtday.org.nz to generate further discussion about [upstanders](#) and bystanders.

Read more

● Read the next in the series

Find out the next steps for Nick and Charlie in *Heartstopper 2 & 3* in print/graphic novel format or in serial webcomic format at:

<https://tapas.io/series/Heartstopper>

● Read another book by the same author

Solitaire by Alice Oseman

Nick and Charlie - a Solitaire novella by Alice Oseman

I Was Born for This by Alice Oseman

● Read another book with the same idea/topic/ genre

Invisibly Breathing by Eileen Merriman—a NZ love story

Leah on the Offbeat by Becky Albetarlli

Honor Girl by Maggie Thrash—A YA graphic memoir

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky (and a movie adaptation)

○ Listen to an audio version of the book

Social (Share your experience)

Talk

How would you retell this story if you were retelling or recommending it to a friend? Do you agree with the back cover blurb—BOY MEETS BOY. BOYS BECOME FRIENDS, BOYS FALL IN LOVE—or would you add more detail, or avoid the spoiler?

Like, Follow, Share

Alice Oseman has quite a following through her books, webcomic and other creative works. Check her out on instagram (@aliceoseman) or twitter (@AliceOseman).

Join

This is a book and story to read for pleasure but also to read for wellbeing and empowerment. Check out the NZ organisation that helps protes LGBTQ+ issues and discussion in schools and libraries. What can you do to contribute?

www.outontheshelves.insideout.org.nz

The site provides info, advice and opportunities to add your voice through:

- booklists and reviews
- a national campaign week
- library activities
- downloadable posters to promote books/theme/campaign.

What connections can you make to yourself, other texts, the world?

Text to self

Are there aspects of the story or characters that resonate with you—that you can identify with? Such as:

- finding a frendship tricky
- feelings of unrequited like or affection
- being unsure in joining new group situation—sports/arts/friends.

Text to text

While this features LGBTQ stories, it is also typical of a coming-of-age story. Connect to a range of music texts ie music/songs/tracks from today and the past that feature a teen coming-of-age.

This list provides key lyrics and video links. 'Songs about growing up'

www.nme.com/list/songs-about-growing-up-1949494

Text to world

What are the similarities and differences between this UK boys school and your school?

Is this how a relationship between two people of the same sex would be viewed by students and staff? Why? Why not?

NZ Curriculum

This section is intended as a prompt for thinking about how the book might relate to the NZ Curriculum. For example, is it a story about cultural diversity? What language, symbols and text tell the story?

Learning areas		Principles		Values		Key Competencies	
● English	○ Maths & Statistics	○ High expectations	○ Future focus	○ Excellence	● Community & participation	● Thinking	● Relating to others
● The Arts	○ Science	○ Treaty of Waitangi	○ Learning to learn	○ Innovation, inquiry, curiosity	○ Ecological sustainability	● Using language, symbols & text	○ Participating & contributing
● Health & PE	○ Social Sciences	○ Cultural diversity	○ Community engagement	● Diversity	● Integrity	● Managing self	
○ Languages	● Technology	● Inclusion		● Equity			