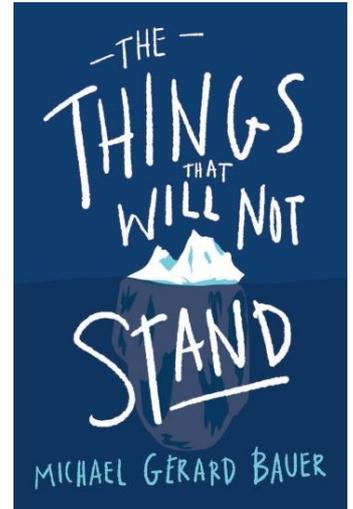


The Things That Will Not Stand

Author

Michael Gerard Bauer



Synopsis

Sixteen-year-old Sebastian and his best friend Tolly are only two of many hundreds of school students who flock to the University Open Day. The idea was to get a glimpse into their future careers, but for Sebastian and his new friend Frida, what happens to them that one momentous day ends up being about far more than jobs and studies. Meeting by chance, Sebastian and Frida find themselves sharing parts of themselves, their pasts, and their hopes and dreams with each other in a way that neither of them could ever have predicted. Standing on the cusp of independence and adulthood, an unexpected connection emerges between them, and they encourage, push, and challenge each other to share with each other not only where they have come from, but also who they themselves really are. The value of stories and creativity, and the rewards that can come with summoning the bravery to share the truth about one's past and current feelings with a chance-met friend, makes this one day in their lives a pivotal coming of age experience that neither of them will ever forget.

About the Author

Michael Gerard Bauer was born in Brisbane and taught English and Economics in a number of schools in the Brisbane–Ipswich region for more years than he cares to admit before resigning from full-time teaching in 2000 to pursue his dream of being a published writer. Michael is now a full-time writer.

Themes

Honesty; Friendship; Integrity; Courage; Family; Grief; Loss; Abuse; Resilience; Hope.

Writing Style

Written in the first person from the point of view of Sebastian, the narrative structure is chronologically complex. The story opens with Sebastian relating events in the present tense, and the main action of the story takes place over a single day – but Bauer incorporates flashbacks, self-reflective stream of consciousness commentaries that reference past occurrences, and relatively lengthy descriptions of past personal experiences within the dialogue. In addition, Bauer has the main characters try to outdo each other at telling patently untrue tales as part of their interactions; and when some of these stories are later revealed as truth rather than imagination, previous events need to be mentally recast within the overall

narrative. The language used is colloquial and realistic, appropriate to the age of the characters as well as to the intended audience, and Bauer makes good use of metaphor, simile, and original descriptive turns of phrase to paint a vivid picture of characters and events.

TEACHER NOTES

Note: Some of the activities and discussion points in this section should not be done until after reading the entire novel, as they contain key information which is only revealed to the reader towards the end of the book.

- 1) Before reading the story, discuss the title. What does it mean to say that something 'will not stand'? Hypothesise as to the content of the novel based on the cover and title.
- 2) After reading the first chapter, as a class discuss how the author has set the scene for the novel. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - Where is the novel set?
 - When is the novel set?
 - Who is the main character?
 - What do we know about the main character?
 - How does the author choose to share information about the main character and the setting with the reader - what literary techniques does he use?
 - What plot complications are revealed in these first few pages?
 - What do you think might happen next? Hypothesise as to what has already happened and what could happen.
- 3) Sebastian is only saved from public humiliation in front of Helena and her boyfriend by Frida's unexpected intervention with an invented story. Map out the sequence of events in the novel up to this point using a double timeline or flowchart, one showing the chronological order in which events occurred, and one showing the order in which they were revealed to the reader. Note next to each event the method used by the author to share each point of information with the reader (eg. flashback, dialogue, internal dialogue etc.)
- 4) Write a short story of your own where a character is saved from the consequences of their own folly by a stranger. Think about how Bauer set the scene and introduced the characters in *The Things That Will Not Stand*, and try to emulate his techniques, using the flowchart or timelines you have created in activity 3 to help you.
- 5) Watch *Casablanca*. After watching the movie, reread the sections where Sebastian and Frida discuss or allude to the story of *Casablanca*. Does your knowledge of the events of the movie assist your understanding of the novel? Why/Why not and in what way?
- 6) As the novel progresses we learn more about both Frida and Sebastian, both what their personalities are, and secrets about their past. Write a brief character analysis for each of these two characters, noting what we learn about each of them, when we learn it, and how it impacts our cumulative understanding of their personality and history at different points in the novel. After

completing individual analyses, write a half page summary of how the interactions between the two over the course of the novel drives the reader's understanding of both characters. Use evidence from the text to support your assertions.

- 7) Write a one page discussion of whether you agree or disagree with the statement Sebastian was emotionally wounded by his brother's life more than by his brother's death. Include evidence from the text in your discussion to help support your conclusions.
- 8) After reading the novel, as a class discuss why Frida/Karen lies and makes up tall tales so frequently. What are some of the reasons why someone might be habitually untruthful about their self? Individually, write a half to one page piece discussing whether Frida/Karen's chronic untruthfulness about herself is a self-protective mechanism, and what in her past has contributed to her needing to act this way. Include evidence from the text to support your arguments.
- 9) After finishing the novel, reread the description of the sandpit incident and Frida's comments on Karen Kratzman on page 131. As a class discuss how your understanding of Frida has changed now that you know she is talking about herself. Consider in your discussion both her part in this conversation, and her emotional responses while discussing the incident.
- 10) Take a tour of a university science department and learn about the experiments they currently have running.
- 11) Research Frida Kahlo, her life, and her artwork. Present your findings in a visual display such as a poster or a slideshow presentation.
- 12) Use your findings from activity 11 to help you write a half-page piece discussing why you think that Karen chose Frida Kahlo as a person worth being named after. Include evidence from the text to support your position, and include a discussion of Frida Kahlo's life, challenges, and artwork, as well as one of Karen's life, challenges, and personality.
- 13) Create an artwork of your own inspired by your favourite Frida Kahlo piece.
- 14) Seb, Tolly, and Frida/Karen learn that the pitch in the pitch-drop experiment at the university can act as both a solid and as a liquid depending on how it is treated. It does, however, flow extraordinarily slowly. Create a faster flowing non-newtonian fluid (one that acts as a solid in some circumstances and as a liquid in others) to experiment with. You can make one using approximately one cup of cornflour/cornstarch and 1/4 cup of water. Search online for suggested activities to investigate your (very messy!) non-newtonian fluid.
- 15) Frida/Karen and Tolly both participated in the theatre sports session at the university. Organise a theatre sports session of your own, including the interview activity mentioned in the story. After the session, write a reflective piece about your experience of theatre sports, how you felt while participating, your favourite and least favourite parts, and why you think that people might choose to participate in them.

- 16) Karen's entire life has been filled with traumatic events and difficulties. She has suffered from loss, bullying, and abuse, and often acts in ways that make her appear different from her peers and intimidating. As a class discuss how negative experiences in a person's life can sometimes cause them to act in ways which can be damaging and upsetting to others, and socially isolating. Some things to include in your discussion are what you can do to help people who might be acting out feel less alone and isolated, and who to talk to or approach if you suspect that a friend or classmate is being abused.
- 17) Write a story about something you remember from when you were in kindy (or preschool). It can be as dramatic as the sandpit incident or as simple as your memory of painting a picture or playing with blocks.
- 18) Tolly is a very important person in Sebastian's life. As a class discuss what it would be like to have a friend who is as brave, outspoken, clever, self-assured and perceptive as Tolly. Individually write a character analysis of Tolly and his role in Sebastian's life, and the part he plays in the development of the relationship between Karen and Sebastian.
- 19) When Sebastian and Tolly assert that something Will not Stand, they have at times made a real difference to the world they live in, and at times failed to enact any real change. In pairs, small groups, or as a class, choose a social, community, or school issue which you feel needs to be addressed, and work to make a real change for the better in your world.