

How to be...the New Person

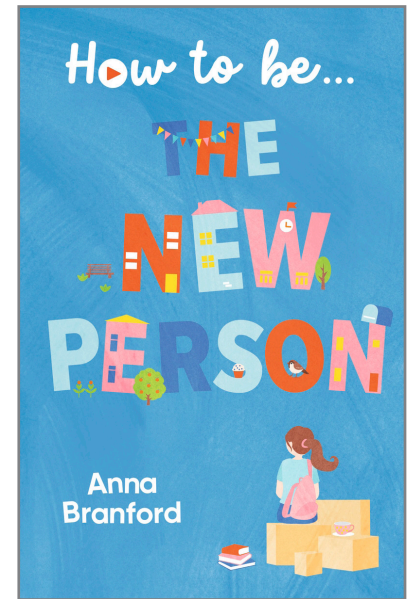
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Hazel Morrison has a secret habit—pretending to make videos about everyday things. *Eight important tips for successfully buttering toast! Putting your hair in a ponytail: a step-by-step guide!* But when her family move to the outer suburbs, Hazel has to cope with starting at a new school where she doesn't exactly feel welcomed. A school project inspires her to create a real video—a how-to guide for being 'the new person'. . . because everyone, sometime, will meet one, or be one!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Branford was born in the Isle of Man and spent her early childhood in Sudan and Papua New Guinea before moving to Australia. Creative writing was her favourite subject at school and she wrote stories in all these different countries. Anna is a doll maker and a sociology lecturer at Victoria University. *Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot* was her first published work for Walker Books Australia and was Honour book in the Children's Book Council of Australia, Book of the Year Awards, Younger Readers Notable Books for 2011.

THEMES

- Change
- Family
- Friendship
- Resilience

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading *How to be...The New Person*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:
 - The title of the book
 - The author
 - The publisher
 - The blurb.
- Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer after reading the book—how close were your predictions to the actual novel?
- What are the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

- Identify the orientation, complication and resolution of the story. Ask students to try to identify this structure in other books or movies. As a class, discuss how these narrative features give meaning to stories.
- Find passages in the text that show Hazel demonstrating or experiencing the following qualities and emotions.
 - Compassion
 - Courage/bravery
 - Resilience
 - Guilt
 - Sadness.
- *How to be... The New Person* is told in first person, from Hazel's perspective. What insight did it give you into how Hazel was feeling? How would *How to be... The New Person* be different if it were told in third person or from a character other than Hazel?
- As a class, brainstorm some scenarios where you could be a 'new person'. Examples could include a new school, new to a friendship group, joining a new sports team, etc. Have a class discussion about practical ways you could help others when they're new in one of those situations—start with ideas from Hazel and Laura's list in Chapter 16!
- Have you ever watched any YouTube tutorials like Hazel does? If you were going to make a tutorial yourself, what would you make one on?
- When Hazel moves away from Gina, she knows their friendship will be different now that they're long-distance friends. Do you have any friends that don't live near you? How do you keep in touch?
- 'There aren't many people in the world like Gina and when you find one, you really want them to be your best friend for your whole life,' (p 19). Do you have a friend or family member that you feel the same way about? Write them a letter saying how much they mean to you and why you appreciate having them in your life.
- Hazel and Laura aren't friends at first, but it grows over time. Have you ever become friends with someone you didn't connect with right away? How did your opinion change for the better over time? Write or draw a story in which two or more people start off not getting along and then become friends.
- Do you have any objects that other people might see as 'junk' but are important to you, just like Veronica? Write a story or draw a picture for the story behind your object, and the reasons it's special.
- 'If he really had asked me those things, I don't honestly know what I would have said. After all, it was Tess who was having the actual problems, and he and Mum who were trying to sort them all out. I was just a sort of extra person in our family. It is difficult to say whether you're doing okay or not when nothing is actually happening directly to you,' (p 8) Why might it sometimes be challenging for Hazel to identify how she's feeling, and to communicate that to others? Do you ever find this difficult? As a group, discuss some things you could try to help express when you're feeling upset or overwhelmed.
- Does your school have a uniform? If so, do you like it or would you prefer to wear what you choose? Have a class debate with one side being for school uniforms and the other against. Reread Hazel's thoughts on uniforms on pp 37 and 38, and remember there's no 'right' or 'wrong' opinion about the topic.
- "'Haze? Oh, she's fine. We're so lucky with that kid. We never have to worry about her! She's made of tough stuff,'" (p 29). Why do you think overhearing her dad say that about her upsets Hazel so much? What expectations and pressures are being put on Hazel because they think she's 'tough'? Be sure to consider her family, her friends and her teachers. How does this affect her? As a class, discuss some ways to cope when you feel pressured, and how it might feel when your family or friends see you differently to how you feel or see yourself. Talk about ways to express this, and how to ask for help.
- Think of times in your life when you have needed support (as a baby, at school, emotional support—eg. physical, educational, emotional). Think of examples when you might need support in the future (eg. when you're old, when you're learning something new, or starting a new job; if you have an accident, or when you go through a challenging time). Think of examples when you have given support. What can be good and what can be bad about giving and receiving support? What kind of extra support do you need?
- Write about an issue affecting young people, just like Hazel and Laura do. You could use an example from the various ideas brainstormed in the book (try p 92) or something entirely new that you think is an important topic. Hazel

and Laura choose to present theirs as a mock video tutorial, but yours could be as a report, a short essay, a media presentation or a video—whatever you'd like!

- Keep a 'vocab journal' while reading the novel. Make a note of any words you come across that are unfamiliar and look up their meaning. Also keep track of any words or phrases that you particularly like and write a note next to each explaining why you like that word/phrase.