

Unnecessary Drama

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Secondary
(Sexual Content, Language)



SYNOPSIS

Eighteen-year-old Brooke is the kind of friend who not only remembers everyone's birthdays, but also organises the group present, pays for it and politely chases others for their share. She's the helper, the doer, the guarder-of-drinks, the minder-of-bags, the maker-of-spreadsheets. She's the responsible one who always follows the rules—and she plans to keep it that way during her first year of university.

Her new share house only has one rule—'no unnecessary drama'. Which means no fights, tension or romance between housemates. When one of her housemates turns out to be Jesse, her high-school nemesis, Brooke is nervously confident she can handle it. They'll simply silently endure living together and stay out of each other's way. But it turns out Jesse isn't so easy to ignore...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nina Kenwood is an award-winning author living in Melbourne. Her debut YA novel, *It Sounded Better in My Head*, won the Text Prize and was a finalist for the American Library Association's William C Morris Award, a CBCA notable book, as well as being shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, the Queensland Literary Awards, the Russell Prize for Humour Writing, the Indie Book Awards and the Australian Book Industry Awards. *It Sounded Better in My Head* has been published in six languages, and is optioned for film.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Write a letter to your future self at nineteen—where do you think you'll be then? Who will matter to you? What would you like to remind yourself of?
- How would you feel living with new people for the first time? Make a list of three 'rules' that would be important to you to be able to live with other people.
- *Unnecessary Drama* is an example of a romance novel—what are some of the features of this genre? Use this knowledge to make some predictions about what might happen in the book.

WHILE READING

- What happened to destroy Brooke and Jesse's friendship? Why did they each act the way they did?
- Compare the way that Brooke reacts to the mouse to the way that Amber reacts. What does this tell you about their characters?
- Why does Brooke feel anxious about the housewarming party? How do the events of the party align with her expectations?

- How does Brooke manage her anxiety? What other ways are there to manage anxiety?
- Describe Brooke's relationship with Tristan. Why did they break up? Why does she want to impress him when they see each other?
- Does Brooke get along with her dad? How does she feel when he cancels their dinner?
- Reflect on a time that someone broke your trust, or a friendship ended. What happened? How did it make you feel? Did you work things out? If not, what would have to change to mend the relationship?
- How did Brooke expect to fall in love? How does it actually happen? What is she looking for in a relationship?
- How does Brooke feel when Jesse goes on a date with Amber? Why doesn't she just tell him how she feels?
- What revelation does Brooke have about her writing that makes her story better?

AFTER READING

Character

- Jesse obviously regrets the way he behaved towards Brooke in high school, but she makes very strict rules to keep him out of her life when they move in together. Should Brooke maintain her resolve or should she be open to starting over? How does what happens at school affect friendships and relationships beyond high school?
- How does Brooke describe her role within her family? How does she feel about it? Discuss the sequence of events that make her snap when Lauren comes to stay.
- Brooke says that Jesse's best and worst trait might be 'that he's so confident in his likeability and charm he thinks hearing his worst traits will be entertaining'. (p 107) Do you agree with her? Why does he find it entertaining, when Brooke finds something incredibly stressful? Where does Jesse's confidence come from? Is he confident about all aspects of his life?
- Do you think Brooke would describe herself as someone easy to get along with? Why/why not? Read Chapter Seven closely, and discuss some of the challenges Brooke has when trying to make friends.

Style and Structure

- *Unnecessary Drama* is about characters just out of high school, starting to define their identities against increased freedom and independence. Make a list of some of the characteristics of this kind of novel— what do you expect from stories written for young adults? Think about the narrative style, point of view, and the ending. What other ways might you describe or categorise the style of this novel? Why?

THEMES

INDEPENDENCE

- How does Brooke feel when she moves in with Harper? What is she happy about? What is she worried about?
- What does independence look like to you? Do you see this reflected in the book? What does independence mean to Brooke? To Jesse? To Lauren? How are they similar and different?
- How does anxiety impact the amount of independence Brooke allows herself?

TRUST

- Brooke doesn't trust Jesse—why not? How does he prove that she can trust him again? Discuss what makes us trust someone, and reflect on a time that someone has broken your trust.
- How does it feel to be distrusted? How do you think Lauren feels when Brooke tells her how to behave when she comes to stay?
- When Jesse is telling Harper about Tristan, he says 'I never trusted him'. (p 121) Why do you think this is? Brooke defends him, calling Tristan 'completely trustworthy' because of his work with at-risk youth. Can they both be right? Is Tristan's work with at-risk youth a good example of trustworthiness? Why/why not?

IDENTITY

- At the beginning of the book, Brooke describes herself as a 'person who prepares'. (p 2) Does she see this as a good thing or a bad thing? How is this challenged or changed over the course of the story?
- How does fear shape the way that Brooke sees herself? Make a list of some of the things she's afraid of. What do you

think she's really afraid of? How does being away from her family give Brooke the chance to explore new facets of her identity? What other influences shape who we are?

RESPONDING

- Do all romance stories need a happy ending? Write an alternative ending to the story. Is it still a romance novel? Why/why not? Compare your ending with others from your class.
- Throughout the book, Brooke tries to keep everyone happy but sometimes this means keeping her real feelings to herself. Imagine that her dad did show up to dinner, and write a conversation between them where she tells him how his behaviour makes her feel.
- Read the blurb of the book as a class. As a group, discuss the purpose of a blurb and the information it needs to contain. Write your own blurb for the book that summarises the story, and captures the tone of the book for possible readers, without revealing the ending.