

# Fragments: Journeys from Isolation to Connection

AUTHOR

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**SCIS:** 5438556

**ISBN:** 9780645099812

**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Secondary  
(Language, Suicide Ideation)

## SYNOPSIS

*Eight lives untethered.*

*Eight voices in the dark.*

*Eight stories of adversity.*

*Eight lost souls looking for hope.*

Tasked with a creative exploration of their mental health and wellbeing, eight students are plunged into the harsh terrain of their psyches, each a fragment of an elusive whole. With seemingly nothing in common, will they ever find their way back . . . to themselves and each other?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

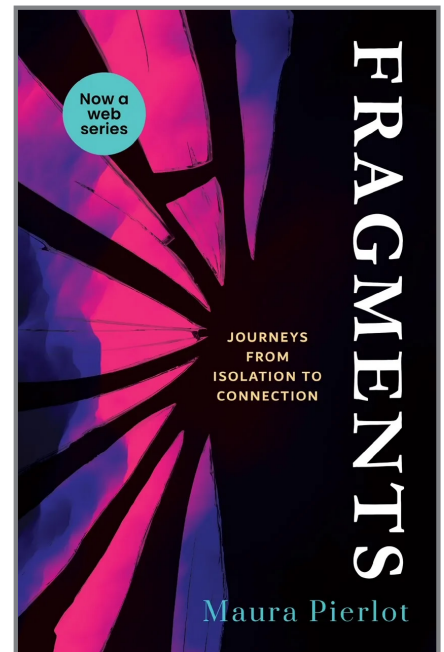
Maura Pierlot is an author, playwright and filmmaker based in Canberra. She has been reading and writing stories for as long as she can remember. She pretends to be an adult but secretly she's still a teenager inside; maybe that's why she enjoys writing for children and young adults.

She loves turning her mind to 'big ideas'—not surprising for someone with a PhD in philosophy.

Maura's debut professional theatre work, *Fragments*, played to sellout crowds at The Street Theatre, Canberra in 2019 and has been adapted as a web series, supported by the ACT Government (artsACT), winning Best Screenplay and Best Web Series at the 2022 Canberra Short Film Festival (2022). Maura has two creative nonfiction children's books coming out in 2023 and 2024. Her first picture book, *The Trouble in Tune Town*, won the 2018 ACT Writing and Publishing Awards and several overseas honours. Maura's essays, memoir, short stories and poetry have been widely published, and she has been awarded numerous writing fellowships and residencies.

In an earlier life, Maura was an ethicist, medical writer, editor and producer and a business owner. When she's not busy creating, Maura visits schools and libraries as a guest reader and speaker, serves as a role model and sponsor for Books in Homes Australia and contributes reviews for the Children's Book Council of Australia's online magazine, Reading Time.

You can find out more about Maura at [maurapierlot.com](http://maurapierlot.com).



**STUDY NOTES****BEFORE READING****English**

- Discuss the title—*Fragments: Journeys from Isolation to Connection*. What could it be about? What is a fragment? How can the word be used? What does it mean to be isolated? What does it mean to be connected?
- Read the blurb on the back of the book
- Read the Author Interview and the Reviews and Feedback sections—how do these inform your understanding of what the book is about?
- How is mental illness perceived in Australian society today? In the past? What about the future? What are the main challenges faced by young people today?
- Read and discuss each character’s story. What is the main issue addressed in each one? What do you think their stories will be?
- Start collecting a range of media and texts that address youth mental health issues and challenges. These may include novels, short stories, blog posts, news articles, nonfiction works, dramatic performances, movies, songs or artworks.

**Drama**

- Form small groups of 4–6 students and ask the groups to select an issue/theme relevant to *Fragments*, eg. bullying, social media, anxiety, depression, neurodivergence. Allocate a student to be the person experiencing the issue (change roles often). Present possible real-life scenarios and have each student act as themselves in the scenario. Allow students to make decisions and challenge them. This could be through changing the scenario (eg. adding a character, changing the setting, changing the response). Ask the students to reflect on their actions:
  - What could they have done better?
  - Why did they react the way they did?
  - Is there anyone to blame?

**The Arts: Health and PE**

- Ask students to discuss what would they do if they believed a friend was experiencing stress, anxiety or depression or if they were being bullied or harassed?
  - How would you approach your friend?
  - What would you say to them?
- Ask students to share strategies they may find useful if they were feeling stressed, anxious, depressed or harassed.
  - How would you want to be approached?
  - Who do you feel comfortable sharing with?

Reflecting on these discussions, generate a Venn diagram or other graphic organiser to list ‘do’, ‘don’t’ and ‘maybe’ strategies for offering support. Is there a ‘one size fits all’ approach?

**Civics and Citizenship**

- Briefly discuss the central themes of *Fragments* as a whole, and of each character’s story.
- Guide students, individually or in groups, to search for media or social media examples of where these themes are addressed.
- Sort examples according to their level of (mis)representation, stereotype, (over)generalisation and assumption. Allow students to determine their own categories but ask them to justify why they place items in these locations.

**WHILE READING****English and Drama**

- Prior to reading each chapter, show students the three catchphrases and have them discuss in groups the ‘type’ of person they think each character is. Guide students to look at the catchphrases in their literal form, the inferred or assumed meaning and the ‘real’ meaning behind the words. For example, look at these catchphrases for Lexy and where they fit:
  - Don’t try to tame me.
  - I’m wild but never free.

- I can look after myself.
  - Literal—I'm independent. I am my own person.
  - Inferred—I'm out of control. Nobody can tell me what to do.
  - Real—This is my façade but inside I'm scared and alone.
- As students read each chapter, have them keep a reading journal, they can include favourite quotes, illustrations, personal reflections, but each of the journal responses must include:
  - a summary of the chapter
  - character's main problem or issue
  - reflection on their literal, inferred and real meaning thoughts looking at catchphrases, compared to what they now know about the character
  - personal response regarding how they felt as they read the text.
  - Does each story reach a satisfying conclusion. Is the issue or challenge resolved or is there more that needs to be said? Can these types of texts be concluded?
- Ask students to choose two of the characters from *Fragments* and complete a character profile on each one. Alternatively, teachers may assign a character to a group of students to ensure each of the eight characters are explored in depth. Students will be required to 'guess' information that is not explicitly stated in the text to ensure profiles are completed. In the image section, students should find a photographic image (online or in a magazine) of a person they feel 'fits' their chosen character.
- As a class, maintain a list of the key themes, challenges and issues as they arise. Discuss and review these regularly. Do they overlap? Are there any common themes? Are they universal? Do/will they transcend time? Are there any issues not addressed?
- Ask students to focus on the 'lies' (p 31) and 'truths' (p 43). Why has the author chosen to include these pages? How are they relevant? Is each section complete or could it be seen as a provocation? As a class, continue to add to these pages as you read and discuss further chapters of *Fragments* or other texts and media from your resource list.
- Write a monologue from another character's perspective. Or write a monologue from the perspective of the character's public self vs private self. Discuss who the character is addressing (eg. themselves, a peer, parent, psychologist). Choose a different audience for the character and discuss how the language, tone and energy of the text/performance changes.
  - Work in character pairs (eg. Vijay and Reena, Freya and Will) to write new material from the other character's perspective.
- As a group, choose a character and improvise a movement piece around/with the other characters. Do you go towards people or away from them? How does the presence of someone else affect your own movement? Focus on rhythm, pace, ebb and flow and the use of different levels and space. This exercise is all about response so be aware of how you are affected by others and how you affect them.
- Walk as yourself, then walk in the shoes of your chosen character. Adopt mannerisms, facial expressions and interactions in character. How fast does your character walk? What part of their body leads? How visible do they want to be? Now, change your pace, posture, presenting part and see how this changes your character (eg. shoulders back and chest forward vs hunched over and small).
- Come up with a gesture for your character (wringing hands, tapping leg, shrugging, etc). Amplify this gesture from '1' (being a normal gesture we wouldn't notice) to '10', where the gesture takes over the entire movement of the character. What does this tell you about your character? Place yourself in different scenarios (eg. school, home, activities). What changes? What stays the same? What triggers the character in different scenarios?
- Identify the main fears for each of the characters or for your character of your choice. Is fear blocking them from an action or emotion? What would happen in the absence of fear? (For example, if Reena was interested in, and pursuing, Vijay?)

## AFTER READING

### English

- Ask students to reflect on the character they identify most with and why. Have students respond to the character's

story with their own story, starting with the words 'I feel . . .'

- Select one character and have students brainstorm a list of questions they may wish to ask the character. These may be questions about why the character said or did something, or what they might have done differently.' Then swap questions with another student and answer them adopting that character's voice.
- What is subtext? Guide students to analyse the subtext on pp 58–59 and discuss its relevance to each of the characters. In groups, have students add to or develop their own subtext interpretations.
- As a class, consider the language and literary devices used throughout the text, specifically those in each character's story. List these features in a table format and have groups of students identify the ones present in their chosen character's story.
- Ask students to analyse the story of a chosen character, in terms of the effectiveness of the language, structure and devices used. The analysis discussion could include the following:
  - specific vocabulary
  - figurative language
  - rhetorical questions
  - images
  - tone and mood.

Considering the different features identified, ask students if they feel their chosen character is credible and realistic. Can they imagine themselves having a conversation with their character?

- Have students discuss the 'voice' of their chosen character. Does each character have their own distinct voice? What language features set one character apart from another? What language features are common across all characters?
- As a class, identify and list the different text types or genre present in *Fragments*. These will include newspaper articles, essay, monologue, poetry and so on. Discuss why the author chose to integrate different genres into the story. Can these pieces be read in isolation or in a different order? What impact do the chosen genres have on the story, the transitions between characters or on each individual character's story?
- As a class, compare and contrast the representation of one of the characters in the *Fragments* play script, web series and novel. Consider the linguistic aspects alongside the visual and aural modes. Ask students to discuss which one they feel best represents the character and the central issue. Students may then select a different character and complete the same activity independently or in a small group.
- Select one of the key issues or themes and have students compare and contrast the representation of this issue/theme in *Fragments* and in another text or media (selected during the 'before reading' activity sequence). Students should consider aspects including:
  - audience
  - tone
  - language
  - purpose.
- Work with students to analyse and discuss 'Coding' (p 93). What is the relevance of this poem with regards to the turning point for the students and the overall message or story question? Consider the following lines:
 

'Coding is power. And choice.  
You can write any script you like.'

Discuss the concept of 'coding' and how it is relevant to the characters and to the youth of today. Write a response to this from the point of view of one of the characters, maintaining their voice and attitudes.

- Discuss with students the presence of a 'story arc' or 'narrative arc' in *Fragments*. Identify links and connections between characters and their stories, and note the development or growth of each of the characters as the story progresses. Focus on 'Today's Forecast' and 'Tomorrow's Forecast', as well as 'Fight Song' and 'Stay' and discuss how these written pieces bookend the characters' stories and contribute to the story arc and overall message of *Fragments*.
- Using prompts from the character story (one of the character catchphrases, excerpt selected by the teacher or key phrases/sentences identified by the student in their reading journal), ask students to write a series of diary entries or blog posts as the chosen character. Students may choose to represent character backstory, or project into the future

after the 'task' has been completed, taking care to maintain the unique character voice.

- Explore imagery in one or more stories. For example: In 'Picture Perfect' explore the photocopier, mirror, self-portrait. What does the imagery tell you about the characters, their self-image and their view of the world?
- Select a character that resonates with you the most and explore the reasons for this. Is there empathy for the central character? Is there a connection? Develop a creative piece that represents your chosen character.
- As a group, list the key issues in youth mental health and wellbeing that are raised throughout *Fragments*. Explore and identify where these are represented in the media. Locate multiple viewpoints, if possible.

### Drama

- Try overexaggerating the script and words. For example: Freya struggles with anxiety. If you haven't experienced anxiety before, what do you think it would feel like? How would a person speak when trying to describe anxiety to another?
- Try reading/performing 'In My Head' (Freya's story) as though you cannot catch your breath. Note how that affects your emotions and performance. Try the same with others experiencing breathlessness around you.
- Try reading/performing 'Now You See Me' (Mason's story) as someone not able to move, ie. being held down or pulled back by others. Or try reading/performing 'Short Circuit' (Will's story) with emphasis on rhythm/tapping.