

# Grace Notes

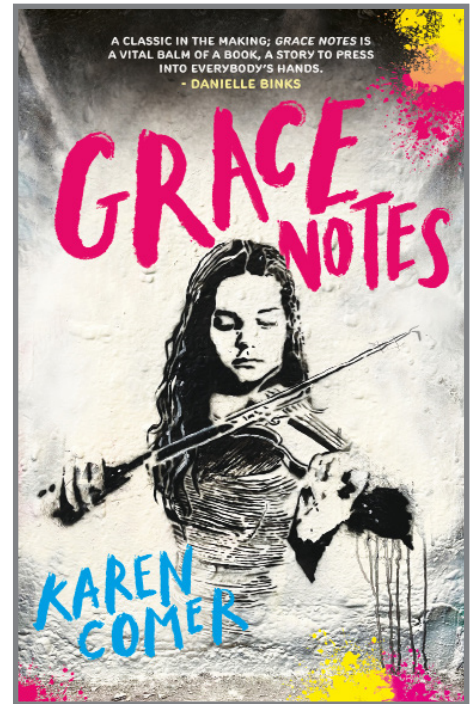
AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary



## SYNOPSIS

*This song has a grace note,  
a tiny note that's there for embellishment  
but can easily be ignored,  
not played.*

*Tonight, I add it in—  
just because.*

*We can all do with an extra note  
of grace.*

Grace Dalfinch is developing her identity as a musician, using the many talents that she has developed in hours of classical training to find her way into the contemporary music scene.

James Crux is a passionate artist who is trying to find ways to develop his skills as a street artist while staying on the right side of the law.

Their worlds collide when Crux is inspired to create his most popular work—a portrait of Grace playing her violin. The popularity of her playing and his artwork set the two on the path to each other. Will they find each other, despite the best efforts of well-meaning parents and COVID-19 lockdowns?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Comer is a freelance editor and presents writing workshops to children and adults. Earlier in her career, she worked in educational publishing and was the editor for children's art magazine, *BIG*. She lives in Melbourne. *Grace Notes* is her debut novel.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF NOTES

Ernest Price is an experienced English teacher who has led English faculties in a range of secondary settings. He has worked with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, as well as the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, to develop curriculum and resources for teachers. Ernest has written teachers notes for numerous publications, including *The Hate Race* and *Foreign Soil* by Maxine Beneba Clarke. He is the author of a forthcoming novel, to be published in 2024.

**THEMES**

- Voice and creativity
- Family expectations
- Safety
- Resilience
- Love and belonging

**TECHNIQUES**

- Form and structure
- Narrative voice
- Characterisation
- Figurative level

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

- Ask students to consider the connotations of the title *Grace Notes*. They should consider the various definitions of grace, as well as the technical definition of a grace note. What predictions can they make about the text based on these understandings?
- The work is set in Melbourne 2020. Have students consider the following:
  - The political climate in Melbourne during 2020
  - The legal framework for the lockdown of the city
  - The lived experience of lockdowns, particularly for young people
  - Their personal memories of lockdowns, if they experienced them
- Have students consider the verse novel as a form. Have they read another verse novel? What preconceptions do they have about the form?
- Ask students to investigate the history of street art in Melbourne. What do they like about the form? Why do they think it is so prevalent in Melbourne?
- Play students a range of music arranged for the violin, including both classical and contemporary tracks. What are their impressions of the music?

**AFTER READING**

- For each of the following excerpts from the text, ask students to consider what is revealed about the text's themes and/or characters.
  - '... I wonder whether there'll / ever / be space / for me.' (p 1)
  - 'I don't want things, I want / POSSIBILITIES' (p 22)
  - 'Is it possible / to love and hate / your mum / at the same time?' (p 109)
  - 'My imaginary crush on Crux / has crescendoed into forte' (p 167)
  - 'We're so entwined / it's like we've swapped hearts / and mine is bursting with colour / and his full of music.' (p 252)
  - 'Nothing of beauty lasts forever. / Nothing grim lasts forever.' (p 278)
  - 'When we finish, we don't speak / because music takes the place of words / sometimes.' (p 318)
- Students may be asked to respond creatively to *Grace Notes*. In writing their own verses, students should look to echo or respond to the author, Karen Comer's, central themes and her key techniques. Some possible prompts:
  - Ask students to choose their favourite verse, and to extend it by a stanza or two.
  - Ask students to respond to a scene from the text from the perspective of another character.
  - Find a silence in the text, and ask students to respond from a designated perspective.
  - Develop the core facts of a contemporary scene, and designate a perspective for the students to adopt. Ask them to extend the text to this moment, adopting the perspective of one of the protagonists. For example, ask them to

consider Grace in 2022, as she finishes high school. What are her dreams now?

- Have students write from their own perspective, responding to their experience of COVID lockdowns in 2020. What were their experiences of the text's key themes? Ask them to adopt some of Karen Comer's favoured techniques.
- Students may be asked to respond analytically to *Grace Notes*. Here are some possible essay questions:
  - *Grace Notes* shows the importance of finding your creative voice. Do you agree?
  - In *Grace Notes*, family is a complex concept. Discuss.
  - To what extent do COVID-19 lockdowns shape *Grace Notes*?
  - *Grace Notes* demonstrates the importance of failure. Do you agree?
  - Everybody finds a place to belong in *Grace Notes*. Discuss.
  - Love is the most powerful force in *Grace Notes*. Discuss.
  - The dual narrators shape the reader's understanding of family dynamics in *Grace Notes*. Do you agree?
  - To what extent does *Grace Notes* show change in Melbourne?
  - *Grace Notes* uses the verse form to show the importance of creativity. Do you agree?

### Themes

- Split your class into small groups. Assign them each a theme from the text and ask them to explore how this idea develops throughout the text. They should develop a presentation for the rest of the class, exploring scenes and quotations from the text that consider the issues and ideas associated with this theme.
- Have students reflect on their personal connections to the themes in question. Do they have a creative practice, or did they experience a COVID-19 lockdown? Give students space to consider these ideas individually, and then open the classroom to allow them to share and develop their perspectives on the themes.
- Students can develop an analytical paragraph in response to the following questions. Have them embed evidence in the form of quotations throughout their responses.
  - Why is creativity important to the characters in *Grace Notes*?
  - What opinions about family are evident in the text?
  - How does the author explore the nuances of safety?
  - Which of the characters in *Grace Notes* display resilience?
  - Where do the characters find a sense of belonging?

### Techniques

- Split your class into small groups. Assign them each a group of techniques from the text and ask them to explore how these techniques develop the text's themes. They should develop a presentation for the rest of the class, exploring scenes and quotations from the text that demonstrate these techniques.
- Have students experiment with using some of the techniques that the author employs throughout *Grace Notes*. Begin at the word and line level then extend to stanzas and poems as the students develop their skill and confidence.
- Students can develop an analytical paragraph in response to the following questions. Have them embed evidence in the form of quotations throughout their responses.
  - How does the author use form and structure to develop the themes of the text?
  - How does the author's use of narrative voice develop the reader's understanding of *Grace Notes*?
  - How does characterisation shape the text's themes?
  - How does the figurative level enhance the reader's understanding of *Grace Notes*?

AUTHOR OF NOTES

**ERNEST PRICE**