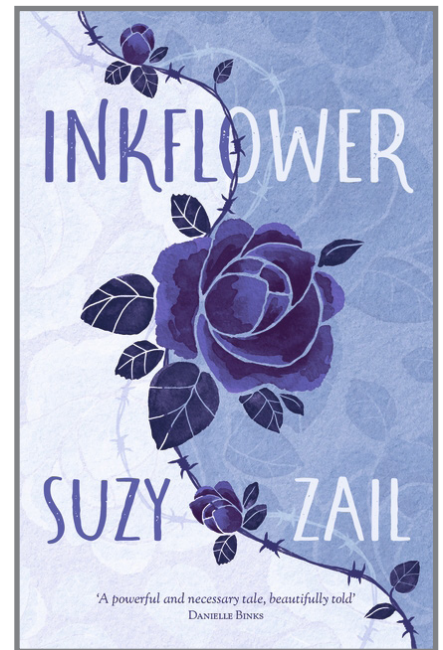


# Inkflower

AUTHOR  
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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid to Upper Secondary  
(Violence, Language, Sexual References, Alcohol References)

## SYNOPSIS

Lisa's father has six months to live. And a story to tell about a boy sent to Auschwitz. A boy who lost everything and started again. A story he has kept hidden—until now.

But Lisa doesn't want to hear it, because she has secrets too. No-one at school knows she is Jewish or that her dad is sick. Not even her boyfriend. But that's all about to change. And so is she.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzy Zail has worked as a litigation lawyer, specialising in Family Law, but now writes full time. Among other titles, she has written *The Tattooed Flower*, a memoir about her father's time as a child survivor of the Holocaust. Her first novel for young adults, *The Wrong Boy*, was shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year Awards, the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature, the WAYRBA, USBBY and YABBA awards. Her second novel with Walker Books, *Alexander Altmann A10567*, was a Notable Book at the CBCA Awards. Her YA novel, *I Am Change*, is the story of a young Ugandan girl's struggle to stay in school. In 2022 Suzy published her first picture book, *Arabella's Alphabet Adventure*. Suzy's books have been published in Germany, the UK, US, Sweden, Italy, Romania and the Netherlands. She lives in Melbourne and has three children.

Visit her online at [suzyzail.com.au](http://suzyzail.com.au) and [@suzyzailauthor](https://twitter.com/suzyzailauthor).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF NOTES

Michelle Praver has been Head of English and Library in schools and a VCE assessor for English. She has taught in Pathways courses and is currently teaching focused academic in First Year College at Victoria university working to prepare the next generation of teachers who will in turn inspire their students. Michelle's other passion is the Arts in all its forms but particularly literature. She has written teachers' notes for many YA texts, been the Victorian judge for the Children's Book Council awards and been actively involved in literature festivals interviewing writers and organising events. She has presented at many English teachers conferences, run PD sessions and continues to immerse herself in the world of books.

## NOTE

**This book explores, among other things, the tragedy of the Holocaust and the murder of 6 million Jews in the Final Solution, a plan designed by the Nazis to make the world 'Judenrein', devoid of Jews. As you take your students on this journey, teachers are encouraged to be cognizant of the distress this exploration may uncover, monitor reactions**

and respond appropriately. In particular, consider providing support for students who may have had past experiences of trauma. The book also follows Emil's decline as he is diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. The process is slow, and though this time is replete with gratitude and connection, teachers should be mindful about student's feelings regarding Emil's deteriorating condition.

## THEMES

- WWII
- The Holocaust
- Cultural Understanding
- History
- Antisemitism
- Refugees
- Racism
- Death And Dying
- Family Relationships
- Friendship
- Disability
- Loss, Grief And Resilience
- Storytelling

## STUDY NOTES

### CHAPTERS 1–3 NOW

- How does the author let readers know that she is setting her novel in the past? (Consider the music icons she mentions, the fashions she describes and the technology to which she refers). Write a few paragraphs of a story in which you, like the author, suggest the era by including references to events/fashions/icons of the time. Weave these subtly into your story. Share this with others and allow them to gather the hints and nominate the era and then, suggest improvements.
- Lisa initially responds to the news of her father's illness by focusing on herself. 'What if Mum remarries? Will I have to share a room with her new husband's kids? Will I have to change schools?' (p 15). How can you explain this behaviour?
- 'How do you comfort someone who's dying? I don't have the words. I never learned them,' (p 14). Consider the way modern society prepares us to deal with death. Is it discussed? How do you think we ought to prepare for this inevitability?

### CHAPTER 4 THEN

- Chapter 4 begins the eyewitness account of the events that befell Lisa's father during the war years. Emil insists that his family listens to his story and the telling becomes a family ritual as Emil shares his account of the violence and hatred which were meted out to Jews in WW2. Emil recalls that he, 'saw things a ten-year old boy shouldn't see,' (p 33).
- The impact of childhood trauma is lifelong. In what way might the retelling of his story be a tool of empowerment for Emil?
- Visit the following website and watch some of the survivor videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOHPgSehL-M> How might enabling survivors of trauma to tell their stories, provide a pathway to healing?
- Emil tells himself that 'Knowledge was my way out,' (p 31). Explain how knowledge can be a tool of empowerment.
- As the days pass, Emil is subjected to violence and racism perpetrated by children at his school. He refers to 'broken shop windows' and the 'burning of books' (p 35). Divide the class into small groups to research the events of Kristallnacht and the burning of books on May 10, 1933, in Germany. Ask students to prepare an oral presentation of their findings using slides to tell the story of these events.
  - Debate the topic 'Censoring ideas is never OK.'

### CHAPTER 5 NOW

- 'I learned the rules early. Lunch should contain . . .' (p 54). Lisa has learned that cultural difference is best kept hidden.

Find examples of the way Lisa works hard to avoid standing out. Contrast this with the way the ‘Vietnamese girl’, Mai, behaves in school and the reception she gets from the student body.

- Do you and your friends embrace cultural diversity or is there an expectation of conformity?
- Is Mr Keller wrong in keeping his past hidden for so long? Share your views.

### CHAPTER 6 THEN

- Transporting Jews in cars reserved for cattle was one of the many strategies for dehumanising prisoners. Use the link below to read first-hand accounts of transportation in cattle cars. <https://www.yadvashem.org/remembrance/archive/central-theme/deportation-of-the-jews-during-the-holocaust.html>.
- Tatte retained his religious observance and his faith, praying regularly. Emil however ‘prays . . . that someone would hear his father’s prayers.’ (p 67) Discuss the idea that suffering, and trauma are transformative. Use both examples of your family’s experiences and incidents from this book to support your view.

### CHAPTER 7 NOW

- ‘I’ve lost a grandmother I’ve never met,’ (p 73). Brainstorm the ripple effects of war on subsequent generations.

Consider issues such as:

- challenges to identity formation
- absent family
- inherited trauma.

Divide into groups and explore one of these above and share your learning through a short dramatic piece.

- When Emil takes his family to breakfast at the Pancake Parlour, the author specifically details that ‘Dad spears a piece of bacon with his fork’ (p 76). When Lisa reflects on being brought up with ‘fairy bread and Tim Tams,’ (p 79), she too emphasises her lack of Jewish connection. Why do you think Zail emphasises the lack of family connection to Jewish practice? How is this relevant to Emil’s story?
- Lisa has the opportunity to reach out to the new girl who is struggling to gain acceptance at Glenrock High but chooses rather to ‘laugh when I’m meant to and . . . ask the right questions,’ (p 82). Can you understand her behaviour? What do you do to fit in? Are there parts of yourself that you hide from others? Why? To what extent do you shape yourself so that you are accepted by others?

### CHAPTER 8 THEN

- Jewish prisoners were shaved, forced to stand naked, tattooed with numbers, made to wear ill-fitting clothes with an identifying yellow Star of David and even commanded to defecate on demand. What is the psychology behind treating fellow humans in this way? Discuss this with classmates.
- Research your own name. What does it mean? After whom were you named? What influenced your parents to select your given name? Introduce yourself to the class with this new information. Why is losing your name and becoming a number so significant?
- Tatte insists that dignity lives inside the individual. ‘. . . they can’t take it because it lives here,’ (p 95). Explain the notion that dignity is internal.
- A violin and a flute played while prisoners froze and starved in a Polish winter in a concentration camp. What might have been the motivation behind this added cruelty?
- Tatte continues to pray despite the suffering and deprivation, responding to Emil’s challenge with ‘It’s all we’ve got,’ (p 97). What role do hope and faith play in survival? What role do dreams and memories play in maintaining hope (p 99–100)? Use your own experiences or those of your family to respond to this question.
- Emil reflects that there are things he had to learn and things he had to unlearn. Make a list of these. What do we learn from this list?
- Tatte is pinned with his arm behind his back and a gun at his head, under the sign ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’. Research the phrase. Explain the ironic term.

**CHAPTER 9 NOW**

- Lisa is aware that words can be ‘ . . . too small for what my father went through.’ (p 103) Are there times where you have found words inadequate?
- Consider the role of music in articulating feelings. Could you argue that music can be more powerful than words? Use the link below to examine the role of music in Jewish life in the ghetto and the role of music as a vehicle for articulating both hope and suffering. Create a piece of music that tells a story. You can do this using digital tools if you cannot play an instrument <<https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/music/music-in-the-holocaust.asp>>
- Emil explains the flower tattooed on his arm. ‘Something beautiful to cover up the ugliness’ (p 105). In what way does this decision reflect the personality of Emil?
- Lisa regrets the number of missed opportunities in never having asked her father about his experiences. Should children push their parents to reveal trauma? Do they have a right to know? Is it selfish or an important obligation to share?

**CHAPTER 10 THEN**

- A woman neither SS nor Kapo illegally provides Emil with some scraps of extra food. Small acts of defiance saved some Jewish lives and demonstrated that humanity cannot be totally wiped out. Research the concept of ‘Righteous Gentiles’ and the way they have been honoured in the State of Israel.
- Explain what Emil meant by the phrase, ‘The best revenge was to stay alive.’ (p 130).
- Emil marvels that the violent Kapo, Janek, is someone’s father. How can we understand man’s inhumanity to man? How might dehumanising your victim enable inhumanity? How can we minimise this behaviour?

**CHAPTER 11 NOW**

- As MND takes hold of Emil, he loses his ability to do simple things. How does he manage to maintain his dignity and hope? Consider his response, ‘Celebrate today,’ (p 138) when answering this question.
- Explain what motivates Lisa’s refusal to share with her friends both her father’s illness and her discovery of his tragic past. What would you do?
- Explain the way in which experiences learned from Tatte, Willie and Emil, provide Lisa with lessons that assist her in navigating her father’s diagnosis. What does she learn?

**CHAPTER 13 NOW**

- Despite Lisa’s growing understanding of racism and bigotry, she allows the Vietnamese girl, Mai, to eat alone rather than inviting her to join their circle and take the empty chair (p 168). Why do you think Lisa is unable to put her learning about prejudice and stereotyping into practice?

**CHAPTER 14 THEN**

- Read the liberation stories below from survivors of Buchenwald concentration camp who made their way to Australia after the war. <<https://www.monash.edu/buchenwald-boys/melbourne/australia-prepares>> <<https://www.monash.edu/buchenwald-boys/liberation>>

**CHAPTER 15 NOW**

- Consider the way in which shared suffering acts as a bond. Explain why this might be the case.
- Lisa blames her father for her own inability to communicate with Deb and Adam. Is there truth in this idea? Discuss.
- As Emil’s MND worsens, Lisa comments, ‘that there are no pills for our pain,’ (p 199). Use this quote as the title for a creative story where pain is used as a metaphor for any form of suffering.
- Despite his growing weakness, Emil remains positive. Use the ideas in this chapter to articulate Emil’s philosophy of life.
  - What is your philosophy of life? Write this into a few paragraphs and share this with a partner
- Emil is reaffirming his cultural heritage as he faces his own demise. Do you believe that it is important to maintain your cultural heritage? Why/why not?

### CHAPTERS 17–20 NOW

- ‘All I can do is give him back his past and tell him it’s important, and that I’ve been listening.’ (p 220) What does Lisa mean by “give him back his past?” How does remembering assist those who suffered?
  - Consider the phrase ‘Lest we Forget’ which is part of our Anzac Day ritual. Explain what it means in light of your reading of this book.
- International Holocaust Remembrance Day is January 27. Organise a school assembly to mark this day. Consider what you will include and what story you will be telling regarding tolerance and acceptance.
- Upon hearing that Lisa is Jewish, Deb says, ‘What does Jewish look like?’ (p 224). What does this quote tell the reader about Deb?
- Mai, the Vietnamese girl in Lisa’s class, has both been reading about bigotry and loneliness and experiencing bigotry and loneliness which she shares willingly with the girls. Lisa says that ‘Letting go is hard,’ (p 223) and Emil argues that ‘Letting others in, . . . [is] not dangerous it’s freeing,’ (p 230). What is the author saying here about the power of communication, sharing and storytelling? Do you agree?
- After the war, Emil and some others seek revenge through both minor and major acts of violence (see pp 233–234). Can revenge be justified? Explain these ideas.
- Investigate the countries that gave refuge to fleeing Nazis. Are these countries morally culpable for providing refuge? Argue your case.
- Emil’s family home and shop and even his cow are now in the possession of strangers. Much Jewish property, artwork and even bank accounts were simply taken over by strangers. What do you think should be done about this?
- Does the phrase ‘let sleeping dogs lie’ have a place here? Write a persuasive piece, arguing your view.
- Emil returns to his hometown and eventually to his surviving siblings only to hear conversations like, “‘Hitler didn’t keep his promise. There’s more of them now than before,’” (p 240) and “‘You’re a Jew and sooner or later they’ll come for you. There’s talk of shutting down synagogues. That’s how it starts . . .’” (p 262). Consider this in light of the phrase: ‘If you watch closely, history does nothing but repeat itself.’

### CHAPTERS 21–26

- Explain what Lisa means when she says, ‘I have been shaped by the stories my father did and didn’t tell me.’ (p 276).
- Lisa sits in silence to try and understand her father’s perspective. Being a prisoner and having your voice silenced undermines your sense of self but Lisa understands that “‘the past won’t be silenced and neither will Dad,’ (p 280). How does Emil maintain his sense of self despite his illness-induced silence?
- Lisa eventually tires of caring about what others think (p 287). She comments that ‘it must be liberating not seeing yourself through other people’s eyes,’ (p 287). How is this a liberation? And how does this new-found liberation empower Lisa? Find examples from the book.
- Emil does not believe in God (p 301) and yet it is important for him to attend synagogue and sit amongst his people. Can you explain this?

### CHAPTERS 27–33

- How might keeping secrets both protect and undermine family dynamics?
- What are the stories in your life or that of your family that you struggle to share. Why? How might telling these stories threaten or comfort? Why did Emil choose not to tell his story for so long? Use the text to provide evidence for your response.
- Lisa considers her loss of ‘grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts to the Holocaust,’ (p 338). She decides that perhaps ‘words are my way back,’ (p 338). Emil says that ‘Everyone has a story,’ (p 347). How can we use words to ensure this sort of suffering does not recur? What steps will you take?
- Write a chapter of your family’s story. Choose a starting point and explore one element which sheds light on who you are.
- One of Lisa’s final exchanges with her father is when she thanks him. What has Lisa learned from her father and from this journey?

- In the Afterword, the author explains that *Inkflower* is based on the biographical story of her father. What is the message/s you take away from this novel? Do you think that the author has succeeded in passing on her father's message?

### FORMAT

- Time has been manipulated using the format of THEN/NOW. Do you consider this an effective storytelling tool? Why or why not? Consider the way in which the strategy enhances tension, builds interest and deals with the notion of the past as a tool for shaping who we are and who we become.
  - Had the author chosen to tell this story as an integrated narrative, what would have been lost?
- All of the Now sections are told using Lisa's voice while the Then parts are narrated by Lisa's father, Emil. Has the author succeeded in convincing you that each voice is genuine? Find examples to substantiate your claim.
  - How does Zail make the transition from Emil's voice to Emil's voice-generated accounts? Is this a successful technique?
- Try your hand at writing a story using two voices which present two tales that ultimately intertwine.
- This story is based on real events. Zail is retelling her father's experience. What might be the challenges for a writer telling someone else's story?
- How realistic is it to ask people to speak up and call out poor behaviour such as racism? What can make this a hard thing to do? What can you do?

AUTHOR OF NOTES  
**MICHELLE PRAWER**