

# Saving Charli

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



## SYNOPSIS

Who are you when your other half is gone? Twelve-year-old Charli knows no other way of being than as a twin. But when her twin sister, Freya, succumbs to a lifelong battle with illness, Charli, consumed by grief, retreats into a tent in her backyard. Closed off from her family and friends, Charli risks losing not only her other half but her whole self. Without her twin, who is left to save Charli?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Di Walker lives in Victoria, with her two rescue dogs, three-legged Ruby and Icy, a loud snorer. She usually writes early in the morning, before the sun rises and before the busyness of the day takes over. When she is not writing, Di likes to garden or listen to podcasts—sometimes both at the same time.

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## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
  - What do you think is happening on the cover of this book?
  - What genre do you think this book might be, and why do you think this?
  - What predictions can you make about the novel based on the cover alone?
  - What does the cover illustration symbolise to you?
  - Based on the cover illustration alone, would you choose to read this story? Why/why not?
- At the very start of the novel, Charli talks about how sometimes she would ‘just count’. As a class, discuss why someone might wish to spend their time just counting while they do a physical activity. Be sure to consider what the benefits to them mentally and emotionally might be, to have some time every day where they are physically active, and not thinking about anything other than counting.
- Charli says at the very beginning of the novel ‘I know it’s not Freya’s fault. I know she can’t help it. That doesn’t make it easier, though. That doesn’t make it okay.’ As a class, discuss this statement of Charli’s. Some things you might like to include in your discussion could be:
  - Do you think that Charli is correct that it not being Freya’s fault doesn’t make it okay?
  - What do you see as the most problematic aspect of how Charli is expected to be responsible and to make sacrifices for Freya’s sake?
  - Do you think that Charli’s parents could have done anything differently in how they treat their children?

- What are some other situations in life that the second part of Charli's statement could be said to apply to?
- In your opinion, does a negative event or circumstance not being anyone's fault make it easier to deal with the situation? Why/why not?
- What, in your opinion, is Charli referring to specifically in this statement? Why do you think this?
- In primary school, Charli and Freya were always put in the same class. Do you think that this was fair to Charli? Why/why not? Would putting them in different classes have been fair to Freya? Can you think of any reasons that Freya might have benefited from being separated from Charli?
- Queenie says that she, Blair, and Charli are a giggle of friends. In pairs or small groups think of new and appropriate collective nouns for at least three different groups of people, animals or things. Some of the groups you might wish to think of new collective nouns for could be:
  - A group of friends
  - A group of babies
  - A group of pencils.
- Sometimes Charli thinks about what it would be like to be an only child. She says that Queenie 'doesn't have to share her parents with anyone else.' As a class, talk about the benefits and the downsides of having siblings, and the benefits and the downsides of being an only child.
  - Individually choose one thing that you really like about your own family composition, and write a short paragraph explaining why you like it, and what the benefits are.
- How does Charli feel about Freya? In small groups discuss all the different emotions that Charli has over the course of the novel, and why she struggles with her feelings regarding Freya so much.
- Blair loves songs from the eighties. Listen to a range of different eighties songs, and see if you can find one (or more) that you like. Ask the adults at home (or maybe a teacher at school) what their favourite eighties music is, and what they like about it, then listen to a song that they recommend. Did you like it too? Why/why not?
- As a class, discuss the concepts of narrative voice and point of view in relation to this novel. Some things to consider in your discussion might be:
  - Why do you think the author chose to write the novel in the first person?
  - How does switching between three distinct points of view affect the reader's understanding of events?
  - How has the author created the three very different voices in the characters of Blair, Charli and Queenie?
  - What distinguishes each character's voice from the others?
  - What techniques did the author use to differentiate the different characters' voices?
  - How much of each distinct personality shines through in their words, and how does this compare to the descriptions of that character that the other two provide?
  - If this novel were written in the third person, how different would it be, why and in what ways?
  - Choose one scene in the novel, and rewrite it using the third person.
- Make a decoupage shoe box of your own. Research online different ways of making them, and create a design document outlining what you will do, what materials you will need, and where you could source them. Try to use as many previously used materials as you possibly can. Once completed, write a recount of the entire exercise, noting down what worked well, what changes you had to make to your original design and why, and how your shoebox turned out in the end.
- Listen to one or more of the pieces of music mentioned in the novel. After listening to the piece, as a class, discuss how it made you feel, and whether you agree with Queenie's and/or Blair's assessment of it. Create an artwork that reflects your emotional response to the music—and remember, there is no wrong way to react to something like this.
- Did you expect to read a scene from Freya's point of view? Was her voice what you would have expected? Are the things she said what you would have predicted she'd say? Why do you think this was the case?
- Why do you think Charli chose to hide in the tent after the funeral?
- What do you think is the saddest scene in the novel? Why do you think this? What about the scene makes it so sad, and how has the author conveyed the sadness?
- When Charli won't leave her tent, she says of Blair and Queenie 'If they were real friends, they would have tried harder.' As a class, discuss the problematic nature of this statement. Include in your discussion the importance of

taking people at their word when they tell you what they want, and allowing people to make their own choices. Why, in the context of the events in this novel, is it actually important to Charli that people don't just go away and leave her alone? How did Blair and Queenie manage to respect Charli's boundaries whilst still making sure that she knew they were there for her?

- What do you think the 'saving' in the title of the book refers to?
- As a class, discuss the way you perceive the relationship between Freya and Charli over the course of the novel. Does your understanding of the relationship between them change over time, and if so how and why? How does the author introduce the different facets of their relationship over time, and were you expecting each new aspect as the story unfolded?
- When Cassandra decides to target Blair, Charli and Queenie, they ignore her completely, but Blair finds herself completely unable to. In your opinion, does this sort of ignoring someone stop them from bullying their chosen victim? Why do you think this might be the case?
  - As a class, discuss bullying, and different techniques that people can use when someone chooses them as the victim of this sort of behaviour. Include in your discussion an analysis of Queenie's methods. When Queenie demonstrates how to properly ignore someone, Blair is left feeling confused and off balance. What is Queenie doing that is more than simply ignoring someone? Why do you think that this tactic was never going to work for Blair? Do you think that Blair's final response to Cassandra would work in real life? Why/why not? What do you see as the most important attribute for a person to have to protect them from bullying?
- What do you see as the main themes of *Saving Charli*? As a class, discuss what themes you can identify in the novel, and then individually write a piece comparing the importance of at least three separate themes that run through the novel arguing as to why one of them might be considered to be the most important theme. Use at least five pieces of evidence from the text to support your assertions.

AUTHOR OF NOTES  
**RAE CARLYLE**