

The Kindness Project

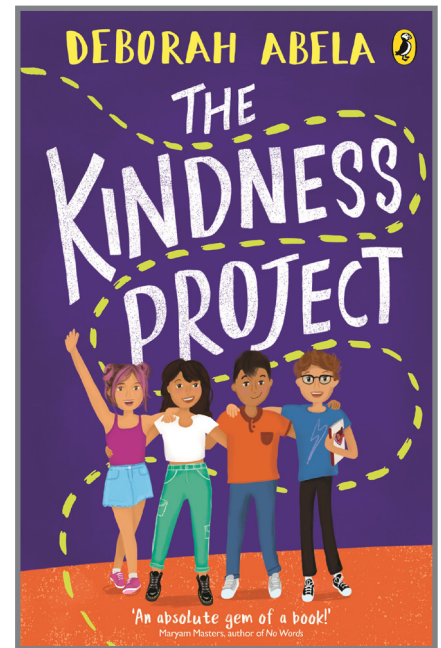
AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Primary



SYNOPSIS

The Kindness Project is a verse novel about four kids who are given a class project to make the world a better place. The trouble is, they don't like each other . . . until they discover they have much more in common than they realise and band together when one of them really needs their help and support.

The novel deals with issues many families face: intergenerational relationships, mental health, illness and loss, but it's also about the power of friendship and family to help us when life feels overwhelming and, most importantly, to remind us we are not alone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After training as a teacher, Deb travelled to Africa where she was harassed by monkeys, caught in a desert sandstorm and thrown in jail . . . twice! She's worked as a child wrangler and a rides operator at Luna Park, but her first real job was as writer/producer of a national children's TV show at Network TEN.

She has since become an internationally published and awarded author of 28 books including her cranky climate change trilogy. Her family's survival in WWII and migration to Australia inspired *Teresa A New Australian*. *The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee* and *The Most Marvellous Spelling Bee Mystery* were inspired by her fantabulous Grade 4 teacher, Ms Gray. She's also written picture books: *Wolfie*, *An Unlikely Hero* and the 2021 CBCA Notable, *Bear in Space*. Deb's won awards for her work but mostly hopes to be as brave as her characters. She's a proud ambassador for the charities, Room to Read and Books in Homes. *The Book of Wondrous Possibilities* was a CBCA Notable book 2023 and was shortlisted for the 2023 REAL Awards, Davitt Awards and Speech Pathology Book of the Year Awards. *The Kindness Project* is her first verse novel.

Find out more about Deborah at deborahabela.com.

THEMES

- Kindness
- Family
- Friendship
- Worries and anxiety

STUDY NOTES**BEFORE READING**

- Before reading the book, look at the cover. What do you think the story will be about? What does the design say about the book? (For example, think about the colours, the characters and objects, the font choice, the use of light and shade.)
- What genre do you think this book will fall into?
- Is there a particular character who stands out on the cover for you? Why do you think you picked that character?
- How many characters can you see?
 - What kind of personalities do you think they might have and how do you think they might fit into the story?
- Who do you think the book is aimed at? Why?
- Do you think the dotted line that features on the cover could be representative of something in the book? What do you think that could be?
- Have you ever had a teacher that you found inspiring? What was it about this person that made you feel this way?
- Do you believe that a small group of people – even kids – could change the world? Can you think of examples of people who have really made a difference?
- We can feel good by receiving and giving kindness, so both are good for how we feel about ourselves. What does kindness mean to you? When did someone do something really kind for you? What was it? How did it make you feel? What was a kind gesture you did for someone else? How did that make you feel?

WHILE READING**Writing Style**

- *The Kindness Project* is a verse novel. What makes a verse novel different from other stories?
 - Do you think the format of a verse novel suits this type of story?
- Have you read any other verse novels? How did they compare to *The Kindness Project*? In what ways are they similar? How are they different?
- There are several authors whose quotes appear on the first page on the novel: Pip Harry, Zanni Louise and Maryam Masters. Research the type of books they have written. Why do you think these authors were asked if they would provide a quote for *The Kindness Project*?
- Write a scene in the style of a verse novel about one of your friends. If you think it suits the story, use pull-out words and different fonts to help convey the emotions and feelings you want to show.
- Choose one of the poems from the book—how has the author used the design of the poem to help convey emotion and pacing?
- Several kids have given quotes about what they thought of the novel. Write your own quote once you have finished reading the book.
- Deb has written her novel in free verse, which means there are no rules! Yay! It doesn't have to rhyme and each verse can be different—some are longer and some are shorter. Choose a verse you like from the novel and see how Deb uses very few words to tell the story. For example, look at the poem on page 16. Sometimes Deb changes the font of a word to match the feeling or meaning of that word, like 'hurricane' or 'scared' or she plays with how the word appears on the page, like:

down F-A-S-T-E-R-A-N-D-F-A-S-T-E-R.

down

down

- Choose a verse you really like and think about how you could write a similar verse, playing with both fonts, form and style to create a poem. Don't forget, you can always play even more with your poem by using simile, metaphor, alliteration or onomatopoeia.

Kindness

- Do you think the Kindness Project is a good idea?
- There are a few different Kindness Project groups listed on pp 269–271. Which of these do you think you'd be interested in joining? Why or why not?
- Create a Word Wall of all the words that come to mind when you think of kindness.
 - Create your own poem about kindness using the word wall as your inspiration.
- There are lots of studies that show how kindness can improve our physical and emotional health. Research up to ten ways kindness can make us feel better.
- Nicolette's happy place is with her nanna or in the Story Tent in the library. For Leaf, it's being with his mum or drawing. What makes you happy? It can be something you do on your own or with others, it can involve sport or art or building, cuddling up with a book or being in nature or dancing! Where is your happy place?
- Make a list of small ways you can be kind every day. Make a chart for your classroom wall to remind you. Challenge yourselves to come up with as many as you can.
- In *The Kindness Project*, Ms Skye's class create lots of ways to make the world a better place. If you had to create a Kindness Project, what would it be? How would it make the world a better place?
 - Create a poster about your kindness project and give a class presentation on how it would work. The following link has lots of ideas to inspire your own Kindness Project <www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-ideas>.
- Create a meme that sums up what you think kindness is. Print them out and plaster them around your class.
- Research groups or organisations that work hard to change the world. It could be as big as an organisation as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors Without Borders), or as small as a local community gardening group. What is their aim? Give examples of what they do. How do you think they make the world a better place?

Jigsaw Puzzles and Other Symbols

- Symbols are a way to help explain an idea, emotion or theme in writing. Nicolette loves doing jigsaw puzzles with Nanna. There are a few times jigsaws seem to match what's going on. For example, Nanna says that puzzles are like humans,

‘When we find the person
who fits us perfectly
everything feels right.’
(p 4)

What do you think Nanna means by this? How does Nicolette experience this herself?

- Find two other examples of where jigsaws are used to explain something that is happening in the novel.
- Find other examples of symbols Deb uses to help tell her story and give it more impact.

Similes

- Similes are a way of helping us see an idea from another angle, by comparing one thing to another. It can emphasise an idea, make it clearer or give it more impact. Similes often use the words ‘like’ or ‘as’. See the examples on p 18.
- Choose any subject you like and write a poem using at least one simile.

Family

- Nicolette is worried about her nanna during the story. Has there been a time when you've been concerned about a family member? What did you do about it? Were you able to talk to the person involved about the problem?
- Do you think things would have been different for Nicolette had she been able to talk to her mum about her worries about Nanna?
- Why do you think Nicolette's mum had such difficulty going to see Nanna at the nursing home?
- Many different families are represented in the narrative. Was there a family or character you could most relate to in the story? Why do you think Deborah felt it was important to represent different types of families?
- Leaf's mum lives with schizophrenia, something which affects 1 in 300 people according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Did you know about schizophrenia before you read Deb's book? Do you think Leaf was nervous when he told Nicolette about his mum? What did Nicolette do? How do you think her reaction made Leaf feel? How does Leaf feel about his mum?
- At the end of the book, when Leaf's mum is invited on stage, what do you think are Leaf's main worries? Did those

worries come true? Why or why not? Leaf's mum says schizophrenia:

'can be hard to understand even for me
but don't be afraid
to ask questions
because that's how we learn
about each other
and find out we have much more in common
than makes us different.' (pp 281–282)

What do you think about this statement?

- In a group, talk about your family. Write a list of the similarities and differences between the different families of the group members. Note any points of crossover between families.
- Nicolette has a small family consisting of just her mum and nanna. Do you have a big or small family? Draw your family tree. Share your tree with others in the class. Feel free to include pets and friends!
- Nicolette's nanna has done a lot of wonderful things in her life. Read the section on p 49 about her travel adventures. Was there anything here that really surprised you? Pick an aspect of Nanna's life and research it. Write a paragraph or two about what you have discovered.
- Nicolette is so furious about the way her nanna is treated in 'Alcatraz' that she kidnaps her. What things upset her most? Nicolette knows her nanna is fascinating, so why do you think the nursing home staff don't know this? Talk to one of your grandparents or an older friend of the family about life when they were your age. Make a special note of things that were different—for example, clothes, transport, technology or food. Create a presentation to share with the class.
- What is a stigma? Do you think this is why Leaf is nervous talking about his mum's illness? Research mental health and stigmas. What are ways stigmas can make someone's mental health worse? Do you think Leaf's mum's appearance during the presentation night could help reduce stigmas? How?

Friendship

- Read the 'Friendship Manual' on p 23, then answer the following questions:
 - Have you ever felt like Nicolette?
 - Does she feel like this all the way through the book?
 - How does her attitude to making friends change?
 - Why do you think that is? Can you find a place in the story that backs up your ideas?
- At the start of the story, Nicolette has worries about DJ and Layla. When do you think this changes in the story, and why?
- Think about the friendship groups you have, and the friends your family members have in their lives. Do you think friendship groups change much over time? Why do you think this is?
- Do you think Ms Skye knew what she was doing when she selected which kids to put in which groups? Do you think she might have known what would happen with Nicolette, Leaf, DJ and Layla? Can you find evidence of this in the text?

Worries and Anxiety

- In the narrative, Nicolette has lots of worries. How has this been expressed in the design of the book? Do you think this is an effective way to help the reader know how Nicolette is feeling?
- Have there been times when you've felt worried or anxious about something? What kinds of things helped you feel less anxious?
- Do you think having a good support network, and friends you can rely on, helps when you have things go wrong in your life?
- Leaf is the new kid at school. He seems pretty relaxed about the whole situation and fits in easily. Do you think the way he acts is usual for a kid starting at a new school? Do you think Leaf could have been feeling anxiety on the inside and he just wasn't showing it?
- Sometimes, it can help to write down or draw your worries. Why do you think this is an effective thing to do? Do you think Leaf's drawing helps him in the same way?

- Once you've read the whole story, what do you think of DJ's behaviour in the first part of the story? Do you think there could have been a reason for him acting the way he did? Does that excuse his behaviour?
- How important do you think it is to talk about your worries instead of bottling them up?
- Why do you think telling someone your worries might be helpful? Nicolette worries about how they will react when Leaf tells Layla and DJ his concerns about his mum. Should you be careful who you tell your worries to? Who are some people in your life you think you could share your worries with?
- Nicolette, Leaf, DJ and Layla all have their own worries. Pick one of these characters and write a paragraph about the problems or concerns that they had at the start of the story. Next, write a paragraph about how these problems have been resolved (or not resolved) by the end of the book. Do you think the character has grown or changed by the end of the story? Why or why not?
- Write a short scene about Nicolette, DJ, Leaf and Layla in six months' time. Do you think they would all still be friends? Do you think they would be worried about the same things?
- The text design has used different fonts to accentuate the meaning of the words and to help give them emotion. Sometimes, colour can also be used to express emotion. Write a list of the characters in the story. Assign each character a colour that fits them best at the start of the story, and then again at the end of the story. Have you chosen different colours or the same colours? Why do you think this is so?
- Do you have any worries or concerns at the moment? Write this worry down on a piece of paper and put it in a safe place at home. Wait a week, then get this piece of paper out and re-read it. Has your worry changed at all? How do you feel today about what you wrote down a week ago?

Heroes

- There are lots of times that heroes are mentioned in the book, such as Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg and Roald Dahl. Who are the heroes in your life? It can be someone you've never met or someone in your family, like Leaf and his mum. Why are they a hero to you? What are the qualities or actions that make them someone you admire?
- Do you think it's important to have people we look up to? In your answer, give examples why.
- Leaf is good at drawing superheros and creates the characters The Masked Avenger and Ruby Flame for Nicolette. Choose someone you look up to and draw an illustration of them as a superhero.