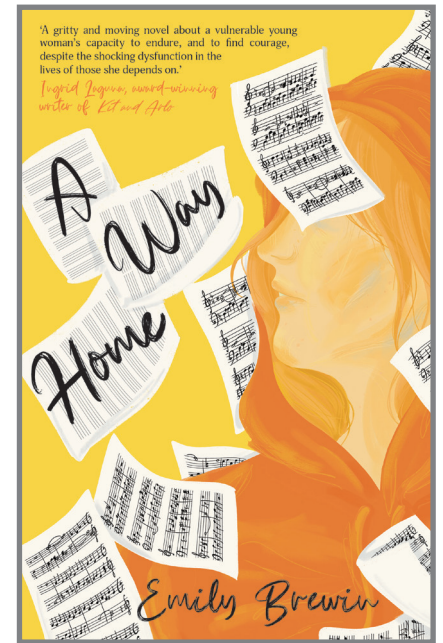


# A Way Home

AUTHOR  
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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Secondary  
(Violence, Sexual Content, Suicide Reference)

## SYNOPSIS

Sixteen-year-old Grace lives under a bridge in Melbourne's CBD. It's cold and wet, but hidden. Safe, at least, until she can go home.

When winter drives her to the City Library one morning, Grace meets Louie, a weird kid with his own problems, and discovers a community piano. The piano reminds Grace of her mum, a celebrated pianist whose mental illness makes life a rollercoaster—and not always a fun one.

When Grace comes up with a plan to find the help she and Mum need, life begins to look up. But things don't work out as Grace imagines and suddenly her world's turned upside down again, and maybe for good this time.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Brewin is a Melbourne author, copywriter, and learning designer. Her first novel, *Hello, Goodbye*, was published in 2017 and her second, *Small Blessings*, in 2019. Her short stories have appeared in anthologies, *Into Your Arms: Nick Cave's Songs Reimagined* by Fremantle Press, *We'll Stand In That Place and Other Stories* by Margaret River Press and the *Bristol Short Story Anthology—Volume 10*. She has written for *The Age*, ABC Education, news.com.au, *Meanjin*, *Kill Your Darlings*, *Archer*, *Feminartsy*, *The Victorian Writer*, *Screen Education*, and *Mamamia*. She is currently working on her fourth novel.

## STUDY NOTES

### BEFORE READING

- Explore your understanding of homelessness in Australia. Find contrasting points of view from three different media sources to contribute to a class discussion.
- Study the cover of *A Way Home* and discuss in pairs what the image predicts about the main character and her story.
  - Considering your predictions, redesign the cover using your own symbols.
  - Identify any symbols that appear on the cover, describe them and record what they mean to you. Compare your findings in small groups and discuss.
- In small groups, discuss how personal crisis can change a person and their world view. Identify situations where this has occurred with someone in the media and discuss the impacts of the crisis.
- Read articles on homelessness from three media sources. Analyse the use of language in each source and compare them. Discuss why language might differ across sources.

- In *A Way Home*, you'll be exploring Grace's experience of growing up with a parent who has a mental illness. List your assumptions about mental illness, discuss these in pairs and then as a class.

### WHILE READING

- What events have shaped Grace and her mother, Liesel's lives? Consider how and why readers might respond differently to each character. Find three quotes per character that best represents them.
- In terms of genre or style, *A Way Home* is social realism. Research what this means and rewrite the definition in your own words. Then, scan the novel to find as many examples of social realism as you can in 20 minutes. Exchange these examples with your classmates.
- In Chapter One, the author introduces us to the main character, Grace. In pairs, make a list of the things we learn about Grace. What do these observations tell you about her personality?
- 'Mum's illness is an ocean, sometimes calm, sometimes stormy, but always so immense it's hard to see the shore.' (p 71) The author uses evocative and descriptive language to evoke feeling and convey meaning in this quote. Find other quotes in *A Way Home* that do this.
- In the final chapters of the novel, we begin to sense what Grace's future might look like. What techniques does the author use to enable us to see this?
- Although Grace is experiencing homelessness, we know she has a mother whom she cares deeply for. Collect and curate a series of quotes from the book that tell us about Grace's relationship with her mother.
- Read the the below quote, then answer the question that follows:  
'Kate looks impressed. "A reader and a musician . . ."  
I blush, heat spreading rapidly from my cheeks to my neck. I've never thought of myself as either and I can't help smiling.' (p 62)  
In this quote from the novel we witness Grace reflecting on how the world sees her. Collect other examples of this. How does Grace's perception of herself change over the course of the story?
- *A Way Home* is told from a first person POV. See an example of this in the quote below.  
'Get a grip! I reprimand myself before stepping into the corridor. My runners squeak on the concrete floor and I count my steps.' (p 188)  
Describe what's meant by first person POV compared to second and third person. Find five examples of this POV in the novel and explain what they tell us about Grace's inner world and personal circumstances at the time.
- Imagine you are Grace and create a day-in-the-life-of vlog (video blog) that outlines a day living on the street. Use sensory language and examples from the text to inform your work. Broadcast your vlog in small groups, discussing the angles and opinions that arise.

### AFTER READING

- Create a collage representing Grace's journey in *A Way Home*. Focus on one of the following themes:
  - youth homelessness
  - friendship
  - mental health
  - mother-daughter relationships.
 Include images, quotes and symbols that reflect your chosen theme.
  - Using the above themes, break into small groups and explore one of the themes from the book. Present your findings to the class, highlighting instances from the text that represent your theme.
- Create a multimedia profile that explores one of the book's main characters. Include images, music and narration to convey your understanding of the character and their story.
- Create a list comparing how Grace and Louie's friendship is portrayed in *A Way Home* compared to friendship in another text (digital or print) you know. Analyse the similarities and differences in the representation of friendship across texts. Then apply the same principles to your own friendships. Do your friendships have any similarities to Grace and Louie's? What are the main differences?
- Consider the choices that Grace, Nan and Liesel make in the final chapters of the novel. Think of alternative choices

and rewrite the ending based on these. Discuss your alternate ending with a classmate.

- Keep a regular reflective journal while reading *A Way Home* that focuses on your thoughts and feelings around the characters, plot and themes. Reflect on, then discuss how your views and understanding of these text elements evolve as you progress through the novel.