



TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Belinda Bolliger

WALKER BOOKS

About the Book



CORA SEEN AND HEARD
WRITTEN BY ZANNI LOUISE
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Cora Lane gets tongue-tied, is often ignored and would rather hide in the library than step onto a stage. However, when her parents decide to renovate an old theatre in small-town Tasmania, Cora realises this is the perfect opportunity for her to reinvent her personality.

Enter Cora 2.0, stage left.

When Cora quickly slips back into her old ways and has once again made friends with the librarian rather than kids her own age, she feels lost. Frustrated she's not the person she wants to be, she shares her deepest feelings with her imaginary pen pal. The last thing she'd expect is for her letters to go missing. And now, the real Cora Lane is about to go public, but is she ready?

Themes

Self Acceptance • Courage • Friendship • Family Dynamics • Community • Coming of Age

For Ages 10-13 Years

Please Note: This novel contains references to alcoholism, sexuality, puberty, abuse.

About the Author

Based in the Byron Bay hinterland, **Zanni Louise** is passionate about writing quality books for children and inspiring people to write their own stories.

Zanni has written 16 books for children, including picture books and junior fiction. Her books have been described as quirky, warm and funny, and are sold in many foreign territories. She's been twice listed in the CBCA Notables, and her picture book *Archie and the Bear* was selected for the highly prestigious international children's catalogue: The White Ravens.

About the Teacher Notes Author

Belinda Bolliger worked as an editor and publisher of children's books for over twenty-five years. She was the Children's Publisher at Hodder Headline (now Hachette Australia) and Children's Commissioning Editor and Publisher for ABC Books/HarperCollins. She has worked with many award-winning authors and illustrators, including Libby Hathorn, Garry Disher, Frances Watts, Judith Rossell and Matt Ottley. Belinda was editorial manager for Australian Standing Orders (Scholastic) for over 11 years, reviewing and selecting the most suitable new releases from Australian publishers to send to schools around the country. Belinda now works as an associate agent at Key People Literary Management and as a freelance children's editor and project manager.

Curriculum Links

English • Humanities and Social Sciences (History; Historical Knowledge and Understanding; Civics and Citizenship) • The Arts (Drama; Visual Arts) • Health and Physical Education (Personal, Social and Community Health) • Cross-curriculum Priority: Sustainability

Teacher Notes

Cora 2.0: Confidence and Being Yourself

Quote: 'If I saw Cora 2.0 down the hall, I'd think: *That's a girl I'd like to be friends with. She's cool.*' (p 2)

Quote: 'I'd love to be a different person. Who wouldn't? A different person wouldn't stumble over their words instead of honouring their awesome Pop. A different person would ooze confidence like midsummer peanut butter sandwiches.' (p 8)

Quote: 'It's Cora 1.5 making her way to the front of the room. She's half old me, half new me, with what I hope is the confidence to at least get up in front of the class. No doubt she'll blow it and we'll be back to Cora 1.0 once again.' (p 184)

Cora is unhappy with herself and how she thinks other people perceive her. When she learns she and her family are moving from Queensland to Tasmania, she decides to reinvent herself. What does Cora hope to achieve by reinventing herself as Cora 2.0?

Why do you think Cora finds it challenging to be Cora 2.0?

Brainstorm what it means to be confident. Create a word cloud of words and short phrases that describe confidence.

Do you sometimes wish you were a different person? Do you think everyone wishes this?

Is it possible to change who we are? Or should we focus on accepting ourselves instead?

Discuss the difference between how we see ourselves and how others see us. Do you think we are more critical of ourselves than other people are of us?

Cora feels like everyone else is cooler than her and more confident. Do you think that people who seem that way on the outside may not feel that way on the inside? Read Clair de Lune's letter on pp 67-68. Cora discovers that even someone who is talented, famous and loved can feel unheard and unseen.

Why might we feel we have to hide who we really are? What happens when the people around Cora get to know the real Cora?

What does it mean to you to be seen and heard?

If you could be a new version of yourself like Cora 2.0, what would you change? Write three things you'd like to change about yourself and then choose a friend who you trust and tell them these three things. Have your friend tell you the three things they would change about themselves. Then have each of you take turns to tell the other person all the things you like about them, for example:

Person 1: I like that you are a good listener.

Person 2: I like that you stand up for people who are being picked on.

Person 1: I like that you offer to share your lunch with me.

Person 2: I like that you care about the environment.etc

Quote: 'Here's to Cora 2.0 showing up once again. Excellent.' (p 148) Do you think it's really a new version of Cora showing up? Why? Why not?

Quote: 'You might feel like no one sees the real you. But there is no way you'd ever feel beige. So boring that people paint you on their walls so they won't notice you. Please provide practical tips for how to at least act more confident. How to be less beige.' (p 190)

Google the colour beige. How would you describe it? What does Cora mean about being 'beige'? If you could be any colour that you wanted to be, which colour would you choose? Create an artwork of you and your chosen colour. You might take a photograph of yourself and add colour to it or create a painting or drawing of yourself from scratch.

Why is Cora surprised that people like Rae and Trudy can relate to feeling beige?

Towards the end of the novel, Cora writes a list titled 'Being Yourself Like Clair de Lune'. (p 281) Write your own list, about you: Being Yourself Like [Your Name].

Quote: 'The way to people's hearts, it seems, is not pushing horn-rimmeds up your nose and drinking espresso. It's speaking my truth and telling people my weird, embarrassing dreams.' (p 231)

What does Cora mean by 'speaking my truth'? If you were to speak your truth, what would you say? What is Cora's truth? What do you think Elle's truth is? Or Bekah's? Or Cora's mother's truth?

Comparing Yourself to Others

Have you heard the quote from Theodore Roosevelt that says 'Comparison is the thief of joy'? What do you think it means?

Throughout the novel, Cora compares herself to other people and always feels she comes up short. How is she robbing herself of happiness by doing this? Who are the people Cora compares herself to? What strengths and character traits does she have that these people don't have?

What does it mean to 'play to your own strengths'?

Letter Writing

When Cora discovers the letter from the unknown Bug to Clair de Lune, she starts writing her own letters to the singer. Why do you think she does this when she knows she will receive no reply? Do you think it's helpful? Could Cora have done something else about expressing her worries and insecurities? What could she have done instead?

When Cora's letters to Clair de Lune go missing, she faces the possibility of her thoughts being exposed. How would you feel if your innermost thoughts and secrets were shared amongst people in your class? Discuss in relation to issues of privacy and identity.

Write a letter to your future self about things you are feeling and things you worry about. Now imagine you are your future self (choose an age – perhaps 10 or 15 years in the future). How would you respond?

Why do you think Bug's letters cause such a stir when they are published in the local paper? Think about Cora's thought that 'Bug really does speak for all of us.' (p 238)

New Kid

Starting a new school can be intimidating. Have you ever been the new kid at school? How did it feel? What did it take for you to eventually feel comfortable?

What does it mean to 'walk a mile in someone else's shoes'? If you've never been the new kid, imagine how it must feel for somebody to start at a new school in the middle of term. How can you help a new classmate settle in?

Coming of Age and Change

What is a 'coming-of-age' story? How does *Cora Seen and Heard* fit into the idea of a coming-of-age novel? How does Cora 'come of age'?

Cora's mum embarrasses Cora by always asking her about the start of her periods. But when her periods start and her mum isn't there, Cora is deeply upset. Why do you think this is? Why is it important to have support and understanding when we face big changes?

Discuss the many changes that Cora faces throughout the novel: moving to a new state; making friends; her periods starting; finding the confidence to be herself and so on. Choose a friend and share with them some of the big changes you have faced in your life. How did you deal with them?

Quote: 'Just because I used to think that's what I wanted, doesn't mean I have to want that forever. People change, Cora. They aren't that simple. We're not concrete blocks that remain the same for the rest of history. We grow. We change. We're not sculptures on pedestals.' (p 212)

Cora's sister Bekah is a good example of how people can change. Think back to when you were younger and then think of yourself now. How have you changed? In a piece of creative writing, write about who you might be in 10 years. How might you have changed?

Friendship

Quote: 'I could ask her if she's okay but somehow, I know she doesn't need me to do that. I know she needs to just sit for a moment. Not say a word.' (p 91)
Elle and Cora become good friends. How are they friends to each other? As a class, brainstorm what it means to be a good friend.

Can friends sometimes be fallible? Discuss ways to deal with a situation where you feel that a friend has let you down. Cora often jumps to conclusions (for example, she thinks that Elle has sent Cora's private letters to the newspaper). What happens when you jump to conclusions without checking with the other person first?

Have you heard the saying 'Choose discomfort over resentment'? What does this mean? How could Cora have used this in her life, for example with her mother and with Elle? Perhaps she could have also used this with Maude. How would this have changed her judgement and fear of Maud?

Quote: 'Real friendship should be slow and steady. Like a Huon pine tree, growing slowly and getting stronger.' (p 145) How do Cora's growing friendships with her classmates reflect this quote? Choose one of her friends (eg Elle, Rae, Arlo) and show how the friendship grows slowly and gets stronger.

Characters

'A character arc is the transformation or inner journey of a character over the course of a story. If a story has a character arc, the character begins as one sort of person and gradually transforms into a different sort of person in response to changing developments in the story.'
(wikipedia.org/wiki/Character_arc)

On a large piece of paper, draw the shape of an arc. On the top curve of the arc, write the main plot points of Cora's journey. Along the bottom curve of the arc, write how these situations impact Cora and add to her development as a person.

Choose one of the other characters in the story and plot a character arc for them as well.

Discuss the character of Elle. What did you think of her when the author first introduces her in the novel? How did your understanding of her change by the end of the novel? How does Elle's journey illustrate the themes of self-esteem, family dynamics and friendship?

Community Service Council

Quote: 'The community service council is a small group of students who will be appointed to represent you all to do something meaningful for the community.' (p 103)

In the novel, the students of Year 6 elect classmates to be part of the Community Service Council. Do you have a similar body at your school? If not, you might like to consider forming such a group or perhaps creating community service goals as a class. Ms Marcus explains that the goals of community service are (p 103):

- Helping people
- Making people feel better
- Getting outside ourselves
- Being part of something bigger

What projects can your council undertake in the school or wider community that aim to meet these goals? For example, you might establish an anti-bullying campaign at your school, or you might implement a recycling program at your school or in the wider community.

Cora is surprised when she is nominated to be part of the council. What character traits do you think her classmates saw in her that motivated them to nominate her?

Leaving a Legacy

Cora does a project about her Pop and describes the legacy that he left her and those around him. What does it mean to leave a legacy?

Choose someone in your family's history or, if you prefer, someone outside of your family who you admire. Write a page about the legacy this person has left and why it is significant to you and, if relevant, to the wider world.

Creative Block

Quote: 'Have you ever had creative block? Every now and then, you go to make something, but you freeze up. It might be stress related. Maybe you fear criticism or have performance anxiety.' (p 138)

What does it mean to have creative block? Have you ever experienced this?

Quote: 'Let's explore this idea of "creative block" for a moment. In your free writing journals, I want you to write for the next five minutes, without inhibition, about your own creative processes. No thinking. No analysing. Go'. (p 205)

Undertake this activity that Ms Marcus sets for Cora's class. Then, as a class, discuss how it worked for you. Brainstorm some other strategies to counteract creative block.

How does Cora overcome her creative block when she's trying to sculpt something from the Huon pine? What inspires her?

Caroline Creek Theatre and Community

How does the setting of the Caroline Creek Theatre contribute to Cora's journey of self-discovery? Discuss how different settings in the book influence the characters and the storyline.

Read pp 56-58. What is the significance of Cora dressing up in different costumes from the costume vault?

Quote: 'This is our third outfit change for the night and I think we're finally ready to return to the party. Ironically, the more costumes I try on, the more like myself I feel. Just Cora, hanging out with her best friend and her friend's grandma.' (p 282) At the end of the novel, Cora dresses up again. How is it different this time?

The townspeople of Caroline Creek are very proud of the old theatre because of all the history that it holds. Do you have a similar landmark or building in your suburb, town or state that is equally significant?

Break into groups and choose a place (for example the Sydney Opera House, Salamanca Place in Hobart, or your local town hall, etc) that is of historical and/or cultural significance. As a group, create a poster presentation of your chosen landmark or building and present it to the class.

Research some of the town theatres built in the 1800s and the 1900s (eg dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/theatre). Look for descriptions of the Caroline Creek Theatre throughout the novel and find out about some of its features. For example, it is described as Baroque, it has gold embellishments (p 15), it has a costume room and dressing rooms, Cora's dad wants to add a chandelier and so on. Find information online about any of these features that are new to you.

Create a piece of artwork that shows how you think the Caroline Creek Theatre looks. You might like to create a diorama, a painting, a collage, a digital artwork, etc.

Will your artwork show the theatre when Cora and her family first arrive? Or will you show it after Hank has finished his renovations?

On p 252, Cora says, 'Our theatre has a gold heart. And a crystal soul.' What do you think she means?

Work in groups to design your own theatre. This could include drawings, models or digital designs, along with a description of the types of shows that would be performed in your theatre. How would these shows contribute to your community? Which famous performers would perform in your theatre?

Clair de Lune

The character's name Clair de Lune is based on a beautiful piece of classical music by a composer called Claude Debussy.

Listen to the music here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxxSJzloDjg>.

How would you describe the music? Brainstorm a list of words. Why do you think the author chose this name for the character of Clair de Lune in the novel?

The character of Clair de Lune is a wonderful creation by the author. Write a story about Maud/Clair de Lune. Incorporate all the things we learn about her throughout the novel – her backstory, how she becomes famous, how she becomes the woman we know as Maud and so on. You might like to illustrate your story as well with costumes from the time.

Cora shares her feelings with Clair de Lune. Imagine that Clair de Lune writes back to Cora. What would she say? Write a letter to Cora as if you are Clair de Lune.

Discuss how Cora's fear of Maud stops her from seeing the truth. What do you think might have happened if Cora had instead taken the time to find out more about Maud? How would this have helped Elle?

'Your grandma felt forgotten.' (p 273) The character of Maud illustrates a difficult problem in many communities – looking after our elderly. Often we forget how our elders have stories and wisdom to share with us. You might like to visit an aged-care home to talk to some of your older community members or invite someone from your community to come and speak to the class about their life story.

Writing Devices

The author uses several different devices to tell the story, including lists, (eg p 65), Bug's letters to Clair de Lune and dialogue from podcasts. Do you think these are effective? Why or why not? What purpose do you think they serve?

Cora's teacher Ms Marcus sets the class a project about inspiring women through history. Cora chooses some of these women to create lists, for example, 'Being an interesting person like Amelia Earhart' (p 47). Choose three people from history who inspire you and write lists in the same way that Cora does to inspire herself. For example, you might choose Greta Thunberg, the young climate activist:

Be brave like Greta Thunberg

- Age is not a barrier to making an impact.
- Be resilient in the face of criticism.
- Practise what you preach.
- Find practical ways to care for the environment.
- Encourage inclusivity.

Cora's Sculpture

Cora finds a piece of Huon pine and decides to begin a sculpting project (p 33). Find out more about Huon pine trees. Why are they considered so special?

Talk about the symbolism behind Cora's project of making something from a piece of wood. Do you think this reflects the way she and her family are making something new of their lives?

Produce a Podcast

The book concludes with an epilogue that is a transcript extract from a podcast by Cora and Elle. Break into small groups and write and record your own podcast about something important to you. It might be something personal like Cora and Elle's confession space, or it might be on a topical issue, such as climate change or caring for the community's elderly.

What goes into making a podcast? Consider the following:

- What is your central idea?
- Who is your audience?
- What will the structure be?
- Do you need to seek anyone's permission for any content?
- What equipment do you need?
- Will you have guest speakers? Music?
- Record your podcast and play it for the rest of the class.

Creative Writing

Choose one point in the story and write a diary entry from Cora's perspective.

Write a dramatic monologue from Cora's point of view, expressing her thoughts and feelings about her attempts to reinvent herself.

Write a letter to your future self, describing who you are now and who you hope to become. If you like, you can seal your letter and put it away to open at another time in the future.





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