



CATCH

Written by SARAH BRILL

RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 14+ YEARS OLD (SECONDARY)

GENRE: Young Adult, Speculative Fiction, Paranormal

THEMES: coming-of-age, identity, responsibility, confidence, love, courage, heroes, romance, family, basketball, dedication, self-discovery, self-belief, expectations, acceptance

CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- English

NOTES WRITTEN BY: Christina Wheeler

ISBN (AUS): 978 | 761 | 8 203 7

INTRODUCTION

Catch is the story of sixteen-year-old Beth, whose newfound ability to catch those who are falling – whether deliberate or accidental – allows her to sense danger and save lives. Having grown up surrounded by high achievers like her sister Meg and best friend Lin, Beth has always struggled to maintain focus and find her niche. Her sudden growth spurt over the summer, however, together with her secret paranormal gift, reveal talents that help Beth slowly find herself.

Being an unlikely hero brings challenges though, as the pull to rescue others becomes all-consuming. Eventually, Beth must learn to reconcile the possible with the probable, trust her instincts and allow those close to her to provide support with this enormous responsibility. Through Beth's coming-of-age journey therefore, Sarah Brill has created a story that explores the importance of altruism, trust and delicately balancing selflessness with self-care.

Including themes of acceptance, courage and hope, *Catch* is a story that is both original and thought-provoking. It should be noted that the text contains indirect references to suicide and domestic violence. It is suitable for Young Adult audiences.

PLOT SUMMARY

Beth is about to start Year 11. Over the summer, she has grown considerably, so much so that people are finally starting to notice her, including Etienne from across the road. Not only that, but she has also started feeling waves of nausea whenever someone – often a stranger – is in danger of falling. This urges her to drop everything and run to make the catch. Unsettled by her recently acquired strength, height and senses, Beth is unable to resist the impulse to rescue, even if it means failing school or compromising relationships. Eventually, she confides in her best friend, Lin, who helps her to navigate this strange new world.

On the home front, Beth's older sister, Meg, is preparing to give birth mid-year before continuing with her Year 12 studies. Meanwhile, Etienne gives Beth the attention she's only ever dreamt of. Encouraged by him to join the school's highly contested basketball squad, Beth slowly begins to forge her own identity rather than be seen simply as Meg's little sister.

Jeopardising her commitment to homework and the basketball team, however, are her constant feelings of nausea that signal an imminent catch. Unable to ignore these, Beth is drawn to each catch, even if it means letting her team down or having overdue assignments. She also is at risk of being hunted by the media when her identity is revealed. Ultimately, Beth must determine how she can continue helping others without sacrificing her own happiness.

Q&A WITH SARAH BRILL

Apart from portraying the challenges of growing up and being your own person what do you hope teenage readers will take from reading *Catch*?

I like that *Catch* has a lot of little windows into other people's worlds through the people that Beth catches, so I hope teenage readers get a sense of the wider world when they read *Catch* – of other people's struggles who might be different ages or living different kinds of lives to them. I hope that it widens their perspective of the world a little while also providing some comfort and entertainment.

Classrooms often encourage students to dig below the surface events in a novel to find a deeper meaning. Is there a deeper meaning to Beth's paranormal abilities or are you keen for readers to create their own meaning?

There's no deeper meaning for me with the paranormal. I occasionally thought when I was writing it that the reason Beth can catch is because she's afraid to fall ie afraid to trust. But I'm not sure that is actually present in the story. I think the catching is more a device to thrust her out into the world, forcing her to make decisions about how she wants to live and who she is.

Do you think *Catch* is a typical YA novel? Why/ Why not?

I'm not an expert on YA novels. The ones I have read are so varied. I think there's some typical elements with following a school year and the romance story line.

Why did you choose to give your protagonist a superpower?

For a time, I was interested in people who claimed to have performed miracles or who were spoken to by God. I remember reading about one involving a little boy, in South America, I think. My memory is that God spoke to him and told him how to heal people and that that meant he would have to travel to do God's work. The article included a quote from his mother who said something like, 'You know it's great that he can heal people, but sometimes he needs me to drive him long distances and I have other children who need to get to soccer practise...' That tension between the miraculous and the practical really stuck with me.

On another level, I liked that the word catch can be used in lots of different ways. You can catch up or be caught out. You can catch a bus or a cold. Fall is similar. You can fall over or fall in love etc. I used to have a list with the variations. Again, I don't know that this is

strongly in the book – I think I snuck in a few ‘catch’ things but it was something I enjoyed thinking about as I wrote it.

Beth seems the polar opposite to her hyper-focused and organised sister. Why did you decide to make the sisters so different?

I wanted Beth to be quiet and shy, someone who is used to being in the background, who's comfortable there and needs to learn how to take the lead in her own life. I made Meg her opposite because I wanted Beth to have been protected by her family, including her sister. So she has to fight against their preconceptions as well as her own.

The role the family plays is an important part of the novel – Meg and her baby, Beth and her parents, Etienne and his parents. Why did you choose to include these elements?

Beth's family were always very much a part of the story for me because of that original concept of a power that's also an inconvenience to everyday life. I wanted to explore how the important people in Beth's life respond to her growing up and the revelation of her unusual power. The inclusion of Etienne's family, and Lin's to a lesser extent, was to show those different family experiences and how that can impact the choices and the responses people have to different situations.

Lin creates a ‘boundary’ for Beth to cope with her newfound ability and all the other things going on in her life. What is the significance of this boundary?

The boundary is a way to shrink Beth's world a little. It's meant to help her with focus. I think the boundary is as magic as the ability to catch in a way. Lin and Beth don't know why it works, but it does work. There's a practical element to the boundary because it comes with a map that Beth studies, it helps her learn her way around the streets. And then there is the magical element where Beth is using her breath and her mind to focus. It's a bit like an extension to the meditation she also uses.

BEFORE READING

- Discuss both the literal and metaphorical meaning of the wording on the cover – ‘Sometimes people fall’. Make predictions about the protagonist on the front cover. Return to this conversation after finishing reading *Catch*. How have your ideas changed? What has stayed the same?

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

ENGLISH

LITERATURE

Discussion Prompts

- The dedication of *Catch* reads, 'For those of us afraid of falling'. What does this mean? What issues arise for people who are afraid to 'fall'? What are the unforeseen benefits of sometimes falling? Which strategies could help people feel more willing to 'fall' safely.
- As you read *Catch*, make note of references to falling and catching. How do various characters 'fall' in some way? How are they 'caught' by others?
- Beth comments that, '*Mum's questions didn't always need answers. Sometimes she just needed to ask the questions.*' (page 3) How does Beth's understanding of her mother show her growing maturity? What have you come to understand about your parents? How well do you know your own idiosyncrasies? Share in a reflection.
- What prevents Beth from sharing her story about catching the painter with her family and Lin? Why does she wait so long before unburdening herself with this secret? Why does Lin encourage her to keep the news to herself for so long?
- When Beth catches the falling milk from the table, no one notices. Why has this been included in the text?
- Beth and Meg are extremely close, both in age and in their relationship. How does their relationship change as the story progresses? How would this story be different if they were rivals? Why do you think Meg warns Beth about Etienne? How is their relationship strengthened later in the text?
- Make predictions about the role of Rohan in *Catch*. Why has he been included in the story? How does knowing him and his story make Beth feel towards her other catch victims? How does the author use Beth's relationship with Rohan to create tension with Etienne? Why is this important to the story's structure?
- Why does Meg describe Beth as '*quieter and calmer*' than her (page 67)? Why doesn't Beth feel this describes her anymore? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- With her newfound senses, Beth feels other people's pain quite intensely (page 89). Discuss Beth's character and whether she would have sensed people's pain before this summer, just not in the same way as now. Give evidence from the text to support your thinking.

- When being driven home in the police car, explain what Beth means when she says, *'I listened without really hearing.'* (page 103)? Have you ever listened without really hearing? Why does this happen? Share in a reflection.
- What does Beth mean when she says, *'With my eyes open, the sounds in my head slipped into the background of my mind.'* (page 105)? How does keeping her eyes open help her to live as normal a life as possible?
- Why, when Lin suggests she stops catching, does Beth say, *'I can't do that.'* (page 105)? What is compelling her to keep catching? What does this reveal about Beth's character? What would you be feeling and thinking in Beth's position?
- What is it that makes Beth say, *'I think I loved my sister in that moment more than I'd ever loved her before.'* (see page 107)? Why is their relationship critical to Beth's story?
- Beth has difficulty managing her workload and staying focussed. What strategies could you offer her to help with this?
- Why does Beth's mum worry, *'That the problems [she] was seeing were too big for a teenager to manage.'* (page 145)? Does she have a point? Why? Why does her mum continue, *'I worry about what happens next for these people. Who's looking after them, and if they need more help.'* (page 145)? How would you respond to this if you were Beth?
- Beth imagines speaking to a therapist about feeling *'the weight of other people's problems in my arms, and the pleasure I [get] when I [hold] them and [offer] them comfort.'* (page 146) How would talking about this help Beth?
- What role does Lin play in *Catch*? What are her character strengths? How would the story be different without her? How do we know how important she is to Beth? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- When Beth rescues Rock from the train platform, she says, *'I could feel the defeat in him, and something else too. Something like hope.'* (page 171) In what ways is *Catch* a story about hope rather than defeat?
- Why does Rohan jump a second time?
- Lin wants to know more about those who fall and what happens to them afterwards. Why is Beth less interested in knowing more, saying, *'What I do is enough.'* (pages 190-191)?
- Why, even though she is failing school and letting down the people around her, does Beth say, *'I couldn't stop catching. I couldn't sit back and do nothing while I felt people falling.'* (page 210)?
- What does Beth mean when she says, *'Here was an opportunity for me to be a new Beth.'* (page 213)? How would she be different from the previous Beth? Do you feel she needs to change? Discuss.

- Why do you think Beth's dad has a '*constant need to be on his bike.*' (page 215)? How does this compare with Beth's compulsion to catch?
- Why has the character of Rock been included?
- Discuss Beth's comment, '*The idea of being able to work within my limits but without a boundary felt like a freedom I wanted to try.*' (page 258)
- Considering the themes of *Catch*, discuss the symbolism of the following excerpt: '*All I wanted to do was fall into his arms and have everything fade away. If I could. If he could.*' (page 275)
- Why does Beth say, '*It felt like catching was taking everything I liked away from me.*' (page 288)?
- How does *Catch* capture the difficulties of growing up and forging one's own identity?
- How important is acceptance to the story of *Catch*?
- *Catch* offers a glimpse into the lives of many minor characters. How does this broader perspective help consolidate the themes of the text?
- Is Beth herself afraid to fall? Discuss.
- What place does Beth's romance with Etienne have in the overall context of *Catch*?

Learning Experiences

- How does the first chapter of *Catch* introduce tension? In small groups, re-enact the dinner scene in which Meg shares the news of her pregnancy.
- Beth says, '*But what kid ever really tells their parents everything?*' (page 9) Does this necessarily mean she and Meg are not close to their mother? Discuss. In a written piece, reflect on your own relationships with your parents.
- Create a Character Comparison of Beth's parents. What are their traits? How are they similar and different? Use excerpts from the text to support your thinking.
- How are Beth and Meg similar and different from one another? Why does Beth describe their relationship as close (p8)? Use a graphic organiser to share your thinking.
- In the role of Beth, write a journal entry about the 'space' between you and Meg that has recently developed (see page 68). How has her pregnancy and your catching pulled you apart?
- Beth says that '*Everyone knows what too much feels like sometimes.*' (page 77) In a reflection, share a time when this was true for you.
- In the role of Beth, draft the '*long texts about everything*' to Etienne that you never send (page 90).

- Create a character portrait of Beth, Meg or Lin. Use excerpts from the text to illustrate your understanding of this character.
- What role does family play in *Catch*? How do the different families portrayed in the text reveal the different influences of family upon one another? Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Invite a counsellor to discuss the sensitive issues raised in *Catch* such as suicide and domestic violence. Discuss strategies that can help when feeling isolated, ostracised or overwhelmed by various circumstances.
- Discuss the use of figurative language throughout *Catch*, and how this contributes to reader engagement. Examples include:
 - *'Mum's hair, which was short and curly and often out of place, looked as chaotic as the house.'* (page 3)
 - *'I watched him with the patience of a loving parent.'* (page 18)
 - *'We were thrown into the chaos of the school hallways.'* (page 21)
 - *'I faded out of the conversations around me.'* (page 24)
 - *'She turned up with her arms full of books, smiling at me like she was carrying puppies.'* (page 26)
 - *'He looked just a bit shiny from shooting baskets in the heat of the afternoon.'* (page 32)
 - *'His skin was warm and I felt a glow from touching him that moved up my arms and into my face.'* (page 39)
 - *'They scraped him off the road and into an ambulance.'* (page 49)
 - *'My heart was racing, my head was racing.'* (page 57)
 - *'I felt Etienne standing beside me before he spoke. I felt his warmth, the solidness of his body close to mine.'* (page 69)
 - *'He smiled at me then in a way that made my stomach flip and my feet sink a little into the floor.'* (page 70)
 - *'Thinking about why I could catch, how that was possible, led me down a long, dark tunnel of confusion.'* (page 72)
 - *'I started spinning in a circle, like a dog trying to pick up a scent who ends up chasing its own tail.'* (page 85)
 - *'I didn't know how to find that one thread to follow in the tangled ball of pain.'* (page 85)
 - *'Meg let my silence sit between us a bit longer...'* (page 100)

- *'My eyelids felt like they were the weight of bricks and I just had to let them fall.'* (page 105)
- *'I still felt that tangled ball of nausea mixed with other people's pain and misery, but it was receding to the background of my mind.'* (page 109)
- *'I nodded, mute with fear.'* (page 137)
- *'My throat went dry.'* (page 137)
- *'All I saw was Maye's arm, casually flung over Etienne like a statement of ownership.'* (page 16)

ASSESSMENT:

- In what ways does Beth *'let [herself] fall'* in *Catch* (page 44)?
- What role does basketball play in *Catch*? How is the teamwork on the court reflected in other aspects of *Catch*?
- How is the societal prevalence of domestic violence incorporated into *Catch*?
- Lin uses boundaries to help Beth: *'If you try to go too big you might end up not being able to help anyone. Including yourself.'* (page 117) Why is this good advice? Why does Beth need such boundaries? How important are boundaries in life more generally?
- Lin says to Beth, *'At least losing a basketball game will never feel worse than losing a catch.'* (page 126) In the role of Beth, describe what it is like to lose a catch and the impact this has on you.
- Why, after sharing the truth about catching with her parents, does Beth say: *'I didn't feel normal at all. I felt really weird. Like I'd disappointed them both so much, and not just because of the lying. Also just because of me.'* (page 140)?
- With reference to one of the following excerpts from *Catch*, write a monologue in the role of Beth:
 - *'Accidents. Carelessness. Desperation. Violence. I couldn't see any kind of order behind it. It was just life. Modern city life. We'd built these big structures to take ourselves high off the ground, to fit us all in; we put pressure on ourselves and others to be more than we were. Falling was one of the prices we had to pay.'* (page 147)
 - *'I had spent months assuming people would be disgusted or angry somehow if they found out what I could do. That they would single me out or avoid me. Label me as weird. But there was nothing except joy in Etienne's face. I wondered if that was just Etienne, or if others would be the same. If I would be labelled a hero instead.'* (page 183)
 - *'Knowing people were falling outside of my boundary was difficult to admit to out loud even though I thought about it all the time.'* (page 187)

- Write the article about Beth that appears in the local newspaper.
- Explain how *Catch* uses the concept of the unlikely hero to tell this story.
- In an essay, discuss the concept of 'falling' in *Catch*.
- In the role of Rohan, write a recount of your time knowing Beth.
- Create an annotated visual representation that shares the concepts of falling and catching in the novel *Catch*.
- Write an additional chapter suitable for inclusion in *Catch*.
- Create a graphic novel version of the first few chapters of *Catch*.
- In an essay, discuss the character development that Beth undergoes in *Catch*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SARAH BRILL grew up in Perth, Western Australia and began writing at the age of fifteen. She initially focused on playwrighting but also wrote for film and radio. After having children, Sarah started working in sustainability-related fields and writing when she could. Her first novel, *Glory*, was published in 2002. Her second novel, *Symphony for the Man*, was published in 2020. Sarah lives in Sydney with her three sons and two cats.

ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Christina Wheeler is a Teacher Librarian, speaker, literacy specialist and writer. She has been creating Teacher's Notes for over sixteen years and is a fervent advocate for deep analysis and rich discussion of texts. Christina has presented at international, national and state conferences, sharing her expertise in effective approaches to learning, teaching, academic research skills and literacy. She is passionate about nurturing in children not only a love for literature, but the cognitive skills to make genuine connections between the stories they read and the world in which they live, learn and love.

CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

(In alphabetical order of authors)

As companion texts to *Catch*, consider the following texts:

Chataway, Carol and Lee, Declan *Wings*, Lothian, 2004

Crew, Gary and Woolman, Steven *Caleb*, Era Publications, 1996

Garner, Helen *This House of Grief*, Text Publishing, 2014