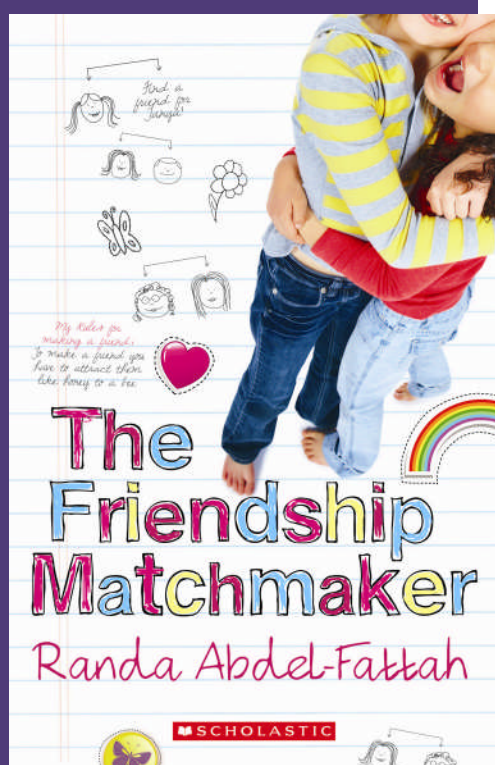


# Teachers' Notes

## The Friendship Matchmaker

Randa Abdel-Fattah

Teachers' Notes written by Anita Jonsberg



### OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Junior Fiction
Title	The Friendship Matchmaker
Author	Randa Abdel-Fattah
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## Introduction

Lara Zany is an extremely important person at school. She is the one lonely students go to in order to find a friend or three – trios simply don't work, according to Lara, as someone is invariably left out. So successful is Lara, that much of her time at home is devoted to maintaining detailed files on her subjects and in matching individuals according to where they live, their interests and hobbies. Lara has firm rules about what behaviour and dress standards need to be adhered to if students are to avoid being bullied and she supplies notes to those in obvious need of help. One day, Lara's attention is piqued by new student Emily Wong, who breaks all of Lara's rules and is clearly in need of urgent help. Emily wears different-coloured nail varnish on each hand, a Dora hair tie *and* dolphin earrings. Lara just knows that Emily is a disaster waiting to happen and rushes in with advice. Strangely, Emily seems content to stand out and ignores Lara's rules. Lara can only watch in disbelief at Emily's ever-increasing status.

*The Friendship Matchmaker* explores issues of identity, self-esteem and bullying in a poignant tale of schoolyard politics. It becomes apparent that even those who seem popular may have their own painful secrets.

## About the Author

Randa Abdel-Fattah is the award-winning author of the young adult novels *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, *Ten Things I Hate About Me* and *Where the Streets Had A Name*. Her books are published around the world and she regularly gives talks and workshops at schools and writers' festivals across Australia and overseas. Randa lives in Sydney with her husband Ibrahim and their two children. She works as a litigation lawyer and is also a human rights activist, appearing on television programs such as the ABC's *First Tuesday Book Club*, the ABC's *Q&A*, *Insight* on SBS and Channel Seven's *Sunrise*.

**It is not intended that you use all activities and discussions in the notes. Please select those best suited to the level and make-up of your class.**

**\*N.B: Please check all websites for content on the day of proposed use.**

## During Reading

### The Friendship Matchmaker Manual

1. The opening of the manual engages the reader in several ways. It is an instructional text, (exposition) and displays several conventions of this form:
  - The title clearly outlines the purpose of the text.

- It uses second-person narration, addressing the reader directly, using 'you' and 'you're'.
- The introduction clearly shows who the intended audience is, students who are 'sick and tired of being lonely', or who are 'the third wheel in a trio'.
- It reassures the reader that the writer is an authority on the subject – an 'Official Friendship Matchmaker' and that she has 'come to the right place!' for advice.

In pairs, make notes about what other aspects of this section help to engage the reader. Share these as a class and make links with the openings of other texts you have read.

2. Discuss Lara's use of acronyms in her glossary. Why are acronyms used here and in society? What acronyms are used in your school?
3. What are glossaries for? Discuss other books and websites that use glossaries.
4. How far do you agree with Lara when she describes school as a 'war zone'? Is hers a helpful attitude or not?

## Chapter 1

*For discussion:*

1. What 'props' does Lara take to school with her? Why does she take them?
2. Look at the way Lara describes Dean's actions and words. Look also at Lara's descriptions of the 'quads and pairs' in her class. What do these tell you about Lara's focus and opinion of herself?

*Activity:*

1. Rewrite the scene in the classroom from Miss Pria's point of view. The reader of your piece should learn more about Miss Pria than is evident in the text. For instance, why is she grumpy? What does she think of Lara? Does she enjoy teaching and is just having a bad day or does she hate her job?

## Chapter 2 (see resources under 'Self-esteem' below)

*For discussion:*

1. How does Abdel-Fattah encourage the reader to see the extent of Lara's absorption with herself and her beliefs about the importance of appearance?
2. How would you react to Lara's advice? What would you think of her? (Boys can imagine she has told them about hair and clothes, as well as jewellery.)
3. What impression of Emily is suggested in this chapter? How is this impression communicated?

## Chapter 3

*For discussion:*

1. Lara's FIMS takes place in front of an audience, similar to *Dr Phil* and *Jerry Springer*. What are the positive and negative aspects of holding a mediation in this format? Collate your ideas on the whiteboard. What is the overall view of the class? Why would Lara do things this way?
2. What terrible advice does she give her 'audience' at the end? What might happen as a result of this advice?

## Chapters 4 & 5 (see resources under 'Friendship')

*For discussion:*

1. On what grounds does Lara match the two young boys on the school bus? Are these enough for a friendship?

*Activity:*

1. In pairs, write your ten rules for friendships. Decorate your rules with pictures that are drawn or clipped from magazines. Have your teacher put them up in the classroom.

## Chapter 6

*Activities:*

1. Emily says: 'I'm not going to change who I am just so I don't get bullied.' In your own words, write about whether you agree with her attitude. Describe your personal experience of the challenge of 'fitting in'. This piece of writing will be shared with your teacher and no one else.
2. At the end of Chapter 6, Emily and Tara go into competition. Explain why you think this is or isn't a good idea.

## Chapters 7 & 8

*For discussion:*

1. What does Emily do to become even more popular? Would you respect someone who did this? Why?

*Activity:*

1. Think about something your school or class needs and organise your class to raise money for it. (Donations are okay, but most people would like to buy something with their money. You don't want to get in trouble like Emily!) Set a realistic time-line for your goal and pin it up in class. Mark off each mini-total as you reach it. Allocate specific jobs to groups of people in your class and your teacher is the supervisor who ensures everyone contributes.

## **Chapter 9**

*For discussion:*

1. Look at Lara's profile of Bethany. What do you notice about it? Try to rephrase the profile in positive terms and collate your findings on the whiteboard. How important is it in every day life to be able to use different perspectives about people and events? What things can you think of that might benefit from re-framing in this way?

## **Chapter 10**

*Activities:*

1. Lara begins to transform Tanya's appearance, but Tanya is not keen at first. What does she say about her clothes and her hair and what impression does this give of Tanya's parents?
2. What are your feelings about Lara at this point in the novel? She says she's 'not a control freak' – is this true? What do you think will happen next?

## **Chapters 11 & 12**

*For discussion:*

1. What does Lara's response to her sister's comments suggest?
2. What important turning-point occurs for Lara in this chapter?
3. How many things do Lara and Tanya have in common and how is their relationship different from the ones that Lara is trying to set up?

## **Chapter 13**

*For discussion:*

1. How many 'Topics to Stay Away From' did Lara and Tanya discuss in the previous chapter? What does this suggest about Lara's 'rules'?

*Activity:*

1. Chris Martin is obviously the 'class clown'. Write about a 'CC' that you know and describe how he or she drives the teacher (and sometimes the class) mad. Make up a fake name for the CC, to avoid hurting anyone.

## **Chapter 14**

*For discussion:*

1. Who is more caring about Tanya in this chapter, Lara or Emily? Is Lara's plan to find Tanya a friend in this way a good one?
2. Tanya tells Lucy that '*she* was the one who'd lost her balance'. This is a metaphor – what does it mean?

## **Chapter 15**

*For discussion:*

1. Lara reminds the reader that she is a 'Loner by Choice' at the beginning of this chapter. Does the reader still believe her? Why or why not?
2. Lara's attempt to role-play with Tanya goes off the rails. How does the author show that this is a positive occurrence?

## **Chapter 16 (see resources under 'Bullying' below)**

*For discussion:*

1. Lara describes her PE class:  
*We were going to play T-ball. Ms Kozub picked Kamil and Aidan as captains. They stood in front of the class and took turns choosing their team. It's the most psychologically damaging part of school. I'm certain that serial killers and psychopaths were all probably picked last in sports.*

Does your school do things this way?  
Do things need to be changed?

*Activity:*

1. The reader discovers that Emily has been verbally abused at previous schools. She tells Lara how she dealt with the bullies. Do you agree with Emily's methods? How would you, or how have you, responded to taunts of this nature?

## Chapters 17 & 18

*For discussion:*

1. Compare Emily's friend-finding techniques with Lara's. Whose are better and why?

## Chapter 19

*Activities:*

1. Tanya is bored with Stephanie. In pairs, discuss why and then share your findings with the rest of the class. What is effective communication? What qualities do the people you like to speak to have?
2. How do readers feel when Lara finally realises that she and Tanya are friends? What particular words, phrases and sentences has the author used to help communicate this wonderful realisation?

## Chapters 20 & 21

*For discussion:*

1. As a result of her realisations, Lara awakes with a whole new perspective. It can be said that she has experienced an epiphany. What is an epiphany? Who in the class has ever had one?
2. How has this affected her relationship with Emily?
3. How does reading this chapter change the reader's opinion of Lara?

*Activity:*

1. The class is on an outing to an aquarium. There is a worksheet to complete. Describe the best and worst excursion you have been on. Make suggestions that would have improved the worst one.
2. Describe your personal response to the way the characters deal with Lara's discovered notes. The reader knows more about Lara's journey than they do (dramatic irony). How does this affect your reaction?

# Friendship

What is friendship? How do you know if you have found a friend? What are healthy and 'toxic' friendships?

Some useful websites to help explore this topic here:

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=286&id=1636> (for young students)

<http://www.friendship.com.au/> (contains good links to advice, chat forums and message boards – good for students who are insecure about their own ability to make friends)

<http://www.cyberparent.com/friendship/> (some good advice about 'toxic friends', suitable for all ages)

# Self-esteem

1. Think about what self-esteem is. In groups, make notes about what you think it is. Give three examples of what good self-esteem is and what poor self-esteem is. Collate notes on the white/smartboard.

Here are some helpful websites:

[http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/self\\_esteem.html#](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/self_esteem.html#) (explores self esteem and gives tips and hints on how to develop your own – also helpful on a number of other issues that affect young people)

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=287&id=1588> (useful site with self esteem poetry exercise and detailed notes and illustrations about self-esteem – the site is also useful for discussion of bullying, see below)

[http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&rlz=1G1GGLQ\\_ENAU292&q=self+esteem&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=prAKTYS7OoPqrQeP09mlCQ&sa=X&oi=image\\_result\\_group&ct=title&resnum=5&ved=0CFEQsAQwBA&biw=1003&bih=567](http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&rlz=1G1GGLQ_ENAU292&q=self+esteem&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=prAKTYS7OoPqrQeP09mlCQ&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=5&ved=0CFEQsAQwBA&biw=1003&bih=567) (images that explore or communicate states of self-esteem – best viewed and selected prior to class by the teacher)

2. As a class, discuss Lara and Emily's self-esteem at the beginning of the novel. What clues help you to assess each girl? Fill in the table below with your findings:



<b>Lara</b>	<b>Emily</b>
<i>Eg:</i> Lara describes herself as an 'Official Friendship Matchmaker' (pg 1). This shows she feels important.	<i>Eg:</i> Emily decides to keep her nail polish on, even though Lara tells her 'it will attract attention' and 'it looks weird' (pg 15-16). This shows she does not mind being the centre of attention and is strong enough to trust her own judgement over Lara's.

Which girl has the stronger self-esteem?

## Bullying

What is bullying? How is it dealt with in your school and who can help?

Resources that can help explore the issue of bullying can be found here:

[http://www.theline.gov.au/parents\\_and\\_teachers/information](http://www.theline.gov.au/parents_and_teachers/information) (extremely useful for teachers and parents – free music downloads from singers who support the project also available for teachers and students)

<http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/> (easy to use website for teachers and students, with lots of information, including resources and information about cyber-bullying)

<http://www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing/> (in-depth exploration of causes, outcomes and evaluation of strategies used in many schools – of interest to teachers and parents)

<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/bullies/> (contains the mini-quiz 'Are you a bully?', which is useful in helping students identify their own behaviours)

## Major Assignments

### Creative:

- Design and produce an anti-bullying poster for your school.
- Write your own Friendship Matchmaker Manual.
- Describe a friend you really admire.
- Write a letter from Lara to Emily after the events of the novel.
- Write a letter to Lara after the events of chapter 2.
- Invent another character and add him/her to an existing chapter (his/her actions and speech must fit with what already exists).
- Produce a pamphlet about true friendship.
- Design a cartoon strip that shows the events of the novel.
- Cast the novel for a film version. Explain your choices in full.
- Make a personal profile of yourself – be honest!
- Make a model of Lara's bedroom. Try to reflect the person she was at the beginning of the novel. Write a commentary to explain the decoration and furniture.

### Analytical:

- Lara is the only real bully in the novel. Discuss.
  - How does Abdel-Fattah create sympathy for an ostensibly unlikeable character?
  - Why is the character of Emily such an effective counterpoint to Lara?
  - What does the reader learn from the novel?
  - 'School is a war-zone'. Discuss with reference to the text.
  - Write an argument, responding to the statement 'teachers don't like students'. You may argue for or against.
  - 'Parents are essential in building their child's self-esteem'. You may argue for or against.
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