



# TEACHERS' RESOURCES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 13+

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding; Literacy

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- This gripping portrait of a struggle to survive in the Australian bush, interwoven with a past of family violence and tragedy, shows how resilience can be built and obstacles overcome even in the most testing of circumstances.

## THEMES

- Trust and forgiveness
- Art and creative expression
- Landscape as antagonist
- The impacts of trauma
- Family violence
- Small towns
- Friendship and notions of family
- Alcohol abuse and recovery
- Suicide and mental health
- Gender and sexuality
- Grief and grieving

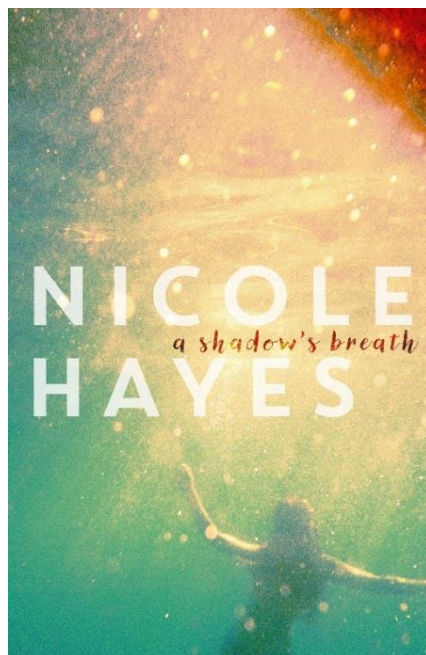
## PUBLICATION DETAILS

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9780143781080 (ebook)

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## A Shadow's Breath

Nicole Hayes

### PLOT SUMMARY

Then, things were looking up for Tessa. Her mum was finally getting her life back on track. Tessa had started seeing Nick. She was making new friends. She'd even begun to paint again.

Now, Tessa and Nick are trapped in the car after a corner taken too fast. Injured, stranded in the wilderness, at the mercy of the elements, the question becomes one of survival.

But Tessa isn't sure she wants to be found. Not after what she saw. Not after what she remembered.

**A compelling story of heartbreak, courage and forgiveness from the award-winning author of *The Whole of My World* and *One True Thing*.**

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

When Nicole Hayes isn't yelling at the Hawks on TV or sharing hosting duties on the all-female AFL podcast, *The Outer Sanctum*, she teaches writing and writes fiction, essays and scripts. Her debut novel, *The Whole of My World*, was published in 2013 and was shortlisted for a Young Australians Best Book Award and longlisted for the Gold Inky Award. *One True Thing*, Nicole's second novel, won the Children's Peace Literature Award, is a CBCA Notable Book and

was shortlisted for the WA Premier's Book Awards. She has also co-edited an anthology of footy stories, *From the Outer: Footy Like You've Never Heard It*, with Alicia Sometimes. Nicole lives in Melbourne with her husband, two daughters and a dog called Brody. Say hi at [nicolehayesauthor.com](http://nicolehayesauthor.com) or tweet @nichmelbourne.

## AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Nicole says:

I started writing *A Shadow's Breath* when an image of the hot, brutal Australian bush came to mind and refused to leave me alone until I sat down and tried to write about it. These few sentences became the first blurred visions of a young woman waking from a head injury, trapped in a car wreck, in the middle of nowhere. Almost immediately she became Tessa Gilham, and I knew she was running away from something.

I'd always wanted to write about the bush, so as soon as I had my character I knew I had something. As a city girl, the vastness of the landscape – its looming presence on the outskirts of all our major cities – beckoned to me, enticing but also vaguely threatening. It wasn't until I left Australia and lived overseas, that I became conscious of how distinctive and fascinating the Australian landscape is. Its sheer size and harshness so intimidating, yet rich with promise and possibility. And danger. So many different kinds of danger!

In my previous books, the main characters' homes, while flawed and problematic, were still safe. Their families and their houses still, on some level, offered sanctuary and a kind of escape. But around the same time that I was formulating this story, I met some young people whose home lives were really volatile. Dangerous, even. And I realised that the home as sanctuary that I'd written about in my earlier work wasn't an option for some young people. Too many of our kids are frightened to go home. Afraid of what they'll find – whether it's family violence, or drug and alcohol abuse – and are forced to live with uncertainty and fear. For these young people, home is not an escape. Not a sanctuary at all.

As Tessa grew on the page, it became evident she didn't want to go home. Couldn't go home. I thought about the reasons this might occur, drawing on the stories I'd been told, some terrible things I'd seen, and soon enough I had a very clear idea of what sorts of problems might have driven Tessa away in

the first place. A home life so terrible that even the fear of dying in the drought-stricken Australian bush wouldn't be enough to drive her home. All of this is teased out in the journey down the mountain with her seriously injured boyfriend, Nick, beside her, each of them trying to keep the other alive. Each of them struggling with their own pain and despair.

Tessa's backstory developed from there: seventeen years old and nearing the end of Year 11, she lives in a small house with her mum, Ellen. Together, they're trying to rebuild their lives in the wake of trauma wreaked by the arsehole – Ellen's former partner, a violent alcoholic. Ellen has only recently sent him packing, and mother and daughter are furtively trying to find their way back to each other, haunted by the fear that the arsehole might return, and complicated by the fragility of Ellen's fresh sobriety. It all feels so fragile, so delicately balanced, particularly for Tessa, who's never felt safe enough to plan for a future beyond escaping the arsehole, and their oppressive small town, where everybody knows them and everybody has written her off.

But Tessa has a secret, one she's kept deeply buried since her dad died. The interweaving narratives allowed me to draw out Tessa's private pain while also portraying her complicated present: her hard-fought but fragile trust in her mum; the blossoming love for her boyfriend, Nick; the loyal but complex friendship with Yuki, her one constant; and the hopefulness inherent in her renewed love for her art . . .

With all these positive developments in Tessa's life, the question that drives the survival story is, why is Tessa afraid to go home?

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

### Writing style

- *A Shadow's Breath* alternates between 'Now' chapters in present tense, and 'Then' chapters in past tense. Why do you think the author chose to structure the novel in this way?
- If you were creating the soundtrack to a film of *A Shadow's Breath*, what songs would you choose? Would you use different types of music for the 'Now' and 'Then' scenes? What treatment would you give to the climactic moments?
- Is there just as much mystery in the gradual revelation of past events as there is in the question of whether Tessa will survive her current ordeal? Why or why not?



- Take note of when and how information is revealed – what does the author conceal from the reader, and why?
- Nicole Hayes' previous books, *The Whole of My World* and *One True Thing*, were written in first-person, but *A Shadow's Breath* is third-person. Why do you think Nicole made this choice?

### Art and creative expression

- How does Tessa's art help her to work through her grief and anger? Research how art or other forms of creativity can be used as therapy.
- Was it the process of creating an artwork that made Tessa remember the traumatic event from her past that she'd forgotten (her father's death), or were there other factors?
- Should Tessa pursue her interest in art as others tell her, because she has such a talent for it? Why does she feel that she shouldn't? What is stopping her?
- Discuss the other forms of creative expression explored in the novel – Yuki's drama group and film project; Lara's photography. What makes artistic expression so personal to each of us?
- Nicole says: *'In the book I use colour as a metaphor for how we can view exactly the same thing in such different ways. Like the dress meme. And colour blindness. It parallels life. How Tessa sees herself versus how she thinks the town sees her versus how they really see her; how she sees her mum, too, and how that colours her reaction to that climactic scene. She brings the different colours and light, the knowledge and her own experience to the moment and chooses to see her mum's actions as a betrayal – one she was always expecting – rather than how Nick sees it, which is not as clear, not as certain, and open to interpretation. We all see things in our own particular way, which can sometimes blind us to reality and, equally, help us fill in gaps. Things are rarely one thing or another. They can be many things, depending on who's doing the looking.'* Discuss the symbolism of colour in the story, and how we extrapolate meaning and emotion from colours.

### Trust, forgiveness, family and friendship

- Should Tessa forgive her mum? Why or why not?
- Did others in the town do enough to help Tessa's family? What are some of the factors in family violence that might prevent women and children getting the help or assistance they might need?

- Why do you think Nicole chose to not reveal the name of 'the arsehole'?
- Explore the complexity of Tessa and Yuki's friendship. Is Tessa a good friend to Yuki, and vice versa?
- Why did Nick not want to go to university?
- Choose a scene that features two or more characters, then write an alternate version of that scene from one of the other characters' perspectives. How would they see the same situations differently to Tessa?

### Landscape as antagonist

- How does the landscape of the Australian bush act as an antagonist in this story?
- What other books have you read that feature aspects of the Australian landscape strongly? Some examples include: the mysterious caves in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay; Sydney's The Rocks area in *Playing Beatrice Bow* by Ruth Park; the isolated cabin in the bush in Tristan Bancks' book *Two Wolves*; the dystopian future-Australia landscape of Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*; the inner-city cafes of Melina Marchetta's *Saving Francesca*.
- Write a short story set somewhere you've been in Australia that made an impression on you. It might have been a beach, desert, bush or cityscape. How can you make your setting have an effect on the characters of your story?
- What does 'home' mean to Tessa? How does the concept of home change over the course of the story? How much does our home shape who we become or who we are?
- How does Tessa's struggle to survive in the harsh bush help her to find strength within herself?
- *'She closes her eyes, lets the lull and pull of the water buoy her before she slips under the surface again. Underwater, she opens her eyes and peers into the black. Light filters through the ripples, dust flecks suspended like a thousand tiny stars. She lifts her feet, lets the water hold her and drifts. Weightless and timeless, she lets all of it go . . .'* (p. 152) This quote inspired the choice of cover image. Why did the publisher choose to depict this moment on the book cover? What is happening for Tessa in this moment, and what choice does she make? What other key moments could have been powerful images to depict on the book's cover and why?



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

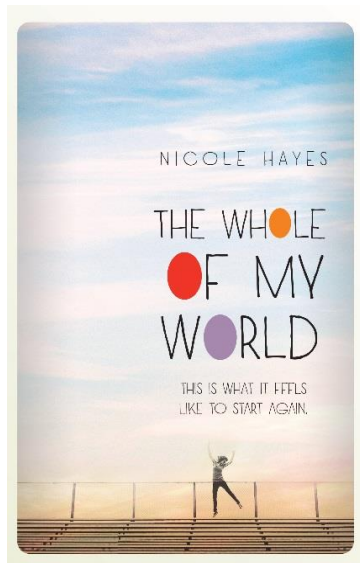


*One True Thing*  
by Nicole Hayes

Frankie is used to being a politician's daughter, but with her mum now running for Premier, life's a whole lot crazier than usual. All Frankie wants is to lose herself in her music. So when her best friend, Kessie, invites a student journo to interview the band, Frankie is less than thrilled.

But Jake's easy to talk to, and he seems to really like Frankie. That doesn't stop her from wondering if he's just after the ultimate scoop, especially when photos surface of Frankie's mum having a secret rendezvous with a younger man. With her family falling apart around her, Frankie is determined to find out the truth - even if it means losing Jake.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



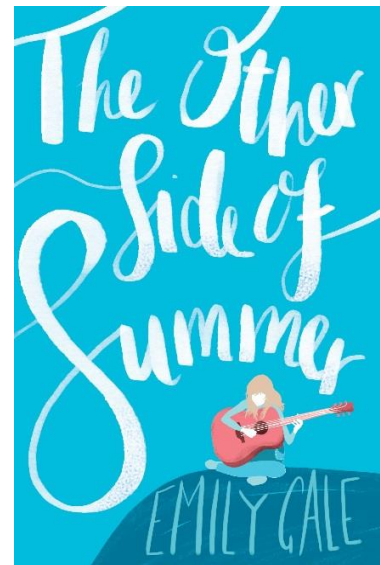
*The Whole of My World*  
by Nicole Hayes

Desperate to escape her grieving father and harbouring her own terrible secret, Shelley disappears into the intoxicating world of Aussie Rules football. Joining a motley crew of footy trags - and, best of all, making friends with one of the star players - Shelley finds somewhere to belong. Finally she's winning.

So why don't her friends get it? Josh, who she's known all her life, but who she can barely look at anymore because of the memories of that fateful day. Tara, whose cold silences Shelley can't understand. Everyone thinks there's something more going on between Shelley and Mick. But there isn't - is there?

When the whole of your world is football, sometimes life gets lost between goals.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



*The Other Side of Summer*  
by Emily Gale

Summer is trying to recover from a tragedy, but it seems impossible when her family is falling apart around her. Having an extraordinary best friend like Mal helps a little, but Summer's secret source of happiness is a link to the past: one very special guitar.

Now her dad's plan to save them is turning Summer's life upside down again. The next thing she knows, they've moved to the other side of the world.

In Australia, Summer makes an unlikely friend, who seems to be magically connected to her guitar. Is this for real? Has a mysterious boy been sent to help Summer? Or could it be the other way around?

[Teachers' resources available.](#)





## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
<b>A Shadow's Breath</b>	<b>Nicole Hayes</b>	<b>9780143781097</b>	<b>8-12</b>	<b>\$19.99</b>		
One True Thing	Nicole Hayes	9780857986887	8-12	\$19.99		
The Whole of My World	Nicole Hayes	9781742758602	8-12	\$18.99		
The Other Side of Summer	Emily Gale	9780143780113	5-9	\$16.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

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