



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary to lower secondary
(Years 5-7)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English; Science; Humanities & Social Sciences; Technologies; the Arts; Health & Physical Education.
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Information & Communication Technology Capability; Critical & Creative Thinking; Personal & Social Capability; Intercultural Understanding.
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Asia & Australia's Engagement with Asia.

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A great starting point for a critical discussion about the place and influence of social media in our lives.
- To promote discussions about our own identity and how we perceive and express that.
- To promote discussions about our changing relationships with our parents and friends as we grow and change.

THEMES

- Use of social media
- Identity
- Friendship
- Family

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and
Oliver Phommavanh

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Don't Follow Vee Oliver Phommavanh

PLOT SUMMARY

I'm not on social media, but everyone knows all about my life - from birth - thanks to Mum's Instagram, The Chronicles of Vee. It used to be a bit of fun, but when we got to 100,000 followers, Mum's started to take it way too seriously.

My mission?

Stop my mum posting everything about my life.

How?

1. Become Anti-Vee and make my life unfollowable.

2. Make Mum's life more exciting than mine so she posts stuff about herself instead.

Easy, right?

That is, until Anti-Vee becomes more popular than the real Vee. Can I ever make Mum cool enough to start her own Instagram or am I doomed to have everyone following me forever?!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oliver is a young Thai-Australian writer for children. He has featured in school sessions and on panels at the Sydney Writers' Festival among many other appearances at festivals and writing events, plus in blogs. He has worked as a primary school teacher and a stand-up comedian, and now spends his time writing and sharing his writing passion with kids and engaging them with humour.

Oliver's first book, *Thai-riffic!*, drew much from his own life growing up as a Thai-Australian, and he has continued to focus on kids from different cultural backgrounds, dealing with the everyday fun and worries of school and family in his books *Con-nerd*, *Super Con-nerd*, *Punchlines*, *Thai-no-mite*, *The Other Christy*, *Natural Born Loser*, *Don't Follow Vee*, and *Ethan* in the *Stuff Happens* series.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Oliver says:

You would think that Instagram and social media would be my major starting point for this story.

But at its core, *Don't Follow Vee* is about embarrassing parents who love sharing their kids' lives with everyone. You may know it as 'sharenting'. Growing up, we were one of the first families in my neighbourhood with an actual video camera and a stills camera. My parents would shoot hours of videos of my sister and me. My mum has five thick photo albums of baby Oliver. There were plenty of photos of me naked. And my Mum didn't mind showing them to relatives, friends, and if she had the chance, random strangers!

Major embarrassment.

These days, sharenting is much more widespread because of cameras on mobile phones and social media. You can track a child's life from their birth and see them grow, month by month, day by day – all on their parent's Facebook or Instagram account.

It got me thinking, Facebook is a decade old now, so I'd imagine there would be kids who have their own lives up there for the world to see. I wonder how do they feel about that? What happens when they grow up and want to start their own profile someday? Can they ask their parents to take down those baby and childhood photos?

This dilemma is faced by Matty B, one of the characters in *Don't Follow Vee*.

I wanted to take this story further with Vee, who not only has her whole life up on her Mum's Instagram account, but has her real life revolve around creating good social media. Vee's Mum is always talking about

followers, taking Instagrammable photos and brainstorming ideas with Vee about what to post. It may be a little cynical, but I'd imagine that being an Instagram star requires a lot more thought than people realise.

I also wanted to explore Vee's close relationship with her Mum. They may be a team, but Vee feels like Mum needs to get out more and actually have her own life. Vee feels that her mum can be suffocating at times. I had a blast writing about this daughter and mother relationship.

Finally, there's the social media angle of this story. I've been visiting schools for years now and I can see the impact of social media on the kids. A lot of them want to be YouTubers. Some of them have already started their own channels. They consume so much content through YouTube these days so they know about Twitch (people who stream themselves playing video games). A few kids may be too young for Instagram or Facebook, but they are still interacting online through playing video games or chatting through other messaging apps. A friend is only a text away.

For the longest time, I avoided wanting to use Instagram or Facebook in *Don't Follow Vee* because it might quickly date the book (hello MySpace) But I think it's safe to say, bar something drastic, or the end of the world, that Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and insert the next big thing, are here to stay.

I was also wary of not wanting to preach to my readers about online awareness and the proper use of social media. I think the kids get enough of that kind of stuff at school, plus it's self-explanatory in the story without spelling it out. I wanted to set *Don't Follow Vee* in a world where social media and technology is a given, and fully integrated into kids' lives. Some of the little things like when Aaron talks about 'screen dollars' are borrowed from my own observations of how parents deal with their children when it comes to screen time and gadgets.

CHARACTERS

Vee

Veronica Lee (Vee) is a confident girl who is self-aware of her unique situation, being a minor Instagram celebrity. She's also had to learn to be resilient, after years of being hounded by kids who want a shout out or have a few seconds of fame. She is quite cautious about being associated with anyone's online account, not wanting to blur the lines between her real life and online persona. As a result, Vee is guarded about parts of her life, especially things that belong in her vault. She is proud to have things that none of her followers know about.



Vee enjoys calligraphy and playing games like most kids.

I based part of Vee's personality on one of my university friends, also named Vee (ha!). She's kind and a little cynical, with a snappy attitude, so I thought it would be a perfect fit for the book Veersion.

Vee's Mum

Vee's Mum, Lynda, is a bubbly person who adores Vee (a little too much sometimes) and is just as witty as her daughter. In the story, Vee's Mum started a blog with some funny posts about being a single mother, which led to Instagram. She has an ordinary job but dreams of doing Instagram full-time, like her other Insta-mum idols. Vee's Mum falls into the category of an 'everyday Insta-mum', so she knows she can't compete with the ones who look like supermodels or travel around the world. She's very precious about what she posts and can become obsessed about each post, measuring her own happiness by how many likes she gets.

All of Mum's interests, like cooking and singing, are pushed aside for *The Chronicles of Vee* (except when she cooks for Vee). She doesn't have many friends outside of work, which is something that Mum wants to address.

Annabelle

Annabelle Murphy is Vee's bestie, and one of the few friends in Vee's inner circle. Annabelle is shy and meek, always happy to go along with the flow. She loves making slime and watches slime videos on YouTube all the time. Annabelle gets her positivity from her parents, who have cheesy quotes all over their fridge.

Bryan

Bryan is one of Vee's old primary school friends, and has always been around her life. He has an uncanny obsession with burgers, posting burgergrams on his Burger Bryan Instagram account. He is trying his best to be kind to everyone in the burgerlover community, but has to deal with a troll who is closer to him than he thinks.

Bryan is basically me as a burger fan and burgergrammer. It was easy writing about how Bryan sets up his burgergrams and how he rates his burgers, because that's what I do on a weekly basis. I've been lucky to be a part of a caring burger community online, so it's definitely something that anyone can start on their own.

Matty B

Matty is Bryan's good friend and also helps him with his burgergrams, having access to Burger Bryan's account. Matty is facing his own battles, as he's getting teased by his classmates because of his mum has all his

baby photos up on Facebook. Matty has his own plan to get revenge on his mum by posting all of her old childhood photos online.

Emily and Hassan

Emily was one of the most popular kids back in Vee's old primary school, and has continued that into her first year of high school with her trendy fashion posts and being quite active on social media. She is always annoying Vee in real life, with snarky comments. Emily would do anything to be in Vee's position and can't stand Vee for not taking advantage of her fame.

Hassan is a gamer who streams online, and is one of many of Vee's classmates who wants a shout out to her or plug for more followers. Hassan gets himself in trouble often, thanks to his big mouth.

THEMES AND ACTIVITIES

Use of social media

Activities

- Discuss how you use social media and technology in everyday life. How many hours per day do you use technology?
- Compare the rules of using technology at school and home. Do you agree with them? What would you change?

Identity/Real life and online persona

Activities

- Create a Venn diagram of Vee in real life and online. Is Vee being herself online? Would you be yourself online? What parts of your life would you keep away from social media?
- Discuss: why would people pretend to be someone else online?
- Vee has a vault where she keeps her precious possessions. What kind of things would you put in your own vault? (Be as specific or as general as you like)
- Why is Vee so determined to keep things out of her online persona?
- Do you have an obsession like Bryan's burgers or Annabelle's slime-making? Would you ever go on YouTube or online for it? Design a fake YouTube, Instagram account or website on paper about your obsession/interest.
- Start a blog or diary/journal about your interests and post/write about something over the course of the study.



- Vee's Mum has Trysday Fridays where Vee tries something new. What kind of things would you try for the first time? What is something that you would never, *ever* do? Track how Mum feels about the fun run over the course of the book. What changes her mind?

Friendships

Activities

- Compare how friends have interacted with each other over the years. Create a timeline of communication methods and uses. From letters and telegrams to the home phone, mobiles, chat programs and social media.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using phones and gadgets to communicate with friends?

Families

Activities

- How do your families embarrass you? Create an 'embarrometer' where you list and rate some moments on a scale of 1 (not so embarrassing) to 10 (major embarrassment).
- Discuss how your family share photos and videos online. Would you feel like Matty and be embarrassed about having baby photos up?
- Vee comes up with a list of things that annoy her Mum. Make a list of things you sometimes do that are annoying for your parents or family. Make the same list about things your parents or other family members sometimes do that you find annoying.
- Have a family meeting and suggest you all do the exercise above. Without showing or discussing them with each other, try each week to stop doing one annoying thing on your list. Come back together after a month and talk about how it went.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Don't Follow Vee	Oliver Phommavanh	9780143505747	3-6	\$16.99		
Natural Born Loser	Oliver Phommavanh	9780143505730	3-6	\$16.99		
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