



# TEACHERS' RESOURCES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary  
Ages 9–12

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Humanities and Social Sciences, Civics and Citizenship,
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Students will learn of the immigrant perspective from a source informed by the author's own experiences
- An in-depth look at the ways racism can be subtle in our everyday interactions

## THEMES

- Belonging
- Safety
- Racism
- Cultural identity

## PREPARED BY

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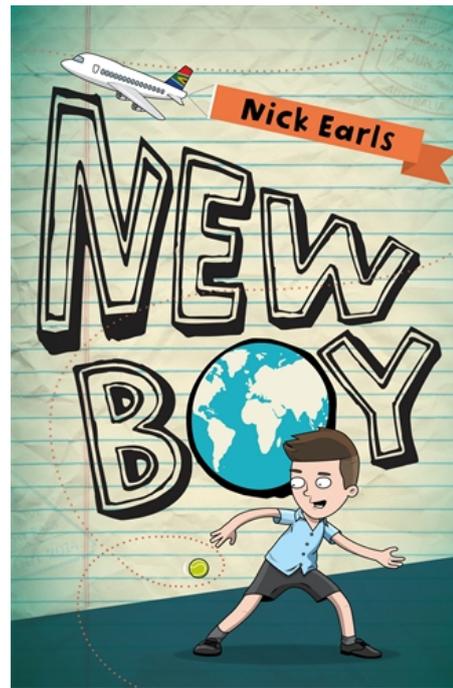
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## New Boy Nick Earls

## PLOT SUMMARY

Adjusting to a new country and a new school was never going to be easy for Herschelle. The food is strange, it's so different to South Africa and, worst of all, no one understands the Aussie slang he's learnt on the web.

But it's the similarities that make things really hard. Herschelle will have to confront racism, bullying and his own past before Australia can feel like home . . .

A moving, funny new novel by one of Australia's best-loved authors.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Earls is the author of twenty books, including the bestselling novels *Zigzag Street*, *Bachelor Kisses*, *Perfect Skin* and *World of Chickens*. His work has been published internationally in English and in translation, and has won awards in the UK and Australia. Five of his novels have been adapted into plays and two into feature films. He was the founding chair of the Australian arm of the international aid agency War Child and is now a War Child ambassador.

## CHARACTERS

### Herschelle van der Merwe

*This is not the perfect beginning to my first day. I am supposed to look cooler than this. (p4)*

*I would have been school hockey captain one day, if we'd stayed. I was the guy you picked first for any team, the guy everyone wanted to be friends with, and who got to be selective. (p13)*

*You thought I'd be black because your Dad said I was African. (p15)*

*The others laugh, but it's not at me, not at my language. I'm on the inside, or at least a step closer to it. (p150)*

This is a first-person narrative told through the eyes of a boy who has fled his homeland, along with his family, in the hope of creating a better life. While his exact age is never given, he seems to be about ten years old, although his sense of self and understanding of the world around him suggests a voice years older than this.

Herschelle is a sporty kid, his dream was to one day be the hockey captain of his primary school. He was well liked at Bergvliet Primary School and describes himself as someone the other students wanted to be around. When he arrives at One Mile Creek Primary and is immediately paired up with someone he perceives to be a nerd, he struggles to reconcile himself with the new image that might be created of him. He seeks out the popular kids, the bigger, tough looking kids who are playing down ball. But as it turns out, these are the exact boys he needs to avoid.

Carrying his own stereotypical notions about Asian people, he is quickly taught that appearances are only ever half the story. Herschelle is confused about how to belong here. He had assumed that a crash course in Aussie slang courtesy of the Internet and his keen ability to play sport would immediately guarantee him the status he had back home. He was wrong. He quickly learns that language can exclude as effectively as it can include, and when you add an accent onto some incorrectly used words, you can quickly become a target for humiliation.

Herschelle gets hurt by Lachlan Parkes and his friends; teased for something he can do nothing about. While this is the difficulty he chooses to retaliate against, it is in fact the perceived betrayal of Max that really does the most damage. Herschelle

doesn't forgive Max easily. He feels as though his trust has been broken and Max has set him up to be the victim of bullying. It takes the truth of Max's own experience for Herschelle to realise just how much Max has suffered as well.

Herschelle's story is one of finding a new identity while maintaining the core of his old one. It is about changing perceptions, breaking down barriers, forgiveness, humility and the acceptance of change. He is a brave kid who has fled violence and fear and is trying to fit into a new world. Luckily for him it is a world that having a mean return shot at handball buys credibility among friends who have their own race track in their back yard.

### Discussion

1. How old do you think Herschelle is? What are the clues about the type of boy he is?
2. Is it clever or foolish to research the slang words on the Internet and confidently use them among these new friends?
3. What does his first impression of Max reveal about Herschelle? What does it reveal about Max?
4. What attracts Herschelle to Lachlan Parkes? What kind of boy do you think Herschelle was back at his old school?
5. What is the significance of there being no hockey team at this school?
6. What is your perception of the fight with Lachlan? Why is it such a big deal that this is labelled as racism?
7. Can you identify the turning point in the friendship between Max and Herschelle?

### Mum

*I'd never admit it to her, but it'll be good to have Mom behind the counter sometimes. I wonder how she went with Hansie. (p29)*

Mum is the stalwart of the van der Merwe family. Part of the reason for leaving Cape Town stems from the fear she shares with her husband after the break in at their home. She wants the best life for her sons and knows that the sacrifice of leaving family, friends, careers and, dreams behind will be worth it.

Josie has to settle the boys into their new environment without the help of her husband. In the midst of Hansie's tantrum and Herschelle's misplaced preparation, Josie stays positive to remind



them this will be a better life. Even her conversation about the confusing safety messages is a reminder that this country is very different to where they have come from. While it might seem perilous to the van der Merwe's to park their car without the protection of a paid guard, and the lack of security at school seems more reckless than a measure of the safe environment, Josie does remind them all of the benefit of compulsory seatbelts. She faces the embarrassment of bringing an empty plate to the school fundraiser with humour and stoicism and comes to the aid of her sons when they most need it.

Herschelle finds comfort in the thought his mother, the great organiser, might one day be standing at the bench of this new canteen, with its new process and procedure. He confides in her about the trouble at school and she encourages this new friendship as a way to make sense of a strange new world. This move must be hard for Josie as well, but obviously not as hard as living in fear of another attack over the barbed wire fence, and the horrible injury that young man suffered as a result of desperation.

### Discussion

1. What are your first impressions of Josie van der Merwe? List five adjectives that describe her.
2. What kind of relationship does Herschelle have with his mother?
3. How does he describe her to his friends?
4. What is the most surprising thing Josie does in the text?
5. How does she respond to the incident between Lachlan and Herschelle?
6. What does the 'bring a plate' scene reveal about Josie and what the move has been like for her?

### Dad

*'So we're teaching them South African food, then?' Dad says. 'Some of them must be okay if they want to try that.'* (p152)

While his father's job becomes a good explanation for the dramatic move to Australia, it is only part of the reason the van der Merwe's left South Africa. Herschelle's father has been able to transfer his employment, and although he still works away at the mines, the rest of the family feel much more isolated than they did back in Cape Town.

Herschelle speaks to his dad via Skype quite often, and stays in touch with text, but for the most part, he is really angry with his father for making the

decision to move them all away. They have left their family and friends behind, and Herschelle feels as though he has also left his identity in Cape Town. His parents have even chosen a school for him that doesn't play hockey, despite the genuine passion and talent he obviously has for the sport.

While Herschelle's relationship with his mother is fine, he still misses his dad, and the chance to express his concerns about the lack of security at his new school, or the willingness of Australian people to just leave their cars parked without paying someone to watch them is lost with the distance between them. When his Dad finishes his two weeks at the mine and they are all together, having a barbeque, Herschelle has had to fight his own battle.

His Dad has offered whatever support he can from the mine, but Herschelle knew he had to solve it himself. He took his father's advice and stood up for himself, but it was ultimately his problem to solve. Piet wants this new place to work for his family. They have fled violence and danger to create a life that is safe and free. Deep down Herschelle knows that too, but it takes a little longer for him to accept it.

### Discussion

1. Describe the kind of relationship Herschelle has with his father.
2. Why is he angry with him? What does he feel is the worst part of the decision?
3. A number of father's feature in the text. How does Piet van der Merwe compare with Mr Parkes or Mr Kennedy?
4. Is his father optimistic about the move? Does he acknowledge his son's concerns?

### Hansie

*Somehow, with that threat, Hansie manages to take the tantrum up a level. Tears are squirting from his eyes and his little pale fists are flailing.* (p2)

Hansie is Herschelle's little brother. Like Herschelle, he didn't get any say in the decision to move the entire family from Cape Town to Brisbane, and like Herschelle he is having a little bit of trouble adapting. He misses his Dad, he is reluctant to start at the new childcare in a different country where lots of things are not what he is used to.

As his typical of his age Hansie loves superheroes and trains and as soon as his Dad walks in from his two week stint away at the mines, he begs him to



come and play ball with him. He age prevents him from any major impact on the narrative or the development of the themes, but the two boys in the family, especially one so young, does help to explain the decision Herschelle's parents have made to leave behind the danger of Cape Town, and try and start a new, safer life in Australia.

### Max Kennedy

*A small nerd is making his way up the steps. They have misunderstood and paired me with a nerd. (p11)*

Max epitomises the fear Herschelle has about coming to a new country and starting at a new school; he is exactly the kind of boy Herschelle would not have been friends with back home. This is not his choice. He has been partnered up with Max as a buddy. Ms Vo has chosen Max as she knows he is exactly the kind of friend Herschelle will need. He is a smart and studious kid, but he is also kind and friendly, and he loves hand ball.

It turns out that while Max might be the 'nerd' Herschelle suspects; he is also a great friend. The situation is helped significantly with the Kennedy's acceptance of the barbecue invitation. Even here when Herschelle accidentally insults Max's mother, the Kennedy's are the kind of people that can laugh it off. They show a genuine interest in the South African food they are being served and reciprocate the time spent together with an invitation for Herschelle to come and ride the motorbikes they own.

Max is nerdy and a result is an easy target for a bully like Lachlan Parkes. But he is very different to Herschelle. He doesn't resist physically, he doesn't even want anyone to know what has been happening. He just wants to survive it the best way he can. So when Lachlan asks him for information about what the barbecue at the van der Merwe's was like, the only option is for Max to share what he knows. No one can blame him for wanting a bit of freedom from the taunting for a while. Herschelle can't possibly understand this. He has no idea what Lachlan is capable of and no consideration of how Max has probably suffered. But he blames Max. Max is further humiliated by being called into the principal's office to explain something he is so ashamed of. And Herschelle punishes him even more.

There are so many times Max could have laughed or teased or made fun of Herschelle. But he never does. He avoids embarrassing him further by joking about

the error or trying to ask questions and learn the words Herschelle is familiar with. It seems early on that Max has a certain admiration for this new boy, with the unbeatable skidder and the reluctance to be the victim. He hates the position Lachlan has put him in and when Herschelle's anger subsides enough to forgive Max for his betrayal, the boys find another common interest as they race bikes around the Kennedy property. Both of these boys have a lot to learn, and their friendship provides a sound opportunity to do this.

### Discussion

1. Why does Herschelle make the assumption Max is a nerd? Why does this matter so much to Herschelle?
2. Is Max a good choice as a buddy for Herschelle?
3. List the differences between these two boys. Will their friendship be sustained?
4. Are you surprised that Max tells Lachlan that the meat at the barbecue resembles a poo? What makes him do this?
5. Why is it harder for Herschelle to forgive Max than it is for him to forgive Lachlan?
6. What is so significant about Max using the word *dwaal*?

### Ms Vo

*She has long straight black hair. I think she's from China or somewhere close.*

*'I know what things mean in Australia,' she says, and it feels as if I've made things worse rather than better. (p35)*

Herschelle makes a number of assumptions about his classroom teacher based on her looks and her ethnicity. Despite commenting on how white his class seems to be, compared to the expectation of the 'melting pot' of cultures he was expecting, He categorises Ms Vo as someone who was not born here.

This is a reflection of life in South Africa perhaps, where Asian migrants are much less part of the cultural constitution of the population. When he unknowingly swears at her, and she responds by reciting her birth place, Herschelle begins to realise that there are many things about this foreign land he had not considered.

This assumption about her being foreign, or not born here, or expecting an accent are a type of racism



where he bases his perceptions of her character on her ethnicity. It is not malicious and comes from an innocent enough place, but it does further highlight the key differences between these countries that some take for granted as being very similar.

Despite his ignorance, Ms Vo is patient and kind with this new boy. Her suggestion to have him share some information about his own country teaches both the class and also Herschelle a little about the history, and therefore current state of South Africa. Along with Mr Browning she has the insight to assign Herschelle to assist the next new boy that arrives. And again in his conversation with others, he learns a little more about himself.

### Discussion

1. What is Herschelle's original perception of his class teacher?
2. At what point does this change and why?
3. Why does Ms Vo buddy Max up with Herschelle?
4. Should Herschelle have confided in Ms Vo about Lachlan's treatment of him?
5. Why does the author have this character in the story? What does she add to the narrative?

### Lachlan Parkes

Lachlan is the classic bully; he is manipulative, secretive and preys on the weakness of those around him.

Initially he is very appealing to Herschelle as he sees Lachlan as the type of student he was at his old school in Cape Town. Perhaps Herschelle was one of the popular students; perhaps he even picked on those he perceived as nerdy or less cool than himself. He says himself how good he was at sport and how he got to choose who he associated with. Lachlan's prowess at sport, his popularity with the rest of the 'cool' crowd and his status in the yard makes him someone Herschelle identifies with.

This is, until he realises just how cruel Lachlan can be. This isn't the first time Lachlan has treated a student with contempt and taken great pleasure at their discomfort. Eventually readers discover, although many will guess much earlier, that Max has been the target of Lachlan's negativity for a long time. When Herschelle's accent becomes the source of Lachlan's teasing, and Herschelle realises there is in fact nothing he can do about that, he becomes furious at the injustice of it. It is weak and pathetic of Lachlan, and there isn't really he can do about it.

It is not until he physically retaliates and the principal identifies the bullying as racism that the boys realise just how bad this situation has become. Even Lachlan is shocked that what he was doing was considered so offensive. Herschelle is the one to reach out, to offer forgiveness. He doesn't want this boy to remain an enemy and instead they include him in their team. Perhaps it is a lesson learned from the great Mandela he has spoken about, perhaps it is his natural response, or perhaps it comes from his abhorrence at racism and the realisation that is not unique to his home country.

### Discussion

1. Find the opening description of Lachlan Parkes. What is your first impression of him?
2. What is it about Lachlan that appeals to Herschelle? How does this contribute to his fury when he becomes the victim of Lachlan and his friends?
3. Can you explain why Lachlan targets Herschelle?
4. What are the hints that Max has already been tormented by Lachlan? Should Herschelle have picked up on this?
5. How realistic is it that the boys invite Lachlan to play handball with them?

### Character activities

1. This text could easily translate to film or television. To try and cast an actor for each of the characters, students can create a mood board for each one. These can be in hard copy with materials or it could be constructed using an electronic source. For each character, students choose a key symbol that defines the character, one key quote, an adjective describing the relationship to each of the other key characters in the text and a visual representation of them according to their description. Students can then consider other elements of the character; a song that suits their character, what they might wear and the key scene someone might have to read if they were auditioning for this part. They could make suggestions about who might be suitable to play each part.
2. Choose a conversation that would happen between the characters in the text but does not feature in the narrative. It might be between a parent and a child on the way home from school,



or as a response to the bullying incident. It might be between two other students, a bit like the ones Herschelle has over Skype with his friend Richard back home. It might be between two of the teachers, or two of the parents. Have the students brainstorm all the possible scenarios and then try and capture the voice of the characters. Choose one and then write out the conversation that might have occurred.

3. Create a book trailer for New Boy. It could have a character focus where each character is introduced with a catchy description over a still shot of them. It would need music, a brief description of what happens in the narrative, some mention of the target audience and it cannot give away the story line. Students work in groups to create their book trailer and then share them with the class. They could act out and film the trailer themselves, or use images from online sources – perhaps linked to the actors they have cast to play each role.

## LANGUAGE

### Aussie slang

*If you'd put the work in looking at the Aussie slang websites, you'd know all that.* (p9)

Herschelle wants to be prepared for this new country. He makes every attempt to be able to fit in with the other students by learning the Aussie slang he can find online. But his application fails him. At times it makes him look more foolish than if he had no idea what the expression was in the first place. At other times the words he has learnt just confuse him and whoever he is trying to have a conversation with. The problem is that like any informal language, Australian slang rapidly changes. According to the place, or the time, or the age group, words come in and out of fashion and can date very quickly. There is often more than one expression for the same situation as well, as Herschelle finds out.

#### Activity

*'The fan's cactus already.'*

*'The fan's carked it.'*

*'It's gone bung.'*

Divide the students into two teams. Provide students with the above example and discuss what the actual meaning of these expressions is. One student from each team takes it in turn to name a slang

expression that is used in the text. Each student only gets one turn and a point is awarded for each expression they identify. Discuss any they don't understand the meaning of.

### Language as culture

*I speak Afrikaans, which is like Dutch so I can understand Dutch. But luckily I also speak this language called English.* (p16)

Herschelle is a white South African boy with a typical Dutch heritage. He can speak fluent Afrikaans, but also English. But the English he knows and would confidently speak among his friends back home is loaded with jokes, innuendo and shared experience that doesn't transfer to the Australian playground. He hadn't factored in language being an area that would limit his ability to belong and make friends, but it seems the slang lessons he has taken are confusing him far more than helping him. The key example of this in the novel is the misunderstanding of his mother at the request to bring a plate. The assumed part of this custom is that the plate has food on it to share, but this is not explicitly said and so they are left humiliated by their error.

#### Activity

Students need to consider the unique way Australian's manipulate the English language to create specific meaning. Choose an Australian sitcom or drama, and then choose either a British or American show that is similar. Watch each one and record the specific examples of English that have been used in each show. Identify and list the words of the same products, objects, actions etc. that have different words to describe them. Write about an example of someone embarrassing themselves by using the wrong word in a situation because of the different meaning it might have in another country. E.g. the word 'thong' is a good example.

### Language as Identity and Belonging

*As soon as I've said it, I realise it's a joke he doesn't get.* (p15)

One of the ways we know we belong to a group of friends or an organisation or team is by using a shared language. We can make jokes, understand instructions or explain ourselves by using language that we understand. It can make us feel special as it is unique to this group and identifies us as a genuine member of this group. Herschelle and his family discover that one of the hardest parts of trying to fit



in to a new culture is understanding the subtlety of language. They speak English fluently and have their own specific labels for food or objects or actions. Even though they have made some effort to become familiar with the idiosyncratic nature of Australian slang, the way it is used is confusing and only further highlights the difference between the two countries. They can communicate with the people around them, but at times it makes them feel even more isolated and different.

### Activity

Write a letter, or email to one of your friends about something that happened recently. Include as many private jokes or references to personal things using language that the two of you would understand, but that perhaps your parents or teachers, or other friends would not. Underline all of these examples of language and consider how they make you feel as though you belong to this friendship. Recall a time when you have used language to exclude someone. Describe how it made you feel saying things that they had no idea about. Describe how it might have made them feel. Consider how powerful language can be to exclude or dominate.

## SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

### Hockey

Herschelle defines himself according to his sporting prowess. Readers never actually witness just how good Herschelle is, as they don't play hockey at One Mile Creek Primary, but if his trick with hand ball is anything to go by, then he must have some ability. As is the case for many boys, he wants to be a sporting star. He has imagined himself as the hockey captain, and probably dreamt he would play professionally one day. This move to a new country, without any consultation, results in Herschelle attending a school that doesn't even play his chosen sport.

The first day he arrives is sports day and as no one had informed of this, he doesn't have the correct gear. So his first impression at the skill he excels at is to be wearing someone else's clothes, carrying a bag with a girl's name on it and being put in a team where no one has a clue about how to win. It crushes Herschelle as he had never considered he wouldn't be one of the best at sport. When he talks to Richard back home, the conversation is about hockey. He is angry at his dad for not choosing a

school where hockey featured, but he also knows deep down that some things in life are more important than hockey, and the safety of his family is one of them.

### Barbecue

The act of inviting friends over to your backyard to share a barbecue is perceived as a typically Australian custom. There is no doubt that this it is, but it is also quite typical of South African entertaining. The host family choose and cook the food and the guests bring drinks or something to share. The barbecue is significant in a number of ways in *New Boy*.

Firstly, it is the first connection the van der Merwe family make with an Australian family. It allows them to share part of their own custom that they are proud of and is unique to South Africa.

Secondly, it provides a connection between the mothers of these two boys. Josie is able to overcome her embarrassment at the misunderstanding with the empty plate by cooking delicious and unusual food.

Thirdly, it provides the source of betrayal for Max. The joke at the barbecue that the meat resembles a poo is funny in the backyard, but when this is transferred to the school yard and inspires the taunting that follows, the comradeship of the meal shared becomes hollow and tainted.

Lastly, when Herschelle's father returns home from his first stint at the mines to their house with little furniture, in a country that is still very foreign to them, they feel connected and safe. They can enjoy some of the life they had back home, without the fear of violence or intrusion. The familiar smell of food cooking on a braai gives comfort and solace and reminds them they have made the right decision.

### Plate

Sourced directly from his own experience, Nick Earls includes the humiliating scenario of Josie and Herschelle desperately trying to fit in to this new place, and getting it horribly wrong. The concept of bringing a plate relies on the assumption that people know this is a request for food to be brought and shared. When they arrive, with their plate empty, their status as outsiders is highlighted. And even though Max is as considerate as possible about their error, they recognise just how little they understand about this new culture. It is indicative of a language



barrier, despite them sharing one, but also of the tradition that comes with living in a place for a long time. It is a reminder that this is not their home, and that they will have to work hard to feel as though they belong.

### Handball

This school yard past time is a favourite among Australian boys in both primary and secondary schools. And so it seems is enjoyed by boys in other countries. The rules might differ slightly, but when you have a winning shot, it surpasses all boundaries. Herschelle's identity is so bound up in his sporting ability that the chance to excel at something, and actually impress these boys, even though he regards them as nerds, allows him a little solace in a very confusing new world. His 'skidder' is impressive and wins him the adoration of Max, Ben and Harry. He spends time with Max teaching him how to perfect it, and when they eventually invite Lachlan to play, he uses it to beat him. Everyone needs to be reminded that they are good at something, and this lunchtime challenge makes things not seem so bad for Herschelle for the time being.

### Barbed wire

The reason for the move to Australia takes Herschelle some time to reveal. Readers know something traumatic has occurred, something drastic enough to make his father seek out a new job in a new country. When the fight at school erupts and the fear on his mother's face is apparent, they are all reminded of the violence they have fled. This new house doesn't have barbed wire. Their house in Cape Town most certainly did. Barbed wire and a guard, and yet neither were enough to deter or prevent an intruder. Herschelle remembers the night well; the boy with the knife, his desperation, and then his pain as he is caught in the barbed wire, his leg ripped to shreds. It existed for their protection, this barbed wire. Just as the security guards at school were armed with weapons and the men on the street demanded payment to keep cars safe, it was all to increase the safety. When Herschelle arrives he finds no comfort in the lack of these safety measures. What he doesn't yet realise is that their absence isn't a sign of danger or carelessness, but that this town has no need for such extremes.

### Empty house

The move to Australia has been quite sudden and shocks all of them. They have a house to live in, jobs to go to and schools to attend, but they are

desperately trying to make it feel like home. It doesn't help that most of their furniture hasn't arrived yet. The house is empty; even more so with Piet working away at the mines. So much of their old life had to be left behind and with a lot of their furniture yet to arrive, the house feels empty and hollow. The boys are sleeping on temporary beds and they are using the outdoor furniture as their dinner table. This only further reminds them of what has been left behind. As well as friends and family and hopes and dreams, this move requires them to adapt and change.

### Symbols activity

Students choose any symbol from the text. They use a ball of play dough or plasticine to create this symbol. They then find a quote that indicates the significance of this symbol to either one of the characters of the story, or one of the key themes that is explored. Students place the symbol on a sheet of paper with the quote written on it and leave it on their desk and the class take a gallery walk around the room to observe what other students have considered. These provide a visual exploration of the characters and themes of the text enabling students to come to a deeper understanding of the narrative.

## THEMES

### Belonging

*And we had friends, loads of them. We never ran out of people to see. Here it's just us. (p3)*

*Ms Vo has got me all wrong and sent me to the nerd colony. This is going to give the cool people entirely the wrong idea. (p26)*

The key concept of this text is one that is the timeless, overwhelming human need to belong.

Everyone has the desire to find a place, a group of people, a way of doing things that make sense to them. It creates a sense of safety and is often intertwined with one's sense of identity. Herschelle has always felt as though he belonged. He considers himself one of the popular boys at his school back home, where he could choose who he associated with and he was never left without someone to be around. He knew what he was good at and what he loved and he had found people that shared these interests. But now everything had changed.

Based on what he knew about Australia he had assumed that his skill at sport, particularly hockey would make the transition easy. After all if he could



speak the language and be competitive on the sporting field, everything else would be fine. The only problem with this is the difficulty of learning the subtlety of informal language online, and the lack of hockey in this new town. He has to try and fit in and be accepted by these people he doesn't know or really understand.

He wants to remain his confident self; someone people like and want to be around. But when he is partnered up with the group of boys he perceives as nerdy, this version of himself starts to get shaky. And when the boy who is popular and athletic makes Herschelle the target, his identity starts to crumble. He fights back in the most basic way, but more out of anger of the betrayal of Max than fury toward Lachlan. He may not have wanted to come to this new country, but he knows why they have, and now that they are here, what he really wants is to belong. If a superior grasp of hockey and an ability to converse in the local lingo won't work, he has to find something that will. And lucky for Herschelle it seems that hand ball crosses a few borders. If fear is what they have fled, then acceptance and inclusion is what they are seeking and eventually they get it right.

### Safety

*And where are the security guards? Anyone could walk in. (p8)*

*I don't think I can tell him why we left. I don't really want to talk about it. (p16)*

It is made obvious from the beginning that the van der Merwe's have left South Africa under duress. It wasn't an easy decision, nor was it something that the family agreed on together. But everyone agrees that it was the right thing to do.

Herschelle is obviously traumatised by an event that happened in Cape Town. It takes him a long time to allow himself to remember the event, let alone have the capacity to tell anyone about it. Snippets of his old life and observations of this new one reveal just how dangerous his home town was. The lack of security guards at the school and barbed wire around the houses, along with the absence of men who are paid to monitor your parked car spell trouble for Herschelle.

Initially none of his family can recognise that the lack of these measures doesn't in fact make the place more dangerous, but that there is no need for this kind of monitoring and protection here. Australia, and this suburb of Brisbane in particular,

don't have the same level of violence and crime that parts of Cape Town do. It is so unlikely that someone will try and break in to their home, armed and dangerous, that there is no need for barbed wire and a guard to protect them.

While the violence does seem to come from within the school itself at first, and the fear in his mother's eyes reveals just how significant their reasons for leaving were, eventually this family recognise the terror they have left behind will not reach them here. If they have moved here to find a new life, of freedom and safety, then they have come to the right place. It just might take a little while to get used to the way things are done in One Mile Creek.

### Racism

*This is bullying, but it's also racism. (119)*

*You have targeted him because of his nationality. Because he sounds different. That's racism. (p120)*

Herschelle knows what racism is. He has shared the history of his country and even the role his family played in the way people were treated according to their skin colour with his classmates. But for Herschelle, it is a matter of black and white. He is a white boy and feels as though racism is something he will never have to face. But he is wrong.

Herschelle is teased because he doesn't sound like everyone else. His family eat different food and he speaks about things in way that is unfamiliar to these boys. They don't understand this and so out of ignorance and fear they choose to humiliate him. As the principal says; this is bullying, but it is also racism. Neither Herschelle nor Lachlan think for one minute that what is happening is racially motivated.

Both of these boys are white, and both think that racism can only occur toward people who have a different colour skin. But that is obviously not the case. This allows students to consider the way we treat people who are different. They might speak a different language or have a different religion. The notion that it is only racism if you are insulting someone with dark skin is simplistic and inaccurate and teaches these boys just how serious their behaviour is.

### Cultural identity

*As I'm standing there looking out over the class, something doesn't seem quite right. At first I can't figure out what. Then I realise it's that everyone is pretty much white. (p23)*



This is a story about Australia. About an average primary school with ordinary students and the way they respond to a new boy arriving. This is a scenario that would happen on a daily basis in this country and the results in this text are very typical of what happens in school yards and homes all over the place. It is also a story about South Africa, about the perceptions people may have of our country, of things we say and do that are not exactly what they expect.

Herschelle finds many similarities between these two countries; the importance of sport, of gathering with friends and family around a barbeque or braai, and the presence of the fear of difference. It takes a while for Herschelle to recognise the different safety expectations that exist in each country and why. It takes him even longer to realise just how much our identity is embedded in the language and customs we share.

We take so much for granted about the way we speak and the assumptions we make in these old clichés or familiar expressions. The concept of ‘bringing a plate’ is not complicated or new, but it is something that people who have lived here for a long time take for granted. In other countries this happens, but it often has a different name.

In his first month in Australia, Herschelle has had to make sense of seatbelts and traffic lights, no security guards at school and the lack of a hockey team. But he has also been exposed to dirt bike tracks in the back yard and the warmth of Australian friendship. He has been able to share some of the delicious food they eat at home and teach the boys his trick with a tennis ball. While he won’t forget where he came from, he will eventually merge the South African Herschelle with the Australian boy he will grow up to be.

### Themes activities

1. Divide the students into groups that represent the themes. This group needs to become the ‘experts’ on their allocated themes. They can read the notes included above, and then complete the following chart in as much detail as possible. Once they have a detailed set of notes each, number each student in the group and then form new groups with the numbers. This group needs a representative from each of the expert groups. The expert then shares all of their knowledge with the rest of the group.

| Theme             | Description of Key Ideas | Character Involvement | Key Scene | Symbol | Key Quotes |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------|------------|
| Belonging         |                          |                       |           |        |            |
| Safety            |                          |                       |           |        |            |
| Racism            |                          |                       |           |        |            |
| Cultural identity |                          |                       |           |        |            |

2. After the re-formed groups have completed their table, students can form pairs to write two ‘fat questions’ for each theme. A fat question has a wide answer and cannot be answered with a simple yes or no; it needs a thorough investigative answer. Compile the list of questions as a class and have students choose two for each theme from the list to answer. These questions typically start with a ‘why, how, what if, justify, explain, consider’.

## ACTIVITIES

### KWL

The back of the book has an author’s note from Nick Earls explaining the inspiration for the novel. While there are many links to the current conversation concerning migrants, refugees and asylum seekers that are worth exploring; this text is rooted in Earls’ own history. Have students read the explanation and discuss whether they know other people, famous or not, that have arrived in Australia from another country that is seemingly very similar to ours. They could begin a KWL Chart that is maintained throughout the text study using Earls’ insight as the starting point.

K = Know – Students fill in this column of the chart with ideas they have or facts they know about people who migrate to Australia.

W = Want – This column is filled with questions that are raised throughout the reading of the text.

L = Learnt – This is where students add the facts or insight they have gathered as they read Earls story and learn about Herschelle. This could also be completed using stories from other class mates and their experience.

### Student experiences

The most important source of information about migration and what this looks and feels like can come from the students in the classroom. Depending on the class dynamic, the social and cultural status of the students, the area the school is situated in, and even the level being taught, students will have



their own stories to tell. It may be a personal experience, the shared history of their immediate family or a story of someone they have come to know. It may even be the story of the teacher.

A really nice structure to give this sharing of experience is a personal show bag: Students are invited to bring in five things that are significant to their journey until this point in their life. They can be anything from material objects to songs to photos to food or heirlooms; anything that symbolise defining moments and relationships in their lives. Those who have come from other countries will feature this element of their upbringing naturally in their presentation. Each student has a few minutes to explain each object and students may ask questions. This works particularly well if the teacher includes themselves in the activity.

### Migrant and refugee facts

Invite students to research the current statistics on the various places people migrate to Australia from. They can consider their own personal town, state and also the country as a whole; then they compare this to the recent numbers of refugees and where they are coming from. It would also be worth allocating different groups of students different decades to compare how this has changed in the past century and what makes people leave their homelands and begin a new life here in Australia. Create a class fact sheet for prominent display.

### Cape Town vs Queensland

A really basic Venn Diagram could be established in clear view in the classroom and added to throughout the text study. With one circle as Cape Town, the other as Brisbane and the overlapping section for the common elements. Students could add quotes, key words or images to each section of the Venn Diagram to highlight the differences between the two places, and to identify the similarities. E.g. Hockey, Racism, Barbecue, Bullying etc. This could be teacher directed with a set of key words written and students deciding and justifying which section they go in, or it could be completed individually

## ASSESSMENT

### CURRENT ISSUE RESEARCH:

New arrivals to Australia have received a lot of attention in the Australian media over the last few

years. So much of this has been negative and uses fear to make a point. Find two stories about people who have recently arrived. Find one negative and one positive story. Try and re-write the negative story to consider what it might actually be like for these people trying to make a new life for themselves in a foreign country, especially given what they have left behind. For the positive story, write a letter from their perspective saying what has helped them fit in and belong to their new community.

### Creative writing

1. Ms Vo and Mr Browning have a conversation about the incident between Herschelle, Max and Lachlan. Write out what they think happened and how they will respond to this.
2. It is two years after the end of the novel. Write another chapter from Herschelle's perspective. What has changed? Who is he friends with? What is happening with his family? How has Roy settled in?
3. Josie van der Merwe writes an email to her family or friends back home after they have been in Australia for a month. What are some of the things that may have surprised her, or shocked her? What is she still confused about? What is she hoping for? What is she missing?
4. Create a survival guide for a new student arriving at an Australian primary school. What elements do you think are essential to be able to fit in as quickly as possible? Consider language, sport, television, food, school rules etc.

### Analytical essays

1. *'Just be yourself,' I tell him. 'That won't make you fit in here right away, but who else can you be eh?'*  
What has Herschelle learnt about his own identity and the best way to try and fit in?
2. *The others laugh, but it's not at me, not at my language. I'm on the inside, or at least a step closer to it.*

New Boy shows readers just how important it is to belong. Discuss with reference to at least three characters from the novel.



## ORDER FORM

| TITLE                    | AUTHOR           | ISBN          | SCHOOL YEAR | RRP     | QTY | TOTAL |
|--------------------------|------------------|---------------|-------------|---------|-----|-------|
| New Boy                  | Nick Earls       | 9780143308393 | 3-6         | \$14.99 |     |       |
| Boy Overboard            | Morris Gleitzman | 9780141308388 | 3-6         | \$16.99 |     |       |
| The Other Side of Summer | Emily Gale       | 9780143780113 | 5-8         | \$16.99 |     |       |
|                          |                  |               |             |         |     |       |
|                          |                  |               |             |         |     |       |
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