



RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper secondary
(ages 14+)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Language, Literature, Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Analysing how language and writing evoke mood, tone, tension and characterisation
- Encouraging creative and imaginative writing

THEMES

- Love
- Relationships
- Friendships
- Family
- Grief
- Poetry

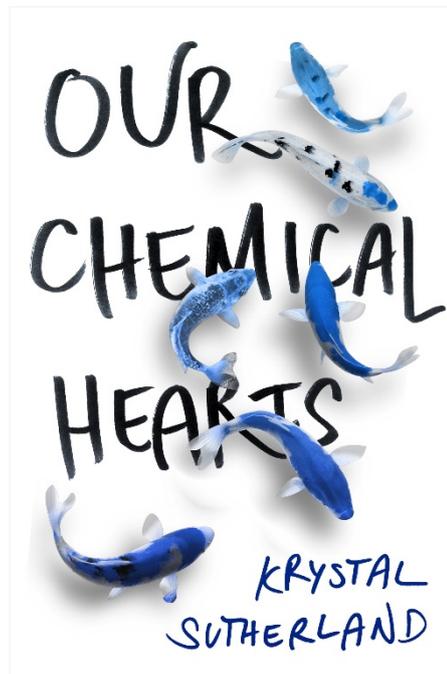
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Our Chemical Hearts

Krystal Sutherland

PLOT SUMMARY

Henry Page has never been in love. The slo-mo, can't-eat-can't-sleep kind of love he's been hoping for just hasn't been on the cards—at least not yet. Henry's too busy trying to get into a semi-decent college and become editor of his school newspaper, a dream three years in the making. The rest of his spare time he spends with his best friends, Lola and Murray, playing video games and advising them on their own sordid love lives.

Then he meets Grace Town, the elusive new girl in school, who wears oversized boys' clothing, walks with a cane, rarely seems to shower, and is hiding crushing secrets. She's hardly who Henry expected his dream girl to be, but when the two are chosen to edit the paper together, sparks fly. After all this time, Henry's about to learn firsthand just how disastrous the road to first love can be—and that sometimes it's the detours that end up mattering much more.

A brilliant debut that is equal parts humour and heartbreak, Krystal Sutherland's *Our Chemical Hearts* is a potent reminder of the bittersweet bliss that is first love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krystal Sutherland was born and raised in Townsville, Australia, a place that has never experienced winter. Since then, she's lived in Sydney, where she edited her university's student magazine; Amsterdam, where she worked as a foreign correspondent; and Hong Kong. Krystal has also interned at Bloomsbury Publishing and was short-listed for the Queensland Young Writers Award. She has no pets and no children, but is fond of naming inanimate objects: in the Netherlands she owned a Dutch bicycle called Kim Kardashian and a small, inflatable velociraptor called Herbert. *Our Chemical Hearts* is her debut novel.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Krystal says:

'When you know, you know.'

It's a saying I'd heard over and over again about love. Until I started writing *Our Chemical Hearts*, I didn't know it could apply to books as well. I mean, I'd written manuscripts before. I'd had lukewarm feelings about them. I'd tried to make them work, but we'd fought constantly, or there'd been no passion in the relationship, or we'd wanted different things.

Then *Our Chemical Hearts* came along and swept me off my feet.

For writers, it's often hard trying to remember how a story started in your head. By the time you reach the end of it, everything – even the characters you began with – has changed. That wasn't the case for me this time around.

It started with a boy and a girl. He had black hair and dimples. She wore guy's clothing and walked with a cane. He believed in grand love stories. She'd already been in one.

He was Henry. She was Grace. *Our Chemical Hearts* would be their bittersweet story.

It was the best and worse writing experience I've had.

Best because it came to me so easily. I wrote in class, at work, in front of the TV. Sometimes I wouldn't write for a week, and then a chapter would materialise in a single session.

Worst because I was getting my own heart broken at the time. In the end this, too, was a blessing, because *Our Chemical Hearts* is not a book I could

have written before that, or a book I could write now. I put it on paper in the eye of the storm, amidst the carnage of a relationship coming to an end, and it's all the more raw for it.

Let me be clear: the story is not my story. The characters are not me, not us, not in any way. But whatever burning black thing crawled up inside my ribcage and died while I was writing only served to make the book that much better. That much truer.

(God, this makes it sound so depressing! It's not. Mostly. Only like 60% of the time.)

Henry was a great character to get inside the head of. Young, naïve, but above all incredibly hopeful, I wanted so badly for him to get the happy ending he deserved. Alas, I learned that tales of first love rarely end how we want them to (even when we're writing them).

I'll finish with a quote from the inimitable John Green. In one of his videos he said: "It's amazing how much you can love made up people, and how much you can miss them."

I love Henry and Grace and I miss them already. I hope that – by the time you finish reading – you love and miss them too.

WRITING STYLE

- What is the novel's writing style? Consider how and when information is revealed, and the use of different modes of communication, such as text messages, PowerPoint, social media messaging and letters. How effectively does this contribute to the novel's storytelling?
- How does the first-person point-of-view affect what is revealed to the reader? What does Henry know or not know? How might the story have been different if a third-person narration had been used?
- How might the story be different if it had been written from another character's point-of-view? Choose an incident in the story and write it from a different character's perspective, such as Grace, Murray, Lola, Sadie or Madison.
- How does the use of humour by Henry and his friends contribute to the story of *Our Chemical Hearts*, which is not always a happy one?
- How effectively does the use of both comedy and tragedy in the plot of *Our Chemical Hearts* convey the complexities of Henry's life and friendships?



- The novel's ending is not a conventionally satisfying one. What did you think of this ending? Was it the best ending for this particular story?
- How does the book's title relate to its content? What does it refer to?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Pablo Neruda

The poem Grace was reading, I assumed over and over again because the page was dog-eared and food-stained and in generally bad shape, was by a guy called Pablo Neruda, whom I'd never heard of before. It was called 'I do not love you,' which intrigued me, so I started to read, even though Hink had not yet succeeded in making me like poetry.

Two lines in particular had been highlighted.

'I love you as certain dark things are to be loved, in secret, between the shadow and the soul.' (p. 9)

- Who was Pablo Neruda? What is he known for? What time in history was he alive and in which part of the world?
- How does his poem 'Sonnet XVII' or 'I do not love you*', quoted on pp. 9, 15 and 38 and alluded to in the last paragraph, relate to the themes of *Our Chemical Hearts*?

(The poem is from the book *100 Love Sonnets* published by The University of Texas Press, 1986, and can also be viewed online here: <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/xvii-i-do-not-love-you/>)

Kintsukuroi

"I read about this technique called Kintsukuroi in an art book in middle school. Have you heard of it?" Grace shook her head. (p. 170)

Grace picked up one of the Kintsukuroi pieces. I had eleven in total now, some of them gifts from Lola over the years, some from Mom after art acquisition trips to Japan, some purchased on eBay or Craigslist with my allowance. There were other things in the cabinet as well, all of them broken or crooked or wrong somehow. A silver bangle that Sadie had been given as a gift, the joint warped. A can of Coke with a misprinted label. (p. 171)

- What is kintsukuroi?
- How does it feature in *Our Chemical Hearts*?
- How does it relate the plot and themes of the book?

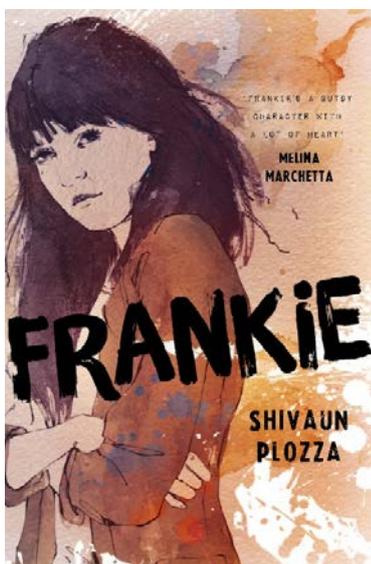
- How does Henry consider it to be a metaphor for Grace? What is Grace's response to this?

Creativity

- Consider some of the different forms of creativity and communication in the novel:
 - Articles and artwork in the school magazine Henry finally creates with the help of other students
 - Poetry
 - Henry's PowerPoint presentation for Grace
 - Letters
 - Text messages
 - Kintsukuroi bowls
- Create your own creative work, in one of the forms noted above or in a form of your own choosing, to express one of the themes of *Our Chemical Hearts*.



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

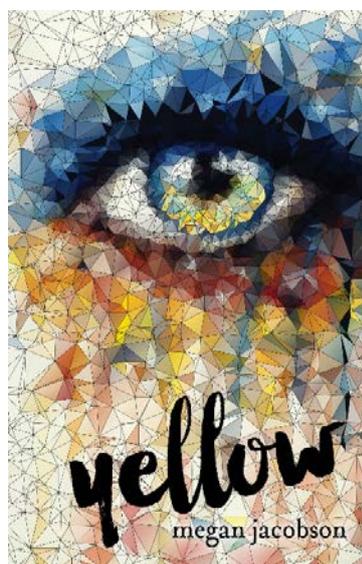


Frankie
by Shivaun Plozza

Frankie Vega is angry. Just ask the guy whose nose she broke. Or the cop investigating the burglary she witnessed, or her cheating ex-boyfriend or her aunt who's tired of giving second chances . . .

When a kid shows up claiming to be Frankie's half brother, it opens the door to a past she doesn't want to remember. And when that kid goes missing, the only person willing to help is a boy with stupidly blue eyes . . . and secrets of his own.

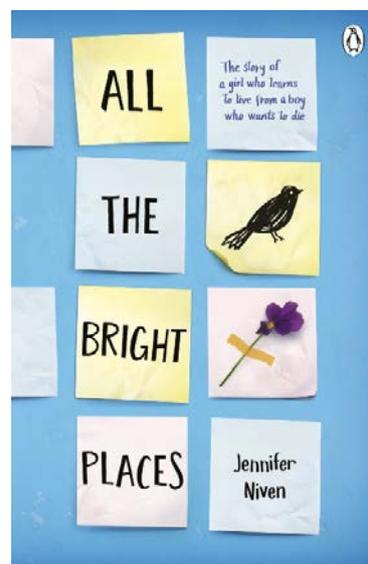
Frankie's search for the truth could change her life, or cost her everything.



Yellow
by Megan Jacobson

If fourteen-year-old Kirra is having a mid-life crisis now, then it doesn't bode well for her life expectancy. Her so-called friends bully her, whatever semblance of a mother she had has been drowned at the bottom of a gin bottle ever since her dad left them for another woman, and a teenage ghost is speaking to her through a broken phone booth.

Kirra and the ghost make a pact. She'll prove who murdered him almost twenty years ago if he makes her popular, gets her parents back together, and promises not to haunt her. But things aren't so simple, and Kirra realises that people can be haunted in more ways than one.



All the Bright Places
by Jennifer Niven

Theodore Finch wants to take his own life. *I'm broken, and no one can fix it.*

Violet Markey is devastated by her sister's death. *In that instant we went plowing through the guardrail, my words died too.*

They meet on the ledge of the school bell tower, and so their story begins.

It's only together they can be themselves . . .

I send a message to Violet: 'You are all the colors in one, at full brightness.'

You're so weird, Finch. But that's the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me.

But, as Violet's world grows, Finch's begins to shrink. How far will Violet go to save the boy she has come to love?



ORDER FORM

| TITLE | AUTHOR | ISBN | SCHOOL YEAR | RRP | QTY | TOTAL |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------|---------|-----|-------|
| Our Chemical Hearts | Krystal Sutherland | 9780143573906 | 8+ | \$19.99 | | |
| Frankie | Shivaun Plozza | 9780143573166 | 8+ | \$17.99 | | |
| Yellow | Megan Jacobson | 9780143573333 | 8+ | \$19.99 | | |
| All the Bright Places | Jennifer Niven | 9780141357034 | 8+ | \$17.99 | | |
| The Things I Didn't Say | Kylie Fornasier | 9780143573630 | 8+ | \$19.99 | | |
| The Piper's Son (YA crossover, 16+) | Melina Marchetta | 9780143203421 | 10+ | \$19.99 | | |
| The Sidekicks | Will Kostakis | 9780143309031 | 8+ | \$19.99 | | |
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