



TEACHER'S NOTES

I Had Such Friends

by Meg Gatland-Veness

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meg Gatland-Veness was born in a tiny country town called Milton and now lives on the Central Coast of New South Wales with her boyfriend and two cats. She attended the University of Newcastle where she studied a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Secondary Teaching.

Meg has been writing stories for as long as she can remember and reading them even longer. She always carries a notebook with her in case inspiration strikes or she encounters a beautiful new word. Equal to her love of words is her passion for championing local youths and fostering important conversations about issues facing young Australians.

When she is not writing novels, Meg is a high school drama teacher who channels her creativity into choreographing and directing musicals, writing poetry, singing and dancing.



ABOUT THE BOOK

So, then it happened. Peter Bridges pulled into the bus bay. You're not allowed to do that. Peter was in my year but I hardly ever saw him at school. He was on the football team, though he had almost been kicked off more times than I could count, for fighting and not showing up to training. His car was the cheapest-looking Toyota Corolla I had ever seen in my life.

"Hey Hamish," he said, and I couldn't for the life of me work out how it was that he could possibly know my name. "Want a ride home?"

When Charlie Parker dies it affects everyone who knew him. Everyone, that is, except for Hamish Day, the boy with only one friend, who lives on a cabbage farm. After a tragic car accident leaves his school in grief, Hamish finds himself pulled into the lives of the people left behind. He tries his best to thread them back together again, even though he is pretty sure he's the least qualified person for the job.

With hard-hitting themes of unrequited love, sexuality, bullying, death and suicide, readers will take part in a poignant story about self-discovery, grief and the tragic power of silence. A gripping look at adolescent pain with a narrative maturity that accurately reflects its YA milieu, *I Had Such Friends* pushes us to reflect on our own 'sliding doors' moment. Who are you to someone else, and what part do you play in his or her story?

THEMES and ISSUES

THEMES

- Coming of Age
- Friendship
- Family
- Life and death
- Catharsis
- Sexuality
- Love
- Grief
- Prejudice

ISSUES

- Love and Loss
- Death of loved ones
- Growing up in rural areas
- Teenage Relationships
- Bullying
- Homophobia
- Suicide
- Abuse

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Chapter 1 - 10

1. What do you think is meant by the tagline "What if the beginning is the end?"
2. What do you believe the book will be about just looking at the title?
3. Reading the blurb, what thoughts do you have?
4. What is the purpose of 1st person narration? Why do you think the author has chosen this style?
5. What is the purpose of beginning the novel with Charlie's death?
6. Why do you think Hamish focuses on this event?
7. How do you connect with Hamish? Does he possess similar qualities to you? Is he the opposite of you?
8. When Hamish describes himself, how do you feel? Why would Gatland-Veness have created a protagonist like this?
9. The novel explores the idea of friendship from the very beginning. How does Gatland-Veness both challenge and agree with traditional notions of friendship?
10. Do you think Peter Bridges is a metaphor for something? Why is this character significant?
11. Why do you think Peter takes an interest in Hamish?
12. What positive qualities does Martin possess that Hamish overlooks?
13. Describe Hamish's view on the world. Is he optimistic, pessimistic, etc.
14. Do you think Hamish represents a typical high school student? Why/why not?
15. Why has Gatland-Veness chosen a town Hamish describes as falling apart? Do you think this is an objective description or due to his outlook on life?
16. Who is Hamish's sister? Why does he compare himself to her? Does this clarify judgements you made about Hamish?
17. Hamish talks about "guys I hated for being everything I wasn't." Why do you think many people react with anger when they experience hatred?
18. Why is Annie so significant to Hamish?
19. Describe Hamish's home life and family. How do you think it has shaped him?
20. Juxtapose Hamish's family with Martin's. How do they differ? What impact do you think this has on their friendship?
21. Gatland-Veness explores the themes of love and loss. How have they been represented in the novel thus far? Why are these themes important to explore?
22. What kinds of bullying does Hamish witness or receive?

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Chapter 1 - 10 (continued)

23. Why is Hamish so blunt when he speaks of death?
24. What inner issues do you think Peter is struggling with?
25. How do the main characters view school?
26. Consider the quote, "I thought that it wasn't Paige who died at all. It was me." How do you react to this quote? What do you think Hamish means by this?
27. What does Fred symbolise?
28. Consider the quote, "we couldn't escape that place... Always that pervading silence." How do you react to this quote? Does it impact your opinion of Hamish?
29. Why does Gatland-Veness make use of Australian jargon like "dero?"
30. Why do you think Hamish likes spending time with Peter despite the consequences he might face?
31. Why doesn't Peter seem happy about Annie's call regarding Charlie's death?
32. Hamish is facing an internal conflict over whether he is good or evil. What do you think about this?
33. What does Hamish realise when Martin has an asthma attack? How does this event explore the themes of life and death?

Chapter 11 - 20

1. How do you feel when "Hey faggots" is shouted? How do you think the characters receiving this label feel?
2. Do you think Martin or Hamish should have acted differently in line for the canteen?
3. Put yourself in Hamish's shoes. How would you feel about the date with Annie?
4. Hamish says "She gave me a smile, so I got to keep that." Why do you think Hamish feels this way?
5. Do your opinions of Peter change when you are told about his home life?
6. Hamish can be quite sarcastic at times. Do you think this is a coping strategy?
7. How do the houses of Annie, Martin and Hamish represent their characters?
8. Why do you think Hamish told Peter about Paige?
9. When you find out Hamish was there for her death, how does this make you feel? Does it explain Hamish's character more?
10. "Paige is dead." Why do we feel quite upset with Hamish's delivery?
11. When was a time you were vulnerable? How did you feel? Does it make you connect more to Peter?

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Chapter 11 - 20 (continued)

12. Peter drops a bombshell. What are your thoughts on Hamish's reaction to Peter and Charlie?
13. How do you feel about the role Annie played for Charlie and Peter? Does it change when you find out about her uncle?
14. What do you think the beach symbolises for Peter?
15. Why do you think Hamish's parents are worried about his friendship with Peter?
16. How do you relate to Hamish and his first kiss?
17. Do you think Hamish is conflicted at this point? (When he sneaks out to go to Peter's house.)
18. Why is Hamish no longer jealous of the footballers?
5. How does Martin react to Hamish? Were you expecting this and why do you think he responds in the way that he does?
6. Are you surprised when Hamish tells his parents about the situation?
7. Did you expect the book to take this direction of events?
8. What role should parents play in their children's relationships?
9. How do you feel when Hamish sits in the toilets at lunch? Have you ever been in a similar situation?
10. What is the role of the school when dealing with issues such as relationships and bullying?
11. The novel has a few moments of bravery. Why is Annie so important in the canteen line?
12. How is the ending similar and different to the beginning?
13. Hamish contemplates many 'what if' scenarios. What is the difficulty with this?
14. Why do you think Hamish didn't go to the funeral?
15. What do you make of Hamish and Annie moving to Sydney?
16. "We'll always have each other, and that is enough." Why do you think Gatland-Veness chose to close the novel with this?

Chapter 21 - 25 (continued)

1. How do you feel about love? Have you ever experienced love?
2. When Peter and Hamish go to the beach, why do you think their relationship progresses quickly? Do you think this is wise?
3. How do you think Hamish is feeling when Peter leaves?
4. Why does Hamish need Martin? What about their friendship is Hamish realising when he calls?

ACTIVITIES

1. Create a new book cover and title.
2. Before reading the book, complete a Know/Want/Learn chart. Complete the chart and discuss once the book has been read.
3. Brainstorm issues/themes/ideas the book might explore.
4. While reading, highlight quotes that are significant to you. Connect them to a theme or explore literary devices.
5. Draw/Sculpt/Paint Hamish: what does he look like to you? Given the description provided by Gatland-Veness and his character traits, how would you justify your creative decision?
6. Write a haiku about the novel every 5 chapters and include what you have found the most important parts of the chapters. When completed, compare them. What do you haikus focus on? Does this lead you to a new conclusion about the novel, or even yourself?
7. Martin is to Hamish, as who is to you? Write a short poem or description about your closest friend. What qualities does he/she possess? How does that impact you?
8. Within the first few chapters, the author utilises many metaphors and much vivid imagery. Create a running list. What do they unearth?
9. Act out the scene where Hamish's parents ask him to see a counsellor. Improvise your characters. What does this scene show you? Mind map issues surrounding family and mental health.
10. Create a venn diagram comparing how Hamish describes himself and the area he lives in at the beginning and end of the book.

ACTIVITIES (continued)

11. Identify key themes of the book with the class. In pairs or groups (4 people max), collect quotes or identify chapters in the book that explore these themes.
12. Brainstorm what traits you believe you possess. Do they match up to a particular character?
13. Create a series of vlogs from a character's point of view. Complete at least 5 with one beginning before the novel, and one taking place after the novel.
14. Re-write a chapter. What would you change? What would stay the same? Consider:
 - Language
 - Setting
 - Plot
 - Characters
 - Point of View
15. Write 3 newspaper reports. Imagine you are interviewing a character at the beginning, middle and end of the novel.
16. Write an epilogue 5 years in the future. Where is Hamish? What is he doing?
17. Create a photo essay that documents Hamish's journey in the novel. What photos will you use to accurately reflect this?

EXAM QUESTIONS

1. How does the setting of *I Had Such Friends* reflect the character of Hamish? Compare to other characters.
2. Explain how TWO themes are represented in the novel. Compare to at least ONE related text.
3. "Fear is a reflection of the nature of humanity." Discuss with reference to *I Had Such Friends*.
4. Explain how love and acceptance are established throughout the novel.
5. To what extent does environment contribute to the struggles of a person? Refer to your chosen text and at least ONE related text.
6. Without Peter's friendship, Hamish would be lost. Discuss.
7. "People make rash choices when confronted with unfamiliar circumstances." Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer with reference to *I Had Such Friends*.
8. How is belonging to place explored in the text?
9. "We'll always have each other, and that is enough." How does *I Had Such Friends* explore this notion?
10. How effective is the author's use of literary devices to convey the themes of love and loss?

FURTHER READING

- *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* by Becky Albertalli
- *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green
- *Looking for Alaska* by John Green
- *If I Tell You* by Alicia Tuckerman
- *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
- *Boy Meets Boy* by David Leviathan
- *Tash Hearts Tolstoy* by Kathryn Ormsbee
- *Looking for Alibrandi* by Melina Marchetta
- *Deadly, Unna?* by Phillip Gwynee
- *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove* by James Moloney
- *Every Heart a Doorway* by Seanan McGuire
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* by Mark Haddon

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