



Plain Jane

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE & THEMES

A challenging and inspirational story of hope overcoming adversity. Jane, struggling to deal with her sister's life threatening illness, fails to notice that her own health and grip on reality has begun to spiral and fragment.

Although her caustic perspective colours her view on life in general, Jane struggles to cope as her grip on reality begins to disintegrate; her only anchor being her relationship with Farley, a boy she befriends who challenges her interpretation of the world.

The themes explored include:

- Mental illness
- Suicide
- Serious illness
- Forming relationships
- Sibling loyalty
- Family bonds
- Self esteem
- Friendship
- Resilience
- Stereotyping

SUMMARY

Disrupted by a life-threatening diagnosis for her younger sister, Emma, the cohesion of Jane's family is strained to breaking point and unable to give her the support she needs.

Her relationship with her boyfriend Dell makes no demands on her numbed senses, allowing her a space where she can avoid the chaos in her life as she begins to disengage from school and family life as they all try to deal with the routine of Emma's hospital treatment.

Confused by an increasingly disjointed perception and deploying an unrestrained caustic tongue, Jane's behaviour begins to drive a wedge between her and her friends, further isolating her within the chaotic world of her own creation.

Meeting Farley provides the only anchor in her spiralling world, however their relationship is unable to protect her from the combined effects of the trauma of her experiences of her sister's illness and her grandfather's violent death. Jane's world finally collapses in a storm of uncontrolled images and action that require medical intervention before stability can be restored and a future charted for her family and her relationship with Farley.

APPROACH

In the story of Jane, the issues and challenges of living with mental illness are highlighted with a sensitive honesty.

The story challenges stereotypes and asserts that everyone, irrespective of their condition, can, with support, achieve fulfillment in their own life's journey, enriching not only their own lives, but also the lives of those around them.

The structure of the story dictates four sections and the activities allow the class to explore the issues in a sensitive way.

The nature of the issues suggests whole-class or small group discussion techniques within the curriculum areas of PSHE & PDMU.

Useful resources include Active Teaching and Learning Strategies.

www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stage_3/ALTM-KS3.pdf

In addition mental health support for adolescents can be found at these links.

www.nami.org/Learn-More/Know-the-Warning-Signs

www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/worried_about_your_child/parents_mental_health_drug-alcohol_problems

Section 1 Invisible Pages 8- 73

SUMMARY

Dell's father makes Jane feel uncomfortable and unwelcome, so she tries to avoid him when she visits Dell, her undemanding boyfriend whose basement she uses as a refuge, watching him engrossed in playing video games without the necessity for a lot of conversation.

Developing an acerbic and jaundiced outlook to the world since her sister Emma was diagnosed with a life-threatening cancer, Jane's reaction has been to detach herself from her normal routines, including school attendance.

Since Emma has been in hospital, her parents have been distracted and, without their focus, Jane's routines have begun to unravel.

Her visits to relieve her mother sitting with Emma in hospital are harrowing, having to cradle the frail, retching frame of her sister who reacts violently to her medication, while in the background a DVD her grandfather made before he died loops a constant saccharin sentiment that Jane finds nauseating to endure.

Watching the toll that double shifts at work and hospital visits are taking on both her parents, Jane reflects on the moment she began to skip school and the ineffectiveness of the school counsellor to support or understand her.

Visiting hospital, Jane remembers how much potential Emma had as a dancer, but now feels isolated and unable to penetrate the bond that has strengthened between Emma and her mother since her illness.

Although her attendance is haphazard, she still shares the school bus with the girls

from her village and Tracey, her best friend. She is unable, however, to share their life expectations, railing sarcastically at the limit of their ambition and succeeding only in intensifying her own isolation.

By third period, Jane has endured enough and finds herself walking into town instead. Idly browsing the limited number of stores, Jane recalls without any resentment how Emma always seemed to appear perfect.

Visiting each shop for a few minutes only, to avoid suspicion and to keep warm, she meets Farley, who seems to be helping out at one of the small cafes. His optimism infuriates her, yet she is intrigued.

Continuing to surf the stores, Jane is unable to prevent herself from challenging the faux sympathy of a shopper dropping a coin in to a collection box for her sister, pointing out that the concept of sympathy appeared to be more comfortable than its reality.

Spending so much time travelling, Jane has developed the habit of sketching the images of people she glimpses from the bus window.

Intimidated by the hospital each time she visits Emma, Jane is determined to remain upbeat, but is unable to restrain her exasperation at the hospital practice of presenting even the most serious condition in a positive way and Emma's collusion with the charade.

Frustrated by the strength of the bond Emma has with their mum, Jane makes a resentful remark before leaving, clutching the money her mum gave her to buy supper for herself and her dad.

At home, her isolation continues, as her father is always too tired from double shifts to engage with her in any meaningful way.

On the bus to school, her sense of apathy leaves her totally indifferent to the discussions about the school disco, her sarcasm justifying her self-imposed distance from the excitement of Tracey and the others.

The routine of school and hospital has numbed her, creating a sense of little expectation, that today, her 16th birthday will not pass unnoticed.

Recalling previous birthdays, she realises that her mum has left for the hospital without remembering her birthday.

When Tracey and the girls produce cupcakes on the bus and sing happy birthday to her, she swallows her guilt at her comments and agrees to meet Tracey after school in town for a treat.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp 13&52):** Jane is suspicious of the sympathy that strangers show for her sister's illness, believing it to be insincere and voyeuristic. Do you agree with her? Every tragedy nowadays seems to attract a 'Facebook' flurry of sympathy. Can this really be sincere or of any benefit for the person experiencing the tragedy?
- **(Read p26):** Emma is seriously ill, however the full extent of the illness has been kept from Jane. Would it have helped her to be fully involved in the family discussions? Should everyone in the family know the extent of a serious illness? How would you prepare a child to receive such information?
- **(Read p33):** Tracey and the other girls have their ambitions set on early marriages and raising families. Their career ambitions are set to working in their local economy. Do you think their aspirations are limited? Do the expectations of friends and family define how you see your future?
- **(Read p45):** Jane describes the inhabitants of her town as two separate stereotypes. Is this a useful way to try to understand people or the way they behave? How might these views colour judgements about them? How can stereotyping be challenged? Are stereotypes accurate? What type of person is more likely to use them?
- **(Read p59):** Jane feels as though she is invisible. Emma's illness is consuming all her mother's attention. While she has sympathy for Emma, Jane has begun to resent the absence of her mother's support for her. Is Jane being reasonable? Is she right to expect her mother to recognise that she too needs company and support or is she behaving in a selfish and immature way?

ACTIVITIES

1. Say or Not (Read pp18-19)

Before he died, their grandfather recorded a video message for Emma that Jane dismisses as sentimental nonsense, however Emma seems to find comfort in watching it.

Could you support a close friend who is seriously ill by sending them a video message? What would you say and what would you NOT say?

Create a 20-second greeting to help them understand that you care.

2. Silent Dialogue (Read p29)

Jane watches, as Emma and her mum are able to communicate with each other

without actually talking.

How do you think that they were able to do this?

The author wondered whether she might include a short description here of what Jane saw.

Write a brief (100 word) paragraph to describe the silent interaction between Emma and her mum.

3. Groundhog Day (Read pp36-37)

Life for Jane seems to be in a loop. The sequence of activity for each day seems to recur without any variation.

Create a cartoon to represent the image she holds of the monotony that this experience holds for her.

What image would you use and how would you represent the seemingly endless repetition?

4. Stereotypes (Read p45)

Jane has classified her town into two extreme stereotypes, describing each group unfavourably.

If you were to describe your town using stereotypes, what would they be?

Which group would you belong to?

Write the character profile for each group using the perspective of someone from one of the contrasting groups.

5. Seen from the Bus (Read pp52-53)

To occupy her thoughts, Jane tries to observe the people she sees from the bus window, the images flickering past like the frames from a silent film.

For her English assignment she decides to write a short poem to describe what she sees and underline the loneliness and monotony that she feels.

Can you help her to write the poem?

6. Say It (Read pp59-60)

Jane, Emma and their mum occupy the cramped hospital room, each lost in their own thoughts. Their conversation is polite and functional, but does not represent what they are thinking.

Draw a large triangle and write their names, one on each of the vertices. Each person is now linked to the others by a line.

Along each of the lines write a thought or fear that you think each of them would most want to share with the other.

7. Wash, Rinse, Repeat (Read pp67-68)

Jane is trapped in a monotonous routine, her day reduced to a numbing repetition.

This is a common feeling for us all at times.

Think carefully about where the repetition exists in your daily routine.

Describe some of the elements of your routine using the Wash, Rinse, Repeat metaphor that Jane uses.

8. My Name (Read pp57-58)

After he leaves Emma's room, Dr Jonathan makes a brief note of his impressions of Jane. He does this in order to help him understand Emma's state of mind and how she might cope psychologically with the effects of her illness.

He is particularly interested in how Jane and Emma interact with each other.

Recreate the note he made in the file.

Section 2 Fighting Back Pages 74-148

SUMMARY

Watching *Schindler's List* in history class does little to lift Jane's mood, emphasising for her the insignificance of her own existence.

Abandoning school, Jane spots Farley in the park and on impulse follows him onto the Red River bus that she takes to visit the hospital.

Farley notices her and by way of introduction, takes her binder to examine her sketches more closely; very closely in fact as Jane discovers that he is myopic. She also learns that he has returned to the area in an attempt to reconnect with his past, having been born in a local commune, his father a USA draft dodger and his mother having died shortly after his birth.

Farley compliments Jane's drawings and she, while offering other binders from her bag, shares some personal information without revealing anything about Emma.

Arriving in Red River, they go their separate ways, Jane feeling a tingle of guilt that she enjoyed an exchange that wasn't defined by Emma's illness.

Emma has made Jane a craft bracelet for her birthday and her mum has sourced a cake to celebrate, however Emma develops a sudden and violent nose bleed that delivers a reality check and allows the hospital

routine to intrude again.

As the nurse and doctor try to stabilise Emma, Jane notices her mother's attempt to direct the doctor not to reveal anything in front of her and reacts with a tantrum before storming out. When she returns, she meets the doctor in the corridor who reassures her that the nosebleed was not an indication of Emma's condition worsening.

On the bus home, Jane gets a birthday text from her boyfriend Dell with a request for her to join him at home. Although tired, she is persuaded.

She enjoys spending time in Dell's house. Despite having to avoid his father, it is undemanding. However she is completely unprepared for the birthday surprise Dell has arranged for her.

Greeting her in his best outfit, Dell leads her through a petal strewn hallway to his retreat in the basement where he presents her with a gift of a necklace and a bouquet, offering the choice of a meal in a restaurant or home delivery pizza. Jane chooses the pizza.

As Dell awkwardly puts his arm around her, Jane feels the pressure of expectation become oppressive. Unable to make him understand how she feels, she tears the gift from her neck, returns it to him and leaves.

Returning home, her dad has gone to bed and alone she opens the card from her parents to discover \$50 that she knows they cannot afford.

In the morning ignoring Dell's text messages, Jane finds one from Farley inviting her to lunch.

On the bus to school, Tracey is anxious to learn Jane's reaction to the gift she gave her.

Embarrassed, Jane hides that she has forgotten to open it but then moved to discover that Tracey has compiled a huge chronology of photos of her on a data stick. She hugs her to show her appreciation and is warmed when Tracey reciprocates.

Skipping class, Jane finds herself in town, deciding to use her birthday money to buy a camera.

Joining Farley, he surprises her with a birthday gift of art materials.

Torn between her resistance to anyone finding her interesting and her delight that Farley has acknowledged her passion for art, she allows herself to begin to enjoy his comments and seeks his advice on purchasing a camera.

The process of selecting and buying the camera allows her the opportunity to begin

to enjoy his company, zipping her coat up to hide her smile when they part.

Slipping into the weekend, Jane notices how the family routine has adapted to take account of their new circumstances and when she meets her mum in the morning they hug and overlook Jane's tantrum and the disaster of her birthday.

At hospital, Jane is stunned by the vehemence of Emma's outburst at their parents forgetting her birthday and unsettled when Emma reveals her own frustration at the suffocating nature of her mother's attention.

Desperate to avoid engagement, Jane uses the camera to distract further revelations from Emma.

Sending a holding text to Dell, Jane agrees to meet Farley again. Skipping school, she notices immediately the dispirited look in his eyes as he announces that he is taking her to visit his grandparents.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p76): Feeling guilty, Jane has lied to Tracey to avoid meeting up with her. Should she have told Tracey the truth and risked hurting her? Is lying always wrong or can it be socially acceptable at times to invent an excuse? When do you think it is acceptable to lie? How would you recognise a 'social' lie?
- (Read pp99-100): Jane mocks Brenda's ambition to get married and raise a family. Why do you think she despises Brenda's dream? Do you think that Jane is jealous? Is it acceptable for her to ridicule Brenda's aspirations? Does Brenda consider her dreams to be limiting?
- (Read p111): Jane is aware that there is an accepted code to determine behavior among her friends as they approach their 16th birthdays. Why do you think such codes exist and how are they generated? How do they control behavior within the group? Do you think that 'peer pressure' is a useful mechanism? Is it generally benevolent?
- (Read p112): Jane disliked her grandfather and although he is dead she is unable to feel any sadness at his loss. Is it acceptable to be so honest about her feelings in this way? Is it appropriate for her to be unconcerned? How do you think you should react when someone that you don't like dies?
- (Read p132): Jane is able to rely on the household routine to sustain her through her daily tasks. This routine has been adapted to cope with the changes in their circumstances. Do you think that routine is a useful strategy in our daily

lives? Are all routines useful? When might a routine become oppressive and counter productive?

ACTIVITIES

1. Where I was Born (Read p86)

Farley observes that the course of your life and your beliefs can be determined by where you were born.

Do you believe that we have real choice to decide for ourselves or does the place we are born control all the important decisions?

Working in small groups, make a list of the 5 important influences on your life, rank them and explain how they direct your decisions. If you lived in another part of the world, how might these influences and your decisions be different?

2. Mum's Sadness (Read p93)

As Jane watches her mum's face, she sees the smile dissolve to reveal a core of sadness and gloom underneath.

Create a sequence of 5 quick sketches of her mum's expression to illustrate the progression from fixed smile to blank sadness.

Think how you can use colour, line and shading to achieve the effect.

3. The Scale of Life (Read p104)

On her life scale of experiences, Jane places Dell at the good end of the scale.

On a blank page, rule a line to represent her life scale, marking one end to represent the things she enjoys most and which enrich her life and the other end the things that cause her frustration.

Working in small groups, decide on 7 things that she might place on the scale and then add them to the scale where you think she might place them herself.

4. Jane sees, Dell sees (Read pp104-113)

Dell has gone to a lot of trouble to arrange the evening to celebrate Jane's birthday, unfortunately Jane does not share his enthusiasm, every aspect of the evening making her more uneasy.

Make a list of what you think were the 5 most significant moments of the evening and then using two columns explain what you think Dells' intentions and Jane's interpretations were for each of the moments.

5. The Snowfall (Read p120)

Jane sees the snowfall as a metaphor to explain the process of change. She

understands the **PROMISE** of the first fall, followed by the **TRUTH** of the disruption it inevitably brings in its wake, shadowed finally by **ACCEPTANCE** of the process.

She decides to write a 3-verse poem to share her feelings using the themes of **PROMISE, TRUTH & ACCEPTANCE**.

Can you help her to write the poem?

6. I'm Good At (Read p127)

Jane has begun to respond to the positive comments from Farley.

It is important for all of us to be able to recognise the worth in ourselves. We are all good at many things.

On a sheet of paper, draw an outline of both your hands with your fingers outstretched.

Inside the outline of each of the right hand fingers, write the things that you think you are good at and in the palm space write what you enjoy doing most.

Now carefully and quietly move through the class and in the left hand blanks write a comment for everyone else to describe what you think they are good at.

7. Silence (Read p137)

Jane has experienced a lot of silences. Some of them are gentle while others are oppressive.

Can you explain the difference between the two since there will be no conversation to give you clues?

Choose one of the silent situations that Jane finds herself in, perhaps from school and write two short descriptions to describe the experience first as a gentle experience and then as an oppressive one?

Write them from Jane's perspective.

8. Read it Jane (Read pp139-142)

Emma needs to explain how she feels to Jane, however Jane is unwilling to listen and manages to distract her sister by taking photos and starting a pillow fight.

Emma however is determined to be heard and later that evening she composes an email to Jane to explain how she feels.

Could you help Emma to compose her email? What do you think she wanted to say to Jane?

Section 3 Farley Pages 148-208

SUMMARY

Jane recalls how her family had moved to Kendal to be closer to her grandfather and the disappointment their relationship had been from the start, never really gathering any enthusiasm.

On the drive to Farley's grandparents in Kaitlin's borrowed car, Jane learns that they were hostile to his father when his mother moved to live with him in the commune, detaching themselves completely from him and his father when his mother died.

His father has arranged this reconciliation and Farley is apprehensive.

The visit is polite, anodyne and his grandparents avoid difficult issues. Farley learns nothing about his mother and when his grandfather abruptly ends the visit on a pretext, he is deflated realising that the animosity still festers beneath the surface of their smiles.

Ushered back to their car, Farley remembers that it won't start without a push and is anxious to avoid that embarrassment in their driveway.

Thinking quickly, Jane conjures a plan that delivers a stinging rebuke to his grandparents prompting them to drive off on their pretext leaving her and Farley by themselves, his gratitude reducing them both to helpless laughter.

With time on their hands and the car at their disposal Farley suggests a visit to Emma, having gleaned the information from a trawl on Jane's Facebook page.

Jane's rage at his intrusion explodes, forcing them to return to the café in silence before he explains that he simply wanted to know more about her life.

When she meets Farley again, she persuades him to play the violin for her, having learned of his skill from the conversation with his grandparents.

Overwhelmed by his playing, Jane encourages him to pursue the kind of music he likes irrespective of his father's wishes.

Jane spends the weekend without contacting Dell despite several missed calls from him and when Tracey chides her about it she promises to contact him.

However when Tracey presses her about Dell, distracting the carousel of comforting images that Jane is running in her head, she

receives a stinging rebuke that silences her.

Enjoying the sanctuary of an impromptu art lesson with Farley, Jane's phone interrupts to announce Dell's persistence.

Incandescent, her rage bubbles into an almost incoherent rant that worries Farley before she snatches her art pad and leaves.

Taking a call from Emma who wants to chat to her, she allows some of her anger and hurt to poison the exchange prompting Emma's concern about her.

At school, Jane has forgotten the scheduled history test and sitting staring at the exam paper, her senses desert her and she flees the room and the school.

Unable to control her thoughts, she fears she is going insane and messages Farley for help.

Sitting with his arm around her she realises that the history exam shock has released the dam that kept the images from the day her grandfather died repressed and the traumatic story spills now to Farley of how she found her grandfather dead from a gunshot suicide and managed to keep her part in the discovery secret, allowing her mother to raise the official alarm.

Reluctantly, at her insistence, Farley leaves her on the bus as she travels to visit Emma.

Things have reached crisis in the hospital as the doctors consider amputation to halt the growth of the tumour in Emma's leg.

Reacting badly to the shock of hearing this, Jane can neither be calmed nor controlled and flees to pursue her own irrational course to prevent the amputation.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p150):** Jane confesses to loving her grandfather, but at the same time, not liking him. How is it possible to hold these two emotions about the same person at the same time? Is this a contradiction? What is the difference between liking and loving another person and how are they different?
- **(Read p151):** Pregnancy and medication can create some agonizing dilemmas for parents. It is natural to be concerned for the welfare of your child, however do you think that the mother should disregard her own health priorities? Where do you think the priority should lie between the health of the child and that of the mother? Was Farley's mum right to stop taking her medication in order to breast-feed him?
- **(Read p160):** Jane is irritated that Farley has been able to access private information from her Facebook page. What do you think that 'privacy' means?

What information should not be shared? Does 'social media' undermine the whole concept of privacy by encouraging people to share every aspect of their lives? Why are people so interested in the trivia of someone else's life?

- **(Read p192):** Jane's mum has an unfulfilled dream of an idyllic lifestyle. We all indulge in dreams of success for ourselves. Do you think that this type of fantasy activity is useful or do the dreams only serve as a reminder of what we have been unable to achieve? Would it be better if we didn't have dreams at all?
- **(Read p195):** Jane's grandfather has committed suicide in an attempt to escape the effects of a serious illness, apparently without any consideration for his family or those who discovered the scene. Do you think that suicide is essentially a selfish act with the person only thinking about their own needs?
www.dbsalliance.org/pdfs/suicidefinalweb04.pdf
www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/what-speak-us-about/signs-you-may-be-struggling-cope/giving-yourself-strength
www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/NOSP/Resources/booklets/someone_thinking_suicide.pdf

ACTIVITIES

1. We could have said (Read p158)

Recovering their composure as they drive away, Farley's grandparents discuss the meeting they had with Farley and the information that Jane has given them.

Do you think they had any remorse?

Create the conversation they had as they drove away. Did they both have the same impression? What do you think their views were?

You can perform the sketch when you have created the dialogue.

2. Happy and Happy (Read pp163-164)

Jane seems very excitable and her dad is concerned. Later when she is asleep, he decides to ring her mum to discuss his concerns.

Together they reveal and discuss what they have noticed about Jane's behaviour and share their concerns, trying to find a reason for it and identify how they can support her. Create and then dramatise their conversation. Do you think it would be a

calm discussion? Where do you think they would lay any blame?

3. Tracey and Dell (Read p174)

Tracey criticises Jane's refusal to reply to Dell's calls and texts. It is obvious that she has been in contact with him herself. She and Dell have exchanged several texts over the weekend as they try to understand why Jane has not replied to him.

Recreate the text exchanges they had. How might Tracey have offered to support him? What would she say?

4. Farley or Dell (Read pp177 & 188-189)

Both Farley and Dell have had an influence on Jane's life. At different times she has turned to them for understanding and support.

To help her understand her feelings for them both, she has decided to create a Carroll Diagram.

Working in small groups, draw a Carroll Diagram on a blank page with the columns showing Dell and Farley and the rows showing pros and cons for each of them.

Now add three contributions for each of the four cells.

5. Lies (Read p195)

Both Jane and her mum have lied about the nature and discovery of her grandfather's death.

Each of the lies has had devastating consequences as they tried to suppress what actually happened.

Draw a time line to represent each of the lies starting on the day they began, up to this point in the story.

Now mark on each line what you think were the consequences of the lies for Jane, her mum and their relationship.

What lies did they have to invent to keep the initial one secret? How do you think that this web of lies affected them?

6. Illness: The Facts (Read p199)

A lot of Jane's anxiety is caused by a lack of proper information about her sister's illness. This information should be available to her from the hospital.

Create a simple pamphlet that would give her the necessary information in a calm and supporting way.

What type of guidance do you think it should contain?

You can use the links below for further information.

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/resources-and-publications

www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/When-Your-Sibling-Has-Cancer.pdf

www.cclg.org.uk/Publications

7. Can you hear it too? (Read p204)

Jane is beginning to lose touch with reality and has begun to hear strange disturbing noises in her head.

Can you create a 20-second audio podcast of what you think she heard?

You can download some examples from these sites:

soundbible.com/tags-buzzing.html

soundbible.com/tags-buzz.html

www.soundsnap.com/tags/buzz

8. Cancer (Read p207)

Medical terms and drug names tumble through Jane's head in a chaotic swirl of images and colours, fractured by her concern and fear for her sister.

Create a collage of images to represent the turmoil of feelings that Jane was experiencing.

Look carefully at how Picasso created his picture, Guernica. Could you create your collage in a similar style?

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7NGmk0D17Q

Section 4 The Truth Pages 209-292

SUMMARY

Disorientated, Jane's sleeping patterns have been severely disrupted and she has difficulty remembering the chronology of her daily routine.

Impulsively she completes a major home clean for her mum, ringing her to find that the anger from the most recent exchange has dissipated, her mum telling her that she and her father are on their way home to talk to her.

Dreading the implications of that conversation, she phones Dell finally and announces that she is coming over to visit him.

The comfortable den that was Dell's

basement, where they spent so much time together, now sees oppressive and claustrophobic. Seeing Dell, Jane is reminded that it was he she called to rescue her the day she discovered her grandfather's suicide and now blames him for never probing or allowing her the space to articulate what she had seen, instead leaving that discovery to her mother.

As her distress threatens to overwhelm her, Dell realises that something is very wrong. However the clamour of their conversation has wakened his father who, despite Dell's pleas, peremptorily evicts Jane to the street.

Sitting on a park swing to calm her thoughts and allow time for her parents to fall asleep, Jane fails to recognise how much time has elapsed and finally returns home hypothermic to the research strewn chaos of her room where she has been trying frantically to gather the evidence to refute the doctor's decision to amputate her sister's limb.

Rising early next morning, she listens as both her parents express their concern at her behaviour and insist that she accompany them to the hospital for a family meeting with Emma.

At the hospital, Jane creates a diversion searching for Dr Jonathan to present her research in the hope of preventing the surgery.

After two hours that she believed that spent with the doctor, her mother finds her and escorts her to Emma's room.

Taking control, Emma reveals her decision to ask for a complete limb amputation, confessing in the process that her dancing career was simply a pressure she no longer wished to return to.

Unable to accept Emma's decision, Jane flees, walking aimlessly until she rings Farley to rescue her. He eventually finds her as darkness falls and she suggests they go to the café in Verwood, ringing her mum to reassure her where she is.

The embrace of her local café is smothering as attention focuses on her and Farley together. Distracted and unable to focus, the thoughts in her head reaching a dizzying speed, she leads Farley to leave, but not before they meet Dell and Tracey hand in hand coming into the café.

Racing to the car, Jane tries to kiss Farley to lose herself in another fantasy, but he stops her, recognising her distress.

At home, her father, exhausted by the strain tries without success to listen to her.

Spiralling out of control, Jane is unable to control her rage on the bus with Tracey and her friends, revealing the demons she has to deal with before making her way to the hospital.

Her last movements are noted, leaving the hospital into the teeth of a snowstorm before her world turns completely white and blanks.

The prospect of peace drifts tantalisingly before her, promising to protect her forever as the voices of Farley and her mum intrude, drawing her back.

Her recovery takes many weeks as she begins to accept her mental illness, the drugs and therapy helping to restore her sanity.

Discharged and at home, the process of re-establishing relationships is underway. Some however are more difficult and when she and her mother finally admit their understandings of the day her grandfather dies, their journey to reconciliation begins.

When Farley finally calls to see her, Jane is surprised, believing their relationship extinct, as he had not contacted her since the night he rescued her from the snow.

However, as Farley begins to reveal his thoughts and the reasons for his actions, Jane realises that her world is truly enriched with possibilities again.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p220): Dell rescues her from the traumatic scene of her grandfather's suicide yet he asks no questions nor tries to encourage her to discuss what has happened, accepting the lack of information. Was this the correct course of action? How else could he have dealt with the situation? Did his lack of action affect Jane's mental health? Why did he behave that way?
- (Read pp222-223): Jane has realised that her relationship with Dell was simply a way of escape for her. She was never really in the relationship. What should you look for in a relationship? How should it challenge or enrich you? How would you recognise if it were complementing or suffocating you? How could your feelings alert you?
- (Read pp229): Jane is destabilised, her mental state is deteriorating and her actions steadily becoming more erratic. Yet no one seems to be alert to her distress. Even her family. Would you be able to recognize if one of your friends needed help for mental illness? What could you do? How would you recognize the signs of their distress? What things

should you NOT do?

- (**Read p235**): Jane realises that Emma has been under pressure to excel at dancing, her parents seeking to develop her talent without considering that it might not be something that she wanted to do. Where do you think the threshold lies between parental encouragement and parental control? When does support become demand? How can you make parents aware of this?
- (**Read p250**): When Jane sees Dell and Tracey holding hands; she understands that they are now in a relationship. Did Tracey take advantage of the situation with Jane or was it Dell? Do you think their haste was inappropriate? Does it reveal anything about their concern for Jane or is it simply a sign of the essential emotional immaturity of teenagers?
- (**Read p261**): Before she walks out of the hospital into the storm, Jane has succumbed to a bi-polar event detaching herself from reality without any regard for either her safety or identity. She was completely sure that her fantasy world was real. How do we tell ourselves the differences between fantasy and reality? What clues do we use to keep us safe and sane?
- (**Read p275**): Jane has a mental illness, bi-polar disorder. She is not 'crazy'. What is the difference? Why is it unhelpful to use pejorative stereotypes to describe mental illness?

ACTIVITIES

1. Control your Head (Read p224)

Jane is increasingly unable to control the disturbing thoughts that invade her mind.

Suggest a simple technique that she might use to help her cope and control what she is thinking.

Create a colourful humorous cartoon based card that she can carry with her to remind her to use the technique when she feels threatened by the thoughts.

You can use these sites for suggestions.

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/negative-emotions

www.wikihow.com/Gain-Control-of-Your-Emotions

2. Do you like me? (Read p242)

Jane feels instinctively that Farley likes her, however, although she cannot see his face she is able to interpret other clues from his behavior.

How would you recognise from someone's behaviour if they liked you? Which signs would you use? How would they betray their feelings?

Create a list of the 5 most common non-verbal clues that someone liked you and explain what they mean. You can work in small groups for this activity.

3. Hello Dell (Read p251)

Jane flees the café for the car to wait for Farley, however he has taken the opportunity to introduce himself to Dell and Tracey and they have a brief conversation.

What do you think that they said to each other? What did they say about Jane? Did they even mention her? Was the conversation relaxed or strained do you think?

Create the dialogue for the three of them and perform it, adding the voice tones that you think they used.

4. Jane (Read pp257-260)

After her outburst, Jane exits the bus, disappearing into the swirling snow. As her words continue to reverberate around the bus, each of her friends and some of the passengers begin to form impressions of her.

Draw a blank outline of Jane and inside the outline write what you think were the thoughts of Tracey, Aisling, Brenda and some of the other passengers.

Did anyone sympathize with her? Were any of the opinions positive?

5. Gone; Almost (Read p264)

Jane is hovering on the edge of death from hypothermia, the author recreating her thoughts through images of dance and music.

Recreate the stream of Jane's thoughts using words only. Would you choose nouns, verbs adjectives or adverbs mainly? How would you combine them?

The words will **ALMOST** make sense but not quite.

What effect would omitting all unnecessary words or changing sizes of fonts create?

Could you create a WORDLE image?

www.wordle.net/

6. Facts (Read pp268 & 272-273)

Recovery for Jane is traumatic because mental illness is a hidden condition that still carries a stigma, as many people are afraid to be associated with it.

An important part of the recovery process

for Jane will be the support of her friends and this requires them to have the facts and not the myths about mental illness.

Create a fact and myth sheet about mental illness that her friends could use to inform them properly, using humour since Jane is essentially a funny person.

www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/myths-facts/

www.walkinourshoes.org/myths-vs-facts

www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/danny-baker/mental-illness-myths_b_5446254.html

7. Dear Dell (Read p277)

Tracey is now with Dell, but Jane still has a fondness for him, realising that he has been damaged by his background and will at some point in the future have to face and control his own demons.

Using the insight that her own experience has shown her, she decides to write to him to encourage him to try to deal with his issues sooner rather than later.

Create the letter she might have written to him.

8. Suicide Circles (Read pp283-284)

The suicide of her grandfather has had a devastating effect on Jane and her mother, as they were closest to him. However every suicide affects many people although not to the same degree.

Working in small groups draw 5 concentric circles to represent the ripple effect of the consequences of a suicide.

In the centre, write the word SUICIDE. Then in the expanding zones inside the circles write what you consider the effects and consequences to different people, relations and friends of the person who has committed the suicide.

Start from the middle of the diagram with those most closely affected by the suicide.

For more information about Kim Hood and her books, go to www.obrien.ie/kim-hood

