

# FRIEND OF MY HEART

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JUDITH CLARKE

## Teaching Guide

By Gillian Perdue

### RATIONALE AND THEMES

This book has been chosen for use in the junior cycle of second-level schools because it is entertaining, well-observed and deals sensitively and thoughtfully with such issues as:

- Developing boy/girl relationships
- Developing sexual morality
- Responsible sexual practices
- Family interaction
- Adolescent worries and fears
- Parental worries and fears
- Tender observations on growing old
- Relationships across generations
- Communication between the sexes
- Love and loss

### SUMMARY

Friend of my Heart delves into the lives of William and Daz, teenage siblings who are finding love and relationships challenging and confusing. William has become obsessed by a beautiful girl whom he follows around, watching from a safe distance. He doesn't even know her name. Daz, normally cool and practical, has fallen for the school's resident heart-throb with the bad reputation. Their granny, Sheila Thredlow, lives in a retirement home in a twilight zone of near permanent senile dementia. She has become obsessed with finding the lost photo of her best friend, Bonnie. William and Daz have well-meaning and caring parents but, ultimately, they must sort out their own lives. This they do, while analysing the meaning of love and obsession, making new friends and trying to help Mrs Thredlow. It all

works out in the end, though there is heartache and loss on the journey.

### APPROACH

For the purposes of this exploration, the novel has been divided into five main sections, covering six or more chapters at a time. However, the pace at which the novel is read is entirely up to the teacher. It may suit to read one chapter per day, or in larger blocks. Possible discussion points and activities, mostly language-based, are listed at the end of each section.

## UNIT 1

### SUMMARY

The novel begins by assembling a cast of characters. We meet William first, self-conscious and awkward, secretly pining for a beautiful girl whose name he doesn't even know. Next we meet the object of his desire, Karen, blissfully unaware of William and his unrequited love. Her main interests are netball and discussing how far you should go on a date. William has a cool and disdainful older sister called Daz who has also begun pining. She has fallen for the school idol, the impossibly good-looking Valentine. William and Daz have a long-suffering anxious mother called Kathleen and an eighty-year-old granny who lives in a retirement home cum twilight zone of senile dementia. Gran (aka Mrs Thredlow) keeps asking for the friend of her heart, Bonnie Lewis. Love, loss and longing are in the air.

Read pp.1–26.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Anxiety** The opening chapter (pp.1–3) describes William's agony of apprehension as he waits for a glimpse of his beloved Karen. What signs are there of William's nervousness and anxiety? Discuss William's personality type.
- **Surprising behaviour** William imagines Karen reading poetry. Why is the book that she's reading such a contrast? Later, he imagines her lying on her bed, dreaming. What is she actually doing? Can you think of examples from TV and/or other media where this type of humour is used to great effect (e.g. old grannies roller-blading)?
- **Talking about things** Discuss Karen's belief about boys that 'it's a big problem, the way they don't say anything.'
- **Retirement homes** On p.9, the author mentions three types of residence for old people. Why do you think grown-up children might want their parent(s) to leave the 'shabby old homes they loved'? Draw up a list in class giving reasons 'For' and 'Against' moving an elderly relative.

### ACTIVITIES

1. PERSONALITY TYPES We have already discussed William's romantic, sensitive personality.

Read the description of Valentine O'Leary (pp.5–7) and write a short paragraph about his personality. Do the boys' appearances match their personalities? Discuss.

2. SONNETS Search the Web or an encyclopaedia for information on the Italian poet, Petrarch. He was born in 1304 and first saw Laura, the girl who inspired

his love poems and sonnets, in 1327 at Avignon.

Find and read a sonnet by Petrarch or other love poet. Can you think of any other people who have inspired writers, song-writers or artists? Name these.

3. DEBATE Daz believed 'that boys covered up their finer feelings and that perhaps the more deeply they covered them, the finer, the sweeter, the more loving those feelings might be' (p.10).

In the light of this belief, organise a debate on the motion that: William and Daz are both romantic dreamers.

4. SIMILE A simile compares one thing with another, though they may not really be alike. On p.7, what part of William is compared to 'slices of bread' poking 'from the top of a toaster'? Can you recall what was likened to 'a big ugly pancake' (p.25)?

Read the unit again, looking for other examples of similes.

5. PARENTAL CRITICISM On p.17, Kathleen hears herself sounding exactly like her own mother, as she criticises the nail varnish Daz has chosen to wear.

Make a list of twenty things your parent(s) or guardians say now that you vow you will never say. (Be sure to keep the list for posterity!)

## UNIT 2

### SUMMARY

William tells Daz about the mysterious girl. She works out what school Karen goes to and suggests some further detective work to help William find a way to get to speak to her. Daz, normally practical and cool, has fallen for Valentine O'Leary because she's heard a rumour of an extraordinarily kind deed he has done. They exchange glances in the classroom, his practised and calculated, hers a reflection of real emotion. We meet another character, Joanna Lachlan, a girl who is convinced she's fat and ugly. Old Mrs Thredlow recalls her best friend, Bonnie and her passion for Viv, Mrs Thredlow's brother. William's detective work yields little success.

Read pp.27–52.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Projection** Both Daz and William have formed unrealistic impressions of the object of their affections. Compare William's daydreams about Karen with pp.31–32 where Daz tries to imagine Valentine's home life.
- **Mundane tasks** Think of a famous person or hero(ine) of your own. Now try to imagine them doing the washing-up, cleaning their shoes or some other mundane task. How does this affect your picture of them? Does it sully or tarnish the image? Discuss.
- **Disclosing secrets** On p.38, we read that Sheila (Mrs Thredlow), didn't want to tell her best friend that Viv had gone off with another girl. Discuss her possible reasons for not telling. What might you do in such a situation?
- **Self-doubt** William is prone to negative thoughts about himself. To compound this, he tends to imagine others being better, cleverer and more successful (see p.47 'Daz ...'). Does this help his self-confidence? Discuss.

### ACTIVITIES

1. DESCRIPTIVE ADVERBS These tell us how an action was done and are often formed by adding '-ly' onto an adjective, e.g., shouted angrily, cried bitterly.

Read Chapter 14 and make a list of the descriptive adverbs used.

2. SELF-IMAGE Both William and Joanna (pp.35–36) suffer from poor self-image.

What factors influence one's self-image? Do you think fashion magazines, TV, music videos and other media have any influence?

Imagine that you are William or Joanna's best friend. Write five positive confidence-building things you could say to them. Now, choose a real classmate and do the same for them. Read them to each other. Discuss your feelings afterwards.

3. DIALOGUE William is terrified of being caught by the 'old guy' raking the school drive. Imagine this happens. Write the dialogue between them. Now, write the dialogue as if it were Daz who was caught.

4. THEORY Read pp.42–43 and then discuss the theory that Patrick O'Leary is a bully who treats women as sex-objects. How do you think this affected Valentine?

5. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: These words appear in this unit:

humanity, sullied, shaman, affliction, baleful, impartial, inappropriate, stately. Try to locate the page where they appear. Then write a definition for each. (Refer to a dictionary if necessary.)

## UNIT 3

### SUMMARY

Daz waits in the library each afternoon, hoping that Val will meet her there. Mrs Thredlow reminisces about people choosing the wrong type to fall in love with. Her brother always went for harsh, beautiful girls who made him unhappy, girls like Nelly Jarman. Sheila blamed Nelly for Viv's decision to join the army and go to the Front, where he died. She becomes obsessed with finding the only photograph of Bonnie. Confused and deluded, she leaves the hospital and walks miles into town. Meanwhile, Joanna weeps and hates herself for her size and William has no success in love. Mrs Thredlow is brought safely 'home' where her shocked family gathers at her bedside. Daz vows to find the photograph.

Read pp.53–83.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Delusions** Read Chapter 15 and find examples of Daz deluding herself about Valentine. Have you ever tried to convince yourself of something which one part of you knew to be untrue or impossible?
- **Equal rights** What is your opinion of the treatment of the residents in the Sunset Home? Is anyone unkind to them? Look up the Charter of Human Rights in your local library and discuss in class. Discuss the following motion: 'The very young and very old are not full citizens and should not be treated as such.'
- **Right to keep money** Money and power are closely linked. Do you think the residents in the home should be allowed money? Discuss.

### ACTIVITIES

1. PUNK ROCK On p.55, one of the nurses' aides mentions her daughter's new boyfriend who is a 'punk'. What do you know already about punk rock and punks?

Write a short piece about the evolution of punk rock and what it sought to express. You may like to use the web or an encyclopaedia to aid your research.

2. IRRITATING TAUNTS What sentence did William use to wind his sister up (p.65)? List five sentences/taunts that have the power to really annoy you. What is it about them that particularly infuriates you? Now make a similar list for either a sibling, parent or friend – things that you know they hate to hear!

3. ADVERTISEMENT Does the 'Romantic Runaway' sound tempting? Daz is still trying to get her parents to go off for the weekend.

Write a magazine or other advertisement for a weekend break – one that would be impossible to resist.

4. BREAKING UP We read that Daz had dropped five boyfriends in two years, one got dropped because he laughed in the wrong places during films.

Write a list of your personal top ten reasons to break up with someone. Discuss the emotions involved in breaking up, from both sides. Is there a kind way to finish a relationship?

5. PEOPLE AS CREATURES William is likened to a 'mud-dwelling bird'(p.70).

Choose five people you know and match them to the animal, bird or other creature they most resemble. Write a short paragraph for each.

6. PROBLEM-PAGE LETTER Write a letter to Auntie Polly outlining a problem you have, factual or fictional. Have the class write replies and vote on best/funniest/most tactless.

## UNIT 4

### SUMMARY

The plot thickens as various characters and strands are drawn together. Daz begins to search for Bonnie Lewis, or a photo of her. It turns out that she lived on the same street where Joanna Lachlan now lives. Daz and Joanna become friends. Daz begins to realise that she does not enjoy the emotional condition she finds herself in and starts to question it. William is incredulous to discover the object of Daz's affection

and wonders if his sister has been sleeping with other boyfriends. He knows that Valentine uses girls and has a fair idea that he doesn't practice safe sex. Mrs Thredlow's reminiscences take us back to her last meeting with her brother before he went off to war. Her best friend, Bonnie, followed Viv to the front, as a nurse. Sheila never saw Bonnie again either. Daz demeans herself in an embarrassing phone call to Valentine's house.

Reread pp.84–117.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Dementia** This condition has been described as 'a state of serious emotional and mental deterioration, of organic or functional origin'. Discuss the various forms of dementia that have arisen in the novel. Does being 'in love' qualify as a form of dementia?
- **Losing face** What emotional response did you have to Daz's phone conversation with Val? Do you think that she suffered or lost anything as a result of the call? Discuss.
- **Safe sex** Do you agree with William's estimation of Val as 'a pig' who'd consider himself insulted if a girl suggested he wear a condom?
- **Putting out** What is your opinion of Daz who does not 'put out', even if a boy ditches her because of it? William knows, however, that if she cared enough for someone and was really in love, she'd do it. Discuss the pros and cons of this in class.

### ACTIVITIES

1. DEPRESSION Conflicting emotions and moods are a necessary part of growing up. However, more serious depression can overwhelm a person and he/she may need to seek help.

Find out about Depression and the signs to look out for if you feel someone may need help. Contact Aware on their helpline. Tel: 1890 303 302 or visit [www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie).

2. FASHION On p.84, we read of the clothes that were in fashion at the time when Sheila Thredlow was young. However, it's not just clothes that are affected by fashion. Names, music, even handwriting styles go in and out of fashion.

Make a list of names that are currently fashionable. Now, write a short piece

about clothing and/or music that you think will not go out of fashion.

3. POETRY ANALYSIS William discovers that his grandpa is the 'culprit' for the flappy ears. Are there any family characteristics that run through your family?

Read the poem 'Heredity' by Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) which discusses the 'family face'. Collect photos of parents, grandparents and other relatives when they were the same age as you are now, and compare the way you look.

4. ARTWORK Read the description of William's bedroom (p.88) and of Daz's room (p.114). Discuss the contrasts between the two rooms. Vincent Van Gogh (1853–90) did a famous painting of his own room, La Chambre à Arles. See if you can find a reproduction of it.

What does your bedroom say about you? Write a piece describing your room. Try to notice and describe even tiny details.

5. LITERARY REFERENCES Both William and Daz quote poetry. Daz learns that she was named after the sister of the famous poet, William Wordsworth (1770–1850). She previously misquotes William Shakespeare: 'If lasagne be the food of love – play on' (p.93).

Write a short account of the life and work of one of these famous writers and choose a short quote from one of their works that you particularly like, explaining your choice.

6. INSULTS William believes that if Petrarch had had Daz for a neighbour, he'd never have written a line (p.116). Read what his reply is on p.109, after being called a looney.

Make a list of famous people, living or dead. Now, write a comment that their neighbours could have said about them, e.g. Elvis. Comment: I wish he'd stop playing that damn guitar and go to bed!

## UNIT 5

### SUMMARY

William consults his English teacher about love, insanity and Petrarch. It transpires that Joanna's neighbours on Aspen Street, Mr and Mrs Almond, knew of Sheila. Mr Almond's older

brother, Stan, had glimpsed her at a dance and had loved her since. The Almonds give the girls a rosebud from her dress which he had always kept. Meanwhile, Joanna has noticed William's 'lovely' grey eyes and William tells Daz that Joanna is beautiful. Daz passes on the compliments and all is set for romance to begin. The children go to the Sunset to give Mrs Thredlow the rose bud, but she doesn't remember it. At last, they realise that Bonnie must have been a nurse, and go to the records office in the nurses' training college. They discover that she died in the war, in Gaza, aged only 26. They search again for photos and Joanna finally discovers the only one of Bonnie, hidden in the box. Mrs Thredlow is overjoyed to see, once again, the friend of her heart.

Read pp.118–148.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Playing a role** On p.135, Daz thinks about how terrible it would be to be trapped into living a false life while your true self shrinks away. Discuss with reference to your own experiences.
- **Changes in marriage** Do you think Sheila was truly happy in her relationship with her husband, Ken? (p.119) Discuss the expectations a

person would have if they were getting married nowadays compared to those of fifty years ago.

- **Making mistakes** Daz realises that she has been in love with a person who didn't exist (p.134). Do you agree with her? Discuss.
- **Music expressing emotions** Mrs Almond feels that modern songs don't have the same meaning as the old songs. Discuss songs (recent or old) which you feel have something to say.
- **Organisations** Age and Opportunity ([www.olderinireland.ie](http://www.olderinireland.ie)); Age Action ([www.ageaction.ie](http://www.ageaction.ie)); Alzheimer's Society ([www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie))

#### ACTIVITIES

1. **EMIGRATION** With the frequent occurrence in the population of Irish names such as O'Leary, and Irish songs such as The Pride of Erin, there is evidence of Irish influence on Australian life.

Use an encyclopaedia, web search or history books to find out about Irish emigration to Australia. Write a short account.

2. **THE PERFECT AGE** Conduct a survey among relatives, friends, teachers etc. with a view to answering the question: What is the perfect age to be? At what age have you personally been happiest to date and why?

3. **SYMBOLS** Sometimes we can tell more

from a simple action than from a page of explanation.

Read p.135 and write a piece explaining what Daz was really doing when removing the dark green nail-polish.

4. **WORLD WAR** Australia fought on the side of the Allies in both World Wars. The film Gallipoli tells the tragic story of the disastrous campaign in Turkey in World War I.

Find out about Australian involvement with the Allies in both wars. How is Australia governed now? When did British intervention in Australian political affairs end formally?

5. **AGE-RELATED ISSUES** In recent years, there has been great improvement in the standard of care provided for the elderly. Find out if your local hospital has a special unit or team who provide this care. Perhaps you could visit or write to a residential care unit in your area. Write an account of your observations/thoughts afterwards.

Contact your local Health Authority. Some elderly people are not cared for in a residential home or hospital but live alone, not always successfully. Contact Alone on Dublin at [www.alone.ie](http://www.alone.ie) for video and workpack.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR, JUDITH CLARKE



JUDITH CLARKE was born and educated in Sydney, Australia, and now lives in Melbourne with her husband and son. She has worked as a teacher, librarian and lecturer. She has also published novels for younger readers, and short stories and poetry in magazines. Her well-received Al Capsella novels and her collection of stories, *The Boy on the Lake*, were first published in Australia and subsequently in the USA.

#### ALSO BY JUDITH CLARKE:

*The Heroic Life of Al Capsella*

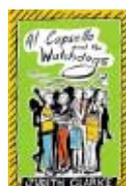
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#### REVIEWS:

THE HEROIC LIFE OF AL CAPSELLA

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Sunday Press

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'A very funny novel...the humour is very engaging and the insights into adolescent lives very telling.'

Best Books

'A very, very funny book'  
Gay Byrne Show