



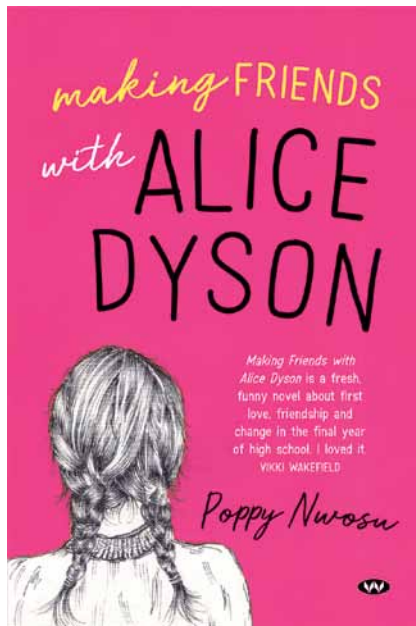
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TEACHERS' NOTES

Making Friends with Alice Dyson

By Poppy Nwosu

Notes prepared by Poppy Nwosu © 2018



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I. Introduction to *Making Friends with Alice Dyson*

My eyes follow sneakers up over long legs, further still to the looming figure of a boy.

I stand abruptly.

Black eyes, messy hair, a permanent scowl on a permanently angry face. Our school's delinquent, a waster, the kind of boy who always sits at the back of class, the kind of boy even popular kids are afraid of.

The kind of boy who doesn't care what anyone else thinks. Ever.

Teddy Tualai.

Alice Dyson knows exactly how she'll be spending her final year of high school. With her head down, quietly concentrating on her textbooks and homework. She's completely focused on the future, and nothing and no one is going to get in her way.

Until a totally bizarre encounter with the school's most notorious troublemaker derails all her plans, turning Alice into the unwilling centre of attention and her life into one enormous complication.

And even worse? Now Teddy Tualai won't leave her alone.

A romantic story about rumours, friendship, and discovering who you really are.

Runner-up for the 2018 Adelaide Festival Unpublished Manuscript Award

Praise for *Making Friends with Alice Dyson*

Making Friends with Alice Dyson is a fresh, funny novel about first love, friendship and change in the final year of high school. Alice knows exactly who she is and where she wants to go – but sometimes love is what happens when you're busy making other plans. I loved it. – **Vikki Wakefield**

Making Friends with Alice Dyson is a tender, assured novel about the complexities of first love, friendship and staying true to yourself. It will have you falling in love from the first line to the very last. – **Allayne Webster**

Don't judge a book by its cover, and don't listen to the rumours about Teddy Tualai! *Making Friends with Alice Dyson* is a sweet contemporary romance about growing up, growing apart, and getting to know someone before it's too late. A tender and true debut about the power of friendship and the trust it takes to really let someone see the real you. What an outstandingly lovely tale with solid heart; intimate and enchanting. – **Danielle Binks**

2. About the author

Poppy Nwosu grew up in central North Queensland, enjoying a thoroughly wild childhood surrounded by rainforest and cane fields. After studying music at university, she moved overseas to Ireland, where she spent two years working and visiting stunning Europe.

Though she adored the travelling, Poppy missed the wide open Australian skies and came back home to settle in Adelaide near the sea, where she lives with her husband.

Making Friends with Alice Dyson is her first novel.

Visit Poppy Nwosu at www.talltaleswithpoppynwosu.com



3. Inspiration behind the novel

This story was initially inspired by an internet clip that went viral a few years ago, and can still be viewed here:

https://www.reddit.com/r/videos/comments/2hb2dh/two_korean_kids_caught_dancing_on_a_dash_cam/

I thought the clip was goofily adorable and wanted to know more about this couple, who they were and what their friendship was like. In the end the clip inspired a romance. Initially, this was meant to be a short story, yet I enjoyed writing it so much I decided to extend it into a novel. I think the clip is a bit of a spoiler for the story though!

The rest of the novel was then inspired by some of the Shoujo Anime, (Japanese teen anime with strong romance themes) I was watching at the time. My favourite thing about this type of anime is the way that, when the teen characters attempt to make new friends or experience unrequited love, these actions are framed as being really positive and brave first experiences. I really liked the idea that trying your best is something to be proud of, even when it comes to emotions like having a crush, or trying to put yourself out there to make new friends. I also like the idea that these experiences remain positive, and that kids are brave for trying, even if it is embarrassing, awkward or ends terribly. I'm not sure if it comes across in the novel exactly, but this idea was something I was thinking about a lot when I wrote it. I wanted the themes to feel positive overall.

Lastly, a book I loved as a teenager was another influence on me when writing this novel, *Finding Cassie Crazy* by Australian author Jaclyn Moriarty. The stories are not similar at all, but I always remember how this book made me feel when I was younger. I loved the humour in it, the addictive friends to romance vibes, and the occasional heavier themes, and I reread it constantly. I wanted to write a book that had the same feeling as that beloved favourite, something light and enjoyable to read, with an addictive but believable teen romance.

4. Key curriculum links

These Teacher's Notes have been designed as a companion to the novel, *Making Friends with Alice Dyson*, with the aim of encouraging students to engage more closely with the text to promote emotional intelligence, critical interpretation, and a deeper understanding of using the English language for creative writing purposes.

The suggested questions and activities will encourage students to think critically and creatively, and to promote interpretation of meaning and themes behind the text. Additionally, students can examine the novel's style, voice, point of view etc. with questions that encourage group discussion and communication.

The following sections outline suggested questions to ask students, and activities to be performed to encourage group discussion and class engagement. They have been broken down into sections to enable teachers to identify which topics most suit their class or teaching style, or alternatively, for one or two questions to be selected from every section.

Learning Area, English Year 7–10

'These texts explore themes of interpersonal relationships and ethical dilemmas within real-world and fictional settings and represent a variety of perspectives.' (ACARA)

General Capabilities

Ethical Understanding

'In the Australian Curriculum: English, students develop ethical understanding as they study the social, moral and ethical positions and dilemmas presented in a range of texts. They explore how ethical principles affect the behaviour and judgement of imagined characters in texts and the real-life experiences of those involved in similar issues and events.' (ACARA)

Critical and Creative Thinking

'English ... In discussion, students develop critical thinking as they share personal responses and express preferences for specific texts, state and justify their points of view and respond to the views of others.' (ACARA)

5. Questions and activities

Before reading

1. Watch the video of the inspiration behind the novel (but don't read the filthy comments!)

- Describe what the students are doing and how the video made you feel.
- Do you think these students are close friends?
- What is friendship? Write a definition.
- Describe what friendship personally means to you. Are there different types of friendship? Do you find it easy or difficult to make new friends? Why? Do you think everyone makes friends the same way? Think about a friendship in your life, how did you meet and become friends with that person? Compare notes with a partner. Was the experience similar or different?
- In what ways do you think the filming and publication of the pair dancing changed this experience for them?
- The video of the students went viral in multiple countries. Do you think they gave their consent for it to be posted online? How do you think they might feel about the popularity of the clip? How do you think other people around them reacted to the video?
- If someone filmed you without your knowledge, would you mind if they uploaded it to the net without your consent?

2. Based on the video you just watched, which was the inspiration behind the novel, what do you think this book will be about?

- Write a list.

3. As you read through the novel, make notes on the following themes and characters:

- **Themes** Self-discovery, friendship, love, identity, fear, facing adversity, social classes, parental expectation, relationships. Include quotes in your notes that you think best demonstrate each of these themes.
- **Characters** Alice Dyson, Teddy Taulai, May, Finn, Sophia, Violet Taulai, Alice's mum and dad, Harry, Julie, Stacey Green. Include quotes in your notes to demonstrate aspects of each character.
- Make a table of stylistic features used in the characterisation of Alice and Teddy. What is the purpose of those stylistic features? In other words, how does the writer draw our attention to the characters' personality, backstory, relationships, attitudes, beliefs, attitudes, motivations, ambitions, development etc. through the stylistic features.

STYLISTIC FEATURES	WRITER'S PURPOSE

After reading

Answer the following questions using quotes from the text to back up your answers:

- At the beginning of the novel, what were the most important things in Alice's life? Were they the same by the end of the story?
- Alice is very decisive about what she wants to do in the future. Is her friend May the same?
- What does May want throughout this book? Does she get it?

Themes

Social Adversity

- At school, students often refer to Teddy as a loser, psycho, scary, violent, freak etc. Do you think this is fair? What do you think are the differences between who Teddy is and how everyone at school perceives him?
- Alice gets called names at school as well – nerd, teacher's pet etc. How does she handle this? Do you think it upsets her?
- In chapter 2 (p. 14) Alice asks Teddy 'Do you really not care what everyone thinks?' Why does she find it interesting when he confirms he doesn't care? Do you think it is normal to care what other people think about you? Describe the positive and negative factors of this way of living.
- In chapter 8 (p. 52) Alice states that she refuses 'to be embarrassed by what I liked.' Do you think it is brave of her to stand by her opinions even if others don't agree? Describe a situation where you felt embarrassed because of something you liked? Do you ever pretend to like things to fit in with those around you?
- Describe the difference between Alice and Teddy's home-lives (eg. their houses, locations where they live, their bedrooms, relationships with their family). Do you think these differences matter to Alice or Teddy? Who do you think they might matter to?
- Describe the different ways that Alice and Teddy react to the video going viral. Why did they react differently? What other factors may have contributed to these different reactions? (eg. Alice's parental expectations, Teddy's familiarity with being talked about often)
- In chapter 10 (p. 63) Alice's mother first meets Teddy. Alice states that she believes her mother doesn't like Teddy because he is 'too messy, too dark, too loud and confident.' Discuss why her mother might have reacted this way and how this made Alice and Teddy feel.
- In chapter 2 (p. 13) Alice states that her parents are 'a bit intense about school stuff.' Describe what you think she means by this?
- In chapter 29 (p. 185) Alice explains to Teddy that she worked hard for years to make her parents happy but, 'after a while, the idea of doing it forever, to have them choosing everything for me forever, it was suffocating.' Alice felt trapped by her parent's expectations of her performance and future and she takes drastic measures to make changes in her life for the future, deciding to defer uni to pursue her own dream. Have you ever felt trapped by the expectations of people around you?
- In chapter 9 (p. 171) Alice says: 'I just sit with my head in my hands and I cry and cry and cry, wondering why I never told anyone my plans for the future, wondering why I couldn't just be honest with my friends about my feelings, why it never even occurred to me.' Have you ever found it difficult to be honest about your feelings with the people around you? Why do you think that is? Do you think honesty can solve problems? Do you think honesty is the best policy in every situation?

- In chapter 27 (p. 175) May explains to Alice what happened at the party they attended. 'I expected it to be perfect, you know? We would kiss and it'd be romantic and then he'd choose me over Sophia and we'd start going out instead. But Alice, he just kissed me and then he got really handsy and too ... full on. And when I didn't want to, he was just angry and drunk. He said ... mean things. He said I was leading him on. And then he went and told everyone. Except when I started hearing all the rumours, they weren't even what happened. He just ... made it up.' And: 'I tried so freaking hard to get him to like me, and I didn't even know anything about him. And I spent all this time hating Sophia even though it was me trying to do something awful to her.' Discuss the differences between May's expectations of romance and the reality of what happened. How does this statement make you feel about Finn? What kind of person is he? How does it make you feel about May? Did your opinion of Sophia change throughout the novel? Why?
- In chapter 4 (p. 31) Alice states: 'When I get to school all anyone can talk about is how Stacey Green made out with some guy at the party. There's even a photo, a big wet mess of glazed eyes and sloppy tongues, and everyone is laughing about it, whispering and pointing as Stacey walks through the halls.' Our lives are often caught on camera or video and posted online (by ourselves or by others). Do you think it is easy to move on after making mistakes or doing things people make fun of? Why do you think everyone in the statement above made fun of Stacey Green but barely mentioned the boy she was kissing? Do you think people made fun of him too? What are the strongest messages being conveyed through this incident?
- In chapter 10 (p. 54) when Teddy first tells Alice that he hurt someone three years earlier, he says; 'I'll never do anything like that again. Ever. It was a mistake.' Teddy's mum has passed away. How do you think this affected his actions at the party three years ago, when he hit another student? Do you think that excuses his actions?
- In chapter 4 (p. 28) Alice defends Teddy against another student, saying: 'So what if I am friends with him?' How do you think Teddy felt when he heard Alice say this? Do you think people at his school often stand up for him? Do you think it is important to stand up for other people? Can you think of times when you wouldn't stand up for someone. Explain your reasoning.
- At the end of the novel, Alice and Teddy have very clear plans for after school finishes. However, May doesn't know what she wants to do in the future. Do you think this was scary for her? Do you think a lot of people graduate high school with no clear pathway forward? How do you think that makes them feel? How do you feel about the future?

Friendship and relationships

- In chapter 6 (p.41) May says, 'Having a social experience is part of high school too. It teaches you how to relate to other people.' Do you think it's an important skill to be able to interact well with others? Is this something you can learn to do well? What difficulties do you think face people who are shy?
- In chapter 8 (p. 54), Alice is with Teddy Tualai at the Art Gallery looking at a painting they both like (In the Sassafras Valley, Victoria by Isaac Whitehead – Art Gallery of South Australia). The following quote appears; 'I glance back at the painting of the forest. At first there doesn't seem to be much besides the shadowy gum trees. But if you peer a little closer it is dark and deep like a well with no bottom. Anything could be hidden there, if you bothered to look hard enough.' Alice is describing the painting in this statement, but what else is she talking about? Talk about symbolism in text and how it can be used to show what a character is feeling / the progressing stage of a relationship. What other examples of symbolism can you find in the text? Explain the writer's purpose in using this symbolism.
- In chapter 6 (p. 43), May states that she has decided to start a relationship with Harry because; 'He likes me and he's funny.' Do you think that is a good foundation for a relationship? Describe what you believe is a good foundation?
- In chapter 8 (p. 108) May tells Alice she has fallen in love and Alice reacts with the following statement; 'a thick strangeness washing over me, like my best friend has just leaped light years ahead of me into a world I have

absolutely no knowledge of.' People change a lot throughout their lives, do you think this ever causes conflict within relationships? Do you think change is a good thing? Have you ever felt left behind (like Alice in the statement above) when someone you care about has new experiences? How did it make you feel?

- In chapter 26 (p. 164) Alice wonders if, 'that's all love is, just the same as being friends.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Discuss your idea of love.
- In chapter 29 (p. 185) Alice tells Teddy; 'they told me I'd have to transfer to a private school in the city if I didn't do better. But I was scared to go because I'm not really good with people, and I thought I wouldn't be able to make any friends. And I didn't want to leave May, and I was just scared, I guess.' In this statement Alice admits she finds the thought of making new friends scary. Have you ever felt this way?
- In chapter 27 (p. 179) May and Alice have the following conversation: (May) 'I don't regret that I did like someone. I think it's a good thing, to really like someone else. I think it's kind of brave to try, even if it doesn't work out, you know?' (Alice) I am impressed by May. To be so optimistic about it all, even after what happened to her, after what Finn did. She is brave. It makes me want to be brave too, no matter the outcome. To admit what I'm feeling, instead of trying to always push it all away.' What do you think they mean by these statements? Can you further describe May and Alice's reasoning? Do you think they are referring only to romantic relationships, or could their words have a broader application in their lives?