



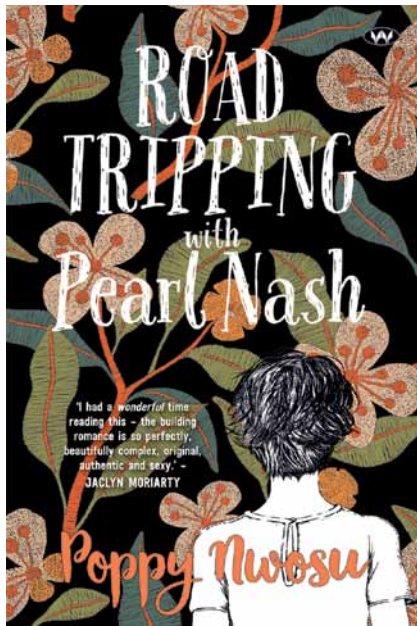
# Wakefield Press

## TEACHERS' NOTES

### Road Tripping with Pearl Nash

By Poppy Nwosu

Notes prepared by Poppy Nwosu ©2021



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## 1. Introduction to *Road Tripping with Pearl Nash*

The summer is finally here, and Pearl Nash is on a mission to save her slowly disintegrating friendship with a whirlwind end-of-year road trip that is definitely, absolutely, most positively going to solve all her problems.

Except, instead of her best friend Daisy's feet on her dash, suddenly Pearl ends up stuck in the middle of the desert beside Obi Okocha, a boy with a mega-watt smile and an endlessly irritating attitude. Tasked with delivering him to the most epic end-of-year party ever, located in a beach shack in literal middle-of-nowhere woop woop, Pearl Nash is certain that nothing could be worse than this.

She's wrong.

Add in a breakdown, multiple arguments, an AWOL nana and a kiss that was most definitely a huge mistake, and suddenly Pearl has the perfect ingredients for the perfect disaster.

*Road Tripping with Pearl Nash* is a story about home and family, about breaking apart and fusing together, and, of course, about love.

### **Praise for *Road Tripping with Pearl Nash***

'I had a *wonderful* time reading this – the building romance between Pearl and Obi is so perfectly, beautifully complex, original, authentic and sexy. I'm head over heels in love with Obi.' – **Jaclyn Moriarty**

### **Praise for *Poppy Nwosu's Making Friends with Alice Dyson***

'A fresh, funny novel about first love, friendship and change in the final year of high school.' – **Vikki Wakefield**

'A heart-warming story of friendship and first love.' – **Melissa Keil**

'Quietly thoughtful, joyful and sweetly romantic – in the same wheelhouse as Jaclyn Moriarty's Ashbury/Brookfield books.' – **Age/Sydney Morning Herald**

'An outstandingly lovely tale with solid heart; intimate and enchanting.' – **Danielle Binks**

### **Praise for *Poppy Nwosu's Taking Down Evelyn Tait***

'I reckon Lottie will go down as one of the great characters of OzYA lit - and deservedly so.' – **Gabrielle Williams**

'A delicate, layered story about revenge, relationships, and learning to be kind. I adored this one.'  
– **Jodi McAlister**

'Sharp, sweet, sonder.' – **Simmone Howell**

## 2. About the author

**Poppy Nwosu** is an author of young adult fiction. She has published three romantic contemporary novels: *Making Friends with Alice Dyson* (2019), *Taking Down Evelyn Tait* (2020), and *Road Tripping with Pearl Nash* (2021), and is the editor of the 2021 Wakefield Press YA anthology *Hometown Haunts: #LoveOzYA Horror Tales* (a project supported by an Australia Council for the Arts grant).

Her work has been shortlisted for the Adelaide Festival Unpublished Manuscript Award and the Readings Young Adult Book Prize, and has been awarded the SA Writers Fellowship residency at Varuna Writers House, as well as an Arts SA grant. She has appeared at Adelaide Writers Week and Salisbury Writers Festival, among others.

Poppy is based in Adelaide, Australia. Visit her at [www.poppynwosu.com](http://www.poppynwosu.com)



## 3. Inspiration behind the novel

The biggest inspiration behind this novel was a road trip I took through central Australia and along the East Coast many years ago with my husband, about two years after we first met. He was new to Australia at that time, and I had never been to central Australia, so we took off in a car and spent several months driving. It was an incredible experience, and I was very drawn to the idea of writing a road trip coming-of-age novel and drawing from our time on the road.

I planned for the characters in my book *Road Tripping with Pearl Nash* to follow the same route that my husband and I once did, but in the end, without really planning to, the road trip in my novel drew more inspiration from a mishmash of the dry scrubby desert of South Australia and also the small town rural coastal regions in SA as well, which I have often visited while living in Adelaide.

When he first read this novel, my husband told me that it seemed like my most personal yet, with him recognising many real-life details within the story. For instance, the love interest, Obi, shares the same heritage as my husband (his dad is from Nigeria and his mum is Tamil) and the story was peppered with moments from our real life (for example, I used to wear braces as a teen and was very self-conscious!). Interestingly, as the numerous drafts of this project were completed (with a huge amount of direction and help from my literary agent, my publisher, my editor and others), I think the characters in the story became their own people with their own strong personalities, and were less reflective of my own life. Even so, this does still feel like a personal story for me in many of the themes and ideas it explores, particularly grief, love, family and that familiar coming-of-age self-consciousness of growing up.

My other inspirations behind this novel were actually quite minimal. I really only had threads, favourite tropes and unconnected ideas, which eventually came together to form the story.

I wanted to write a bickering enemies-to-lovers romance about two teens on a road trip, and I wanted to explore themes around grief, but in a light-hearted and easy to digest way. I also knew I wanted the book to open at a petrol station on an isolated highway, and that the main character would be searching for her missing grandma.

This was really all I knew going into the first draft of this book. I often call myself a discovery writer, and that writing style was certainly how I approached this novel. Being a discovery writer means you often start a project with no solid plans for what the story will be, and through the act of writing, you begin to discover for yourself what your project will be about and who your characters are. I had no real idea of what the end of the novel would look like, though I knew I wanted it to feel uplifting. So I just began to write, forming the characters and the plot as I went along.

In 2019, I was lucky enough to be awarded a SA Writers Fellowship residency at Varuna Writers House. This meant I was given support to travel from my home city to the Blue Mountains in NSW to visit Varuna, The Writers House, which is a writing retreat. I had never been to a writing retreat before, so wasn't sure what to expect, but that one full week of total quiet and stillness was an incredible opportunity to focus deeply and write. And that is what I did.

It took me one week of writing to get the first draft of this novel out, which I did at Varuna. It was complete at fifty thousand words. However, that draft required a huge amount of work to become the book you can read today. With feedback and help from many amazing people, I worked hard to strengthen the novel and the characters over many months, and the book ended up gaining an extra twenty thousand words as I fleshed out the story, characters and themes.

*Road Tripping with Pearl Nash* is a very different story now to when I first wrote it, and I am proud of the hard work that has gone into this project and the book it has become. I really hope you enjoy it!

## 4. Style

*Road Tripping with Pearl Nash* is written in first person present tense, in a deliberate attempt to bring readers inside the head, thoughts and viewpoint of the protagonist, Pearl Nash. This voice and close viewpoint are meant to enable the reader to feel like they are on the same journey as Pearl and discovering information and feeling emotions as she does.

The tone of this novel is deliberately light, positive and ultimately uplifting, but does not shy away from discussion around some darker and more uncomfortable topics, for instance: grief as well as small acts of thoughtless privilege or racism, and the painful ending of a precious relationship. However, these darker threads are explored with a light touch, recounting situations that may be uncomfortable but leaving room for readers to make up their own mind about these complex topics. The aim is that overall, the novel will retain that light feeling, while still exploring complicated and relevant social issues, and ultimately deliver a fun, positive, fast-paced and entertaining read.

## 5. Discussion questions and activities while you are reading the book

### a. While reading

#### Themes and characters:

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

- THEMES: Expression of self, growth and change, friendship, love (the different types of love within this story, both familial, platonic and romantic, as well as positive and negative), prejudice, identity, fear, facing adversity, relationships with family, relationships with friends, grief. Include quotes in your notes that you think best demonstrate each of these themes. Which characters are used to explore certain themes?

- CHARACTERS: Pearl Nash, Obi Okocha, Nana, Pearl's mum and dad, Pearl's uncle and aunt, Daisy, Lachlan, Stacey Green. Include a quote or description in your notes that you feel sums up each character.

CHARACTER:	Quote or description:
Pearl Nash	
Obi Okocha	
Nana	
Daisy	
Lachlan	
Pearl's mum	
Stacey Green	

- POINT OF VIEW: This novel is written in first person present tense (with occasional flashback scenes taking place in first person past tense). Using first person narration enables the reader to get inside the protagonist's head and explore the way she views the world around her and the events that happen to her. This also means that everything that occurs within this book is Pearl's perception of events. Have you heard of the concept of an unreliable narrator? Do you believe Pearl's first person narration is reliable? Make a table of thoughts or perceptions that Pearl Nash has about other characters within the story, both from the beginning of the book, and then from the end. Does Pearl's perception change within the narrative? Does this mean she is an unreliable narrator? Use quotes from the book to demonstrate Pearl's perception of others.

CHARACTER:	Pearl's initial assessment of character:	Pearl's assessment of same character by end of book:
Obi Okocha		
Nana		
Daisy		
Stacey Green		

- QUESTIONS AND HOOKS: When writing a novel (or any kind of creative story) it is essential to pose a question (or a series of questions) at the beginning of a narrative. This works to draw readers into the world the author has created and keep them reading on, wanting to know the answers. These questions can be very big (Will Pearl manage to salvage her friendship with Daisy? Why did Lachlan leave Obi behind at the petrol station?) or very small (Will Pearl admit that she enjoys reading romance novels?). In a table, write down the main questions you have after reading the first three chapters. When you have finished the book, come back and make note of which questions were answered satisfactorily.

CHARACTER:	QUESTION OR HOOK:
Pearl Nash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Will Pearl save her friendship with Daisy?</li> <li>● Does she want to save it?</li> <li>● Why has her friendship fallen apart so badly?</li> <li>● Why doesn't Pearl get along with Obi?</li> </ul>

CHARACTER:	QUESTION OR HOOK:
Obi Okocha	
Daisy	
Lachlan	
Nana	

## 6. Questions to consider after finishing the book

### a. Answer the following questions

- Answer the following questions using quotes from the text to back up your answers:
- Where did Pearl grow up, and do you think that has impacted her character?
- Does Pearl experience change throughout this novel? Is she the same person at the end as she was at the beginning? What do you think she has learned?
- The author's intended main theme in this story, is the idea that life can sometimes be very complex, and that there are not always clear answers in every situation. Did you also feel like that was the biggest theme of this book? Or was there a different idea or theme that you noticed most when reading this story?

### b. Exploring themes

#### FRIENDSHIP:

- **Prologue:** Read the prologue of the novel. What does this section tell you about Pearl? What does it tell you about Daisy? Do you think they have a solid positive friendship at this point in the story? If not, why? What clues in the writing gave this away?
- **Read chapter eight:** In this flashback chapter, how does Pearl feel about Daisy? What is their friendship built on? Do you think the other kids they are sitting with also like Pearl? Does Pearl believe she is liked?
- In chapter 2, Pearl thinks the following to herself: 'Everything has changed over the past year since Lachlan and Daisy got together – my best friend leaping light years ahead of me, experiencing everything first; a boyfriend, love, sex, a relationship.' How do you think Pearl feels about Daisy experiencing these things first? Do you think it upsets her? Do you think she feels left behind? Is the way Pearl feels Daisy's fault? Do you think what Pearl is describing is common in friendships between teenagers? How do you think it might negatively impact a friendship? Also, discuss whether this is anyone's fault or just a complex part of growing up.

## GRIEF:

- In chapter 13, Pearl speaks with her nana about her grandpa's death, and how it is making her nana feel, as follows:

*'We never talk about Grandpa.*

*Not anymore.*

*I continue carefully. 'I think maybe because it's been so long since he passed away ... maybe we forget that you're still ...' I search for the word.*

*'Grieving?' My nana peers at me, flames sending patterns dancing across her skin.*

*I nod.'*

Grief is a very hard thing to understand from the outside. It can feel very isolating when you experience grief, because no two people experience it in exactly the same way. Pearl and Nana both loved Grandpa, but now he has been gone for a few years and they are dealing with their emotions very differently. Write a short summary about how each character feels about grandpa after reading chapter 13. Explain what is different between Pearl and Nana's feelings and why you think that might be.

- In chapter 13, Nana says the following to Pearl:

*'Don't you think it's so strange that everyone always says passed away?'*

*I blink at her. 'But he did pass away.'*

*'No, he didn't, love. It wasn't like that. He died. That's the truth. And it was so awful, Pearl. You weren't there and I'm glad of it. He wouldn't have wanted you to see him that way. But he was so sick, and it was awful. There was no peace. He didn't just ... pass away. There was nothing gentle about it. He died.'*

*I say nothing, frozen in place. I watch her hands. Short stubby fingers, her skin pale and wrinkled, veins popping. She twitches and kneads them, as if she can't stay still.*

*'I feel like I have to say passed away to everyone I meet, because if you say died people think it's too blunt, they feel upset. So even when I talk about my own husband, I have to put it in a way that doesn't upset other people. It makes me so mad.'*

The above conversation was taken from a real life encounter the author had with an older woman at an event. The woman's husband had died a year or so earlier, and she was struggling to cope. She spoke about how the language she used when speaking about her husband's death was more for other people than for herself, and how frustrating she found this.

In Australia, most (but not all) people live relatively comfortable and safe lives. Often, we do not really have to think about or experience death. This is not true for everyone, of course, but for a large percentage of Australia's population, death feels very far away. Often in Australia, talking about death or bad things that have happened can be considered awkward, or not socially accepted, and therefore, many people do not know how to respond or talk openly about this subject with someone who has experienced it. This can make grieving the loss of a loved one a very isolating experience for many people, as they might feel they should protect other people from the painful facts to ensure that the conversation doesn't get awkward. But this means they are unable to express themselves or their feelings honestly because of a worry that they may shock someone with their words.

In older times, humans lived much closer to death because we did not have the modern medicine, science or quality of life we are lucky enough to have now.

Have you heard of the concept of Memento Mori? It is an idea often used in the past in cultures that lived more closely alongside death. Do some research and write a summary of Memento Mori, and explain your thoughts on

it. Do you feel like it is a good way or a bad way to live? Think about Nana in this novel. Do you think if she lived in a culture that was based on the idea of Memento Mori it would make her grieving process easier or harder?

- By the end of the novel, did you feel like the storyline about Nana grieving her late husband was resolved? Or not? Why do you think the author chose to finish this storyline in this way? How did it make you feel?

## IDENTITY:

- Pearl Nash lives in the city and goes to a city school. But she wasn't born in the city. She grew up in rural Australia on a farm, and made the transition to city living in her early teens. In the book's prologue Pearl says, *'They all still think of me as that weird country kid, even after four years of living in the city.'* Pearl feels like she sticks out at school and is different from the others, because of her country background, her braces and her taste in books etc. She is self-conscious about herself. Do you think she should feel that way? Do you believe it can be hard to be confident in who you are and what you like at all times? Do you think everyone around you feels self-confident all the time? Write your answer down or discuss with a partner.

- In chapter 15, Pearl and Obi have the following conversation:

*I catch him watching me. 'What?'*

*He shrugs. 'You seem different. Out here. Not like how you are at school.'*

*'What do you mean?'*

*'Being in the country suits you.'*

*'Whatever!' I make a face. 'I'm exactly the same. You just don't actually know me that well, Obi.'*

*'No?'*

*'No way. And I don't know you well either. Seeing someone at school every day isn't the same as actually knowing them.' I roll my eyes. 'I'm always like this. Just not usually in front of you. Obviously everyone acts different around the people they're comfortable with.'*

Do you act differently at home or around people you feel very comfortable with, or are you always the same in every situation? Do you think everyone is like Pearl says or not? Write your answer down or discuss with a partner.

- In chapter 6, Pearl's uncle makes a bad joke about email scams and Nigerian princes. Is this a hurtful stereotype? Pearl's uncle probably didn't think he was saying anything bad or have harmful intentions behind his words, but how do you think this comment might have made Obi feel?
- Throughout the novel, while he travels through rural Australia, Obi is asked many times about where he has come from. When he says he is from the city, people are sometimes unsatisfied with this answer and press to find out more about his heritage. Do you think they should do that? How do you think these comments make Obi feel?
- In chapter 7, Pearl reveals in her inner dialogue, that she too asked Obi about where he was from when they first met. Now, after spending time with Obi, she has realised how frustrating that must have been for him and she is very embarrassed about her mistake. Do you think Pearl will now be more mindful and thoughtful of how she treats other people because of this experience? If someone makes a bad mistake like Pearl, do you think they are a bad person? Or do you think there is room for education, growth and change around issues like this? Discuss.



## LOVE AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS:

- What kind of relationship do you think Daisy has with her boyfriend Lachlan? Do you think it is positive and healthy? Explain their dynamic. Back your argument up with quotes from the novel.
- The author intended Daisy's relationship to showcase an unequal power balance. How might an unequal power balance in a romantic relationship occur? For example, it might be because one person is older, has more wealth or social standing, or is more experienced in relationships. What are some other reasons? Discuss what potential negative consequences might occur if one person in a romantic relationship holds more power than the other.
- In the novel, do you think Daisy is okay? At the end of the book, Nana points out to Pearl that maybe Daisy needs some help. Do you agree with Nana?
- At the beginning of the novel, Pearl believes that Obi has a higher social standing at school than she does. He is friends with more people and she believes he is more popular. Does this create a power imbalance between them or not? Why?
- In chapter 10, Pearl thinks, '*Kissing someone and liking them are two very different things.*' Even after she and Obi have kissed, Pearl feels very wary of this new relationship between them, as she believes that Obi's feelings might not be sincere. Why do you think she believes this?
- Use quotes from the novel to demonstrate what Pearl and Obi think about each other at the beginning of the novel. By the end, do you think they have built a real friendship based on understanding and trust? Explain your answer.

## 7. Key curriculum links

These Teacher's Notes have been designed as a companion to the novel, *Road Tripping with Pearl Nash*, 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 previous 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)