

Teachers Notes



Written by
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Suitable for
Ages 8-12:
Grades 4 to 7

Themes

- Empathy
- Time travel
- Friendships and what they mean to us
- Standing up for what you believe in

Contents

Overview of *The Secret Library of Hummingbird House*.

The remainder of this teachers notes pack is divided into theme sections containing:

- Theme notes
- Excerpts
- Discussion points
- 1–2 activities per theme.



Description

Hattie Maxwell is trying to make sense of her life since the Big Split. It used to be the four of them – Mum, Dad, Ivy and Hattie – against the universe. But lately it feels like she's a lone star in a big galaxy. Her one escape is Hummingbird House, an old mansion with a giant mulberry tree just perfect for climbing to hide from the world.

So when Hattie learns that the house is going to be demolished, she is determined to save it. A midnight visit becomes a step back in time, and Hummingbird House reveals its secrets: a hidden library, a mysterious new friend and a lost treasure that could help stop the development. Can the past help Hattie to fix her present?

A brilliant time-slip novel with a contemporary twist, *The Secret Library of Hummingbird House* celebrates standing up, speaking out and letting go of the past.

About the author

Julianne Negri has been a musician, eco-crafter, television host, screenwriter and filmmaker. Through it all, writing has been her one constant, be it writing a song or instructions for how to crochet a doily from a plastic bag. In 2018 she received the Australian Society of Authors Emerging Writer's Mentorship Award. In 2014 she was runner-up in the Scarlet Stiletto Short Story Award and in 2015 was Highly Commended in the Southern Cross Short Story Award. Julianne works in libraries on programs for children and teens and presents storytimes. She has five children, is a voracious reader and lives in Melbourne. *The Secret Library of Hummingbird House* is her first novel.

Find this book at our website: affirmpress.com.au

Themes

Empathy

Theme notes

Hattie likes to do things her own way, and she is very focused on solving her problems. But sometimes Hattie's focus on herself means that she doesn't think about how the people around her are feeling, even if she is aware that they are facing challenges. When Hattie upsets someone, she tends to dwell on her own feelings rather than think about how the other person is feeling. But as we move through the book, we see Hattie starting to put herself in other characters' shoes. One way she does this is through reading Hypatia's journal and understanding the terrible loss that Hypatia has suffered. Hattie is also able to apply her own experiences of feeling sad or angry or confused to understand how her friends and family might be feeling. This is called empathy, which means the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Once Hattie is able to empathise with other people, she starts to consider them in her own decision-making, and she becomes less self-centred.



Excerpts from the book

Excerpt 1: *'Have a think about being a better big sister, Hattie.'* (pp. 189–199)

Excerpt 2: *I've managed to upset everyone now. Wow. Well done, me. My special talent.* (p. 181)

Excerpt 3: *My mind flashes back over all the mean things Taylor has done lately. 'Hey, Taylor,' I say. 'If you ever need to talk, you know where to find me.'* (pp.290–291)

Discussion points

- Why do you think Hattie's mum asks Hattie to be a better big sister to Ivy?
- Would you say that Hattie was a good sister to Ivy? Why/why not?
- Does Hattie change her behaviour towards Ivy at any point in the book? Where?
- For those of you who have siblings or close cousins, do you recognise anything familiar in the ways that Ivy and Hattie communicate with each other?
- In Excerpt 2, Hattie knows that she has upset her friends and family. How do you think Hattie is feeling here?
- Do you think that apologising is the best way to show someone that you're sorry? Can you think of other ways of showing someone that you're sorry?
- In Excerpt 3, Hattie shows kindness and empathy to Taylor Dellabella, a girl who has bullied Hattie at school. Why do you think Hattie was being so nice to Taylor here? Could you imagine Hattie and Taylor ever becoming friends?

Activity 1: Dive into the book!

Imagine Hattie has just confided in you that she finds her sister very annoying and doesn't want to spend time with her. What advice would you give Hattie to help her get along better with Ivy? You can work alone or in a pair for this activity, and you can provide your response as a piece of writing, such as a letter to Hattie or a script involving you and Hattie, or as an artwork, comic or poster. Here are some prompts to help you think of what to say to Hattie:



- Ivy is very young and doesn't understand why her parents have split up.
- Ivy is very imaginative and likes to play.
- Ivy looks up to Hattie.
- Ivy didn't get as much alone time with her parents in the way that Hattie did before Ivy was born.

Activity 2: Learn our similarities! (Instructions for teachers)

It's easier to build connections with people when we find out that they share similarities with us. For this activity, divide the classroom into two halves and separate them with a line of masking tape on the floor. The purpose of this exercise is to have students cross to the other side of the line if they answer 'yes' to a question. Start off with easy questions, like 'cross to the other side if you have brown hair' or 'cross over if you drank juice with your breakfast', etc. Then build to questions that will trigger empathy. E.g. 'cross over if you have lost a loved one', 'cross over if someone has ever made fun of you', 'cross over if you've ever stayed in hospital overnight', etc. When you've listed several questions, you can have a whole-of-class discussion about how students felt about the exercise.

Time Travel

Theme notes

The Secret Library of Hummingbird House sees Hattie time travelling back to 1970, where she encounters a well looked-after Hummingbird House, and meets a new friend, Hypatia. While Hattie and Hypatia almost immediately realise that Hattie has travelled through time, it takes them a while to figure out how and why. After the pair slip back in time to see Hypatia's great-grandfather planting the mulberry tree, they work out that time travel can only happen on rare triple moon dates.

This is disappointing for Hypatia, who had set her sights on travelling to the past to meet her grandmother. Ultimately, time travel helps both girls. It teaches both of them how to how to trust a new friend. And while Hypatia gains confidence through her friendship with Hattie, Hattie learns how to be more empathetic through knowing Hypatia.



Excerpts from the book

Excerpt 1: *'I just hope you stay long enough to teach me to time travel too. I was really*

hoping for an alien to abduct me. But now you are here I can see that travelling in time could fix everything.' (p.112)

Excerpt 2: 'Now I know I can time travel here I am going back in time to warn my grandmother of the future so I don't even end up here in the first place.' (p.116)

Excerpt 3: 'Did you know it's a special moon this week?' Ms Guide moves closer to the model and points ... 'A triple moon event like this only happens, say, twice in a lifetime.' (p.6)

Discussion points

- Hypatia believes that travelling to the past to meet her grandmother will help her to fix her future. Do you think that we should go back to the past to change the future? Why/why not? What might go wrong?
- In this book, time travel can only occur during a triple moon. In Excerpt 3, we learn about triple moons from Ms Guide, who turns out to be Hypatia! Did you guess that Hypatia and Ms Guide are the same person, and if so, when? Do you think that Ms Guide knew who Hattie was before the rally?
- Have you encountered time travelling in any other books? If so, did the characters travel through time during a special moon, or was there another means for them to time travel?



Activity: Travel through time!

Imagine you could time travel to any place in any time of your choosing, but you're only allowed to go for one full day before you're transported back to the present. Write a creative piece that explores where you'll go and what you'll do when you get there. You should write this piece using a first-person perspective, which means you'll use 'I' a lot – just like Hattie's narration in *The Secret Library of Hummingbird House*. You can write about this adventure as a story or as a journal entry, but make sure you have a beginning, a middle, and an ending. You can use the prompts below as a guide to help you.

- Where do I want to go?
- Why do I want to go there?
- What will I do when I get there?
- What will I be wearing?
- Who will I see? Who will I speak to, and what will I say to them?
- Will I make any changes that will affect my future?
- Will I take anything from the past back to the present?
- What will I tell my friends and family when I get home?

Friendships and what they mean to us

Theme notes

Hattie has two main friendships: Patrick, her best and only friend at school, and Hypatia, her new 'not-friend' who she meets when she time travels to Hummingbird House in 1970. Hattie has arguments with both friends, which forces Hattie to think about what the friendships mean to her. We learn that the two friends are in Hattie's life for different reasons, with each bringing different qualities to the friendship. Patrick is someone who has always been there for Hattie; he helps her when she's in trouble and he listens to her problems with sympathy. Patrick helps Hattie to start her petition, and his dad helps Hattie by exposing the illegal secret that Hattie uncovers about the Hummingbird House planning development. Meanwhile, Hypatia and Hattie bond through their shared experiences and interests: they have both experienced loss and separation from family members, they both wish to revisit the past to change their futures, they both find it hard to make new friends. They are also obsessed with words and their meanings, and Hattie learns many new words from Hypatia.



Excerpts from the text

Excerpt 1: *Patrick's room is strangely silent ... The door opens, revealing Patrick's tear-stained face. 'I heard you!' he says. 'Through the walkie-talkie! All you did was ask my dad about Hummingbird House. That's all you care about. You don't care about me at all.' He thrusts the walkie-talkie at me, pushes me out of his room and slams the door.* (p.159)

Excerpt 2: *I've never really thought about why I am friends with Patrick. I just am. It's how it has always been. For as long as I can remember we've been friends. I don't even feel like I can be me without him.* (p.186)

Excerpt 3: *'Okay, so here is the list of subjects. Coleopterology, over,' I say, trying not to think about how high I am or how tricky that word is to say.*

'The study of beetles! This is fun, over!'

'Then we have ombrology, over.'

'Study of rain, over.'

'What about brontology, over?'

'Oh, that's thunder, over.' (p.170–171)

Excerpt 4: *'I must absquatulate from this circumbendibus blateration,' Hypatia says, picking up her torch and pushing past me.*

'What do you mean?' I'm so frustrated with Hypatia and her weird lost words. (p.179)



Discussion points

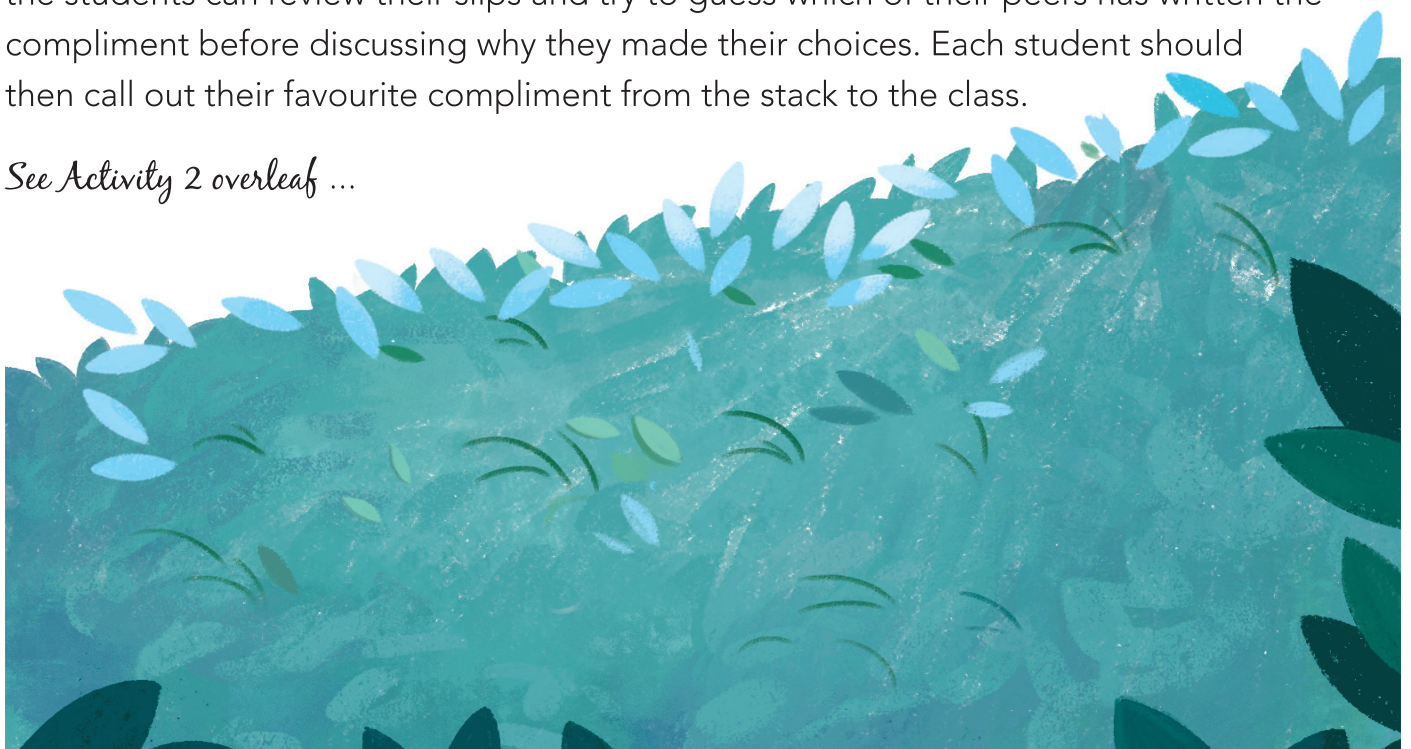
- Why do you think Patrick was angry at Hattie in Excerpt 1? Do you think his anger was justified?

- Regarding Excerpt 2, what do you think Hattie means when she says about Patrick: *'I don't even feel like I can be me without him'*?
- Can you find the moment in Chapter 22 when Hattie makes it up to Patrick?
- Patrick might be described with the adjective 'loyal'. Can you think of other adjectives that describe Patrick?
- Hattie and Patrick have a lot in common, and Hattie and Hypatia have a lot in common. But do Patrick and Hypatia have anything in common?
- Excerpt 2 is from the library scene in Chapter 17, where Hattie climbs to the upper level bookshelves and relays what she finds to Hypatia via their walkie-talkies. Hattie is enthralled by the new words that she comes across, like 'coleopterology'. As a class, go through this scene and discuss all of the nouns that describe a special interest area. Is there anyone in the class who has a hobby in any of these areas? Students can call out a special interest/hobby that isn't described in Chapter 17, and the class can research a noun for it online.
- Hypatia's 'weird lost words', as Hattie describes them, are old words that aren't used much, if at all, anymore. Look at the three words in Excerpt 3 and discuss what you think they mean, based on how they're used in that sentence. Bear in mind that Hypatia is unhappy when she's saying this! After you've had some good guesses, have a look at the glossary at the back of the book to check if you were correct.


Activity 1: Compliments to the class! (Teacher instructions)

It's time to use some adjectives! Split the class into groups of four or five students and give each student a slip of paper for every other person in the group. The students should write one complimentary adjective per person on the respective slips of paper, and they should lay the slips of paper face-down in front of each person. Each student should have a small stack of paper compliments in front of them. Once everyone has finished writing, the students can review their slips and try to guess which of their peers has written the compliment before discussing why they made their choices. Each student should then call out their favourite compliment from the stack to the class.


See Activity 2 overleaf ...



Activity 2: Find Hypatia's Lost Words!



B S E S W R Z R G A N H E I E
E P N Z A C P A O V E S N D R
M T O I U Z D H L U E U L W S
B X A I L Z O H Y L R O L U T
C E A L O K Q X I S T R Q G W
X I G O U S R H P W S E B N H
K X K K S T P U K O E F Z W I
A S E Q C O A R M U Y I S N L
C E F G N M Q U A O Q L N J E
K E S E T J D J Q C J L V A X
K E L D M D Z X Z S K O Q R J
D E N C H Y U O D Y B L K Z N
S D I P S O P A T H Y A I K N
Y R O T A K C A N K K C I N K
E L U B I T A L G V E M E D G



ABSQUATULATE
GADZOOKS
LATIBULE
SELENOPHILE

DIPSOPATHY
KEEK
LOLLIFEROUS
SPRACKLING

ERSTWHILE
KNICK-KNACKATORY
MURKLINS
YESTREEN

Standing up for what you believe in

Theme notes

Hattie is outraged and upset when she learns that Hummingbird House and her beloved 'mulolly' tree are going to be demolished to make way for new apartments. Hattie immediately sets out to save the house, which leads to her starting a petition, gathering community support, and uncovering the mayor and Lord Landord's secret. Throughout the book, we see Hattie's unwavering determination to save the house and tree. At the beginning, Hattie wants to save the tree because she shares special memories of being in it with her parents before their Big Split. Once Hattie meets Hypatia, she begins to understand that the house can mean something to people other than her family. The rally at the end of the book shows Hattie that many people can care about the same cause. Hattie is shocked to find out that her dad is the architect designing the new apartments, but she doesn't let her confusion and disappointment distract her from fighting for this cause. In Chapter 28, Hattie shares in the joy of saving her tree with other children in the neighbourhood, understanding that her actions have brought happiness to more people than just herself.

Excerpts from the book

Excerpt 1: *I've got to stop that development and save Hummingbird House and my mulolly tree – or we will never have a chance to be a family again.* (p. 43)

Excerpt 2: *'There's a big protest on Sunday. You should come along,' I say. 'Sure thing,' says the drummer. 'You're a real little activist, aren't you?' An activist. I like that. I smile.* (p.145)

Discussion points

- Re-read Chapter 4, and reflect on Excerpt 1 afterwards. Why do you think Hattie believes that saving Hummingbird House and the tree will bring her family together again?
- Did you think that Hattie's mum and dad would reunite if she saved the house and tree? Why/why not?
- Do you know what the word 'activist' means?
- Why do you think the drummer describes Hattie as an activist?
- What sort of things do you think activists do?
- Has anyone in the class attended a protest or a rally? Tell the class about your experiences if so.
- Can you think of other ways to describe Hattie as well as being an activist?



Activity: Posters for a cause!

Hattie is passionate about saving the mulolly tree and Hummingbird House for a number of reasons, but the strongest of these reasons is her emotional connection to the tree. In *The Secret Library of Hummingbird House*, Hattie creates a petition for other members of the community to show their support against the proposed demolition of the house and tree.



Petitions are a great way to protest, but there are other ways to show your support for a cause as well as creating or signing petitions. One example is of posters that are stuck in public places (with permission, of course!), or placards that people carry on marches and rallies.

In this activity, you will create a poster to support a cause that you feel strongly about. Your poster will also show other people why they should care about your cause. Your poster should include the following information:

- The cause that you're supporting. *E.g. There should be a book club at the school library once a month.*
- The reason why you're supporting this cause. *E.g. A book club would be a fun after-school activity.*
- Some facts and opinions to support your argument. *E.g. A book club would help students to read more often; a book club would bring more students to the library.*
- Some pictures and cool fonts that make your poster look special.

If you can't think of any causes, perhaps this list will give you some ideas:

- Say no to bullying!
- Foster or adopt animals!
- Help stop climate change!
- Build a swimming pool at school!
- Pick-up rubbish at the beach!

