

**MidnightSun Publishing**

## **A WAY HOME**

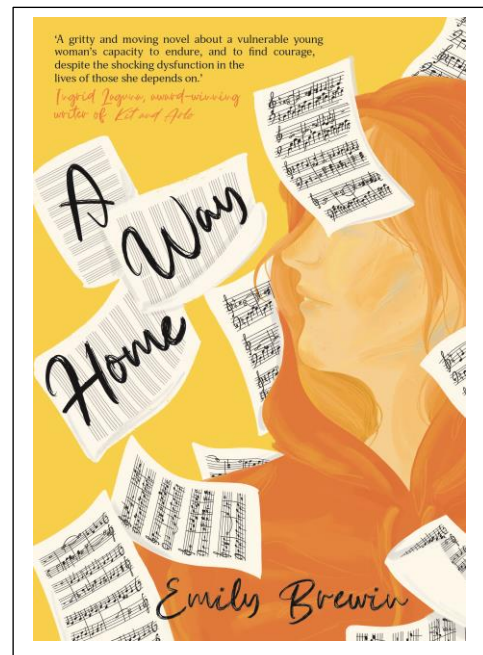
**by Emily Brewin**

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Young Adult | Also available as eBook

RECOMMENDED SCHOOL YEAR LEVEL: 8–10



### **TEACHING NOTES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM**

The English curriculum is built around the three interrelated strands of language, literature and literacy.

- These teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore *A Way Home* in line with the Australian Curriculum: English.
- Questions are divided into stages: from **pre-reading**, **while reading** and **post-reading** and include possible tasks for class work and assessment.

### **SYNOPSIS**

Sixteen-year-old Grace lives under a bridge in Melbourne's CBD. It's cold and wet, but hidden. Safe, at least, until she can go home.

When winter drives her to the City Library one morning, Grace meets Louie, a weird kid with his own problems, and discovers a community piano. The piano reminds Grace of her mum, a celebrated pianist whose mental illness makes life a rollercoaster – and not always a fun one.

When Grace comes up with a plan to find the help she and Mum need, life begins to look up. But things don't work out as Grace imagines and suddenly her world's turned upside down again, and maybe for good this time.

*A Way Home* is a big-hearted novel that explores the complexities of growing up with a parent who is struggling, and about the places and people we call home.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The idea for *A Way Home* evolved from a visit to Melbourne's City Library, which has community piano on its second floor. While I was there, a woman who I assumed was homeless dragged a trolley to the piano and sat down. I can't recall what she played, but it was complicated and beautiful. The whole library stopped to listen. The scene was so lovely and strange I was compelled to research it.

In doing so I discovered the story of Natalie, who trained as a classical pianist but suffered ill health and homelessness. Now, she seeks out and plays pianos across the city. Natalie's story made me consider how personal tragedy and illness can lead to displacement, and how creative pursuits like music can act as a lifeline.

In *A Way Home* we meet Grace, a young woman experiencing homelessness. I want my readers to connect with her. To understand the complexities around homelessness but also to recognise the common human qualities we all share — a need for safety, love, shelter, and connection.

## QUESTIONS

### PRE-READING

1. **Understanding Homelessness (Yr 8, [AC9E8LE02](#))** Explore your understanding of homelessness in Australia. Find contrasting points of view from three different media sources to contribute to a class discussion.
2. **Cover Analysis: A Way Home (Yr 8, [AC9E8LE03](#))** Study the cover of, *A Way Home* and discuss in pairs what the image predicts about the main character and her story. Considering your predictions, redesign the cover using your own symbols.
3. **Personal Crisis Discussion (Yr 9, [AC9E9LE01](#))** In small groups, discuss how personal crisis can change a person and their world view. Identify situations where this has occurred with someone in the media and discuss the impacts of the crisis.
4. **Analysing Language on Homelessness (Yr 9, [AC9E9LY03](#))** Read articles on homelessness from three media sources. Analyse the use of language in each source and compare them. Discuss why language might differ across sources.
5. **Assumptions about Mental Illness (Yr 10, [AC9E10LY01](#))** In *A Way Home* you'll be exploring Grace's experience of growing up with a parent with a mental illness. List your assumptions about mental illness, discuss these in pairs and then as a class.
6. **Symbolism on the Cover (Yr 10, [AC9E10LE07](#))** Before reading, *A Way Home*, study the cover. Identify any symbols that appear on it, describe them and record what they mean to you. Compare your findings in small groups and discuss.

## WHILE READING

1. **Character Analysis: Grace and Liesel (Yr 8, [AC9E8LY01](#))** What events have shaped Grace and her mother, Liesel's lives? Consider how and why readers might respond differently to each character. Find three quotes per character that best represents them.
2. **Genre against the clock (Yr 8, [AC9E8LA03](#))** In terms of genre or style, *A Way Home* is **social realism**. Research what this means and rewrite the definition in your own words. Then, scan the novel to find as many examples of social realism as you can in 20 minutes. Exchange these examples with your classmates.
3. **Character Study: Grace's Introduction (Yr 8, [AC9E8LY03](#))** In chapter one of *A Way Home* the author introduces us to the main character, Grace. In pairs, make a list of the things we learn about Grace. What do these observations tell you about her personality?
4. **Emotional Response in Writing (Yr 9, [AC9E9LA02](#))**  
'Mum's illness is an ocean, sometimes calm, sometimes stormy, but always so immense it's hard to see the shore.' (pg. 71) The author uses evocative and descriptive language to evoke feeling and convey meaning in this quote. Find other quotes in *A Way Home* that do this.
5. **Emotional Response in Writing (Yr 9, [AC9E9LY04](#))** In the final chapters of the novel we begin to sense what Grace's future might look like. What techniques does the author use to enable us to see this?
6. **Mother-Daughter Relationship: Grace and Her Mother (Yr 9, [AC9E9LY03](#))** Although Grace is experiencing homelessness, we know she has a mother whom she cares deeply for. Collect and curate a series of quotes from the book that tell us about Grace's relationship with her mother.
7. **Examining self (Yr 10, [AC9E10LY01](#))**  
'Kate looks impressed. "A reader and a musician..."  
I blush, heat spreading rapidly from my cheeks to my neck. I've never thought of myself as either and I can't help smiling.' (pg. 62)  
In this quote from the novel we witness Grace reflecting on how the world sees her. Collect other examples of this and note how Grace's perception of herself changes over the course of the story.
8. **POV (Yr 10, [AC9E10LA01](#))**  
*A Way Home* is told from a first person POV. See an example of this in the quote below.  
'Get a grip! I reprimand myself before stepping into the corridor. My runners squeak on the concrete floor and I count my steps.' (pg. 188)  
Describe what's meant by first person POV compared to second and third person. Find five examples of this POV in the novel and explain what they tell us about Grace's inner world and personal circumstances at the time.

9. **Vlog: a day-in-the-life-of (Yr 10, [AC9E10LY06](#))**

Imagine you are Grace. Create a day-in-the-life-of vlog (video blog) that outlines a day living on the street. Use sensory language and examples from the text to inform your work. Broadcast your vlog in small groups, discussing the angles and opinions that arise.

## POST-READING

1. **Character Analysis Collage (Yr 8, [AC9E8LA07](#)):** Create a collage representing Grace's journey in *A Way Home*. Focus on one of the following themes: youth homelessness, friendship, mental health, or mother-daughter relationships. Include images, quotes, and symbols that reflect your chosen theme.
2. **Digital Storytelling (Yr 8, [AC9E8LE02](#)):** Create a multimedia profile that explores one of the book's main characters. Include images, music, and narration to convey your understanding of the character and their story.
3. **Thematic Discussion Groups (Yr 9, [AC9E9LE03](#)):** In small groups explore specific themes from the book, such as: youth homelessness, friendship, mental health, or mother-daughter relationships. Present your findings to the class, highlighting instances from the text that represents your theme.
4. **Comparative Essay (Yr 9, [AC9E9LE05](#)):** Create a list comparing how Grace and Louie's friendship is portrayed in *A Way Home* compared to friendship in another text (digital or print) you know. Analyse the similarities and differences in the representation of friendship across texts. Then apply the same principles to your own friendships. Do your friendships have any similarities to Grace and Louie's? What are the main differences?
5. **Creative Writing: Alternate Endings (Yr 10, [AC9E10LE08](#)):** Consider the choices that Grace, Nan and Liesel make in the final chapters of the novel. Think of alternative choices and rewrite the ending based on these. Discuss your alternate ending with a classmate.
6. **Reflective Journaling (Yr 10, [AC9E10LE01](#)):** Keep a regular reflective journal while reading *A Way Home* that focuses on your thoughts and feelings around the characters, plot, and themes. Reflect on, then discuss how your views and understanding of these text elements evolve as you progress through the novel.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Emily Brewin** is a Melbourne author, copywriter, and learning designer. Her first novel, *Hello, Goodbye*, was published in 2017 and her second, *Small Blessings*, in 2019. *The Two Sides of Grace* is her first YA novel. Her short stories have appeared in anthologies, *Into Your Arms: Nick Cave's Songs Reimagined* by Fremantle Press, *We'll Stand In That Place and Other Stories* by Margaret River Press and the *Bristol Short Story Anthology - Volume 10*. She has written for *The Age*, *ABC Education*,

*news.com.au*, *Meanjin*, *Kill Your Darlings*, *Archer*, *Feminartsy*, *The Victorian Writer*, *Screen Education*, and *Mamamia*. She is currently working on her fourth novel.

