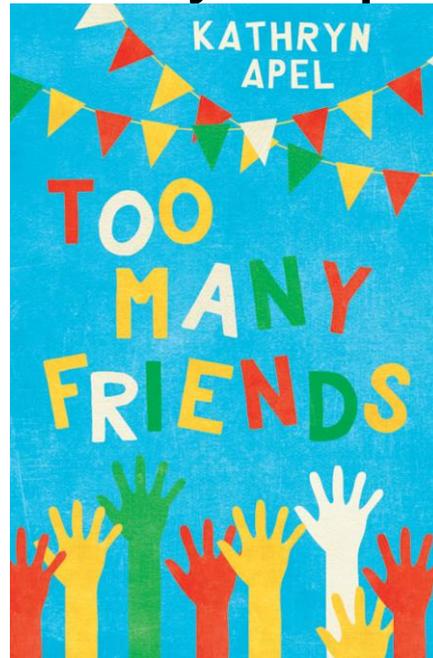


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TOO MANY FRIENDS

Kathryn Apel



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Writing Style	2
Study Notes	3
Author Motivation	6
About the Author	6

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SYNOPSIS

Everybody wants to be friends with Tahnee, and she wants to be a good friend to all of her classmates. The only problem is, not all of Tahnee's friends like one another, or the thought of sharing her friendship. Tahnee feels pushed and pulled in all directions. Why can't her friends all get along?

In a verse novel that cuts to the very core of many playground issues, Kathryn Apel explores what it means to be a truly good friend.

THEMES

Friendship:

- Tahnee is pushed and pulled in all directions by her many friends who like her, but not necessarily one another.
- The text explores the different personalities within friendship groups and the dynamics that can often make friendship difficult.
- Tahnee makes an extra special effort to include the new girl, Lucy.

Getting Along:

- Many of the children in Tahnee's class don't get along very well. *Too Many Friends* explores the nature of friendship and getting along.

Acceptance:

- The children in Tahnee's class begin to understand the importance of accepting one another's differences.

Poetry:

- Figurative language and poetic devices are used throughout the text.

WRITING STYLE

Too Many Friends is a verse novel told in first person, present tense. It is extremely realistic and relatable, as the dynamics of friendship, particularly with younger primary students, is explored. Although Tahnee is in Year 2, this text has applications to older primary students, as the types of friendship issues raised are pertinent throughout the primary years. The text is easy to read, yet thought provoking and tangible. It would be an excellent inclusion in wellness or pastoral care programs, such as *You Can Do It!* and *Bounce Back!*

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STUDY NOTES

- Before reading, discuss the title of the book. What might be some of the issues with having too many friends?
- Introduce students to the verse novel text type. Project some of the first few verses onto the whiteboard and discuss the way in which the verses form the narrative. Discuss the word placement and line breaks, for example on p3, where the arrangement of the words replicates the way in which the children vie for Tahnee's attention.
- In 'Pieces of Me', Tahnee feels pulled in all directions by her different friends. Why is this difficult for her? Do you sometimes feel like Tahnee? Write a reflection to share a time when you felt pulled in different directions by friends.
- Why does it make Tahnee sad that she can't make all of her friends happy at the same time?
- Why do you think that some of Tahnee's friends don't like one another? How does this impact on her?
- Tahnee says 'sometimes I want to be by myself' (p5). Why do you think she feels this way? Do you ever feel like just being by yourself? Share with a friend.
- Why does Tahnee think that 'sometimes it seems like there isn't enough of me to be a good friend to anyone' (p6)?
- In 'I Don't Eat My Friends!', why does Tahnee describe the kids in her class as 'a jumbo pack of assorted party lollies' (p8)?
- Miss Darling asks her class to work in groups for their Science and Technology lessons. What are some of the problems that Tahnee's group face that prevent them from working as a team? Discuss what impedes effective group work as opposed to what allows group work to be productive. Why does Tahnee love group work (see p16)? How can you be an effective group member?
- Discuss the various personalities in Tahnee's group and why their behaviour prevents the group from being able to work well together. Why has the author been so deliberate in her description of these characters and how they behave when in groups?
- Why does Tahnee say that Michael 'should think more before he talks' (p23)? What can you learn about how to treat others from this poem?
- Explore the various poetic devices used throughout the text, discussing how they contribute to the narrative. Examples include:
 - o Shape poetry, for instance:
 - light bulb (p156)
 - fish (p186)
 - Dad's flipper feet (p77)
 - o Simile – The kids in my class are like a jumbo pack of assorted party lollies – they're all different, but I like them all (p8)

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- o Simile – Miss Darling smiles as she moves around the room like sunshine chasing rainbows (p13)
- o Alliteration, simile, metaphor – Roxie doesn't like watching ... waiting ... wishing ... wasting. She's like a wind-up toy coiled too tight, fit to bust! Sometimes I think Roxie's red hair is a spark – ready to flare into a whole bushfire of trouble (p19/20)
- o Repetition – she was winding up to snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, SNAP! (p22)
- o Simile – All around us kids are warbling like magpies, carolling their stories over the chorus of other voices, swooping and diving into the chattering frenzy (p31)
- o Imagery and alliteration – Mum ... smiles a wobble-worried smile to match her wrinkle-worried eyes (p40)
- o Imagery – I can feel excitement shiver my shoulders, and jiggle down to my toes (p72)
- o Alliteration – sometimes they flit and fly so fast (p79)
- o Simile – I stand tall like a helium balloon straining at the top of a taut string (p126)
- o Simile – Roxie is sticking to Heidi like a suction toy in the bath (p145)
- o Imagery – My heart is jazz dancing as I put my head down and focus on my handwriting (p169)
- Tahnee desperately wants to show Lucy that she wants to be her friend, but is not sure how. What advice would you give to Tahnee?
- How is choosing the five toys in 'Testing the Limit' a lot like Tahnee being forced to choose which friends to play with? Discuss the 'force and motion' at play in Tahnee's narrative – she is getting pushed and pulled.
- How important is the ability to compromise with friends and group members?
- How do Tahnee and Sarah handle their group work situation? Discuss the importance of 'give and take' to help the group function more effectively. How did the girls diplomatically handle Michael's bossiness?
- Take note of the editing tips in the poem 'Editing the Teacher' on p68/69. Create a Word Wall and keep adding good quality vocabulary to this wall to help with your writing.
- Write a poem about a party that you have either hosted or attended. See 'It's ... Show Time!' on p74/75 to help with this.
- Discuss the placement of words in 'Duck, Dad!' on p76/77, particularly the section that replicates the rhythm of Dad walking with his duck feet.

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- Why does Tahnee feel like she is the parcel at her own party? How is this scene similar to her experience at school?
- Create your own class Ferris wheel cake, decorating your own cupcake to best represent you. (See 'The Icing on the Cupcakes' p89–91.)
- Why does Tahnee wish that '*all my friends would all be friends*' (p91)?
- Why does Tahnee's dad say to her that 'the *best* friend I saw today was *you*' (p95)?
- How does learning about the children from the Solomon Islands help the children in Tahnee's class to see how fortunate they are, but also how happiness does not revolve around material possessions?
- Make your own 'Palm Snakes' following the instructions on p108–110.
- As a class, write your own story to share with a prep class at your school. Illustrate this story using photos of plasticine figures as Tahnee's class does. Consider creating your own 'writing' hats like Miss Darling's (see p57).
- Plan a class party to replicate Tahnee's Show Party. Create invitations, and plan the food, games, show bags and Sideshow Alley fun. Invite other classes to participate in your games. Consider using this party as a class reward for getting along and being good friends to one another.
- In what ways is *Too Many Friends* a book about accepting one another's differences?
- How do families provide a different type of friendship to the people at school? How is this evident with Tahnee's family? Write a reflection about the friendships that you have with your family.
- Describe the relationship that Tahnee shares with her dad.
- What have you learnt about being a good friend from reading *Too Many Friends*? In small groups, create a table that contrasts what a good friend does and does not do.
- Investigate the principles of force and motion by classifying the same types of toys as Miss Darling's class on p50/51. Create a table and classify the toys as either push or pull.
- Design and create your own toys from recycled materials.
- How important is it to stop and reflect upon what you have learnt? Similarly, why is it useful to listen to what others in your class have learnt?
- What does Tahnee's class learn from Vika? (See 'What We Learnt' on p117–119.)
- What have you learnt about how to be a good friend from Tahnee? Use examples from the text to help support your ideas.

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- Discuss Tahnee's comment that 'I don't want to like anyone best. I just want to like everyone' (p147). How can this notion help to sustain meaningful and long-lasting friendships?
- Write mystery messages to everyone in your class, telling them why they are a good friend.
- Why does Tahnee love that all of the class members' homemade toys are so different? How does this reflect the theme of acceptance in *Too Many Friends*?
- Why has the author given Lucy a snail as a pet? What does this snail symbolise? Discuss the shape poem of the snail on p196.
- What tips would you give Lucy on making friends? Similarly, what advice would you give to characters such as Michael and Roxie about friendship?
- Incorporate *Too Many Friends* into a wellness or pastoral care program at your school such as *You Can Do It!* or *Bounce Back!*

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

The book was inspired by a conversation with a friend, who commented that her young daughter was wearing herself out by trying to be a good friend and meet all the 'needs' of all of her friends. A sociable, caring little girl, she was constantly concerned for her many friends.

This struck me. So often popular people are envied, because they are so popular. But I'd never considered the difficulties that having a large circle of friends, and a people-personality, might bring. As a story hook, it grabbed me straight away.

Many of the characters that appear throughout the story have been shaped by children in classes I have taught. Often a number of students over the years, rolled into one character. Each student always brings their own positive traits to the class. They each have their own weaknesses and insecurities. Yet so often they only see the good in others ... and the bad in themselves.

Similarly, many of the activities within the book are activities I have loved to do with classes – the collage story being one of my most loved!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathryn Apel is a born-and-bred farm girl who's scared of cows. She lives with her husband and two sons among the gum trees, cattle and kangaroos on a Queensland grazing property. *Too Many Friends* is Kathryn's fifth book and third verse novel, following the release of *On Track* (2015) and *Bully on the Bus* (2014) to much acclaim. Kathryn loves pumping poetry because she can flex her muscles across other genres, to bend (and break) writing rules. Kathryn teaches part-time and shares her passion for words at schools and festivals.