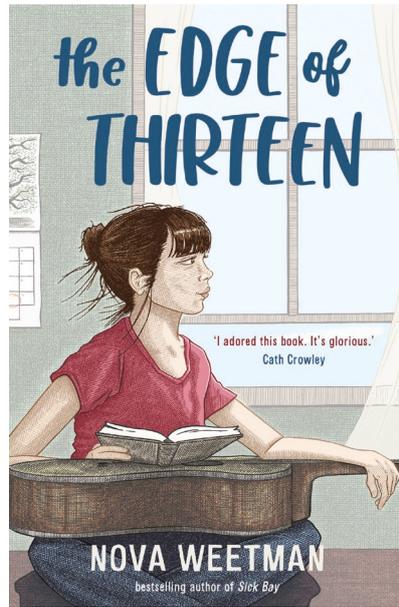


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THE EDGE OF THIRTEEN

Nova Weetman



Teachers' Notes

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

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SYNOPSIS

Clem is thirteen and about to start Year 8. Flat-chested, disinterested in boys and avoiding make-up, she feels as though the gap between her and her best friends, Bridge and Ellie, is widening. Things aren't helped by her ancient mobile phone that has no internet access and regularly malfunctions. How can Clem fit in when she so clearly doesn't?

To make matters worse, Bridge isn't who she used to be. She is obsessed by Instagram posts, gossip and impressing others. Clem has a choice to make: accept change or be left behind.

The Edge of Thirteen is a coming-of-age story about navigating change, making blunders and accepting others despite their mistakes.

THEMES

- Relationships
- Trust
- Friendship
- Belonging
- Change
- Acceptance
- Identity
- Puberty
- Social Media

WRITING STYLE

The Edge of Thirteen is told in first person, present tense, and is the third in a series of novels about Clem as she navigates the clamours of growing up. Teetering on puberty but not quite there yet, Clem is embarrassed by her flat chest and the fact she has not yet started her period, while her friends are far more developed. To add to this, she is increasingly aggravated by her mother, especially as she is not allowed to have a smart phone or Instagram. These elements make for an extremely genuine and relatable text for middle readers, who will readily identify with changes to their friendships, peer group pressure and first dalliances. Clem's doubts and insecurities are realistically and sensitively realised through her voice, and Nova Weetman's use of character and theme creates an excellent read.

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STUDY NOTES

- Using your own experiences of school and friendship, together with the cover of the *The Edge of Thirteen*, make predictions about the challenges that the protagonist, Clem, may face in this novel. What do you think the edge of thirteen will be like?
- How does chapter 1 force Clem to accept that she is growing up? What signs are there that she is not quite ready for the changes that lay ahead? What happens in this chapter that shows she is a true teenager? Have you ever felt as though you want to both grow up, yet stay young? How does Clem wishing she still had 'Pretend Santa' illustrate this conundrum?
- Why does Clem lie about having her period? Why is she embarrassed to still be wearing a crop top while her friends are wearing bras?
- Clem has to wait until she is older to get a smart phone and an Instagram account. Did you have to wait to get a mobile phone? What is her mother worried about? Are her concerns justified? In what ways can you relate to Clem? Share in a reflection.
- Why is Clem embarrassed to be seen out with her parents? Need she feel this way? What advice would you give Clem about this?
- Clem is anxious about starting the new school year, especially as her friends seem interested in boys and make-up, while she is not. How do you feel at the start of a new school year? Share in a journal entry.
- Why, on her calendar, does Clem identify with the 'slow tree, [that is] perhaps a little undecided' (p. 6)?
- What does Clem mean when she says she has a 'jealousy bubble' (p. 11) when her friends know something she doesn't. How can jealousy be dangerous to friendship?
- Why is Clem's stomach churning as she approaches Bridge's place for the first time all summer? Why, at the end of this chapter, does she 'finally let out the air I've been holding since I arrived' (p. 14)? What makes her feel this way? Have you ever experienced this type of feeling? Share in a reflection.
- Why is Clem uncomfortable with the idea of Ellie having a boyfriend? How do you think Ellie feels about it? Does she have reservations as well? How do we know?
- What does Clem mean when she says 'Mum loves trying to dig through all the small moments of my friendships' (p. 19)? Why might her mother do this?
- Discuss the idea that there may be an 'internet version' of Clem as opposed to the real-life version. Why is it important that these two versions are the same as one another?

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- Bridge has 421 followers on Instagram. Why does Nat tell Bridge ‘it’s like a fire and you just have to know how to stoke it properly’ (p. 37)? Why is Clem concerned about this?
- How is Bridge changing? How does Clem feel about this? Why?
- Bridge meets Jacqs and Tom in her photography class. Make predictions about Clem’s friendships with these characters.
- Like Clem, take three photos that define how you see yourself, remembering ‘I don’t want three selfies’ (p. 41). In addition, ‘sketch an image that you think explains some aspect of who you are’.
- How does Clem feel when Bridge suggests they should ‘branch out a bit’ and make new friends (p. 48)? Why does Bridge expect such friendships to ‘[overlap] her’ (p. 47)?
- In the role of Clem, write a journal entry about your first impressions of using Instagram. What do you like about it? What makes you nervous or uncomfortable? What have you noticed about your friends’ posts? How do you want to be perceived online?
- Why is Clem so mortified that her mother bought her *The World of Girls*? Why do you think her mother bought it? Why does Clem ‘[blame] the puberty book for everything’ (p. 61)?
- How does running help Clem to process her emotions? What do you use to manage your stress?
- Describe the relationship that Clem shares with her father. Why is it different to the one she shares with her mother?
- Clem thinks that Bridge is ‘pretending so hard’ (p. 67) to be a version of herself that everyone will like. Have you noticed this in yourself, or in those around you? Why is this a trap? Why do so many adolescents act in this way? Discuss.
- Clem struggles with the relationship forming between Ellie and Sammy, as though she is ‘watching a close-up from a film that is still too old’ for her (p. 69)? She feels similarly when Ellie and Sammy kiss later in the text. Given what occurs on camp, is she right that they are too young, or does it depend? Discuss.
- How does Bridge feel about Clem’s new friendship with Jacqs? Why does she feel this way?
- Create and perform a scripted dialogue between Clem and Bridge on camp addressing their friendship issues.
- What is the significance of Tom and Clem using an old SLR film camera while on camp? Why does Clem think this would make her dad happy?
- Why does Clem use socks in her togs when going swimming? What would you say to Clem if you were her friend? Do you think she would listen? Discuss.

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- How does *The Edge of Thirteen* address issues of gossip and peer pressure in causing friction in friendships?
- Why does Clem let Jacqs pierce her ears on camp? Why does this upset Bridge so much? Why, when she gets home from camp, is Clem so angry that her mother is more concerned about the piercings becoming infected, rather than the fact she had them done?
- Discuss Clem's statement that 'all I've really outgrown is my parents' company' (p. 213), while Jacqs tells her how lucky she is to have her family (p. 226). What is the author sharing with readers about the importance of family, even though it may not always feel that way?
- How do you think Clem's parents are feeling throughout the novel? Write a scene from their point of view.
- Why does Clem take a photo of a tree in the park that 'needs to grow some more' (p. 224)?
- Why does Clem's mum worry so much when she is late home? Why is it important that Clem understands things from her mother's perspective?
- Why does Bridge post the photo of her and Clem on their first day of primary school?
- Clem's mum calls Bridge her 'forever friend' (p. 235). In a reflection, share what you think makes a 'forever friend'.
- How has Clem changed from the beginning of the book to the end?
- Clem is trying to cope with a lot of change in her life, which is causing her stress and self-doubt. How does change affect you? Write a reflection sharing your thoughts.
- What aspects of growing up and transitioning to adolescence seem to be most confronting to Clem?
- Why is Clem so against her friends wearing make-up? What does this tell us about the different rates at which people grow up, and the effects on friendships of people growing up too quickly?
- What advice would you give to Clem about adjusting to change and adapting to changes in her friends?
- Examine the use of figurative language throughout the text. Examples include:
 - My walls are pale green like peppermint ice-cream (p. 4)
 - In autumn their green leaves change to an orangey-red like they are warming themselves for the cold (p. 5)
 - My heart stretches out a beat like it's surprised (p. 7)
 - The queue for the gelato shop snakes right down the street (p. 17)
 - Mum sweeps open my curtains, letting all the sunlight rush in (p. 25)
 - I try and see my reflection in the window but I'm too faint, like a ghost of a girl (p. 35)

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- 'Whatever,' she says, arranging herself like a lioness checking out her prey (p. 52)
- My arms pump by my side, like pistons (p. 64)
- My body is coiled tight like Mum has just caught me on Instagram and is about to ground me for the rest of my life (p. 164)
- How is 'FOMO' (fear of missing out) a dangerous state of mind? How does Clem show symptoms of FOM' throughout *The Edge of Thirteen*? How do social media platforms such as Instagram feed FOMO? What strategies could you use to recognise such traps?
- In what ways is *The Edge of Thirteen* a story about identity?
- What can you learn about growing up and friendships from Clem's experiences? How does fiction help us navigate life's ups and downs from a safe distance?
- Discuss the relationship that Clem has with her mother. Why is it that Clem gets so easily annoyed by her mum at times, yet at others, feel extremely close to her? What examples in the text show how much Clem's mum truly understands and supports her?
- The motif of the calendar with a new tree for each month frames the narrative. Discuss the symbolism of this calendar. What prompts Clem to realise that she has been 'crossing the days off all wrong' (p. 240)? How will crossing the days off at the end of each day rather than at the start help Clem?
- Discuss Clem's revelation when she flips the calendar to a new month that there are 'thirty-one days of potential' ahead (p. 246). How does this show that Clem has matured and developed as a character?

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I've always wanted to write a puberty book. A book about that tricky stage where your body is changing, faster or slower than your friends, and it's awkward and often embarrassing. My own kids seem much more comfortable talking about puberty than I was at thirteen, and I'm really interested in the spectrum of responses – from silent and private to open and relaxed. Having written the two earlier Clem books in *The Secrets We Keep* and *The Secrets We Share*, I felt like she was the perfect character to take me into this territory. I also wanted to explore the pressures that young people feel when comparing themselves to their friends. It's hard to be yourself and to work out what that is, and Clem was my way into that exploration.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nova Weetman lives in Melbourne with her family. She has written for TV and is the author of many middle grade and young adult novels. *The Secrets We Keep* was shortlisted for the Readings Children's Book Prize, the Speech Pathology Book of the Year Awards and the ABIA Awards. The sequel, *The Secrets We Share*, was a 2018 CBCA Notable Book. Nova's middle grade novel *Sick Bay* was a CBCA Notable Book and shortlisted for the ABIA Awards.