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Readers'/Teachers' Notes

Girl 38: Finding A Friend

By Ewa Jozefkowicz
Cover artwork by Anna Hymas



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Fiction/ Children's 9+ • £10.99

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Structure

Discuss: Looking at the title of the book and the blurb on the back cover, which genre would you think it would fit into? Does the cover image influence your decision at all? (fantasy, mystery, horror, real life, romance).

Activity: What would your response be to the question in the blurb 'Have you ever had a friend who persuaded you to do stuff, even when you didn't want to?' Write a paragraph about how you coped with this or if it hasn't happened to you what you would do.



Read the first chapter now.

Activity: What have you learnt about Gem's and Kat's personalities from this first chapter? Write a brief character sketch about each of them quoting from the chapter to illustrate your points ('When she said that I wondered for a moment if she meant me' page 7).

Now read the rest of the book.

Discuss: The whole book is written in first person from the point of view of Kat. What effect does this have on how you relate to the book? Did you empathise with Kat? Do you feel it made the story appear more personal?

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Activity: Write two accounts of an event, one in first person, one in third person and then compare how this changes the mood of the writing.

Characters

Ewa Jozefkowicz is very good at telling us about characters' emotions subtly without explicitly discussing them:

'She was still smiling, but I could see that her smile didn't quite stretch all the way to her eyes.' Page 18

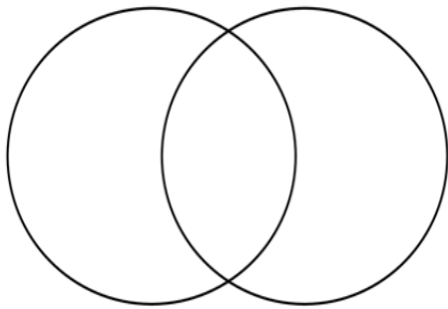
'I caught the look on his face when he came back into the classroom. It was as if something inside him had changed, as though someone had turned out the light behind his eyes.' Page 31

Discuss: What do you understand about how the characters are feeling from these two quotes – are they sad, happy or somewhere in between?



Kat

Kat is the main protagonist or character in the story. The story is written from her viewpoint so we get an excellent insight into what she is thinking or feeling throughout. Many main characters in books experience a personality change in the course of the book, does Kat change?



Activity: Draw a Venn diagram with one circle containing words that describe Kat's character in the first chapters of the book, the other containing words that are new aspects of her character by the end of the book and the middle section showing character traits that stay the same.

Activity: Although the book does not include diary entries it does read very much like Kat's diary, as she is the one telling us about events. Keep a diary for a week, writing at least one paragraph each day about what has happened on that day and

how you felt about it. Did writing things down help you to make sense of what you are feeling and/or thinking?

'She wasn't like the other girls. She was a highly-skilled space-traveller – cool-headed, noble and brave —'
Page 1

'Girl 38 was fearless.' Page 10

Discuss: Drawing her Girl 38 comic strip helps Kat think about events in her life. Do you think the main character is based on herself? Why does drawing things on paper help Kat? Looking at the above quotes at the start of the book does Kat share character traits with Girl 38? Does this change by the end?

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Activity : Create a chart with character names from the comic book Girl 38 in one column and who you think the character is based on in the next column. For each character write a paragraph with quotes from the book showing why you made these decisions. Consider whether the comic book characters share personality traits with the real life people or if they look similar to them.

Activity: Draw yourself as a comic book character, design the clothing to show what sort of character you would be – strong, funny, fast etc.

Gem

At the start of the book Gem and Kat are best friends but this relationship goes downhill during the story.

‘Julius didn’t realise it, but he’d just done the worst thing possible – he’d made Gem look stupid in front of the whole class.’ Page 23

‘Gem had gone above and beyond anything that anyone else had come up with.’ Page 25

‘Gem never did her own dirty work.’ Page 29

Discuss: What do these quotes tell you about Gem’s personality? Is she brave or cowardly, would you want to be her friend? Give reasons why you would/would not be friends with her.

Mrs Jankowski

‘When she stood, unsteadily, I realised that she wasn’t wearing old-lady clothes either, but a white shirt, tucked into a dark blue skirt with beautiful peacocks on it. Their feathers were woven from coloured thread that shimmered in the sunlight.’ Page 13–14

Discuss: When Kat uses the term ‘old-lady clothes’ what do you understand from it – do old people wear different clothes to younger people? Think about older relatives in your family, do they wear the same sort of clothes as you, and would you think it was funny if they did? This is just one example of how we often judge others depending on what they wear (their trainers etc). Do you think we should we do this?

Activity: Talk to an older member of your family (perhaps your nan or grandad) and ask them to tell you about what they remember of their childhood friends and the things they used to do with them. Write this down and print off a copy for them to keep.

Julius

‘Julius grabbed a metal tin from his desk, opened it, and emptied out the pens and pencils inside. Then he picked up all the maggots with his bare fingers and put them in the tin. He did it so quickly that only a couple of people noticed what was going on.’ Page 30

Discuss: What does this passage tell you about Julius’ character? Would you react so calmly if someone played this joke on you?

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Activity: When Julius first arrives at the school he is unsure of how to make friends and probably feels a bit lonely and awkward. With two other pupils from your class prepare a quick sketch using this scenario:

You and your friend are talking in the playground when the 'new kid' comes up and tries to join your conversation. Act out the conversation, showing ways this new person could try to make friends.

Themes

World War Two

Discuss: Reread the second instalment of Ania's story (from page 61). Why were the soldiers separating the Jewish people from the 'ordinary folk'? Look up information on Adolph Hitler's Aryan race to help you discuss this. Why did Ania's parents decide she would have to go to the station in the morning? Do you think this would have been an easy decision for them?

"The world around us was filled with darkness, but within him there was more light than dark. That is all that matters. That's all that you can ask of any human being." Page 115–116

Activity: Imagine you are a soldier in Hitler's army. Write a passage about how difficult it is to hide your feelings and follow orders in first person. Try and think yourself into the situation and describe any conflict you have in your thoughts.

Activity: Watch this animation of Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* <https://vimeo.com/74292820>. Notice how the story is told without words. Now create your own page of pictures that tells part of Ania's story.

Bullying

When you begin reading the book it seems as though Kat and Gem have been friends forever but you soon come to realise that their friendship is rather one-sided. In fact lots of the things Gem makes Kat do are not very nice.

Activity: Write down your thoughts on whether Gem is being a bully or not, using examples from the book to back up your decision.

Activity: Create a mindmap with the word 'bullying' at the centre with examples of bullying behaviour coming from it. Remember, not all bullies hit people, you can hurt people just as much with words.

"I think we need to play her at her own game." Page 177

"We've sent an email round to everyone in the class too, so they'll be there at 1.45p.m. today." Page 189

'She pushed through to the front of the crowd, got up on stage and ripped the parcel from his hand. Then she ran down the side stairs and disappeared through the double doors.' Page 193

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Discuss: There are many examples of people showing compassion and empathy in Mrs Jankowski’s story. What do these two words mean? Can you describe what it means to feel empathy with someone and to show compassion? Are these important feelings to outwardly show and to act upon in our everyday lives?

Activity: Write a passage about Mrs Jankowski’s story giving examples from the text of when the characters show empathy and act with compassion and kindness. Explore how the story helped Kat to stand up to Gem and put a stop to her bullying of Julius – did she learn anything from Ania’s account?

Discuss: Kat decides to put a stop to Gem’s mean behaviour by setting her up to look silly in front of the rest of the class. Is this the right way to deal with being bullied? If Gem is upset, does this mean that Kat is the bully now? Talk about other ways Kat could have dealt with the situation.

Friends and relationships

There are many different types of friendships and relationships portrayed in this book, between Kat and Gem, Kat and Mrs Jankowski and between Mrs Jankowski and Mila for example. All of these relationships are very important and each friend/relative’s life is richer because they have the other person in their lives.

Read pages 241–43 and pages 139–141, paying particular attention to the conversations between Kat and her parents.

Discuss: What does the way Kat’s parents talk to her tell you about their relationship? Are they supportive of her, do they let her make her own decisions?

Activity: An acrostic poem is a form of poetry where usually the first letter in each line spells out a particular word or phrase. Sometimes it’s the last letter or other letters in a line spell out the word. Create an acrostic poem from the letters in the word ‘friends’ writing each letter on a separate line like this:

F
R
I
E
N
D
S

Activity: Create a wordcloud of words that describe one of your friends and put it in a shape that means something to them, a football or a book for example, then print it out and make it into a card for them. You could use one of these sites:

<https://www.wordclouds.com>

<https://worditout.com/word-cloud/create>

<https://wordart.com>

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If you have access to a tablet you could use an app like Wordpack or Wordfoto.

Activity: Have you read other books that have good examples of friendships? Make a list of good friends to encourage others to read these stories and ask your teacher to put it up in the classroom.

Actions and consequences

Mrs Jankowski tells Kat about how Sommer helps her during the war, even though he really shouldn't have:

"Why are you helping me?" I asked him quietly.

"Because when I saw you lying there, hiding among those milk barrels, you reminded me of my own daughter" he said. "The commander thinks I'm taking you to the labour camp in the North of the city." Page 143

Discuss: Why would Mrs Jankowski have been frightened of Sommer at first? She did not know him as a person yet, so what would have made her afraid? She tells Kat more about him when Kat is feeling terrible about what she has done to Julius – why do you think she chooses this time? Can you see any parallels between Kat's behaviour and Sommer's?



Activity: If Kat hadn't decided to break away from Gem and stop doing mean things the story could have ended very differently. Draw or create on the computer two different comic strip pages, one showing what actually happened and another showing an alternative ending to the story and the impact it would have had. Don't forget to use plenty of onomatopoeia (words that try to mimic the sound they are describing, like 'miaow' or 'kapow') in your comic.

(You could use <https://www.pixton.com> or another comic generator site or an app)

Persuasive writing task

How would you encourage others to read this book? Write a book review or create a video that describes what happens in the story and what you liked about it. Make your review as exciting and interesting as possible by not giving away all of the story but just sharing important facts from it. When you have finished show it to someone who has not read the book and ask if it would persuade them to read it.

(Video creation/app suggestions: [animoto.com](https://www.animoto.com), iMovie, Doink Green Screen)

Mindfulness

Read the bottom of page 124 and all of page 125.

Discuss: The breathing exercise Kat's mum teaches her helps her calm down when she's feeling nervous or upset. Is there anything that helps you when you are feeling stressed about something, is there something you do that calms you down?

Becoming fully absorbed in an enjoyable task, whether that be building Lego models or playing a sport, is an excellent way to relax and calm your busy mind.

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Activity: Think about a time when you were worried or anxious about something. Write down five words that describe how you felt. Now read a book for half an hour or do an hour colouring in or drawing. Write down five words that describe how you feel now – did the activity make a difference to your feelings?

Further reading:

Roller Girl, by Victoria Jamieson

Jelly, by Jo Cotterill

Cogheart, by Peter Bunzi

Mystery of the Skull, Pamela Butchart & Enid Blyton

Anty Hero, by Barry Hutchison

Goodnight Mr Tom, by Michelle Magorian

Wicked Nix, by Lena Coakley

The Mystery of the Colour Thief by Ewa Jozefkowicz

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