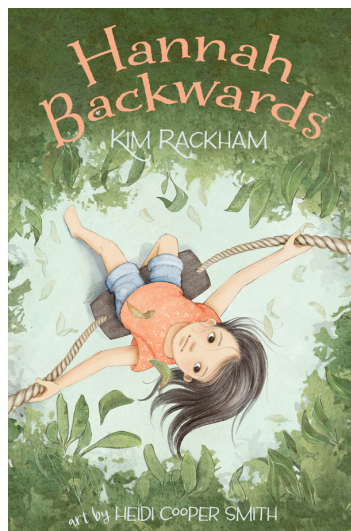


# Hannah Backwards

by Kim Rackham, art by Heidi Cooper Smith

## TEACHERS' RESOURCES



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RECOMMENDED FOR  
Mid Primary Levels

Years 2-4 English - Language/Literature/Literacy  
Years 2-4 Personal and Social Capability

### SYNOPSIS

Hannah loves the familiar rhythm of her days—walking to school with her best friend Izzi, spending afternoons with Nana and Pop, and cozy weekends with her parents.

When Nana gives her a special worry stone to bring calm in uncertain moments, Hannah tucks it safely in her pocket. But change is coming. First, her beloved teacher Mr Spicer leaves. Then, the unthinkable—Izzi is moving away.

As Hannah struggles with the idea of goodbye, her worry stone is always in her hand, but it can't stop the storm of emotions building inside her. A moment of anger threatens to shatter everything they've shared, and Hannah is left to find a way to make things right. With courage, kindness, and the quiet strength of her worry stone, Hannah learns that endings are also beginnings—and that friendships, like the smoothest of stones, can be carried with us wherever we go.

A heartfelt verse novel for younger readers, about friendship, change, and finding the courage to embrace new beginnings—even when goodbye feels impossible.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kim Rackham is a reader, writer and early childhood teacher from Melbourne's outer east. Her favourite thing about books is the way they take her to places she's never been, and help her to understand things she's never experienced. Her short stories have appeared in the NSW School Magazine over many years, and she has three short chapter books published in the educational market. After reading widely in the verse novel genre, Kim fell in love with this free flowing format. *Hannah Backwards* is her first novel.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Heidi Cooper Smith has always loved to draw, but it wasn't until she had three small children and a towering picture book collection that she decided to try her hand at illustration. Six months later, she received her first picture book contract and started work on it soon after. Now with more than ten years experience, Heidi has worked with a number of different publishers on some amazing picture and chapter books.

Heidi writes quirky playful stories and illustrates digitally using watercolour brushes. When she is not writing or illustrating, she can be found covered in clay, working as a production potter while she dreams up new characters to bring to life. Heidi is based in Brisbane.



# THEMES & DISCUSSION

## THEMES

- Friendship
- Family
- Change
- Resilience

## WRITING STYLE

Hannah Backwards is a verse novel, written in first person, present tense. Hannah narrates her story in a series of highly accessible poems. The free verse format is suitable for readers across a range of levels, with illustrations to add to the appeal. With a gentle and hopeful narrative, it encourages a positive mindset in young readers.

Being in poetry format, this book is not bound by the usual conventions of prose novels, and the author has reduced punctuation to a minimum.

### WHAT THE AUTHOR SAID ABOUT WRITING IN FREE VERSE

*...When writing a verse novel, I imagine each poem as its own 'bubble'. Some bubbles are like a snapshot, describing a single scene or relationship or point in time. Other bubbles show something that is happening in the plot, and move the story forwards. While each bubble can float around on its own, it needs to join with the others to tell a complete story.*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

### BEFORE READING

Look at the front cover of the book and read the blurb on the back:

- Consider the title of the story. What do you notice about it? Have you come across palindromes before? Think about the names you call your family and friends. Do you recognise any palindromes among their names?
- Does the title give you any clues as to what the story might be about? After reading, consider the title again. Can you see where the title fits into the story?



## DURING & AFTER READING

- How does this novel differ from prose novels you have read before?
- This novel is written in free verse format. What do you think that means? How does free verse poetry differ from other poetry?
- Do you find it tricky to read and understand meaning without punctuation?
- What has the author used, instead of punctuation, to make the verses easier to read? Re-write one of the verses, removing the line breaks. You may need to add some punctuation and change a few words for it to make sense. Do the words have the same feeling when they are read in a single paragraph? How does it feel different from the original?
- Do the illustrations contribute to your response to the story?
- What is the narrative viewpoint for this story? Why do you think the author chose to write the story this way?
- Can you find an example where the author uses a 'flashback' to provide additional information? How did this information help the story?
- Where is the climax, or turning point, of this story?
- Turn to the pages leading up to the climax. Can you identify lines that show tension?
- Did you feel satisfied with the resolution of this story? Why or why not?
- In *BFF* (pg 8) Hannah talks about some things she and Izzi have in common. What are some of the common interests you share with your friends?
- Are there some verses that make you feel happy? How about sad, or worried? Find a verse that brings out strong feelings in you, and discuss.
- Read *no plans* (pg 17). What can you infer about Hannah's family from this verse?
- Read the verse *best in the world* (pg 11) How would you describe the mood in this verse? How does it make you feel about Mr Spicer?
- Now read the next verse, *matching socks* (pg 12). How would you describe the mood here? Can you identify where you first felt the tension build?
- Why do you think change can be so challenging?
- Can you think of a time when you experienced change? What are some of the things that helped you to adjust?
- Imagine you are getting a new teacher. List some of the things you might imagine about them, both positive and negative? Share your ideas.
- Read *adventures* (pg 16). Nana and Pop both offer support to Hannah when they learn that Mr Spicer is leaving. How do these differ from each other? Discuss the way that both of these help Hannah.
- Mr Spicer says that '*endings are also new beginnings*'. Discuss what he meant by this.
- What do you think it means to have a '*positive mindset*'?
- What are some of the strategies Hannah, Izzi and their friends use to help them adapt when Mr Spicer is leaving? Look for a verse that shows them dealing positively with this change. Discuss.
- Do these same strategies help Hannah when she is saying goodbye to Izzi? Are there other strategies or types of support that help her?
- What does resilience mean in the context of this story?
- Do you think that Mr Spicer's leaving helped prepare Hannah for the more difficult change of saying goodbye to Izzi? Discuss.

- What does Hannah mean when she says she keeps looking backwards? How does this make it difficult to find her own new beginning?
- Hannah finds it difficult to talk about her feelings as Izzi's departure comes closer. Why do you think this is? Have you ever felt that you don't have the words for something?
- What are some other ways we communicate our feelings to others?
- Hannah uses her worry stone to help her feel calm. Have you ever used an object in a similar way? Discuss.
- Can you think of other strategies you can use to help you feel calm in moments of stress or anxiety?
- What do you think Hannah is feeling before, during and after her outburst?
- Why does Hannah gift Izzi her worry stone? What do you think her action is saying?
- How might Hannah and Izzi's friendship look in the future?
- Have you ever had a long distance friendship? How is it different from a friend who is up close?
- Read *not right now* (pg 77). How do you think Hannah is feeling and what do you think she needs?
- Read *in the middle* (pg 78). How is this morning routine helpful for Hannah?
- What are some of the things that help Hannah overcome her sadness after Izzi leaves?
- Consider the idea of having a positive mindset in the context of Hannah finding her new beginning. Discuss.

# OTHER ACTIVITIES

## WRITING

- Imagine you have just learnt that a close friend is leaving. Write a verse that immediately follows this news. Help your reader see and *feel* what is happening, instead of just *saying* it. For example: Instead of telling your reader 'Max was scared,' express the way Max's hands shook, his heart raced, and he stepped back into the shadows. Using actions, thoughts, and senses help to bring your story to life.
- Write a verse about a collection, or something you would like to collect. You might talk about where the items are found, what they look like, or how they are displayed. Create illustrations of your collection.
- Write a flashback verse, to tell about something that happened to you in the past.
- Imagine how Hannah and Izzie's friendship might look in the future, and write a verse about it.
- Do you have another piece of writing you are proud of? You might like to try re-writing it, in verse this time. Compare the two and see if they feel the same!

## EXTENSION WRITING

- Think about a story you would like to tell. Plan the narrative—what are the main characters and plot points that make up your story? You can now write verses based on these plot points. When they join together, does your story feel complete? Add more verses if your story needs more.

When you write in verse, you may not know where to break your line. Sometimes, it may feel right, sometimes it may look right, and at other times, you may be uncertain. Say the words out loud, and that may give you a clue. Remember that it is your poem, and there is no right or wrong!

## ART

Decorate a worry stone or create an object that helps create a sense of calm and peace. Think about your senses - it may be something you can feel, see, smell, hear, or a combination. You could write a verse about your object, too!

## ROLE-PLAY

Create a role-play where a favourite teacher or friend has just said goodbye to the class. What might you do or say to each other to offer support?