

# Extraordinary Stories

Katherine Owens



**ISBN:** 978-1-7643986-4-0

May 2026

Notes by Sue Warren

Key Learning Outcomes:

AC9E7LE01; A\_TSICP1;  
A\_TSICP2; AC9HP8P01;  
AC9HP8P02; AC9HP8P03;  
AC9HP8P04; AC9HP8P06;  
AC9HP8P08; AC9HP8P10

Recommended Reading Age:  
13+

Resources created for: Year 7+

**Genre:** True Stories, Memoir [Anecdote]

## **Themes:**

**Resilience:** The interviewees have all demonstrated resilience in their own individual ways. Some like Leela have found their faith gives them strength. Others like Archer who went through numerous setbacks were able to 'get up' and try again after trying different methods of recovering. The ability to overcome challenges, trauma or significant circumstances and 'bounce back' and, hopefully, be stronger is vitally important. It involves mental, physical and behavioural flexibility. Sometimes professional help such as counselling or social support is needed.

**Overcoming Adversity:** Building mental resilience, having a growth mindset as well adopting positive and proactive strategies are all vital to rising above challenges. Strategies include: building a strong support network e.g. Filipino's comment about surrounding ourselves 'with solid, good people' [p. 62] is applicable here, self-care, positive self-talk, and reframing e.g. obstacles become learning opportunities.

**Trauma:** Having a psychological response to distressing events such as abuse, events or disasters manifests in multiple ways and can impact not only a person's life but research has proven severe trauma is often carried over from one generation to another. Recent research suggests that intensely traumatic episodes alter genetic expression i.e. epigenetics. Donna's experience as a foster child, as part of the Stolen Generation, is testament to this [pp. 14-22].

**Goals and Aspirations:** Setting goals to achieve or be successful is like having a road map with signposts. These actions can inspire, motivate and energise us to create successful outcomes. Lola's determination to become a lawyer provides a good example of this [pp 29-31]

**Self-belief:** While it isn't always easy to develop confidence in oneself and one's abilities, this is a strength to be worked upon. Realising our own capabilities, potential and worth is crucial to our success. Refer to Jake's comments: *'The biggest one for me is "don't let it make you give up". ...* [p. 43]

**Belonging:** This is a fundamental human need deeply rooted in biology. All humans have an innate need to feel included, accepted and valued others. This personal need for connection, social support and sharing is vital for mental well-being and our intrinsic motivation. The concept of 'connection' is a thread that runs throughout these anecdotes.

## **Curriculum Connections:**

*While opportunities may present across the curriculum this book is particularly useful for these aspects of ACARA.*

### **HPE: [Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)**

Mental health and wellbeing education focuses on strategies to maintain and enhance individual and community mental health and wellbeing.

"Research shows that high levels of mental health are associated with increased learning, creativity and productivity, more pro-social behaviour and positive social relationships, and with improved physical health and life expectancy." [Beyond Blue – What is mental health?](#)

### **[Respectful Relationships](#)**

Respectful relationships education is the holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence, inclusive of school policy, programs, practices and partnerships (Our Watch, 2021).

### **General Capabilities:**

Social and Personal Capability

Ethical Understanding

Intercultural Understanding

### **Cross-Cultural Perspectives:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History and Culture

### **Context**

This is a non-fiction text that is a collection of short biographical/anecdotal chapters, the result of firsthand interviews with the respective subjects. Although all these interviewees are now of various ages, their contribution to this book is recollection/s of overcoming the tribulations of their younger lives to achieve their present life. It is essentially a support for young people who are navigating their own teen years with the twin goals of inspiring those who are having difficulties as well as empowering others with understanding and empathy.

While it is written in 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrative, the final thoughts from each subject at the end of a chapter are in 1<sup>st</sup> person.

### **Vocabulary**

The Glossary of Terms is a useful resource for readers but there is other vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to them. The author also makes a point of explaining some terms throughout the text. There may still be words that are less familiar or used by students. Encourage them to make a note of these, perhaps for use in later activities e.g.:

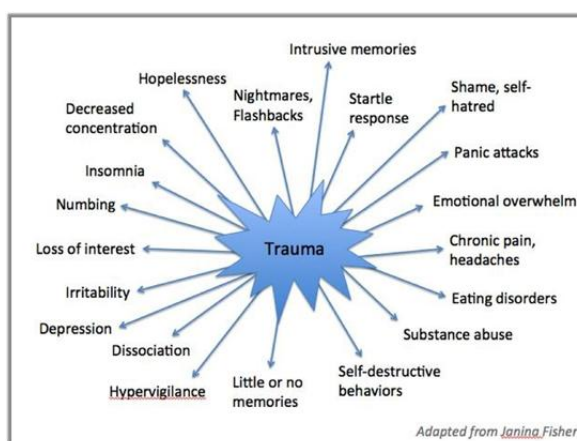
Word	My interpretation	Dictionary definition
aspirations		
neural tubes		
spiritually		
physiotherapy		

### **Reading Discussion Questions and Activities**

1. *'Every day you have a choice to work towards what you want and if you choose working towards your goal you will get there.'*  
Lola [p. 28]
  - ✓ What goals are you setting short-term, long-term? Life goals for personal and career.
  - ✓ How will you get there? What steps do you need to take?

- ✓ What's the start point? How will you measure progress?
- 2. Sarah's anxiety caused by her life experiences became a real obstacle for her. With help and support, and equine therapy, she learned how to deal with it in positive ways [p.81-89]. In what ways did it manifest and how did it impact on her?  
About 1 in 25 Australian teens experience anxiety in a 12-month period, some of it being quite crippling.
  - ✓ What strategies can teens use to manage their anxiety?  
Invite a counsellor or other expert to talk through this topic with the group.
- 3. *She realised that sometimes, when you think you're failing, changing your environment can make a big difference.* [p. 154].  
Meg's litany of illness finally culminated with being diagnosed with diabetes, which had a tremendously negative impact on her teen years. Her determination not to let her illness define her resulted in having success in both careers and her chosen sport.
  - ✓ Consider some of the changes Meg made including changing schools. Can you think of a situation where such a change has been or might be a positive step for you e.g. changing subjects or classes, or transferring to a different sports team?
- 4. Undertake some research into the various types and effects of trauma. Several of the interviewees suffered the impact of trauma. How would you define their trauma? How did it manifest itself. How were they able to overcome it?

- ✓ Consider the recognised incidence of inter-generational trauma and do some investigation into the scientific fundings and the incidence of its occurrence. You might choose to focus on First Nations Australians but there is also evidence of this in others such as descendants of Holocaust survivors or prisoners-of-war.



- ✓ Prepare an informational presentation on your chose aspect and share to peers.
- 5. Gender Identity/Fluidity: This has been and continues to be a problem for many young people who are not only discovering

their own gender preference but worried about telling parents and friends. It may be that they are gay or trans or non-binary or any one of other variations. In some cultures, such variations have been considered a regular part of life throughout history. Investigate cultures that have always openly accepted that there is no standard male/female delineation.

6. Bullying is another common thread in the text.
  - ✓ What is the group's experience with bullying?
  - ✓ What is the school's approach or support to provide a safe environment for all? Is it working?
  - ✓ What could be improved?
  - ✓ What can students do to make a difference?
7. Donna's experience as part of the Stolen Generation is not uncommon. There are several excellent films based on real life stories or documentaries that help young people to understand what happened and the ongoing effects. Choose one of these to watch [see Resources]. What is the current situation regarding those impacted by the Stolen Generations? In what ways can young people be part of change for the better?

## Activities

- Have a 'What if...' box in the classroom. Invite students to anonymously submit a problem or situation that they may have had or are having for which they could use some help or advice. Keeping these confidential as to writer, brainstorm in small groups how that person might be supported. Alternatively, use a Hot Potato strategy or digital white board to brainstorm ideas.
- Personal Anecdotes: Expand on the definition and structure of this genre and encourage the students to write an episode of their own life story.
- Douglas' story references to gender diversity as well as references to bullying or prejudice against LGBTIQ+ people which often still exists today.

Gender bias refers to the **unequal treatment or consideration of individuals based on their gender**, often stemming from deeply rooted stereotypes and unconscious attitudes. This bias can be conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit, and affects people of all gender identities, though it disproportionately impacts women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. There are politicians and 'influencers' actively promoting a diminishing of women's rights and eroding of women's role as equals in society.

- ✓ What is the experience of readers? Have they observed or experienced this?

- ✓ Do they know of current incidences where this is happening e.g. US refusal to endorse high-ranking females for promotion in the military, the 'Manosphere' influencers, the various governments actively pursuing abortion as an illegal act etc?
- ✓ How do they observe the general response to the LGBTIQ+ community? What can they do to show support and allyship for their queer peers?
- ✓ As individuals or pairs, create an awareness initiative to share this information in your school or community.
- Choose a relevant issue to research and examine in closer detail e.g. clinical depression, suicide statistics in teens, eating disorders, anxiety. Present your findings to peers.
- Invite experts to visit for information sessions e.g. school counsellor, local GP, drug & alcohol counsellors, representative from support agencies, police liaison officer. Use student input to determine the most needed of these. Follow up by disseminating information in a chosen format e.g. a slideshow for display in the foyer or library.
- How has social media impacted on mental health, particularly for young people? Investigate research and findings from various sources.
  - ✓ What are the thoughts on the social media ban?
  - ✓ Is it or will it be helpful?
  - ✓ What links are there between social media usage and mental health issues in young people?
  - ✓ Formulate a debate focus around this topic and conduct a class debate OR have a Socratic Circle discussion.
- Invite an equine therapy practitioner to visit (with a horse!) or arrange an excursion to a suitable practitioner.
- The book's back matter contains an excellent listing of various support agencies but there are still more. As individuals or pairs, allocate or choose a particular agency to research. Include in this an interview with a representative (could be either email, phone call or recording). Create a multimedia presentation. Stage an expo to share this information across the school

## Art Therapy

- Junk journalling/art concept board/collage. Invite an art teacher or other practitioner to lead a workshop to develop a personally significant item which might reflect goals or aspirations, express emotions etc.
- Create a short animation or video to highlight an aspect of the issues raised in the book. See [these examples](#) created by young people for a Moving Minds initiative.

- Arrange a visit to a First Nations art exhibition that focuses on the issues that are still impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or have a virtual visit to look at and discuss some of the statement work of artists such as [Tony Albert](#). Reflect and comment in writing on the intent and meaning of pieces that resonate.
- What issue or concern would readers use a focus for an art piece? Have them design and create their own statement work.

## **Resources:**

### **Useful Websites/Articles**

ACARA – [Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)

ACARA – [Respectful Relationships](#)

[Anecdotes: VCE Lesson Bucket](#)

[Reach Out](#)

[Overcoming Adversity](#)

[Trauma Informed Practice](#) – Mental Health Australia

[Guidelines for Working With a Trauma-informed Approach](#) - Australian Human Rights Commission

[Trauma Carried in Your DNA](#)

[Classroom teaching techniques – Socratic Circles](#)

[Mental health of adolescents](#)

[Australia's youth: Mental illness](#)

[Teenage mental health - treatments and causes](#)

[The Indigenous Origins of Gender Fluidity Around the World](#)

[Gender fluidity was never a phase. These 13 ancient cultures ...](#)

[Indigenous Perspectives, Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama](#)

### **Books (a small selection)**

#### **Fiction**

John Marsden: So Much to Tell You, Letters from the Inside [[book club notes](#)], Take My Word for It [[book club notes](#)], Checkers [[book club notes](#)], Dear Miffy [[book club notes](#)]

Patrick Ness: Different for Boys, A Monster Calls, Release, Chaos Walking Trilogy +,

John Green: Looking for Alaska, The Fault in Our Stars, Turtles All the Way Down

Siobhan Curham: The Moonlight Dreamers series, Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow

Sarah Crossan: Toffee, The Weight of Water, One, Apple & Rain

Sarah Crossan/Brian Conaghan: We Come Apart

Brian Conaghan: Cardboard Cowboys,

Malcolm Duffy: Sofa Surfer

Lauren James: The Quiet at the End of the World

Meg Rosoff: How I Live Now

Sophie Beer: Thunderhead

Lesley Parr: Fallout

### **Non-Fiction**

John Marsden: Secret Men's Business

Dr Toni Lindsay: Everything Anxiety Told You is a Lie

Archie Roach: Tell Me Why YA edition

Rebecca Sparrow: Find Your Tribe, Find Your Feet, Ask Me Anything

Dr Julie Smith: Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before?

### **Films**

[Stolen Generations](#)

[Rabbit Proof Fence](#)

[The Last Daughter](#)

[Stolen Generations | One Family's Story part 1 | ABC Australia](#)

[Stolen Generations | One Family's Story part 2 | ABC Australia](#)

[Moving Minds - youth-made films about mental health and wellbeing](#)

[Navigating Modern Adolescence: Social Media & Mental Health \(Mental Health Documentary\)](#)

[Movies for Teen & YA Mental Health](#)

## About the Book

Extraordinary Stories

Contempo Publishing

May 2026

ISBN: 97817643986

## About the Author

**Katherine Owens** is a Brisbane-based aspiring author with a passion for reconnecting young people to the power of story. A proud mum of two boys, Katherine first felt the spark to write while helping her sons learn to read, an experience that filled her with immense pride and a deep appreciation for the worlds books can open.

Determined to nurture their love of reading as they grew older, she went searching for compelling narrative non-fiction for tweens and teens, only to discover a gap in the market. So she wrote the book she wished she'd found: one that is engaging, thought-provoking, and rich with the kinds of life lessons that truly matter.

With a professional background in marketing and current studies in child and adolescent mental health, Katherine brings both insight and heart to her writing. She is particularly passionate about exploring themes of gratitude, empathy, kindness, tolerance, and understanding the lives of others beyond our own experience. Her stories are crafted not only to captivate young readers, but to gently challenge and inspire them.