

# It Sounded Better in my Head

## NINA KENWOOD

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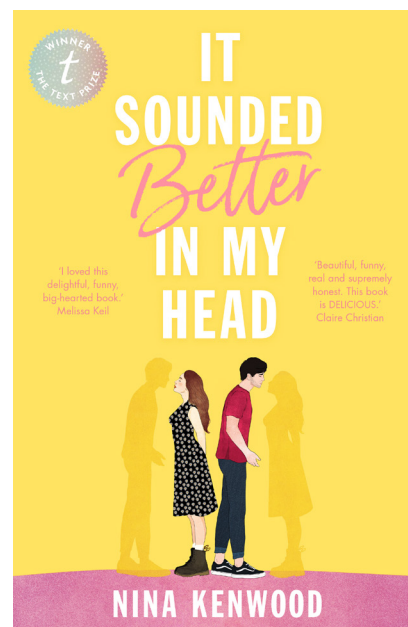
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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### CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

### SYNOPSIS

Natalie is an introvert. All her life she has battled with self-esteem issues as a result of suffering with bad acne. But things are improving: she's just graduated high school and is going to university with her two best friends Zach and Lucy.

But things get complicated when Lucy and Zach become a couple and her parents announce they are divorcing. To make things even more complicated, Zach's older brother Alex has started acting strangely around her but Natalie couldn't be his type. Could she?

*It Sounded Better in my Head* tells the story that most Australian teenagers will recognise and connect with: the uncertain, painful and exciting time between high school and university, childhood to adulthood.

Kenwood's novel is belly-achingly funny but also deeply moving. This is a story that you will want to read again and again.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nina Kenwood is a writer, who lives in Melbourne. She won the 2018 Text Prize for her debut young adult novel, *It Sounded Better in My Head*.

### BEFORE READING

1. The journey between childhood and adulthood can be difficult. Ask students to reflect on the expectations between being a child, a teenager and an adult. The expectations that students can explore could be from friends, families, teachers and broader society. After this brainstorm, ask students how they navigate these new and evolving expectations.
2. *It Sounded Better in my Head* is about friendship, love and growing up. Ask students to research the conventions of narratives and short stories, before writing their own story about how they came to meet a friend who is currently in their life.
3. Considering the title of this book, ask students to take a regular day-to-day experience, such as walking the dog or sitting in class, and narrate the story in first person. Ask them to focus on making the story more humorous through the narration.

### WHILE READING

1. 'I had to slink and manoeuvre my way through the world, trying not to be seen, touched or noticed at all.' (p. 10) Using adjectives and quotations from the novel, describe Natalie as a character.
2. 'My default assumption is that he's probably thinking something negative about me.' (p. 17) How does Natalie's pessimism hold her back?
3. 'I was boringly sensible in my choices.' (p. 23) What risks does Natalie begin to take which contrast her

earlier 'sensible' behaviour? Why is she suddenly interested in stepping outside her comfort zone?

4. 'It's in our nature to ruin things. Hey, that can be one for you, Zach—excellent at ruining things.' (p. 103) How is this 'compliment' from Natalie an example of ironic foreshadowing?
5. 'If it wasn't for my skin...everything might have been so different.' (p. 19) How have Natalie's skin problems shaped the life she has so far led? Is it reasonable to have physical differences impact us in such profound ways?
6. 'We both slot easily in the carer/being cared for roles.' (p. 119) How does this dynamic between Lucy and Natalie change throughout the novel?
7. 'Now they're out there forging new lives for themselves, I have to try to as well.' (p. 288) How does Natalie begin forging a life for herself?

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

1. 'Maybe he's the Bert and I'm actually Ernie.' (p. 283) How accurate is Natalie's perception of the world? How are her first impressions ultimately proven to be inaccurate? Use evidence from the novel to substantiate your answer.
2. 'Haven't you heard the saying opposites attract?' (p. 164) How do Natalie and Alex complement each other? Should we find romantic partners that are the opposite of ourselves?
3. 'She acted like a good person because she really was a good person.' (p. 67) How does Kenwood employ indirect characterisation to reveal the real motivations and identities of her characters?

### STYLE & STRUCTURE

1. Kenwood employs a first person narrative voice. How is this style effective in exploring the key themes in the story?
2. How does Kenwood employ irony and comedy to engage the reader? How and why are these effective literary techniques?
3. Kenwood's novel can be classified as a bildungsroman; a coming of age story. Research the conventions of this genre, before considering how each of the characters comes of age.

### THEMES

#### Insecurity

1. Throughout the novel, Natalie's skin problems are a source of frustration and are the basis of most of her insecurities. How does this aspect of her character operate as an extended metaphor in the novel?
2. Natalie and her friends experience common rites of passages for Australian teenagers; graduating year 12, receiving an ATAR before being offered a

place at university or going into full-time work. What advice can be inferred about this transitional period from the novel?

3. Despite Natalie's insecurities being the focus of the novel, the other characters also have their own weaknesses. What is Kenwood communicating about insecurities and the nature of growing up?

#### Love

1. There are several types of relationships depicted in the novel: Natalie and Alex, Zach and Lucy and even Natalie's parents. What is Kenwood suggesting is the most important thing for a healthy relationship?
2. 'A good person and a good boyfriend are different things though.' (p. 260) What does Natalie mean by this statement?
3. 'I don't think Alex is going to be your great love story, no.' (p. 179) Why does Zach believe that Natalie and Alex's relationship will fail?

#### Mental health

1. 'Things are only as big a deal as you let them be.' (p. 4) How do some of the more minor happenings in the novel get intensified through human emotion? How could the characters benefit from using more logic in their problem-solving?
2. 'You don't have to try now because you're an introvert, is what I take it to mean.' (p. 38) What is the difference between an introvert and extrovert? Which characters are introverted and which are extroverted? What challenges do each of these two personality types face?
3. 'Having a best friend was like having a protective armour, something I'd never experienced before, and something I desperately needed.' (p. 72) How do Zach and Lucy give Natalie the strength to be herself?

## RESPONDING

1. Select a scene from the novel to rewrite from Alex's perspective. Consider how he would tell the story differently from Natalie and why he would tell it in this way.
2. In a piece of personal and reflective writing, explain an insecurity that you have overcome or are working on overcoming.
3. We all have insecurities, but it's how we overcome them that defines us. Discuss with reference to the novel.
4. In her novel, Kenwood is able to capture the 'Australian' experience of growing up. Using the text and your own experiences, in an extended piece of writing, explain how the Australian 'coming of age' experience is unique.