



ZAC & MIA

A.J. BETTS

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Fiction, B paperback

RECOMMENDED AGE:
YEARS 8–10



Text's Teaching Notes for the Australian Curriculum

- ▶ Text's teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ Students can record their responses in writing through reading journals, online discussions or verbally in classroom discussions.

Strands	LA – Language LT – Literature LY – Literacy
Modes	W – Writing L – Listening R – Reading
General capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Literacy  Ethical behaviour  Intercultural understanding  Personal and social capability  Critical and creative thinking  Numeracy  Information and communication technology
Cross-curriculum priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Sustainability  Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

SYNOPSIS

Zac & Mia is a novel about life, death and love. After a series of unsuccessful treatments for leukaemia, Zac enters hospital for a bone marrow transplant and must wait out his time in isolation. Here he meets the girl on the other side of the wall. At first just a series of knocks, loud music and the occasional message on Facebook, Mia struggles with her own challenges. Zac calls her one of the lucky ones, but the question of luck is challenged throughout the novel as the two protagonists must learn to deal with their world that has been turned on its head by illness.

Told in three parts, alternating between Zac and Mia's point of view, this is a story that explores the frailty of life, death and hope. In the process of dealing with their own health struggles, Zac and Mia learn that sometimes, in order to fight a physical illness, you must first learn to win the mental battle. A moving and uplifting story that shows that even in the darkest moments of personal challenges, you are never really alone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.J. Betts is an author, teacher, speaker and cyclist. *Zac & Mia*, the winner of the Text Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing, is her third novel for young adults. Her others are *ShutterSpeed* and *Wavelength*. She lives in Perth, and writes when she's not pedalling.



BEFORE READING

1. What does it mean to be lucky? Recount a story about a time when you might have considered someone lucky, or where someone thought you were lucky when you felt differently. What defines luck? **W** **LT** (ACELT1635)
2. Other than the physical aspects of an illness, in what way do you think illness is challenging for young people? Do some research about ways that hospitals and treatment centres try to improve the lives of young patients. Share your research with your peers. **R** **LY** (ACELY1720)
3. Write and present a proposal for a program that aims to make life easier for teenagers with long-term illness who might have to spend a lot of time in hospital. After you have considered what is already available, see if you can devise something new. **W** **LY** (ACELY1751)

WHILE READING

Part 1 - Mia

1. We don't see a great deal of Mia in Part 1, but her presence is still evident. How does the writer build Mia's character? **R** **LA** (ACELA1553)
2. Why does Zac call Mia lucky? What else does that view tell us about Zac? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
3. Why do you think Mia keeps her illness a secret? Do you think she does the right thing? Consider arguments for each point of view - why she is right to keep it a secret, and why she should be honest with her friends. You could hold a class debate arguing for either side. **R S LT** (ACELT1812)
4. How is humour used in this part of the novel? **R LT** (ACELT1630)

Part 2 - Zac

1. In what way has Zac's illness changed his life? What do you think he finds particularly difficult? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
2. What makes Mia so angry with Zac? Is this anger misdirected? **R** (ACELT1627)
3. Consider what Bec's place offers Mia. In what way does this contribute to her change of attitude? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
4. The author does not immediately tell us what has happened to Mia to make her so angry. Why do you think she withholds this information and how does it alter the way we relate to Zac and Mia? **R LA** (ACELA1553)

Part 3 - Mia

1. What is the symbolism of the olive tree that Mia receives? **R LT** (ACELT1637)
2. Why do you think Zac lies about his trip to Disneyland? **R LT** (ACELT1635)

3. How does Mia change during this part of the novel? **R LT** (ACELT1627)
4. What does Mia come to realise by the end of the novel? **R LT** (ACELT1627)
5. Does the ending of the novel offer a satisfactory resolution? Explain your reasoning. **R LT** (ACELT1627)
6. Compare the passage where Mia sits outside Zac's bedroom with the earlier passages where they communicate through the wall. What purpose do these two scenes serve? **R LY** (ACELY1754)
7. Thought Mia and her mother are in conflict for much of the novel, there are parallels between them. In what ways are Mia and her mother similar? **R LY** (ACELY1744)

AFTER READING

Character

Zac

1. Is Zac an optimistic or pessimistic character? Is he consistent in this view? Find quotes from the text that support your view of Zac. **R LT** (ACELT1771)
2. What does Zac do in the novel to deal with his illness? Are these methods always successful? Consider evidence that supports your view. **R LT** (ACELT1771)
3. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses in Zac's character? In what ways do these strengths and weaknesses contribute to events in the novel? **R LY** (ACELY1744)

Mia

1. Mia and Zac are initially depicted as very different characters. Consider the similarities and differences between the two characters. Create lists of both and find evidence from the novel to highlight each point. **R LT** (ACELT1641)
2. Mia hides her illness from her friends. Why do you think she chooses to do this? In your view, does she make the right choice? Justify your response. **R LT** (ACELT1635)
3. In what way is Mia's stubbornness also an asset? **R LT** (ACELT1771)
4. It is five years after her treatment and Mia has been invited to a school reunion. She must consider whether she will reveal her story to her old friends. Write up a list of reasons for and against and justify each, considering the possible outcomes. **R W LT** (ACELT1644)

Mothers

1. The two mothers in this story have very different relationships with their children. Compare the way



that the two mothers cope with the situation they are in. 🎓 R LY (ACELY1744)

- In what way does Zac's illness alter the way that his mother sees him? 🎓 ⚙️ R LY (ACELY1744)
- Mia believes that her mother does not want her. Is she mistaken? What is the source of tension between the two characters? ⚙️ R LT (ACELT1771)

Style and Structure

- Why is it important that this story is told from two different perspectives? ⚙️ LT R LT (ACELT1771)
- How does the author give the characters their voices? Make a list of the features of Zac and Mia's different voices in the novel. Try to recreate those voices by writing some dialogue between the two characters. Consider the words they use, their tone and the way they respond to each other. ⚙️ 🎓 R W LT (ACELT1643)
- How does the writer use the physical distance between the characters to reveal their stories? 🎓 R LT (ACELT1772)
- What role does each of the three parts of the novel serve? How might our understanding of the novel be altered had we met Mia first? 🎓 ⚙️ R LT (ACELT1772)

Themes

Life and Death

- Both of the main characters are facing death in very real terms. How do they view death and in what way do these views alter their behaviour? ⚙️ R LT (ACELT1635)
- Make a list of the examples of life and death in the novel. Why is it important that both be included in this novel? ⚙️ R LT (ACELT1637)

Luck

- Zac describes Mia as one of the lucky ones. Do you agree? Which characters do you consider lucky in the novel? ⚙️ 🎓 R LT (ACELT1771)
- Is luck something you can create? Is there evidence in the novel that supports your opinion? 🎓 🎓 ⚙️ W R LT (ACELT1635)
- In what way does luck change for Zac and Mia in the novel? 🎓 R LT (ACELT1771)
- What does their belief in being lucky and unlucky imply? How does this affect the characters in Zac & Mia? 🎓 R LT (ACELT1771)

Isolation

- In what way are Zac and Mia are both physically and psychologically isolated? ⚙️ 🎓 R LT (ACELT1772)
- How do Zac and Mia attempt to overcome their isolation? ⚙️ R (ACELT1619)

- Isolation is not always a bad thing. Make a list of the positive and negative aspects of isolation in the novel. 🎓 🎓 R LT (ACELT1635)
- Look at the ways the writer uses different landscapes of isolation in the novel – rural, urban/clinical, psychological and physical. Make a list of the words that are associated with these different forms of isolation. Find other words that could be used to suggest the same thing. 🎓 ⚙️ R LT (ACELT1641)

Love and relationships

- Why do you think the relationship between Zac and Mia blossoms? ⚙️ R LT (ACELT1619)
- In what way does love prove to be the most powerful cure in Zac and Mia? ⚙️ R LT (ACELT1771)
- Consider the relationship Zac has with his siblings. Was it always the same? Has it altered as a result of his illness? Explain your answer with evidence from the text. 🎓 ⚙️ R LT (ACELT1619)
- Map the relationships in the novel. What is each one founded on and how is it affected by the events in the novel? 🎓 ⚙️ R LY (ACELY1754)

RESPONDING

- Relationships can be made or broken by traumatic events. In what way is this true of the relationships in the novel? 🎓 ⚙️ R W LT (ACELT1771)
- In times of trauma people either step up or retreat. Do you agree with this statement? Which category do the two protagonists in the novel fit into? Do they fit into one category? 🎓 ⚙️ R W LT (ACELT1635) (ACELT1771)
- Zac's mother is seen as the welcoming party for new arrivals at the hospital. She is asked to write a column for the Hospital newsletter offering advice to family members of patients. Write her first column. 🎓 ⚙️ R W LT (ACELT1644)
- Illness can bring out both the best and the worst in people. Discuss this statement in relation to the characters in Zac and Mia. 🎓 ⚙️ R W LT (ACELT1635)
- A place is as good a cure as any for our ills. Consider a place that this might apply to for you. Describe it and its healing qualities. 🎓 ⚙️ R W LT (ACELT1815)
- Physical strength alone is never enough to defeat a challenge. In what way is mental strength vital to the outcome of the novel? 🎓 ⚙️ R W LT (ACELT1635) (ACELT1771)