



Teacher's Notes for

GIVE ME FOUR REASONS

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Published by LITTLR HARE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Release Date: July 2011

RRP: \$16.95

ISBN 9781921541827

Reading Guide Ages 10-14. Please note that the recommended age range is a guide only and this book may be suitable for use outside of this recommendation.

SYNOPSIS

Paige has been best friends with Elfi and Rochelle ever since she can remember. On the last day of Primary School they make a vow to stay friends forever. But when Paige begins high school after the summer, she accidentally falls in with the popular crowd and things start to get complicated. Can Paige stay true to her old friends when her new friends don't like them? And can she stay true to herself when she isn't sure who she is anymore?

THEMES

Friendship

Belonging

Family separation

Coping with change

Self-concept and identity

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lizzie Wilcock was born in Fairfield, NSW in 1965. She is the fourth of nine children. Lizzie's first book, *Losing It* – a novel for Young Adults that deals with sexual assault, teenage drinking and other teenage social issues - was published in 2006. It was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. Her second novel, also for Young Adults, *griEVE* was published in 2007. It deals with self-harming behaviours, grief and mental illness. It was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

Lizzie's third novel, *Extinction – The Day The World Ended* was published in 2011. It is a two-part adventure/science fiction/fantasy story aimed at children aged 10 – 14. Part two, *Extinction – The Explosive Conclusion* will also be published in 2011. *Give Me Four Reasons* is Lizzie's first novel with Little Hare. Lizzie is a primary school teacher. She is married to Phil and has a four year old daughter, Isla. Lizzie lives in Newcastle, NSW, Australia.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Give Me Four Reasons is an exciting new novel set around a young girl's transition from primary school to high school, where did the idea for the story come from?

I have a friend who is a counsellor in a high school. When tossing around ideas for my new book I asked her what issues kids were having troubles with. She told me that she had been dealing with many kids, girls in particular, who were struggling with their identity and didn't know where they fitted in at high school. They had dumped their old friends in order to hang with the popular crowd and be a different person. I thought this scenario would make an interesting story.

In the story, Paige seems to struggle to fit in with either her family or her friends. Do you think this is a common problem for the kids who read your books, and why?

I know it is common, as my school counsellor friend identified it as one of the main issues she deals with. But even for kids who don't seek help from their school counsellor, I think most kids struggle at some point in time to fit in with a group – either at school, or with a sporting team or interest group. I would hope that most kids feel safe and secure within their own family environment, but as the pressures of being a teenager increase, kids feel that their parents don't understand them or are too out of touch with what they are experiencing. The pressures of modern life also mean that many parents are too busy to spend a lot of time with their kids, and some kids can feel alienated from their families.

How did you find the move from primary school to high school when you were Paige's age? Do you think it is easier or harder for kids today to make this move?

My first year of high school was awful. My group of four friends suddenly became a group of five, which meant that someone always had to sit alone in class. That someone was always me. I didn't have a long history with these friends, having only moved to the town the year before. And I was the quiet one, like Paige, so it was easy for my 'friends' to dismiss me. I became very unhappy and started playing up in class and the playground, probably in order to be noticed. It took me a while to figure out that I needed to find new friends. When I did, I was much happier.

If you had one piece of advice for kids leaving primary school and starting high school, what would it be?

High School has a larger and more varied group of kids than primary school. The friends you had in primary school may stay with you, but this is a great opportunity to make new friends. Get to know as many kids as you can. Eventually you will find kids you click with. Kids who like the same things as you. Kids who like and respect you for who you are. Don't worry about being 'popular'. Just enjoy the friends you have and be a good friend in return.

In the story, Paige seems to love spending time in the water, either in her pool, or at the beach in her home town or on holiday. Why is this? Do you love the water as much as Paige does?

Swimming is a big part of my life, particularly swimming at the beach. I go to the beach almost every day. It is part of who I am and therefore it becomes a part of my lead characters too, because each of them – Gabbie in *Losing It*, Eve in *Grieve*, Annie in *Extinction*, and Paige in *Give Me Four Reasons* – are me in some way. By writing about what I know, I can give my characters authenticity.

Do you have a favourite character in the story and why?

I really like Shelly. She's fun and daring and carefree. She says what she thinks. She accepts Paige for who she is. And the girls have such a fun holiday together. Who wouldn't like Shelly? I also really like Miff. She is nasty to Elfi and Rochelle, but she has a good heart in the end. And the astute reader will realise that Miff is probably just as scared and unsure of herself at high school as everybody else. She bathes in Sidney's glow, and Paige's, and seems to need this in order to define herself. I hope readers don't see her as a one-dimensional 'popular girl'.

Do you have a favourite part of the story and why?

I like Paige's holiday at Bloodstone Beach. She was relatively happy there, and had a friend. I like all of Paige's scenes with Jed. He is a nice boy and a true friend to Paige, and we learn later that he has a crush on her. But my absolute favourite part of the story is when Janie Harrison arrives with Paige's Passport comments and explains the mix up. Paige says, 'I stop. The world stops. I breathe. The world breathes.' I cry every time I get to that bit.

Who do you think might like to read this book? What age group do you see as the readership for this book?

I think *Give Me Four Reasons* would be a brilliant book for teachers to use with kids in their last year of junior school or their first year of high school. The readership is broader than that, however. Good readers aged from nine would love this book. And every teenage girl, and adult woman will certainly relate to Paige's story.

What would you like the readers to take away from reading about Paige and the things she goes through?

I would like readers to see that not knowing who you are is a common thing as you become a teenager. No-one really knows where they fit in, and we are constantly reinventing ourselves to cope with changes in our lives. I hope readers can laugh at Paige and see that the bulk of her problems could have been avoided simply by talking to her parents and her friends, rather than bottling everything up inside.

Do you have any tips for kids out there who would like to be writers?

Start writing now! Don't wait until you're in your thirties. And don't let the nagging voice of self-doubt stop you from sending your work off to publishers. Read widely in the genre you're interested in writing for. Know what's out there and find something the market needs. And enjoy the writing process.

Is there anything else you would like to let teachers and librarians know about this story?

The working title of this story was Track Three. The INXS song, Track Three on INXS Greatest Hits, Don't Change, came out in 1982 – the year I finished Year 12. I remember singing it and dancing to it at parties that year as we finished school. It became our unofficial anthem. It is still one of my favourite songs today.

The character of Paige is loosely based on a student I taught recently as are the other school students in the story. I am a teacher and I draw on my own experiences to help give authenticity to my characters. The rituals at Juniper Bay Junior School are also based on those of the school at which I currently teach.

QUESTIONS / COMPREHENSION

Chapter 1

1. What is a Passport? Does/did your Primary School have something like this?
2. What early indications do we have that Paige is shy and reserved?
3. How does Paige feel about finishing Junior School? Compare her feelings with those of her friends.

Chapter 2

1. Why does Paige feel invisible during the water fight?
2. Why does Paige feel 'out of step with everyone'?
3. What happens to the photo of Paige on her t-shirt when she puts on the larger size?
4. Paige says she has barely left a mark at Juniper Bay Junior School. What mark did you leave/or will you leave at Primary School? List your accomplishments.
5. Why didn't Paige's friends notice that she wasn't in the circle with them?

Chapter 3

1. Paige's group's motto is track three, "Don't Change" from an INXS song her father loves. Does your father or mother have a particular song they love that they have shared with you? Is it also one of your favourites?
2. If you had to pick a song to be a motto for your group of friends, what would it be and why?
3. Why do you think Paige's mother forgot about their planned tea party?

Chapter 4

1. Compare Paige's relationship with her father with the one she has with her mother. Describe your own relationship with both your parents. Who "gets you" more?
2. How is Paige's father's advice contrary to her new motto with her friends?

Chapter 5

1. What does Paige do to ensure she is noticed by her friends at her pool party? How do they react to her?
2. Paige has a collection of teddy bears that tell the story of her life. Do you have a collection that tells the story of your life, or of a time in your life? Describe your collection.
3. What is Paige's Christmas gift to Elfi? What does a gift like this show us about Paige?
4. Why do you think there are only three comments in Paige's Passport?
5. Write Passport-type comments about two of the kids in your class.
6. Write one Passport-type comment that you would like to see/have seen in your own Passport or yearbook when you finish/finished Primary School.

Chapter 6

1. Does Paige's sister, Felicity, cheer Paige up?
2. Paige's father says, "All good things come to an end, Paige." What do you think he might be referring to?
3. Paige throws three dried up seed pods at Elfi's window. It is their secret signal. Do you have a secret signal or ritual you do with a best friend? Describe it.

Chapter 7

1. Why does Paige betray her sister's confidence, and the boy Justin's at Felicity's pool party?
2. What is Paige's reaction to her father's announcement that he is leaving?

Chapter 8

1. Why does Paige feel additional hurt as she watches her father walk out the door?
2. Why does Paige take meal trays into her mother and sister?
3. Why does Paige feel responsible for her father leaving?

Chapter 9

1. Compare Felicity and Paige's actions when they arrive at the caravan park. What does this tell us about their different personalities?
2. Paige laughs because Shelly looks "like something that just washed up on the beach." Does your name suit you? If not, what would be a more appropriate name for you?
3. Why does Paige think that Shelly won't want to hang around with her?

Chapter 10

1. Why do you think Mum looks annoyed when Paige tells her that Dad might be coming to Bloodstone Beach?
2. Paige is having difficulty telling her mother and mother the truth about the pool party – how she caused the fight. Have you ever done something that you couldn't bring yourself to tell your parents? What was it and how did things work out in the end?

Chapter 11

1. The woman who answers Paige's father's phone could be anyone. Make a list of all the possible explanations of who she is.
2. Many people believe in astrology and fortune telling, whilst others think it is rubbish. What do you think? Has anyone you know ever had their fortune told and has any of it come true?

Chapter 12

1. Why does Paige "want to stay in this water all day, every day, until forever"?
2. Shelly gives Paige a necklace made from the bloodstone she found and says, "Now we're bloodstone sisters." Have you ever given a special gift to or done something with a best friend that indicates you are "blood sisters" or "blood brothers"?

Chapter 13

1. Why didn't Paige tell her friends about her father leaving?
2. As Paige walks past the mirror she notices for the first time how her body and face have changed? What are the reasons for these changes?
3. Why do you think Paige and her friends decided on "the cockroach hole" to be their special place? Do you and your friends have a special place that you hang out? Describe it.
4. Before, Paige didn't mind when she missed her turn in the Give Me Four Reasons game, but now she is annoyed. Why?

Chapter 14

1. Why does Paige tell her class that she spent a month a juvie?
2. Have you ever said anything in front of your class or a large group that you wish you had never said?

Chapter 15

1. Sidney and her friends believe that Paige is someone different from who she really is. Make a list of the things they think Paige is or has done.
2. Why doesn't Paige correct these misconceptions?

Chapter 16

1. Do you think it will be possible for Paige to be popular and keep her old friends? Why?
2. Paige accidentally fell in with the popular crowd. Do you have a "popular" group at school? Do you have other groups too? What are they? What group do you belong to? Can you belong to more than one group?

Chapter 17

1. Why doesn't Paige wear the new skirt that her mother spent hours taking in?
2. What do you think Elfi's mother says (in German) about Paige?
3. Paige's new friends and old friends meet for the first time and the meeting does not go well. Who do you think is to blame here? Why?
4. Why does Paige feel she doesn't have anything interesting to add to the conversations going on in the quadrangle?
5. How does Paige justify to herself the telling of the lie about ripping her school skirt? Have you ever justified something to yourself like this?

Chapter 18

1. Do you think Elfi and Rochelle, Paige's oldest and dearest friends, are being fair when they ask Paige to choose between them and her new friends? Who do you think Elfi and Rochelle expect Paige to choose?
2. If you were asked to make a choice between new friends who are in your classes, and old friends whom you have a history with, who do you think you'd choose? Why?
3. Miff uses the analogy of animals at an African waterhole to describe the different groups at high school. How true do you think this is? Can you think of another way to describe the groupings?

Chapter 19

1. Paige thinks of Shelly and says she was neither a new friend nor an old friend, but a holiday friend, and wonders if these are the best kind. What do you think? Have you ever had a holiday friend? How was this friendship different from your other friendships?
2. We see a different side of Miff in this chapter. What is it?
3. Paige and Felicity are vastly different. Felicity airs all of her thoughts whilst Paige bottles them up inside. Who are you most like? Paige or Felicity?
4. Cindy magazine made Paige realise how "uncool" she was. Do you buy magazines like these? Which ones? Do you follow their advice on beauty and fashion?

Chapter 20

1. We get a glimpse into the real Sidney in this chapter. Do you think her life is as wonderful as she makes out? Why or why not?
2. Jed and Paige both have different interpretations of their motto, Don't Change. How did you interpret this motto when you first read it?

Chapter 21

1. Paige follows Cindy magazine's "Cool for School" checklist. Write your own checklist of what you do to get ready in the mornings for school.
2. Elfi and Rochelle are not very nice to Paige in this chapter. Have you ever had a falling out with your best friend(s)? What did they do? How did you feel? How did everything turn out in the end?
3. Paige inadvertently names her tent group I Don't Care. What have been some of the names of tent or cabin groups that you've had on school camps? Who came up with the name? Did it describe your group appropriately?

Chapter 22

1. Paige is suddenly embarrassed about her mother's car. Have you ever been so embarrassed by something or someone in your family that you disassociate yourself from it or them? Explain.
2. Does the back seat of the bus hold such significance for you? Have you ever sat in it? How did it make you feel?
3. Sidney and Paige really bond in this chapter. Why do you think they do?

Chapter 23

1. Paige does a lot of things in this chapter that she would never dream of doing before. Why?

Chapter 24

1. Do you think it is fair that Paige is sent home from camp? Why or why not? What alternative punishments could she have been given?
2. Paige lashes out at her father for the first time in this chapter. She says, "maybe being unreliable and quitting before things are over runs in the family." Why do you think she says this now?

Chapter 25

1. Why does Paige intentionally kick the garbage bin outside Mrs McKenna's office?
2. What was Flynn James implying to Paige? Do you think others would have viewed Paige's actions during Spin the Bottle like this?
3. Paige's new friends set her up for a fall in the netball game so they can see if that she has been lying to them. Do you think they could have done this in a different way? Would Paige have been honest with them if they had just openly asked her?

Chapter 26

1. Do you think Paige really expects Elfi and Rochelle to suddenly forgive her? If not, why do you really think she went over to Elfi's house?
2. Why do you think Elfi and Rochelle are so unforgiving? If you were in their situation and had been dissed by a friend who suddenly found new friends, would you be forgiving?
3. Although a short chapter, this one is pivotal. Why? (Because Paige is abandoned here by all of her family members too).

Chapter 27

1. Paige can't buy a bus ticket without I.D or a signed form. Do you think this is fair? What other laws or systems are in place to ensure the safety of minors?
2. What are the teenagers doing in the park?
3. Why do you think a police car is patrolling Paige's neighbourhood?
4. Why is Paige so quick to assume its Reuben's car parked outside her house?

Chapter 28

1. Paige runs to "the place I run to when I'm not running away." Mrs Johannssen's cubbyhouse. Do you have a place you go when you want to be alone? Where it is? Does anyone else know about it? When have you gone there?

Chapter 29

1. Why doesn't Paige just go home when she wakes up the next morning?
2. Give Me Four Reasons (or more) why Paige is locked in a public toilet.

Chapter 30

1. How do you think Paige feels when she sees the newspaper story about herself?
2. Paige has a major epiphany in this chapter. What is it?
3. Do you think Paige would have gone home of her accord if the police had not found her?

Chapter 31

1. What do you think Paige is feeling as she steps out of the police car at her home?
2. What does the pendant Shelly gave Paige really mean?
3. What strange new sensation does Paige feel after receiving Jed's card?
4. What four reasons would Paige come up with for never running away?
5. We learn why Sidney was drawn to Paige in this chapter. What is the reason?
6. Do you think the lions will ever become friends with the warthogs?

Chapter 32

1. What indications do we have in this chapter that Paige is beginning to grow up?
2. What do you think some of the comments for Paige in her Passport may have said? Write two or three from classmates from Juniper Bay Junior School.
3. After everything that Paige has been through, we still see her caring nature in the exchange with Janie Harrison. What does Paige say that demonstrates this?

ACTIVITIES AND FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Before she found her empty Passport, do you think Paige was happy with who she was? Do you think she would she have continued living her life, being shy and invisible?
2. Why do you think Paige was so blind to her mother's blossoming romance with Reuben but was so quick to jump to the wrong conclusions about her father and Chloe?
3. How do you think things would have worked out if Paige had got on a bus to Bloodstone Beach?
4. Paige's life is in freefall after she discovers her empty Passport. Make a list of all the things that go wrong for her. What could she have done to prevent much of this from happening?
5. Jed remains Paige's friend throughout the novel. Why?
6. Paige, Elfi, Rochelle and Jed have many rituals in their friendship – the hand sandwich, the Give Me Four Reasons game, the scratchy seed pods being thrown at the window. Why are rituals like these important in a friendship? Do your friendships contain any rituals?
7. Paige inadvertently reinvents herself when she goes to high school. If you were to reinvent yourself, what would you change about your appearance, your skills, your personality, your homelife?
8. Do you think Elfi and Rochelle are fair in their treatment of Paige when she chooses Sidney and Miff over them?
9. Paige and Felicity are sisters but have totally different personalities and thus different ways of coping with change. Discuss these differences. How would the story be different if Felicity had been the main character?
10. One of the central themes of the novel is loss of identity. Have you ever felt that you don't know who you really are? When? Why? What did you do to get things back on track? Write 3 pages on something you have experienced about identity.
11. "Changes are good," Paige's father says. How did the upheavals and changes in the novel result in greater happiness for Paige? For her father? For her mother?