

Teacher's Notes



THE BOY MAEVE

Written by Kai Ash

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

These notes may be reproduced for use within schools free of charge, but not offered in any part for commercial sale.

Copyright © Hardie Grant Children's Publishing 2026.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Young adult readers (ages 12-15, grades 7+)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - Empathy (level 5)
 - Relational awareness (level 5)
 - Understanding texts (level 7)

THEMES

- Trans and queer identity
- Self-acceptance
- Adopted & biological families
- Gaelic mythology
- Coming out

SYNOPSIS

**He only knows two things for sure:
his name is Maeve and he's a boy.**

It's 2002, and fourteen-year-old Maeve – an adopted, closeted trans boy – is facing another lonely year at school. At least he's got Jeremy, his lifelong imaginary friend, for company. But even Jeremy, in all their wild wisdom, can't explain the weird things that are happening to Maeve.

Like why Maeve's hair spontaneously changes colour overnight. Or how Maeve knows his granny Beattie is dead, long before anyone can confirm it. Or why a stranger's voice sounds uncannily familiar ...

Maeve is full of questions – about his birth family and adoption, about Beattie and Jeremy, and about himself. But the answers are out of this world ... and Maeve may have to give up everything he's ever known to discover the truth.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kai Ash was raised in Yuggera country (Brisbane region, Queensland), where he grew up amid bush-covered ranges. Once he was old enough, he set off to explore the world: Czechia, Palestine, Israel, New Zealand, Spain and Scotland. He studied gender, language, law and psychology before returning home again. Kai's work has been shortlisted in The Ampersand Prize, Adaptable, Lane Cove Literary Awards and Melbourne Lord Mayor's Creative Writing Awards, and he was a mentee in the CA/ASA Award Mentorship Program. *The Boy Maeve* is his first published novel.

THEMES

Identity is a core theme of the novel, as Maeve tries to make people accept his gender identity and as he grapples with his possible fey identity. Discuss the way that the stories of the fey are used as an extended metaphor for the challenges Maeve is facing in his immediate family.

In the acknowledgements of the book, the author says 'to Maeve's readers. I hope you got something out of this story about a boy who managed to find a place for himself in this world without having to escape to the other.' What do you think he is trying to express about identity here and in the story?

Use the following questions to explore this theme:

- How does Maeve describe himself?
- How is he described by others?
- What are some of the challenges he faces in sharing his true identity?
- How does he feel when others recognise and accept him for who he really is?
- Why do some people have trouble recognising and accepting him?
- What would you say to these people?

Maeve has a few strong ideas about what it means to be a boy and how boys should act. For example: 'Luckily, he was a boy, and boys didn't care about silly things like hair, or not having hair, so it didn't bother him.' (p141) What are some other examples? Do you think he's right?

WRITING STYLE

Foreshadowing is a literary device that hints or points towards a future event. Details that foreshadow this event come to have greater significance in hindsight. Think of them like breadcrumbs, scattered through a story so that when the reader reaches a significant event they have that 'aha!' moment of seeing how all the pieces come together.

As you read, try to collect these breadcrumbs – make a list of details that seem to point towards something significant. What do you think they mean?

Read more about foreshadowing here: <https://kidlit.com/foreshadowing-definition/>



WRITING EXERCISE

Have a go. Write a short paragraph in which you're at a party with a group of friends, and a stranger arrives. The stranger has a secret. Write a description of their arrival that foreshadows the secret and its significance. Swap your story with a partner – can they guess what revelation your foreshadowing points towards?

COMPREHENSION

- What is the significance of the three names Death draws out of Beattie in the prologue?
- What's your first impression of Maeve? How would you describe him at the beginning of the novel? (Come back and reflect on this once you've finished – how does he change?)
- What are the first hints that Maeve is different?
- Who is Jeremy? What role do they play in Maeve's life?
- Who is Maeve's namesake?
- Why does Beattie hide Maeve's identity from him? Do you think she's right to keep the truth of their relationship a secret?
- What are some of the questions Maeve keeps on a list in his pocket?
- What is the significance of Mahmoud's friendship with Maeve?
- There were three provisions in the agreement between humans and fey (p76–77). Does Maeve find out what they were? Why/why not? Who breaks the agreement?
- Would you describe Jeremy as good, bad or morally ambiguous? Explain your choice with examples from the novel.
- Why does Maeve get so angry at Mahmoud for teasing him about being British? What's he really angry about?
- What's the difference between adopted families, biological families and chosen families? What do you think Maeve learns about families in the novel?
- Mahmoud asks Maeve if he trusts Jeremy (p112). Do you think Jeremy can be trusted? Why/why not? Does anything happen to change your mind? Who can Maeve trust?
- What is Maeve's deepest fear? Does the ending of the novel resolve this? How?

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. This novel brings together two genres – realism and fantasy – to tell a story about identity and belonging. In three short sentences, describe your identity – how do you want the world to see you? Write a short, realistic scene that captures a time when you've struggled to make others see you in this way. Now choose a second genre (e.g. horror, sci-fi, western,



romance, fantasy, speculative, dystopia). How might you rewrite your story into this genre? What does this genre allow you to express about your identity that realism doesn't? Write the scene in your new genre.

2. Read *Euphoria Kids* by Alison Evans. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two novels, particularly in the way they use speculative fiction to explore themes of family, identity and belonging. Write a short essay in response to the following prompt: fantasy gives writers the freedom to express the truth of who they are more than realism. Discuss.
3. What do you think will happen next? Write a chapter from the story set six months after the final chapter in the book.
4. *'Yesterday, his hair had been brown. Not dark brown, like most of his family's, or even medium brown, like Mum's, but still brown. Near enough to pretend it was proper Williams' hair, if he didn't look too closely, and he never did. Now, though? It was orange. Somehow, overnight, he'd become a redhead, a ranga, a carrot top, a ginger. He reached up to touch it. Taking hold of a single strand, he plucked it from his scalp and stared. The vibrant red-orange colour ran right to the roots.'* (p13–14).

Throughout the book, Maeve is told how to look and who to be by those around him, when all he really wants is the freedom to be himself. Draw a picture of Maeve as he'd like to be seen, based on the moments in the book where he feels the most himself.

RELATED READING

Sea Hearts

By Margo Lanagan

Euphoria Kids

By Alison Evans

The Witch Boy Trilogy

By Molly Knox Ostertag

A Hunger for Thorns

By Lili Wilkinson

An Unexpected Party

By Seth Malacari (ed.)

