



Leaving Jetty Road by Rebecca Burton

Teaching Notes written by Christine Sarandis

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Author Profile

Rebecca Burton has lived within walking distance of various South Australian beaches for much of her adult life. Over the years, she has dabbled in vegetarianism, overseas travel and full-time employment; but she is now happily settled in a life made up partly of work and partly of writing. She lives with her partner, Wayne, and their two dogs. In her spare time, she loves baking cakes, drinking endless cups of tea, growing Trees for Life and (of course) eating broccoli.

Synopsis

Leaving Jetty Road is a compelling coming-of-age story about three friends, Nat, Lise and Sofia. When the three girls make a joint New Year's resolution to 'go vegetarian for a year' none of them foresees the changes that will occur in their lives during that year.

While Nat and Sofia meet boys and fall in love, Lise immerses herself in long hours of study. She hopes this preparation will help her overcome the panic attacks she experienced in Year 11. She also discovers – to her delight – that the vegetarianism that they have pledged has resulted in something she has always longed for: weight loss.

As the year progresses and the end-of-year exams loom, the three girls experience various ups and downs: Nat's relationship breaks down, while Sofia's thrives, and Lise struggles with an eating disorder that could threaten her life.

It is during the aftermath of these events that Nat and Lise must come to terms with their lives. Although their experiences are different, they discover a new optimism for life.

Ages 13+

***Leaving Jetty Road* is the winner of a Varuna Award. It was also named as a Notable Book for Older Readers in the Children's Book Council of Australia awards, 2005.**

These teaching notes are divided into the following 8 sections.

- Information for Teachers
- Suggested Usage
- General Questions
- Individual Character Studies
- Thematic Activities
- Afterword
- Further Reading
- Web Addresses

Information for Teachers

An interesting observation has been made by staff at an Eating Disorders organisation – apparently, students who are exposed to too much familiarity with eating disorders through projects focussing on the *symptoms* of eating disorders, actually have an INCREASED likelihood of developing an eating disorder.

Self-esteem: Self-esteem describes the values, beliefs and attitudes we have towards ourselves. It reflects the overall opinion we have about ourselves. Our opinion may be positive or it may be negative. Healthy self-esteem is about accepting ourselves for who we are, the way we are.

For some people their self-esteem may be fragile and easily affected by everyday events such as poor school results or performance in sports. These people fall into the trap of mixing up who they are with what they do, instead of valuing themselves for their own unique contribution to the world.

Low Self-esteem: Most people know when their self-esteem is low. That little voice inside their head will probably be saying things like, "I'm no good", "I'm worthless" or "I'm useless". Low self-esteem impacts on every area of your life including your study, your work, your personal relationships and your emotional state, and it can set you up to behave in self-defeating ways.

At the heart of low self-esteem lie the negative beliefs people have about themselves. They accept these beliefs as fact instead of treating them as unhelpful opinions. Put simply, if people's experiences have generally been positive, then their beliefs about themselves are likely to be equally positive, but if their experiences have been generally negative, then their beliefs about themselves are likely to be equally negative.

While people can't do anything to change the past, what they can do is become more aware of self-critical thoughts that help to keep low self-esteem going. Having a poor opinion of their ability or appearance just means that they are hooked into unhelpful thought patterns which lead them to think about themselves negatively.

The most common thinking traps that people with low self-esteem fall into include:

- Jumping to negative conclusions
- Setting unachievable standards
- Black and white thinking
- Losing perspective
- Discounting the positive

Self-esteem-building habits that can be used daily include:

- Rewarding yourself
- Stop comparing yourself to others
- Laughing more
- Taking care of yourself
- Doing something for someone else
- Keeping a diary of all the good things you notice about yourself

Low self-esteem can often be part of a larger problem. In some cases, discussing these problems with a counsellor could be very helpful.

SOURCE: http://www.counselling.qut.edu.au/selfhelp/students/self_esteem.jsp?view=print

Suggested Usage

These teaching notes could be used in a number of different ways: students could choose three or four questions from throughout the notes and then share their answers via class presentations; or teachers may divide the students into groups and questions could be allocated to avoid doubling up. However, to generate class discussion, it may be useful to allow students to work on some of the same questions in order to gauge their different responses.

General Questions

1. Below are some character statements about Lise, Nat and Sofe. After reading them, use Nat's idea of *swimmers* and *drifters* to classify and describe yourself, taking into consideration your aspirations, your way of tackling problems and your general way of approaching life.

It might help to ask a friend to describe you and then you could do the same for them.

How does your friend's description of you differ from your own? Do you agree with their description?

Lise – quiet, shy solitary, determined – when she sets a goal, she goes out to achieve it, no matter what it takes – she's a swimmer, through and through.

Sofia – also a swimmer like Lise but in a completely different way; she’s more of a happy-go-lucky, anything-goes kind of person. She follows nobody’s rules but her own; she strikes out in her own direction and never looks back.

Nat – the ultimate drifter; decision making is hard work; she’s just floating through life.

2. Discuss the book’s title and the origins of its meaning?
3. What is the setting of the story and how important is it?
4. Briefly outline the plot in your own words.
5. Explore the way in which we are exposed to Nat and Lise’s thoughts through the use of their separate voices in the novel.
6. Why do you think the author employs this technique?
7. In your view, is it successful, and if so, in what way does it enhance the reader’s understanding of the characters?
8. Compare and contrast the girls’ family lives and comment on how the differences might impact on each girl’s self-image or the degree to which they experience a sense of self-worth?
9. Discuss the girls’ situations and plans at the end of the story. Were you surprised by their different outcomes and directions? Explain.

Individual Character Studies

LISE

Her Personality

1. After agreeing to go vegetarian, Nat and her friends go to a café where the conversation becomes very personal. (See pp. 17-18):

Read the passage below and then answer the following questions.

‘If there was one thing you could change about yourself,’ Lise says, ‘what would it be?’
‘Lots of stuff,’ I say, without giving it too much thought. ‘What about you?’
She doesn’t answer. For ages, she doesn’t answer. She creases an unused sugar packet on the café table into tiny, deliberate folds, and then unfolds it again. Then she says, quietly, ‘I’d change everything.’
‘Everything?’ I echo.
She nods. ‘My clothes. My body. My self.’

Why do you think Lise makes this comment and what does she really mean?

Where might Lise's feelings of dissatisfaction originate?

Do these feelings have something to do with what other people say to Lise, the conclusions she makes from her own observations and reading, or her self-talk?

2. Make a list of the warning signs and symptoms that led to Lise's illness.

E.g.

- going vegetarian
- going vegan
- cutting out cappuccinos and ice-cream
- taking up jogging
- experiencing *'the Fear'*
- only eating wheat once a day
- feeling guilty about everything
- excessive studying
- walking home instead of catching the bus
- cessation of her period
- distorted self-image (even when she's thin, she still truly believes she is fat)

Also, read the list of warning signs for anorexia nervosa found at www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/thin/resources.html and compare these with what Lise experienced.

3. Lise doesn't see herself as 'normal'. She thinks there are rules about being a girl that she doesn't understand. (See pp.104 for a list of Lise's rules.) Discuss.
4. As her illness intensifies, Lise starts to add more and more rules to her life. Where does she get her information and why do you think she accepts these rules as fact? Do you think most people believe what they read in magazines and if so, why?
5. Lise spends a lot of her time weighing up all her negative personal attributes (See pp. 82-84). How might things have differed if she'd looked at herself positively?
6. During a History test, Lise has a panic attack and even though she studies obsessively, ultimately she fails her year. (See pp. 85-88) Find out about panic attacks – their symptoms, causes and possible treatments.
7. As Lise starts to lose weight, people begin to compliment her. How does she interpret these compliments? Is her interpretation reasonable?
8. When Lise really lets her thoughts go, they are full of hunger, longing and guilt. And even when she hits her target weight of forty kilos, she's still unhappy and sets her sights on a lower goal. Discuss. (Also see the section of these notes on Jessica Fuller.)
9. Amidst Lise's confusion and worry, the one thing she feels sure of is her decreasing weight. As her judgement becomes unreliable, Lise's hunger seems to be the least of her problems. She begins to see fat people everywhere and finds herself repulsed. Discuss, in light of what you have read about anorexia nervosa.

Her Family Relationships

1. Lise has a habit of comparing herself with her sister, Terri. Discuss. (See pp. 70-71, 75, 87, 96-97)
2. Mixed message about body-image come from Lise's mother – at first she praises Lise for losing weight and then she tries to push her to eat. What is it about Lise's mother and her own attitudes to food and her body that might have left an impression on Lise? How effectively does Lise absorb these impressions?
3. How would you describe Lise's father and his lack of involvement with Lise? Despite the fact that he's a doctor, he doesn't appear to recognise Lise's growing problems.
4. After Nat's mother contacts Lise's parents with her concerns about Lise, Lise makes a bargain with her parents; she agrees to eat a piece of cake every afternoon after school if they promise not to call in a doctor. Why do you think her parents agree to this?

Her Relationship with Nat

1. Why don't Nat and Lise tell each other what they're really thinking? If they had, could it have changed the course of Lise's illness?
2. Why did Lise feel 'safe' (See pp. 80) in her friendship with Nat before Sofe entered their lives in Year 11?
3. Towards the end of the novel when Lise rings Nat, she admits that she needs help and that she's going into hospital. Nat hears hope in Lise's voice and feels reassured about her friend. Discuss.

Her Relationship with Sofe

1. Lise believes people don't like her and this is reinforced when Sofe arrives on the scene. Under these circumstances, Lise believes her friendship with Nat won't last. Why?
2. Why do you think Lise rarely reacts to Sofe's blunt comments?

Her Relationship with Jessica Fuller

1. (See pp 203) Jessica Fuller hunts Lise out and tells her "It doesn't matter how *thin* you get, you know ... Trust me. The way you feel about yourself – it doesn't change. It just *doesn't*. You *still* don't feel like an okay person. You never do."
2. What impact do Jessica's admissions have on Lise and how does Lise react to Jessica's honesty?
3. Which phrase on pp. 204 confirms Jessica's acknowledgement of Lise's eating disorder? Discuss.

NAT

Her Relationship with Lise

1. Nat first notices that Lise has actually lost a lot of weight while they are out clothes shopping (See pp 127-128, 133). This is the first time she realises there is really something wrong with Lise. Discuss Nat's personal thoughts at this stage.
2. Another awkward situation between the girls occurs when Nat makes a cake for Lise's birthday. She especially makes a vegan chocolate cake and even still, Lise avoids eating it. (See Chapter 19) Discuss.
3. Do you think Nat was a good friend to Lise? Explain.
4. At the end of the novel, Nat realises that everything changed after she and her friends made their New Year's resolution. How seriously do you think most people take their New Year resolutions?
5. How did Nat's relationship with Josh impact upon her friendship with Lise?

Her Family Life

1. Nat's relationship with her own mother is restrained by the intimacy between her mother and Lise. Discuss. Do you have a relationship with a girlfriend's mother, and if so, why might it be easier to talk to someone outside your immediate family?
2. Why does Nat want her mum to intervene when it is clear Lise is very ill?

Her Relationship with Josh

1. Nat's growing relationship with Josh impacts upon her friendships. Discuss.
2. Nat is often uncertain in her relationship with Josh and feels much less confident than he does. What differences in their personalities might impact on the stability of their relationship?
3. Initially, Nat is unresolved about her readiness for intimacy with Josh. Discuss.
4. How is Nat affected by Josh's infidelity? What makes this situation ironic given Josh's own family problems in the past?

SOFIA

Her Personality

1. Sofe has a very direct and honest manner with people. Her honesty is often confronting and yet there is an element of this honesty in dealing with Lise that might actually help. Discuss.
2. Describe Sofe in your own words.

Her Relationship with Lise

1. How would you describe Sofe's relationship with Lise?
2. Is her confrontational style effective?
3. Nat believes Sofe is always getting "stuck into Lise". How do Lise and Nat deal with these confrontational attacks in their different ways?

4. When Sofe is suspended just before Swot Vac, she says to Lise (See pp 182), "Oy. You. Eat." How do you think you would react if someone said this to you? If Lise had actually reacted here, what might she have said?

JOSH

His Personality and Family

1. Reread the descriptions of Josh on pp. 23-24, 34-36, 38-41. Write a brief description of him in your own words.
2. Josh has a passion for cooking and has left school to start his apprenticeship. Josh says to Nat on pp. 40, "Cooking for people makes them feel good. Everyone likes food, right?"
3. How does this opinion compare with the way Lise sees and feels about food?
4. Read about Josh's family and his personality – pp. 61-64, 56, 58. What is the one thing that Josh seems angry about in relation to his family?

His Relationship with Nat

1. At first, Josh seems very warm and loving towards Nat. How would you describe their relationship?
2. As the exams loom for Nat, she sees less and less of Josh. Make a list of the reasons Josh and Julie may have drifted back together.
3. How would you describe his infidelity with Julie while Nat is preoccupied with her studies?
4. Comment on Nat's strategy of confronting Josh about Julie. What would you do under these circumstances?

Thematic Activities

1. Using some of the sources in the information for teachers and the links to web addresses at the end of the teaching notes, students work in small groups to research and present a report on issues related to self-esteem, presenting some symptoms of low self-esteem as well as some practical ways of overcoming them. The report or presentation might be in the form of a play, a debate, a PowerPoint presentation, an activity designed for their peers or an artistic representation of their findings and feelings.
2. Make two comparative collages using words and pictures to show the way in which negative or positive self-talk can interfere with people's everyday lives.
3. Share something you enjoy doing with the class, even if you are not "perfect" at it. For example, you might do a cooking demonstration or teach a new skill.
4. Write an article for the school newsletter entitled: 'The person within – my life as me'.
5. Discuss the following positive affirmations and debate the way in which they may help to enhance self-esteem:
"I am a worthy person and I deserve all the good things that enter my life."
"We are all perfect in our imperfect human way."
"I can achieve my goals."
"Today I have done things to the best of my ability."
"I love and accept myself for who I am."

6. Try describing your friends without referring to their appearance.
7. Write a letter to the editor of a women's magazine telling them what, in your view, readers want in the form of role models and health information and advice.
8. Look at the following statements and then choose one or two to discuss; or write about whether you think they are true or false. Explain.
 - Dieting doesn't work.
 - Exercise should be fun.
 - Girls who are thin and blonde have more fun.
 - There are millions of different body shapes.
 - The girls I know like their bodies.
 - Girls are not attracted to fat boys.
 - Girls/Women do not need to eat as much as boys/men.
9. Place a photo of yourself in the centre of a large sheet of paper and then write down all the things which create pressures affecting how you think about yourself. Discuss the pressures.
10. Using magazine cuttings, groups create collages which suggest different views of food covering topics such as: food as sin, food as comfort and food as a reward.
11. List your exercise for one day. What exercise is fun to do with friends?
12. In relation to body types, what is normal and who defines it?
13. Looking through magazines, on television and in films, you will usually only see one type of body represented. Where might you find more representative samples of body shapes and sizes?
14. Make a list of things to say to people (without being rude) who always make comments about other people's appearance.
15. Debate the following statements:
 - No pain, no gain.
 - Fashion is a grim business.
 - Feeling good is better than looking good.
 - Advertising lies.
16. Look at women's and fashion magazines and cut out as many articles as you can on dieting. Discuss these diets and compare and contrast the advice given in each of them. In your opinion, how useful are they?
17. Research the ways in which images of people in magazines are digitally enhanced to create the perfect look. Why do you think we are so affected by these images even though we know that they are unreal?

Afterword

Read the section at the back of the novel by Professor Patricia McVeagh, Sydney Hospital Eating Disorder Unit. Discuss.

Further Reading

For a detailed booklist on eating disorders go to:
<http://www.lfpl.org/teenpages/booklists/eating.htm>

Non Fiction

If Not Dieting, What Next by Dr Rick Kausmann
Real Gorgeous by Kaz Cook

Autobiography

Eli's Wings by Elisabeth Best

Websites

For information about eating disorders:
www.eda.org.au/documents/start.html

www.communitywebs.org/EDASA/

www.nevdgp.org.au/geninf/std_misc/Anorexia_Bulimia_Foundation.htm

www.health.nsw.gov.au/topics/anorexia.html

For information about panic attacks:

www.anxietyaustralia.com.au/anxiety_disorders/panic_disorder.shtml

Other sites of interest:

www.ifnotdieting.com.au/cpa/htm/htm_home.asp

www.kazcooke.com/books/bk.html

www.girl.com.au/selfesteem.htm

www.therapeuticresources.com/2639sample.html