

THE NOT-SO GREAT ESCAPE



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Teacher Resources

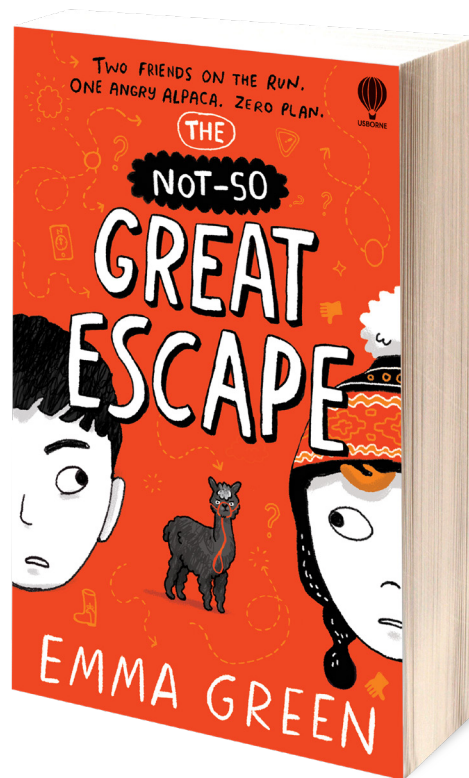
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Book Cover Clues

Put the book cover onto the screen and ask your students the following questions to discuss as a class.



- What's your first impression of the cover? What stands out most, and why?
- How do the characters on the cover appear? What are they doing? What does that signal about their relationship with each other?
- What other symbols or icons do you see on the cover? Why do you think they might be important?
- What do you expect will happen in this story?
- Does the cover remind you of any other book, film, or story you know?

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Extract Focus: Meeting Hedley

Read the extract taken from Chapter One.

Anyway, before he left us, the police officer gave me some advice.

“Keep your head down and things will get easier.”

So, I turned the words into something spiky and hard which squished up the scream inside me, covered it tightly and promised never to let it go.

And I’m still keeping my head down even now, one year later. Well, the real truth is I’m being forced to do it by my roommate, Aiden. That is because he’s currently holding me upside down, while he tries to simultaneously punch and fart in my face.

He’s actually doing quite well.

I suppose the word roommate is wrong on all accounts. Firstly, as you can see, we’re not really mates. Secondly, we both only stay at Bridlebank Therapy Activities Centre from Friday night through to Sunday, and that’s only because, apparently, we both need help with our emotions and things; and thirdly me and Aiden don’t exactly “share” the room. In fact, when I first stayed at the Guff Cave (as I call it), Aiden drew a line (literally with a great big marker pen) in a small corner and piled all my stuff behind it. Since then, I’ve been under strict threat of a front wedgie to not even breathe outside of the pen line on my visits, which actually isn’t as difficult as it sounds because there is always a strong smell of eggy fart coming from Aiden’s bed.

Another reason Aiden is a terrible roommate is because he never has any stuff of his own, and therefore he is always stealing my things, despite the marker-pen line.

And I’m now suspended in mid-air because Aiden has once again stolen my hat.

Listen, it’s not just any old hat. It’s my favourite stripy one that Mum gave me



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on the last Christmas we had together before the Crash. It's got long knitted ears that reach my shoulders, but the really bestest thing about it is that it activates my golden shield of protection. Before, whenever I got scared or I had to do something that made me nervous, which was surprisingly a lot, Mum would pull on the ears and say, "There you go, Hedley, you're invincible now."

Normally, when Aiden takes my stuff, I don't say anything. But my therapist, Dr Rosenhaus, says avoiding fights is not always a good thing. That sometimes confrontation is necessary.

So, when I saw him wearing my woolly hat and wiping his sticky fingers all over it, I said, "Give me my hat back."

And of course Aiden said, "No. What you going to do about it?"

Which is exactly the moment when I realized that despite telling me that avoiding fights was bad, my therapist hadn't actually told me how to win them. So, now I'm just letting Aiden hit me until he gets tired. Or I pass out from the blood pooling in my head – whichever happens to happen first.

Discussion Questions

1. Where is Hedley, and why do you think he is there?
2. What feeling does Hedley try to keep hidden or 'squished up' inside?
3. Why do you think Hedley keeps his head down? What might this show about him?
4. What kind of relationship does Hedley have with his roommate, Aiden?

What clues in the text help you see this?



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5. How would you describe Hedley's personality? Does he seem calm, kind, or generous—or more angry, bitter, or mean? Why?
6. What can you tell about Hedley's state of mind from his actions or thoughts?
7. Why do you think Hedley's hat is so important to him?
8. What is Hedley's 'golden shield of protection,' and what does it tell us about how he handles his feelings?

Activity: Hedley's Hat

Step 1:

Hedley wears a very distinctive stripy hat with long knitted ears that reach his shoulders. Write or draw one reason why Hedley's hat is important to him. You can also think about what it might show about his personality, feelings, or character.

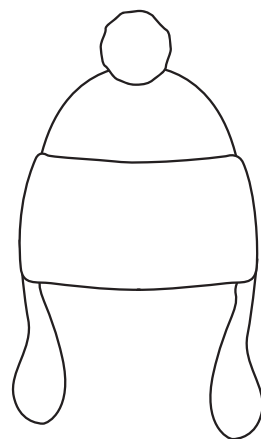
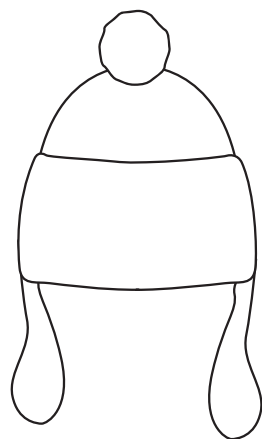
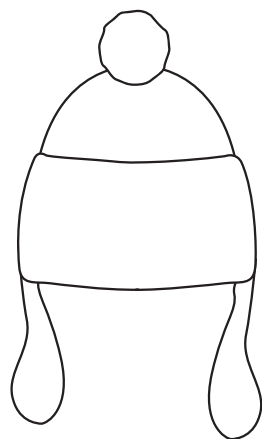
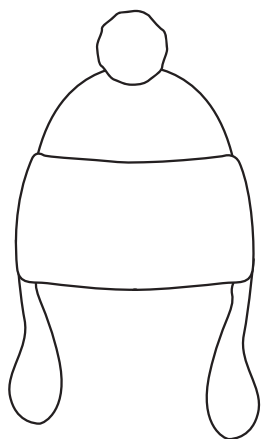
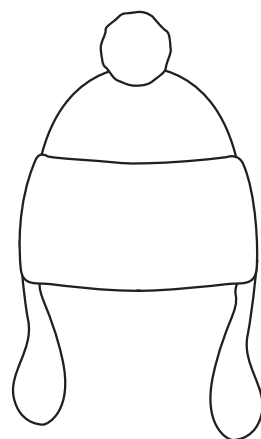
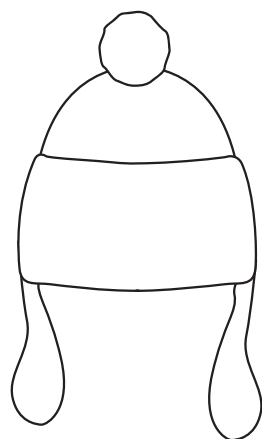
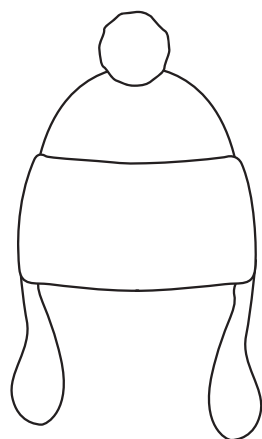
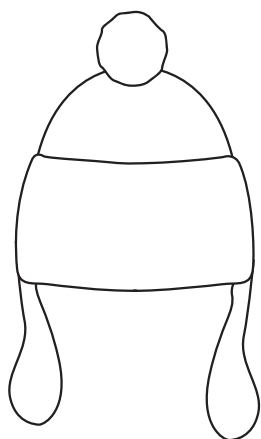
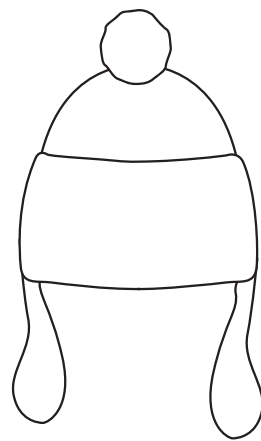
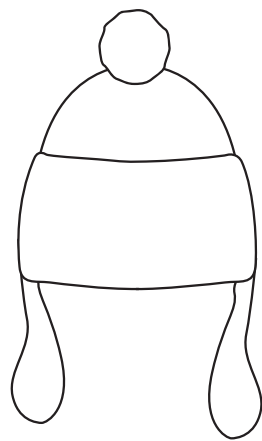
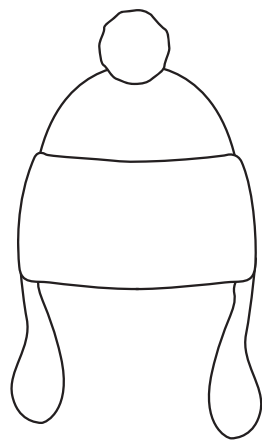
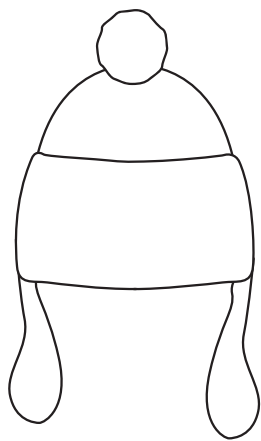
Step 2:

- Look closely at Hedley's hat in the story. Notice its stripes, long knitted ears, and any other special details.
- Using paper, pencils, craft materials or the hat templates provided, create your own version of Hedley's hat.
- On or around your hat, write or draw one thing it tells us about Hedley, for example, something about his personality, feelings, or the way he protects himself.
- (Optional) Share your hat with the class and explain why you chose those colours, patterns, or details.

Challenge: If you could design a hat for yourself, what would it look like? Why?



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Duke the Alpaca

We are introduced to Duke, the alpaca, in Chapter Two of book. Read the extract answer the questions below:

I was beginning to feel a bit sick from the margie bread I'd shoved down that morning, so I grabbed the fence and lifted my head up until I was chin to chin with the nearest alpaca, which turned out to be the one that had nibbled my hat. It was bigger than the rest, with a black coat and a tuft of white hair that stuck up on the top like a skunk.

"That's Duke," said the farmer. "He's my prize winner."

It was already staring at me, like some ancient king, looking down its long nose. As our eyes locked, something spiky and familiarly scary stirred in the pit of my tummy, making me shiver. I blinked, pushing the feeling away. I couldn't back out now; everyone was watching. I'd read that when faced with a wild animal, you should show no fear. Don't look away, let it see the beast within you. Well, here I was, Hedley the roaring tiger.

Discussion Questions

1. How is Hedley feeling in this part of the story? What clues in the text help you know this?
2. Why do you think it might be important that the alpaca nibbled Hedley's hat?
3. Do you think Hedley and the alpaca feel a special connection straight away? What makes you think that?
4. Hedley tries to push away a certain feeling—what do you think that feeling might be, and why?

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5. At the end of the extract, Hedley sets himself a challenge. What is it, and do you think he will succeed? Why or why not?

Activity: Alpaca Detectives

Q. What do you know about alpacas?

Step 1: Share the facts below! Which is your favourite? Do any of them surprise you?

Fun Facts About Alpacas!

- **Where they live:** Alpacas come from tall mountains in South America, like Peru and Bolivia.
- **Size:** They're smaller than llamas, about as tall as a big ten-year-old!
- **Fluffy coats:** Their wool is super soft and warm. People use it to make jumpers, scarves, and blankets.
- **Funny feet:** They have two soft toes instead of hooves, which makes walking easy on the ground.
- **What they eat:** Mostly grass and hay, they love munching!
- **Friendly nature:** Alpacas are gentle and curious, and they like to live with other alpacas in a herd.

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Step 2: Find and share some pictures of alpacas. Look closely and describe what you notice about the alpaca's body, face, wool, and posture.

- Guiding questions:
 - What do you notice about its ears, eyes, and nose?
 - Which features stand out the most?
 - How would you describe its wool/fur?
 - What shape are its feet? Why might that be useful?
 - Does it look more like a sheep, a llama, or something else?

Step 3: As a class, create a "Spot the Alpaca Features" chart, listing the unique features students identify (e.g. long neck, padded feet, fluffy wool, gentle eyes, small ears).

Challenge: Draw Duke and label your drawing with descriptive phrases from the book and anything you've learned from the Alpaca Features chart!

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Further Activity Ideas

If you haven't read the whole book...

- Hedley often talks about a “dark, spiky feeling deep inside.” Think about what you believe this feeling might be. Using paint, pastels, or another creative medium, create a picture that shows what Hedley’s feelings might look like inside him.
- The theme of ‘healing’ is very important in the story. Consider the ways people heal from sadness and how they might be important in the story. As a class, draw a simple path (like a road or stepping stones) on the board. Together, add symbols, words, or doodles that represent ways people heal. Add them along the path. Examples:
 - Talking to a friend
 - Spending time outside
 - Doing something fun
 - Asking for help
- In the story, Hedley has people who believe in him, like his little sister, Aiden, and Nic. Think about someone in your life (a friend, teacher, or family member) who believes in you or encourages you. Draw a large star on a sheet of paper. On each point of the star, write or draw the ways this person supports you, encourages you, or helps you grow.
- In Chapter Eleven, at the petrol station, Hedley sees a picture of himself on the television with the headline: “Police seek boy runaways in connection with animal rustling.” In groups, choose this moment or another event from the story and



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recreate it as a television report. You can decide who will be the news anchor, the reporter, and any “eyewitnesses,” and think about how to present the event clearly and accurately. Use your voices, expressions, and even props if you like to make your report engaging and dramatic, just like a real news broadcast.

If you have read the whole book...

- Think about Hedley’s relationship with Duke the alpaca and the important moments they share in the story. Create a graph or timeline to show these key points and write down how Duke helps Hedley to heal or grow at each stage. Then, do the same for Hedley’s relationships with Lilly and Aiden, noticing the moments that matter most and how these characters influence Hedley’s feelings, choices, and the way he changes. Once your graphs are complete, compare them: what’s similar or different about these relationships, and what do they tell us about Hedley’s character and the way he learns and grows through the story?
- Nic tells Hedley: “we’re all a bit concerned that you may be trying too hard to convince us all that everything is okay.” Do you agree? On a blank sheet of paper, draw a line to represent Hedley’s journey through the story and mark a few key events along it. Above the line, use words, drawings, or even symbols and colours to show how Hedley appears to feel to others. Below the line, show how Hedley really feels inside. You can use different colours, shapes, or emojis to represent his hidden emotions.

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- Think about the funny or silly moments in the story. How do these moments help Hedley cope, connect with others, or feel better? Pick one or two examples and explain how humour helps Hedley heal. You can also draw or highlight a moment that made you laugh and show what it tells us about his feelings.
- The book has a big, emotional twist at the end. Imagine you are a detective looking for clues that hinted at the ending. On a piece of paper, draw or write the clues you noticed while reading. You can use arrows, symbols, or small sketches to show how the clues connected to the twist. Then, reflect on how the twist made you feel – were you surprised, sad, or maybe a little confused? Finally, think about which clues helped you predict the ending and which ones misled you.
- Imagine you have the chance to meet Emma Green, the author of the story. What would you like to ask her? Come up with 5–10 questions. Think about:
 - o Characters: “Who inspired you to create the character of Hedley?”
 - o Plot: “What made you decide to merge the themes of grief and humour?”
 - o Writing process: “How do you come up with ideas for your books?”
 - o Ideas: “What is your next idea for a story?”

