

# Jenny Valentine

## Us in the Before and After Teaching Resources

This pack serves as an introduction to the book and is best used as a cross-curricular Book Club resource or as inspiration for discussion. Questions and activities can be adapted and delivered at the teacher's discretion.

### About the book

*There is one side of that moment, and the other  
Before  
After  
I have dreamed about it ever since*

At the start of a long, hot summer best friends Elk and Mab face the fallout of a sudden death, and the lifelong consequences of a single tragic act.

An intensely emotional story that raises questions about love, ghosts and the unshakeable bonds of friendship.

[www.readingzone.com/authors/jenny-valentine](http://www.readingzone.com/authors/jenny-valentine)

### About the author

Jenny Valentine is an award-winning writer for Young Adults. Her first novel *Finding Violet Park* won the *Guardian* Prize in 2007 and since then she has written seven books for teenagers, including *Broken Soup* and *Fire Colour One*, as well as the younger fiction series *Iggy and Me*, *A Girl Called Joy* and *The Unfamous Diaries of Daisy Brewster*.

Her work has been published in 19 countries. In 2017 she was the Hay Festival International Fellow, spending the year meeting and learning from teenagers all over the world. She lives on the Welsh Borders and has two daughters.

Follow Jenny on Instagram [@jennyvalentinebooks](https://www.instagram.com/jennyvalentinebooks)

## Key themes and concepts

Warning: This book deals with the difficult emotional themes of bereavement and grief.

- Cover clues...
- Characters
- Friendship
- Time and structure
- Memory
- Family
- Grief and loss
- Ghosts
- Therapy and counselling.



### *Cover clues*

Have a look at the cover of the book. Does it connect to any particular moment in the story? How does it communicate some of the story's themes? What does the illustration say to you?

**Draw your own design for the cover of this book.**

### *Characters*

Think of the ways the author uses dialogue and observation to describe the characters in this book? How do they differ from one another? What and how do we learn about them?

**Write down 10 words that describe each of these characters:**

**Elk**

**Mab**

**Knox**

**France**

### *Friendship*

Mab and Elk meet in a maze. Elk is lost and Mab helps her find her way out. Read Elk's version of this meeting (Chapter 5 Metronome). What do you think this says, if anything, about the dynamics of their friendship?

**Write an account of two people meeting for the first time. What hints will you leave for the state of their relationship in the future?**

## *Time and structure*

The story builds up to and explores the aftermath of one significant event. There are two timelines, one looking back in the past tense and one describing the action in the present.

Why do you think the author chose to structure the story this way?

What are your thoughts about the impact of that structure on the storytelling?

**Take a familiar story, for example a fairy tale, and then play with the structure, reorganising events.**

What effect does that have on the sense and the action?

## *Memory*

Whether Elk is remembering the past or experiencing the present, we see events through her eyes. How much can we trust her version of things?

Discussion point: How reliable is memory?

Have a look at this article from the *Guardian*: [www.theguardian.com/science/2023/apr/05/short-term-memory-illusions-study](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/apr/05/short-term-memory-illusions-study)

**Examine the extract on page 20:**

'Gran had this kind of dementia. At the beginning, she could tell you exactly what happened on a Wednesday in July 1952, and who was there and what they were wearing, but if you asked her what she had for lunch like ten minutes before, she'd stare at you, unmoored, because you were asking her for the impossible. All that past everywhere, and an unknown future, and this elusive, self-cleaning present. Later, 1952 got swallowed up as well. And she didn't just forget things; she forgot how to do things. I think we watched her forget who she was.'

**What does this tell you about memory? Look at the language the author uses. What other words would you choose to describe this kind of memory loss?**

## *Grief and loss*

Here are some links to organisations who help young people cope with grief and bereavement.

<https://winstonswish.org/supporting-you/grief-support-young-people/>

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/my-feelings/grief-and-loss/>

<https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/find-support/for-young-people/>

How well do you think this book navigates the questions of bereavement and loss? What strategies does the author employ to help her characters cope with what has happened? How does the book use the idea of ghosts? Why do you think Elk sees Mab's ghost?

**Write a ghost story of your own.**





## Other titles by Jenny Valentine

