

One of the Girlfriend fiction series this title surprised as being more substantial than expected. At first appearances and from the blurb, this is a summer holiday story. It is much more than that. Yes, Zara and Tilly are at the beach and yes, it is their holiday story but it has more punch. This story told alternately from Zara and Tilly's viewpoints delves into the chemistry of friendship and of their respective family relationships and how these affect each girl's view of the same events. Zara and Tilly are thrown together when the third member of their usual group, Mieke, cannot join them these holidays. Both girls are aware that Mieke had been the glue that held these three, very different, girls together in friendship. Both are nervous of how they will get on; very well as it turns out. Both girls have self esteem issues and both families are a little dysfunctional. This story told through a backdrop of the usual summer holiday experiences with some boy action and near death drama allows the girls to mature both in themselves and in their family relationships. By the end of the holidays they have changed, now ready to move on in their lives, in new directions and with newfound confidence. The heroines have just finished Year 11 but this book will appeal to a much younger audience. Covering such issues as friendship, sibling rivalry, family relations, dating, surfing, phone stalking, peer group pressure, self esteem and image this book could be used as a starting point for discussion or study with lower to upper secondary classes.

Lorene Furnage, Department of Education, TAS

This short, easy to read novel is clearly aimed at middle class 14-16 year old girls preoccupied with friendships and appearance. Two girlfriends, beautiful, sophisticated, blonde, Zara and smart, witty, dowdy Tilly, go on a camping holiday that leads to change and greater self awareness. The girls do not live near each other and lead different social lives but their families have been coming to the same camping ground in Indigo every year since they were nine. It is here that they met. Every year another girl, Mieke comes as well and the three girls become the Indigo girls for the summer. But this year Mieke does not come, leaving Zara and Tilly to renegotiate their friendship as a twosome rather than a threesome.

Tilly's family are perfectly well adjusted, loving and supportive. Mum is a psychotherapist and Dad is a political science university academic. With little sister, Teddy they form a warm, friendly family unit. Tilly is discovering her interest in boys but is held back by her plain appearance and poor body image. Zara's family are the opposite. Zara's parents have slipped into cold, non-communication and Zara's usual aloof, 'botox bored', detachment is not helping her deal with the betrayal of her best friend, mysterious cyber bullying and a sense that she is losing her grip on who she really is. Russon has successfully managed to capture the speech and manner of young girls and has taken an American template in terms of narrative and genre and given it a nice Australian feel. This is very much a novel written to satisfy adolescent desires for transformation, acceptance and infatuation that offers guidance in terms of risk taking, recognising true friends and negotiating the minefield that is boys.

I think this novel has appeal for teenage girls and would fit well into a wide reading programme. A book simply to be read for enjoyment rather than study.

Emily O'Connell, Sydney Secondary College, Leichhardt, NSW

The Indigo Girls tells the story of three teenage girls whose lives entwine every summer when their families holiday at the beach. Even though Tilly, Zara and Mieke are completely different in their personalities and their personal lives, they find friendship and support in their shared experience of family holidaying in a camping ground. It is an engaging story which focuses particularly on the growth and development of Zara and Tilly's friendship when Mieke does not arrive in time for their usual summer plans. *The Indigo Girls* has a very real voice and truly captures the thoughts and feelings of Zara and Tilly. The reader can imagine what it is like to be a teenage girl in today's society. Girls reading this novel will be able to identify with the central characters.

Penni Russon's novel would make an excellent choice for interdisciplinary collaboration between English and Human Development classes. *The Indigo Girls* would work well in an all girls setting, as a wide reading novel for students interested in 'chick lit' or as an exploration of issues such as bullying, peer pressure, the changing nature of friendships between girls, risk taking and finding one's place in the world.

Emma Pollock, NSW

This is an unashamedly "girlie" short novel that will resonate with most female readers from roughly 14-17 years. The author has created believable female main characters in Tilly and Zara, each with a modern voice that will ring true with YA readers.

The perennial questions commonly asked as young girls mature into mid to later teenage years are well handled here: family, friends of both sexes, how do I look, how do I behave socially and cope with the swirling emotions of adolescence?

I feel the gentle but probing handling of these themes and others will make *The Indigo Girls* a popular and easy to read novel for female readers in both school and public libraries. I'd also recommend the other *Girlfriend Fiction* titles for these collections.

A must for all Secondary Comprehensive school libraries, a good balance for the now male action character fiction titles that currently now flood the market.

Susan Hill, Winmalee High School, NSW

This book is a delight to read. Girls will love it!

The story centres around two girls, Zara and Tilly, who, although 'friends' of sorts, are not **BEST** friends with each other. Another girl, Mieke, who IS the go-between friend of both, cannot make it for the holidays, so Tilly and Zara have to size each other up by themselves.

Each chapter is written by either one or the other girl, and depicts her view on a situation.

Soon, after some poignant moments, the girls do get it together. They find themselves in a summer filled with secrets, mysteries, adventure and eventually, finding themselves.

Great read for teenage girls.

Pauline Dunn, Mountain District Christian School, VIC

A stand-alone title from the *Girlfriend Fiction* series, *The Indigo Girls* is a "real life", easy-to-read, enjoyable story, with a universal theme of self-discovery, relevant to today's teens. A summer holiday at Victoria's Indigo Point provides the setting for this story of belonging and friendship, family and social dynamics, as Zara Sutherland and Tilly (Matilda) Dove, very much opposites, spend time together without Mieke, the third member of this traditional "summer gang" to provide the balance. Zara is pretty and popular, but the Alpha "golden girl" image masks her joyless inner turmoil and loneliness. She is from an emotionally dysfunctional family and disturbing, secret stalker phone messages also weigh heavily on her heart. She is vulnerable, empty, has everything but that's not enough. Tilly is the "geek", the obscure Omnicron, unapproachable to some, ordinary, seemingly comfortable within her "brainy head" and her close family, but battling body image issues. She too is "heart-naked", fearing exposure.

That both girls feel disconnected is the common thread to their relationship this summer, and sharing frightening, though exhilarating, night surfing (soul surfing) exploits the statement they make, despite the potentially dangerous consequences. Pushing the limits is their way to find answers, however risky, however uncharacteristic, especially for the reliable and predictable Tilly. Female teen readers aged 12-15 will be drawn to these two Indigo Girls, identifying with their struggles, as they learn to nurture self esteem, to trust their bodies and feelings, to move beyond image alone, to recognise and accept who they really are. Just like the bright and cheery cover with its idyllic setting, the positive resolution bodes for "better days ahead". Life is worth living, the affirmation.

A simple story, written with honesty and warmth, in a familiar Australian cultural context and with a refreshing absence of coarse language, *The Indigo Girls* will prove a popular, thought-provoking addition to the secondary library collection for individual recreational reading. Penni Russon is in tune with young people and popular culture, and her exploration of self-loathing, acceptance, identity and awakening sexuality presents an interesting analysis of pecking order, cultural stereotypes and perceived social balance. In this novel of contradictions, as in the real world, people of different personalities, from different family and social backgrounds can happily co-exist. On an awareness-raising level, one is also left to ponder with Zara: "Why doesn't anyone know what to do with unhappy people?"

Alison Cassell, QLD

This is an enjoyable read, which will appeal to middle-secondary girls. Zara's and Tilly's friendship is based on their two-week beachside holiday at Indigo. For the rest of the year they go to different schools, have different friends and interests. This year, things change, because the third member of the summer group, Mieke, can't come. Zara who always seems to know how to behave and what to wear, appears to be one of the beautiful people, though she is not as shallow as these girls often are. Tilly on the other hand is nerdy, wears baggy clothes indicating her lack of confidence and is essentially not a risk-taker. Their families too are poles apart. Zara's parents no longer appear to communicate whereas Tilly's parents are loving and supportive. The girls follow their regular holiday routines, with slight variations now they are only 2. But Tilly steps out of her comfort zone, including meeting Sawyer who changes her perception of herself.

Russon has used alternating voices to tell the story. Both girls are well-developed characters who take risks, enjoy their changing friendship, question their position in life and learn more about themselves during this brief interlude at the beach.

Though this novel is unlikely to become a class text, many readers will enjoy it for its readability, its realistic voices and the themes that Russon deals with.

Maureen Mann, TAS