

Not often does a book live up to what it promises in its synopsis. But this one does! I was laughing out loud (I can't remember doing that while reading any other book) as these whacky teenagers deal with love, family, friendships and one massive three school formal.

The novel follows a quirky group of teenagers: party planning and Manolo-wearing Chelsea, dingo girl Matilda, long-tongued Craig, Cockies recruit and calendar model Angelo, shoe-lace-boiling Zeynap, Indian princess Georgia, former criminal Khiem and Joshua who is not so fond of guinea pigs. Each character raises issues that could be explored through class discussions that focus on love, prejudices, relationships, homosexuality, family and much more. Class activities could also focus on character development and profiles. The vibrant and eye-catching book cover also lends itself to character prediction activities. However, I strongly believe that this book should be one that is simply enjoyed!

This book will engage readers of all levels. The crazy characters will have reluctant and advanced readers laughing at their antics. It is a great book for a book box, wide reading program and a must for every school library! I will definitely be recommending this book to teenagers, young adults and even not so young adults!

I was not familiar with Chris Wheat's writing prior to reading *Screw Loose*, but after reading this book, I have become a fan! It is a crazy, quirky, humorous and fun read!

Lauren Sims, NSW

Screw Loose certainly lives up to its title. The characters and events in the story are whacky and a little crazy. It is a novel about a group of teenagers finding their way in life as they explore high school and the world around them. It's funny and kooky and very modern. Set in Melbourne, the setting and surroundings are very familiar and students will identify with this. The informal tone of language, modern slang and references to current technology such as YouTube will engross our young readers. *Screw Loose* is very engaging and entertaining and the most extraordinary things happen to the main characters. Each character tells the events from his or her point of view. The narrators are from different backgrounds and cultures with different customs and principles. There is something for everyone.

This novel would be perfect for year 9 and 10 students. It would be perfect as a wider reading novel and definitely great for reluctant readers. Chapters are short and easy to get through, even though the novel is over 300 pages. It is accessible to both boys and girls as it has mixed sex narrators. A highly recommended read for students who wish for a novel to speak to them at their level and in their language.

Emma Pollock, VIC

Screw Loose by Chris Wheat – *What a book!* - definitely lives up to its name in a funny, quirky, couldn't put it down way. I laughed, shrugged, questioned and rolled my eyes as I read about this group of teenagers. It is rare that you find such a down to earth book that is written and based in Australia. Teens would be able to relate to the setting, peer group, wackiness and way out writing style of this book. Chris Wheat uses language that is informal, teenage based and flows well. He takes serious teenage issues—being gay, parents' divorce, cultural upbringing—and makes them non threatening, easy to talk to and part of everyday life.

The first few chapters introduce you to the individual characters and their wacky ways. In the beginning it had me wondering where the book was leading but this resulted in me wanting to read on. The characters soon blended as one teen group who, although different in lots of ways, accepted each other for who they are. It is a book about non-judgmental mateship, being an individual and friendship for life. The ending touched a nerve in me with the successful, yet hilarious, combination of three schools of teens from different upbringings and walks of life,

This book would appeal to both boys and girls. I recommend it for reluctant readers as the chapters are short and draw you in. After reading it I was left searching for another Chris Wheat novel. I'm hooked!

Jennifer Deaves, Homeschooler, SA

My initial response to *Screw Loose* was not a positive one. There seemed to be too many characters with every possible issue raised in the first couple of chapters. It wasn't long however, before Angelo's problems with his controlling football club and his Muslim girlfriend, Chelsea's efforts to gain friends and become an appreciated member of her new school, and Matilda Grey's bizarre life as the girl who had been raised by dingoes all combined to provide a funny and enjoyable novel. The juxtaposition of the stories and characters from the three schools adds several layers of interest and provides the springboard for many of the humorous incidents.

Wheat's use of colloquialisms and his references to current technology and youth culture will make the novel readily acceptable to readers, with boys in particular identifying with Angelo, Craig, Khiem and Joshua. They will recognise their own insecurities and hopefully will also realise that there are always solutions. This novel will fit into many of our English units (*Popular Culture, Humour, Teenage Issues*) either as an alternative or an extension read. Students who have enjoyed Michael Bauer's *Ishmael* and Linda Aronson's *Rude* novels are sure to become devotees of Chris Wheat. I look forward to another novel from him.

Patricia Anderson, Nanango State High School, QLD

Screw Loose by title and featuring an assortment of somewhat "screw loose", mixed up characters in a madcap tale of mirth and mayhem, that's Chris Wheat's unique and original style and "over the top" sense of humour which will certainly appeal to teenage readers. The key players in the story are introduced through intriguing quotes on the front cover and the busy and bright back cover collage represents significant aspects of their interconnected lives. It is different, far-fetched and fun. We meet Angelo Tarano, seventeen, recently drafted to the Hobart Cockatoos AFL team, posing nude for *The Boys Came Out To Play* calendar. His girlfriend is the shoelace-boiling, "clean and neat freak", obsessive Muslim girl, Zeynep Yarkan, not viewed as a suitable "family friendly" girlfriend by the Cockatoos. There's Khiem Dao, Vista View Secondary College's resident criminal, his friend Craig Ryan, one of the Vista View rowers and Craig's girlfriend Matilda, supposedly lost in the desert, living with dingoes for four years, now with distinctly wild dog habits herself. Add to the mix, Josh Yeatman, using the *Gaywayz* website to meet Heath, a breeder of gay guinea pigs, Georgia, the abandoned daughter of an Indian maharajah, preferring girls and only child, Chelsea (Bunsy) Dean, the self-important, over-indulged cox of Vista View's rowing team, drawing inspiration and advice from her three hundred strong Barbie collection. Just imagine the uproarious turn of events when their lives intertwine.

Wheat's laugh-out-loud funny book can be enjoyed on several levels and provides a light-hearted, tongue-in-cheek look at a range of contemporary societal issues. His up-to-the-minute cultural references and clever use of the vernacular reflect his astute appreciation and understanding of popular youth culture, presented in the crazy and riotous antics of the characters, snowballing out of control. Ideal for individual borrowing from the secondary school library, through an unusual, yet intuitive expose of adolescent realities, readers aged 13+ will enjoy this twisted tale - a weird and wacky, amusing and engaging leisure time read.

Alison Cassell, QLD

The title of this book, *Screw Loose* certainly says it all! The group of characters and events in the story are just so out there! The gang of friends consists of whacky [and a little crazy people] and is a novel about these teenagers finding their way in life as they explore high school and the world around them. It's both funny and weird, and up to the moment.

The story is set around a mixed Government school on one side of the river, and 2 very elite Private schools on the other side – one girls, the other a boys. It is also set in Melbourne, so the surroundings are very familiar and students will identify with this. The informal tone of language, modern slang and references to current technology such as You-Tube will engross our young readers.

Screw Loose is very engaging and entertaining and the most extraordinary things happen to the main characters. Each character tells the events from his or her point of view. The narrators are from different backgrounds and cultures with different customs and principles. There is something for everyone.

This novel would be perfect for upper secondary students. It would also be perfect as a wider reading novel and definitely great for reluctant readers. Chapters are short and easy to get through, even though the novel is over 300 pages. It is accessible to both boys and girls as it has mixed sex narrators.

The characters themselves cover a broad spectrum of personalities. Angelo, an AFL loving Italian and his Muslim shoe-lace boiling compulsive girlfriend, Zeynep. Matilda 'the dingo girl', and her long-tongued boyfriend Craig. An abandoned Indian Princess, Georgia, who prefers the company of girls to boys. And Josh, who after searching the Gay websites, finds Heath.

Then there is the irrepressible Chelsea, who tries to meld this seemingly weird type of kids, into a combined three-school mixed Formal.

Once I got into the story, I found it a highly recommended read for students who wish for a novel to speak to them at their level and in their language.

Pauline Dunn, Mountain District Christian School, VIC