

Letters from the Inside

A JOURNEY THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

Exploring the Text

Check with your teacher about which questions to try.

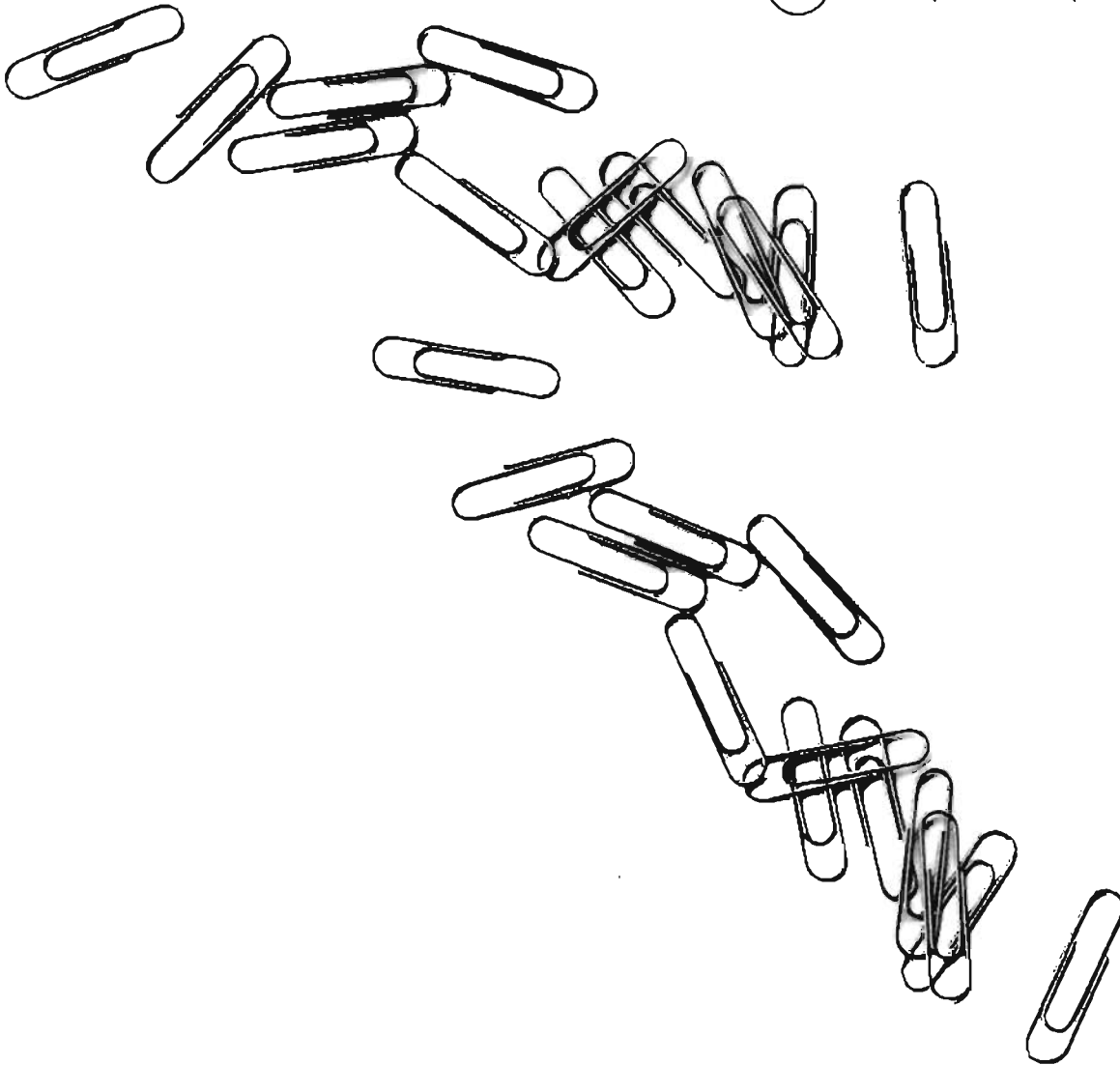
- ① Would you like to reply to Mandy, having read her first letter?
- ② Check the dictionary meaning for 'own'. You are Mandy. Explain why you cannot own a dog (p. 1).
- ③ Mandy described her brother as 'creepy' (p. 8). What would make a brother creepy? Is that better or worse than having a brother who is a creep? Fully explain each answer.
- ④ Mandy described Paul as 'a decent guy, but he hangs around with some of life's legendary losers' (p. 16). Why would a 'decent guy' be attracted to losers?
- ⑤ Tracey suggested that if she and Mandy had been at the same school, they probably would not be friends (p. 16). Why do you think Tracey came to this conclusion?
- ⑥ Mandy was describing Steve to Tracey, telling her how violent he was and that her parents said 'that's what boys are like' (p. 26). Is there really an expectation that 'boys will be boys' and therefore violent behaviour can be excused? How would you reply to Mandy's parents' response?
- ⑦ Tracey was honest enough to admit that she didn't want to know the bad side of Mandy's life (p. 30). In your opinion, can you have a real friendship without sharing the bad and the good?

Page references are to the Pan 1994 paperback edition of *Letters from the Inside*.



- 8 Mandy said that writing to Tracey was like writing to herself (p. 31). What do you think Mandy means?
- 9 Read Tracey's letter dated May 1 and Mandy's reply (pp. 35–40). Think about the contrast between the letters of Mandy and Tracey. Read any two other letters written by the girls and comment on the difference.
- 10 Having read Mandy's letter dated May 4, what advice would you give her? (pp. 36–40).
- 11 Tracey replies to Mandy's thoughts on God (p. 42). What are your thoughts? Do Mandy's or Tracey's views come near to your ideas? Explain.
- 12 'Live fast, die young and leave a beautiful memory' (p. 45). Would you consider these words to be the theme of a winner or a loser? Give reasons for your opinion.
- 13 Mandy wants the truth. Tracey thinks that Mandy would not like the truth (p. 54). You are Mandy. At this stage of the friendship what would you want and why?
- 14 You are Cheryl (p. 65). Give four reasons that might persuade Naomi and Mandy to go to see 'David's Diary'. What would you do to get your own way in such a situation?
- 15 'Maybe no-one has it all' (p. 69). What's all? How much do you think most of us have?
- 16 Tracey is very tough on herself. 'This is a hole and I'm the biggest bitch in it ... If you were here you'd see me like I am' (p. 74). Is the real Tracey who she is in Garrett, or has Garrett made Tracey something she was not?
- 17 Tracey confides in Mandy (p. 94). She is sorry for what she did. She also says she gets 'too mad to be ... absolutely truly sorry', then she becomes confused (pp. 94, 120). Do you think time in Garrett is really doing what it is meant to do? Would there be a better way of helping young people like Tracey?

- 18 Mandy and Tracey often 'get mad' with each other but the friendship survives. Is the 'bad' in a friendship as important as the 'good'?
- 19 Tracey writes that she's '**not sure what a friend is any more**' (p. 104). Write and tell her.
- 20 '**I think true friends keep pushing each other up the ladder**' (p. 124). Supposing your ladder had six rungs, what would each stage of friendship be?
- 21 Mandy is becoming more and more frightened of Steve's behaviour, his threats and his violence. '**I lock my door quite often when I'm in my bedroom now, that's how much he scares me**' (p. 123). What do you think it will take to have Mandy's parents face the reality of Steve's condition?
- 22 What do you think is the reason for Mandy's silence and the return of the letters? Does John Marsden offer us any clues to what might have happened?
- 23 Write your own epilogue.




Think it through, talk it over

In groups or as a class, discuss one or more of these topics.

1 Letters and friendship

'In a way I hope we never meet – it might spoil it' (p. 31). Tracey's letters suggest she does not want to face the possibility that Mandy might have problems she, Tracey, would rather not hear about.

How might the friendship be spoilt by a meeting?

In what way could letters be like a diary?

What sorts of things do people write in diaries?

Are personal diaries meant to be read by other people? Why? Why not?

There have been books published that consist of letters, such as those between Mandy and Tracey, written by real people. Why do you think such books prove to be interesting reading?

Sometimes people who have written diaries or letters to other people over many years request that these writings not be published for some years after their death. Why might such a request be made?

2 Possibilities

Mandy is worried about the possibility that Steve's violent behaviour will become dangerous and that her parents' refusal to face the seriousness of Steve's behaviour will result in trouble.

Is it more difficult to face a possibility than it is to face the reality?

Is the reality of trouble in this case more than possible?

Are possibilities real?

Is Steve's behaviour a reality or a possibility?

Does a possibility have to become a reality? Why or why not?

3 True or fake?

'But they're all true in their different ways (all fake too, sometimes). Guess it shows how many sides we all have' (p. 31). Mandy was writing to Tracey about how different people see her.

Does everyone have a true and a fake side?

Can people's fake side actually contain some truth?

What might we gain from our fake side?

How do we know when to use our different sides?

To whom would you most likely show your fake side?

To whom would you never show your fake side?

4 Winners and losers

What makes a person a winner?

Can losers become winners?

Is it easier to be a winner than a loser?

Can a winner be a loser at the same time?

What is a born loser?

Are some people born winners or do they make themselves winners?

Do you have to be lucky to be a winner?

Was Tracey in any sense a winner?

Did Tracey win or lose in the end?

ANYTHING GOES

Consider how each girl opened her life to the other through her letters. Try one or more of the following activities.

time line Trace the story of Steve on a time line. Note beside each entry the effect of the event or behaviour on Mandy and the concern shown by Tracey. At the conclusion of your exercise you will also have a time line of Mandy's growing fears and Tracey's growing concerns.



illustrate Divide a blank sheet of art paper into four. Choose four of your favourite letters and illustrate them.



paint Paint life-size characters of Mandy, Tracey and Steve. Check the letters for details of dress.



puppets Make puppets of Steve, Mandy and Tracey, and write a couple of short scripts that will clearly illustrate their characters as they engage in conversation. What sort of a conversation do you think Steve and Tracey would have?

short stories Find yourself a partner. Write a short story of one of the events as described by Mandy or Tracey. Leave out some of the words. Swap stories with your partner and fill in the blanks.



classroom comment/discussion Design a classroom comment sheet. Rule three columns with the headings: character, colour, music. Get members of the class to write the name of a character, the colour they think would best represent him or her, and a song they think the character would enjoy. Have a classroom discussion about the choices, and let each person talk about his or her ideas and explain the choice.



role play Choose members of the class to represent Mandy, Tracey, Steve, and Mandy's mum and dad. The other members of the class should write down six questions they would like to ask the characters, then have a panel session where each character in turn answers one of the questions.