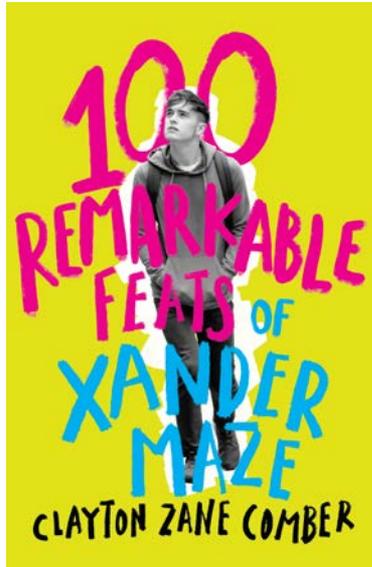


Classroom Resources



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100 Remarkable Feats of Xander Maze

Clayton Zane Comber

BOOK SUMMARY

Can a list save a life?

Xander Maze loves lists, and his grandmother is #1 on his list of People I Love Most in the World. But now that Nanna has stage 4 cancer, can a new list of 100 Remarkable Feats really save her?

Particularly when his list contains difficult things like #2 Make a Friend and #3 Make a Best Friend – *plus* #10 Kiss a Girl (preferably Ally Collins, the girl of Xander's dreams).

Funny, moving and with a protagonist you can't help but fall in love with, *100 Remarkable Feats of Xander Maze* is a book about:

1. Never accepting the unacceptable
2. The power of lists
3. One boy's unconditional love for his nanna

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ACELA1551
- ACELA1553
- ACELT1635

THEMES

- Grief/Loss
- Mental Health
- Families
- Health and Wellbeing
- Identity
- Resilience
- Belonging

Recommended Ages: 14+

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Before Reading

Using imagery to evoke emotion

The lives of characters are impacted by context. In most stories, the main character must deal with a central conflict or moral dilemma and an associated series of problems, and in turn, experience conflicting feelings to a point of resolution. *100 Remarkable Feats of Xander Maze* explores how the lives of individuals are shaped by relationships, and Comber creates characters who are compelling, nuanced, contradictory and deeply human.

As the class reads through the book, invite students to think about:

- How does the author share who Xander is and his relationship with his family?
- What significant human experience does the novel convey?
- What journey from innocence to understanding does the character Xander undergo?
- Examine all the literary features of the novel to see how the author employs narrative structure and voice to add to the journey of Xander.

Specific Questions to Consider

- The handling of time – how has time been manipulated to increase the emotional intensity? Is there a flashback or a flash-forward? What is the effect on the audience?
- Place, setting and imagery – how does it add to the meaning?
- Tone, voice and/or point of view – how close is the reader to the action? What is the tone of the novel? How has tone been achieved? What is the effect of the tone?
- The structure – what is the opening, the inciting incident? How quickly is a problem or a complication introduced? How does the writer hook the reader?
- What is the dramatic moment or crisis?
- Ending or resolution – how long is the dénouement? Why?
- What is the role of the minor characters?
- How is humour used? Does it create empathy?
- Which mythological (or other literary) motifs and allusions are used? What do they connote?
- The art of the dialogue used – how does it add to an understanding of characters?

During Reading

Establishing character and setting

Comber engages the reader immediately with the setting, the characterisation of Xander, his nanna and his mother, and his use of humour and conflict. He also creates empathy in the reader with his characterisation of Xander. A question to ask yourself when reading the novel is: what has the author done to make me want to cheer for Xander?

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Setting

Read the first chapter. Where is the scene located? Write down all the clues Comber gives you about where the action is taking place.

- Does the author say: Nanna was in a hospital?
- How do you learn where Nanna is?
 - What impact does this have on you? Why?
- Why does the setting for this story matter?
 - How does it change how you feel about the characters and what they are saying?

What Comber does is create irony – the reader has a greater insight into the action of the story than Xander, which makes readers empathise with him. There is a discrepancy between appearance and reality, or between expectation and fulfilment. There is a contrast between a character's limited understanding of his or her situation in some particular moment of the unfolding action and what the audience, at the same instant, understands the character's situation actually to be.

Characters and relationships

Read the first two chapters of the novel. List all the information you learn about each character and the relationship they have with each other.

- What impact do these characteristics and relationships have on your understanding of, and empathy for, each character?
- What choices has the author made to make you feel this way?
- What characters are in conflict?

	Information/characteristics	Relationship
Xander		
Nanna		
Mum		

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The author uses two communication modes – written and visual language – to convey aspects of Xander's character. Find both written and visual examples of aspects of Xander's character in the text.

- What is the effect on you as a reader of using two modes for characterisation?
- What do you learn about Xander as a consequence?

Written/oral language	Visual language

Read through the list of 100 Remarkable Feats at the start of the novel.

- How does Comber make you feel as you read the list?
- What do you learn about Xander as a consequence of the things he wants to achieve on his list?

The characterisation of Xander, and his relationship with his nanna in particular, tells us a lot about him. In the opening scenes, the author doesn't just say, 'Xander and his nanna were close, and his nanna is very ill.' He shows the reader these ideas. This is a very important writing skill to master.

Good writing requires observation, thinking and practice. Read 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' by American poet Wallace Stevens (1879–1955).

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45236/thirteen-ways-of-looking-at-a-blackbird>

Focusing on gestures, facial expressions and gaze, find thirteen ways to describe:

- an angry teenager
- an exasperated teacher
- a surprised grandmother
- an excited toddler

Dig deep for ideas and be as specific as possible. Make one of your studies into a twelve-line poem.

After Reading

To drive a character to change, there must be a conflict and key problems to solve.

- What is the key conflict and moral dilemma at the heart of *100 Remarkable Feats of Xander Maze*?
- What is the immediate problem Xander has to solve?
 - What additional problems does it create?
- What are some of the things he does to solve the problems?
- What does he learn along the way?
- How are the problems ultimately resolved?
- What are some of the issues you have thought about as a consequence of reading this novel?
- Do Xander and other characters change across the novel?
 - What do they learn (about themselves, others and the world around them)?
- What are three lasting images or events from the novel that have stayed in your mind?

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- What is it about these events that make them so memorable?
- What are some of the key words or phrases that have stuck with you? Why?
- What insight have you had about society or other people as a consequence of reading this novel?
- Why do you think Clayton Zane Comber wrote *100 Remarkable Feats of Xander Maze*?
- What do you think the author wants the audience to think about as a consequence of reading this novel?
 - What is the author affirming, questioning or challenging?
- What have you learned as a consequence of reading this novel?

About the Author

Clayton Zane Comber is a writer from the South Coast of NSW who has held many varied roles, including a lawyer, optical dispenser, club DJ, creative writing tutor and saxophonist in a Chinese restaurant. He received his MA from Sydney University, before studying in the UK and graduating from Oxford University with distinction for his Master's in Creative Writing. In 2017, Clayton's varied roles eventuated in him opening Bouquiniste Bookstore Cafe Wine Bar, where he is the licensee, book curator, occasional DJ and head dishwasher. His debut novel, *Shooting Stars*, was published by Odyssey Books in 2011.

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