RUNAWAYS

E.L. NORRY

Educational resource pack

ABOUT THE BOOK

He needs to get lost. She wants to be found.

Jamie and July are both eleven-year-olds living in London – but they have very different lives. They meet for the first time at Waterloo Station in the last week of the holidays. They are both desperate to get away from home. July is really worried about her unreliable mum – she needs to get help. Jamie has done something terrible – and left in a panic. Despite their worries, the sun is shining and, as they escape everything they've left behind in the city, Jamie and July can't help but sense adventure in the air.

But running away isn't just harmless summertime fun. What are they really trying to escape? And will either Jamie or July find a place that finally feels like home?

Three homes, two kids, one journey.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E.L. Norry is the acclaimed author of *Fablehouse* (Bloomsbury, 2023) and several previous children's books. She has a BA (Hons) in Film and an MA in Screenwriting. She was born in Cardiff and grew up in the care system. She now lives in Bournemouth with her husband and children and works in further education. Emma's previous books include *Son of the Circus* (Scholastic, 2019), which was shortlisted for the Diverse Book Awards, and *Amber Undercover* (OUP, 2021). Her short stories have been published in anthologies including *The Very Merry Murder Club* (Farshore, 2021), *Happy Here: 10 stories from Black British authors & illustrators* (Knights Of, 2021) and *The Place for Me: Stories about the Windrush Generation* (Scholastic, 2021).

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Ages 9+ Notes for UKS2 and KS3 Teachers

Explore themes of: ✔ Family ✔ Friendship ✔ Foster care ✔ Home ✔ Trust ✔ Hope

Subject Checklist: ✔ English ✔ PSHE

The activities included here are suitable for the classroom or library sessions.

Note to teachers: This book covers some important but sensitive topics, such as parental addiction, which should be handled with care. It is advisable that teachers read the novel and these notes in their entirety before sharing with a class.

CONTENTS

FOCUS ONE – JULY

Activities: Analyse quotes from the text; write from the point of view of the main character.

Objectives: Make inferences about characters' relationships and feelings based on details stated and implied.

FOCUS TWO – JAMIE

Activities: Complete a similarities and differences grid comparing the two main characters.

Objectives: Retrieve information from the text; make comparisons between characters.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

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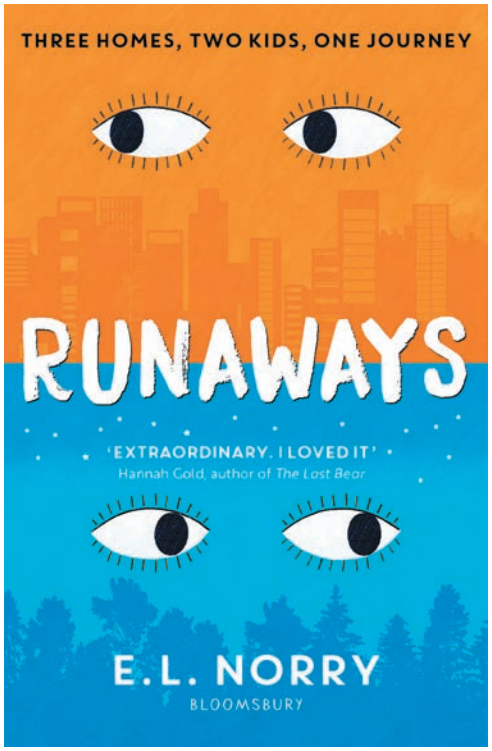
PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Book Cover Prompts



- What genre do you think this book might fit within and why?
- What mood or atmosphere do you feel the cover creates? Which elements give you that feeling?
- Where do you think the book might be set? Why?
- What does the tagline 'Three homes, two kids, one journey' make you wonder about?
- The book has a dual narrative, which means the chapters switch between the two main characters. How does the cover design reflect this? Have you read any books with a dual narrative before?

BLURB PROMPTS

Read the blurb on the back of the book. Who are the main characters and what do they have in common?

The blurb ends with the question, 'will either Jamie or July find a place that finally feels like home?' What does 'home' feel like? Write freely for three minutes, starting with the words: '**Home is ...**'

When you have finished, discuss with your class. Do any similar themes emerge?

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FOCUS ONE: JULY

Read pages 1–3

'Why are we here?' I asked, squinting at Mum suspiciously as she rolled a chunky chip around in the peri-peri salt. 'Won the lottery, have we?'

Even though I was joking, a teeny-tiny part of me hoped when I asked that question – which I always did if we were having a Special Treat – that we had won the lottery. Like, can you even imagine?

Nanna and Grampy used to put scratchcards in my birthday and Christmas cards and honestly, the best part of opening those was the very real possibility that I might actually get a winning number and be able to change everyone's lives.

Anyway – course – Mum shook her head. 'Got enough points on the app to get this meal for free!' She waved her phone at me. But she knew what I meant.

'Don't play innocent with me, young lady,' I growled, like she used to do to me if she was cross.

She laughed and raised one pierced eyebrow. The small silver hoop jiggled. Wish I could raise only one eyebrow. I've tried but I can't do it. I can roll my tongue into this three-pronged petal shape though, but it made Mum cringe, like she did when she saw blood, bobble hats or balloons. All B things – isn't that funny?

Only a few things make me cringe: rubber gloves that are wet inside (Ugh! Super grim), hair clogging up the shower, and the stringy bits on bananas. Once, on the drive back from a garden centre, an extra-long stringy banana strip got stuck to my hand and even though I flapped my hand around, it wouldn't come off for ages, and when it eventually did, it stuck to the car window and Grampy got pretty mad.

'All right, all right, babes. Busted!' Mum groaned and put down her burger. She lowered her head and glanced around nervously.

The Hulk's hand suddenly plunged into my tummy. I knew it! That she'd brought me here for a reason. Nando's wasn't somewhere we usually came to. If we weren't celebrating good news, then obviously she'd brought me here so that I didn't Make a Fuss in public over something ... bad.

'I need to tell you something.' Her voice was quiet.

The fluffy chips crumbled in my mouth and clagged together. I'd only been back living with Mum for three months; was it already going wrong?

'OK,' I said bravely, trying to smile. I did this a lot with Mum – smiled to cover up any worries; I didn't mind. These kinds of skills would make me a world-class performer one day. And sometimes, when I had no idea what to say, I quoted Nanna; she used to have all these wise sayings.

'Go on. *Better out than in!*'

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is July suspicious that her mum has brought her to Nando's?
2. What can you infer about July's family from this extract?
3. What do you think July means when she says, 'The Hulk's hand suddenly plunged into my tummy'? Do you think this is an effective metaphor?
4. How do you think July feels when her mum says, 'I need to tell you something'? Why do you think July feels this way?
5. How does July's outward appearance at the end of the extract contrast with how she's feeling inside?
6. What is your impression of July from the story so far? Can you think of three words to describe her?

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ACTIVITY: JULY AND HER MUM

Part One

Read to the end of chapter one. For each of the quotes in the table below, think about what it tells us about July's relationship with her mum. Write your ideas in the second column. When you have finished, choose a quote of your own from the text and complete the bottom row.

Quote	What does this tell us about July's relationship with her mum?
'How she said things was way more reliable than what she said because really, her words couldn't be trusted.' Page 5	
'Nanna used to say it was like I was the parent, and Mum was the child.' Page 5	
'What Mum said about us being sisters? I've never told her that all I've ever really wanted was a mum.' Page 12	

Part Two

At the end of the chapter, July says:

> 'Anyway, I already had a brilliant bedtime routine. I read *How They Survived* for fifteen minutes before writing down any worries or things I had to do for the next day. Bee, the foster mum I'd stayed with for a while when Mum was getting clean, taught me that, and it really helped settle my brain.'

What worries do you think July might write down the evening after the conversation with her mum in Nando's? Put yourself in July's shoes and write down three things that you are worried about:

1.

2.

3.

FOCUS TWO: JAMIE

Read the extract on page 143

Read pages 47–49

By the main entrance, Garrett and Mum waited by the front doors. As I walked towards them, I heard Mum say, 'Oh, that's hardly fair. It was practically three hours long and he's only eleven, remember?'

'Uh, nearly twelve!'

Garrett looked at me, his eyes narrowed. 'He doesn't seem to have any issue staying awake playing his video games, does he?' He turned to me. 'Sleep well?' His voice was savage; exactly the same as Mr Douglas when I got a maths question wrong.

There wasn't a correct way to answer him, so I went over to Mum and whispered in her ear.

'I'm starving.'

Mum patted my hand. 'We'll head to the tube and find something on the way.'

Her leaving me with Garrett for three whole days was bad enough. I didn't like him, and for the first time I had the sense that he didn't like me either.

Back at Garrett's – I couldn't think of it as 'home' – Mum and him had an argument. I think it was their first one. I couldn't hear everything, so I don't know if it was about me falling asleep, or Mum's cruise, but she kept saying 'Ssh' and 'Keep your voice down!' and he slammed a few doors.

Hearing them yelling made me feel as if I were full of ice cubes and being shaken upside down. Mum and Dad never argued. Sometimes Mum got snippy, but Dad always got her laughing, and he never yelled back. He once said how he couldn't afford to lose his temper, though I couldn't work out what he meant.

Risinu said his parents often yelled, but then couldn't stop kissing – they were just very dramatic. Dev said that when his dad lost his job and couldn't find a new one, his parents often argued about work.

I couldn't sleep – probably cos I'd already slept for ages. My bed at Garrett's was a comfy high sleeper, but I just kept turning over and over. Mum had bought me a lamb kebab from outside the tube, and I could still taste the chilli sauce.

What would me and Garrett eat while Mum was away? He liked to sit at the dining table, with the TV off. Mobiles weren't allowed cos 'mealtimes were important to connect', but Mum, Dad and me used to eat on our laps watching TV. Garrett was big on cooking, but everything had black olives or weird dried mushrooms, balsamic vinegar or anchovies, and when he made me try this stinky cheese at Disneyland I'd thrown up everywhere – he blamed the rides, but it was definitely the cheese.

Once, when Mum had cleared away yet another plateful I couldn't finish and had to sneak me up beans on toast later on, I overheard him say that I should 'develop my palate' and that she needed to stop 'pandering' to me – whatever that meant.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is your impression of Garrett?
2. What do you think Jamie means when he says, 'I couldn't think of it as "home"'?
3. How is Jamie's life now different to his life three years ago?
4. Can you find a simile that describes how Jamie feels when he hears Garrett and his mum argue? Do you think this is an effective simile? Why or why not?
5. How do you think Jamie feels about his mum going away and leaving him with Garrett?
6. On page 18, Jamie tells us that his mum says he is 'lucky'. Do you agree that he is lucky? In what ways is he lucky and in what ways is he not lucky?

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ACTIVITY: JAMIE AND JULY

Read to the end of chapter four. What have you learned about Jamie from the story so far? Do you think Jamie and July have anything in common? In what ways are they different? For each of the areas in the first column of the table below, write down the ways in which Jamie and July are similar and the ways in which they are different.

	Similarities	**Differences**
Interests	e.g. They both like playing online games.	e.g. Jamie plays on his PS5 with his squad. July plays Candy Crush on her mum's phone.
Family		
Friends		
School		
Home		

Do you think Jamie and July are experiencing any similar emotions at this point in the story? Discuss with a partner.

In the blurb, we learned that Jamie and July will meet at some point in the novel. Can you predict how they might meet? Do you think they will get on?

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FURTHER ACTIVITY IDEAS

As you read the novel, collect a list of Nanna's proverbs. Why are these proverbs important to July? For each one, discuss what it means and how it might relate to July's life.

- On page 75, July says, 'you need three things to survive: food, water, shelter'. These are things that humans need to *survive* but what do you think young people like July and Jamie need to *thrive*? Compile a list with your class. Examples might include a caring home, protection from danger, a feeling of safety and security, emotional support, education, opportunities for play and creativity, a sense of belonging and to be listened to. Which of these do Jamie and July each have? What are they each looking for?
- On page 87, July sings the song 'Fix You' by Coldplay. Have a listen to the song and look up the lyrics. Do you think any of the lines from the song relate to themes in the book? Why do you think E.L. Norry chose this song?
- With a partner, write the names of all the people in July and Jamie's lives on post-it notes. Now, draw a line and write 'reliable' one end and 'unreliable' at the other end. Place each character somewhere along this line according to how reliable you think they are. Are there any characters that are in a similar position on the line? What do these characters have in common? Compare the character you think is the most reliable and the character you think is the least reliable. How do they act differently? How do other people in the novel feel when they are around them? Can you think of five words to describe each of them?
- Who are the reliable people in your life? Who would you go to if you needed help or advice? Write a list of three trusted people. Examples might include teachers, carers, friends, family members or other safe adults in your life.
- Write yourself into the novel! Choose one moment in the story. For example, it could be when the characters are at the station, on the train, on the beach or shopping. Think about how you might interact with them if you were there. What might you say and what might happen? How might your intervention alter the course of the story?
- July loves the book *How They Survived* because it gives her a sense of hope. Unfortunately, she loses the book when her bag is stolen on page 124. If you could give July another book, what book would you give her and why? It could be a real book that you've read or one that you've made up. Why do you think she would like it and how do you think it would make her feel?

- Chapters 22 and 23 are titled, 'Home, Sweet Home' and 'There's No Place Like Home'. Summarise what happens in each of these chapters. What do you think these chapters tell us about the meaning of home? The blurb ends with the question, 'Will either Jamie or July find a place that finally feels like home?' What do you think the answer to this question is?
- Imagine you are either July or Jamie, two months on from the end of the story. Write a diary entry describing your life and how things have changed since the end of the story. Think about your home, your relationship with your family, your friendships, school and your hopes and plans for future.
- With a partner, read the themes below. Discuss each one and decide how well you think it sums up what the book is about. Then rank the themes in order, from the one you think is most important to the one you think is least important.
  - Bravery and survival
  - The impact of drugs and alcohol
  - How to deal with worries
  - The dangers of running away
  - The meaning of home
  - The power of friendship
  - The importance of trust

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Read the author's letter to the reader below. How does it make you feel? If you could ask E.L. Norry anything, what would you like to ask her?

Dear Reader,

Have you ever wanted to run away?

The runaway was immortalised in my mind by a 1973 film (an adaptation of the E.L. Konigsburg book), ***From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs Basil E. Frankweiler***. Twelve-year-old Claudia runs away from home, taking her nine-year-old brother with her. They spend a few nights in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, before heading off to meet Ingrid Bergman (as you do!). To a young girl who, at the time, had never left Cardiff, roaming around that fantastic museum seemed like the most glamorous thing in the world. Even now, sometimes, the idea of running away – a chance to go somewhere else and to escape all the usual responsibilities – seems incredibly appealing.

I spent my childhood in children's homes and foster homes; sometimes they weren't the nicest places and I actually *did* run away a couple of times – thankfully, I never got very far and was only ever missing for a few hours. The first time I was about six and visiting my mum for a weekend. Me and another girl on the same estate banged on doors, hoping to find adventure and someone who'd let us in. Eventually a man did and – we were lucky – returned us to where we should have been.

I'm always curious about where authors' stories come from. With this story, a name sparked my imagination before anything else. Inspired by a writer friend, Jenni, I visited the Foundling Museum in London. In a list on the wall, many names caught my attention. But only one gave me a character instantly and stood out above the others: *July Green*. The other main character, Jamie, is named after a foster brother I once lived with. He was younger than me and I was very fond of him– the only time I've ever had a brother. I think there's a lovely serendipity in the fact that Jamie also happens to be the name of Claudia's younger brother in ***From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs Basil E. Frankweiler***, the inspiration for **RUNAWAYS** in the first place.

I carried July and Jamie with me until, eventually, over two brainstorming days in October 2023 with Jenni, the right story found the characters. In five years of being published, this was the first opportunity I'd had to tell whatever story I wanted, in whatever way I wanted. I knew I wanted to write from a dual point of view, exploring two children who have very different lives and are thrown together. The idea of someone running to someone, and someone else running away *from* something, planted itself, and **RUNAWAYS** was born. I thought about why a child might want to leave home and risk losing the comfort and safety of that place. Who does that unless they feel they have no other choice?

RUNAWAYS is ultimately a story of hope, but running away is a serious issue in the UK. Over 100,000 children and young people go missing every year, with a third of those being thirteen and under. As you read, I'd like you to think about home and what that word means to you.

Thank you for reading.

E.L. NORRY

In her letter to the reader, the author explains that she developed the characters of July and Jamie before she came up with the plot of the story. Develop a fictional character of your own! Create a profile for your character including their personality, appearance, name, friends, family, interests, talents and where they live. Now share your character with a friend. What if your two characters were to meet? How might they help each other or not? Can you think of an idea for a story involving both of your characters?

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HELP AND INFORMATION

If you're interested in – or affected by – any of the issues in *Runaways*, you may find some of these websites or organisations useful:

Runaway Helpline

A free and confidential helpline – phone or text 116 000 or see runawayhelpline.org.uk. They will listen and offer support, not judge or tell you what to do.

Missing People

A charity that offers services and support to those affected by a disappearance, both the leaver and those left behind. See missingpeople.org.uk or phone 116 000.

Childline

A free, private and confidential service for people aged under nineteen, where you can talk about anything. Trained counsellors are available any time of day or night and you can contact them by phone on 0800 1111, or via live chat on their website, childline.org.uk.

YoungMinds

You are not alone. Mental health support and advice for young people (and their parents or adults who work with children) available on their website, youngminds.org.uk.

The Mix

Advice and support for anyone aged under twenty-five about a huge variety of topics on their website, themix.org.uk.
It includes online community groups, live chat, crisis messenger text support and more.

Prisoners' Families Helpline

Free, confidential support and advice for families in England and Wales who have a member in prison. Their phone number is 0808 808 2003 and their website is prisonersfamilies.org. Childline (see above) can also offer support to children who have a dad or mum in prison.

Become

A charity for children in care and young care leavers, providing support, coaching and a space for care-experienced young people to meet. You can call their Care Advice Line on 0800 023 2033, or WhatsApp them on 0786 003 4982, or see becomecharity.org.uk.