

Book Club Discussion Questions

HEARTSTOPPER



ALICE OSEMAN.

ABOUT THE BOOKS

Heartstopper is a teen LGBTQ+ graphic novel series by Alice Oseman, covering life, love and everything in between. Sweet and funny, it also sensitively deals with topics like bullying and coming out. There are 4 main volumes alongside a colouring book and Yearbook, which includes *Heartstopper* trivia, full colour illustrations and drawing tips from Alice.

Heartstopper – Volume 1

Charlie and Nick are at the same school, but they've never met ... until one day when they're made to sit together. They quickly become friends, and soon Charlie is falling hard for Nick, even though he doesn't think he has a chance.

But love works in surprising ways, and Nick is more interested in Charlie than either of them realised.

Heartstopper – Volume 2

Nick and Charlie are best friends. Nick knows Charlie's gay, and Charlie is sure that Nick isn't. But love works in surprising ways, and Nick is discovering all kinds of things about his friends, his family ... and himself.

Heartstopper – Volume 3

Charlie didn't think Nick could ever like him back, but now they're officially boyfriends. Nick's even found the courage to come out to his mum.

But coming out isn't just something that happens once - there's Nick's older brother, and a school trip to Paris, not to mention all the other friends and family - and life can be hard, even with someone who loves you by your side. As their feelings get more serious, Charlie and Nick will need each other more than ever before.

Heartstopper – Volume 4

Charlie didn't think Nick could ever like him back, but now they're officially boyfriends. Charlie's beginning to feel ready to say those three little words: I love you.

Nick's been feeling the same, but he's got a lot on his mind - not least coming out to his dad, and the fact that Charlie might have an eating disorder.

As summer turns to autumn and a new school year begins, Charlie and Nick are about to learn a lot about what love means.



HEARTSTOPPER PRE-READING

Discussion questions:

- How many books, films, or television series can you name with a same-sex relationship at its heart? Give examples.
- Are you surprised at how many or how few you can name? Explain your ideas.
- Why is it important that same-sex relationships are represented in books and on the stage and screen?
- Can you think of any other people or groups in society who may feel underrepresented? What is the impact of this?
- What do the letters 'LGBTQ+' stand for? Discuss these terms together.
- What do you know already about LGBTQ+ History Month? What is its aim?
- Have you ever heard of or attended Pride? What is it and how does it link to LGBTQ+ History Month?
- What were the Stonewall riots? Is this something you have discussed already at school or elsewhere?

EXTRACT PACK 1 HEARTSTOPPER – VOLUME 1

110

Back Nick Nelson

Well it started last September

Everyone at school had found out I was gay by then, the bullying had mostly stopped I guess and people had started to be nice to me (there was a group of Sixth Formers who stopped the bullies) but everyone in the school knew I was gay.

So I was practising my drums one morning before form in a practise room and I look up and see Ben looking in through the door window. He walks in and starts telling me how good I am at playing the drums, and I'm just sitting there like 'what the fuck' because I've never spoken to him before in my life... but also kind of freaking out because I thought he was really attractive...

Eventually he comes in and sits next to me and starts talking to me about me coming out at school, and like, how 'brave' I am and stuff... even though it's not like I came out myself or anything, it just got out because I told a couple of people...

And then next thing I know he's just kissing me

Back Nick Nelson

And yeah, we just continued to meet up sometimes at school before form. And like... I was so excited about it. I thought I had a boyfriend, or, like, I was having some big romance... But I slowly started to realise he was just using me for someone to make out with... because I was the only gay boy he knew...

and then in January I found out he had a girlfriend as well. Some girl from Higgs school. I don't know if he's bisexual or gay or whatever but it doesn't really change anything. He was just using me.

tap tap tap

I tried to end it but he just kept pestering me. I thought I'd just meet up with him one last time to tell him to leave me alone but... yeah. That didn't go well I guess haha

111

Discussion questions:

- Why might school have been difficult for Charlie when people 'found out' he was gay? Give examples.
- What is your impression of Ben in this extract? Why is his relationship with Charlie a negative one?
- How might Ben benefit from having someone to talk to? What difficult feelings might he be going through?
- Why might Charlie have been confused by Ben's behaviour towards him? Give examples.
- How might this scenario be different if it was a heterosexual relationship? What changes?
- What does it tell us about Nick, that Charlie can open up to him in this way?
- Why is Nick's and Charlie's relationship a positive example of a same-sex relationship? Explain your ideas.
- How do the illustrations of the graphic novel form help to show the feelings and emotions of the characters?

EXTRACT PACK 2 HEARTSTOPPER – VOLUME 2



552



553

Discussion questions:

- What is happening in the extract from *Heartstopper Volume 2*? What emotions do you think Nick is experiencing here?
- Why does it take great courage to have conversations like this? Explain your ideas.
- How does Nick's mum respond to the news she is given? How is humour used effectively here and throughout the novel?
- How could Nick's mum react differently to this news? How could a negative reaction from her affect him?
- What is the problem with the notion of 'coming out'? Do heterosexual individuals also declare their sexuality like this?
- Why is it important to confide in people you trust when you are ready? How does this idea relate to Charlie's experiences?
- How can you be supportive to those in the LGBTQ+ community who discuss their sexuality with you privately?
- How can you show solidarity with someone in the LGBTQ+ community who comes out publicly? Give examples.

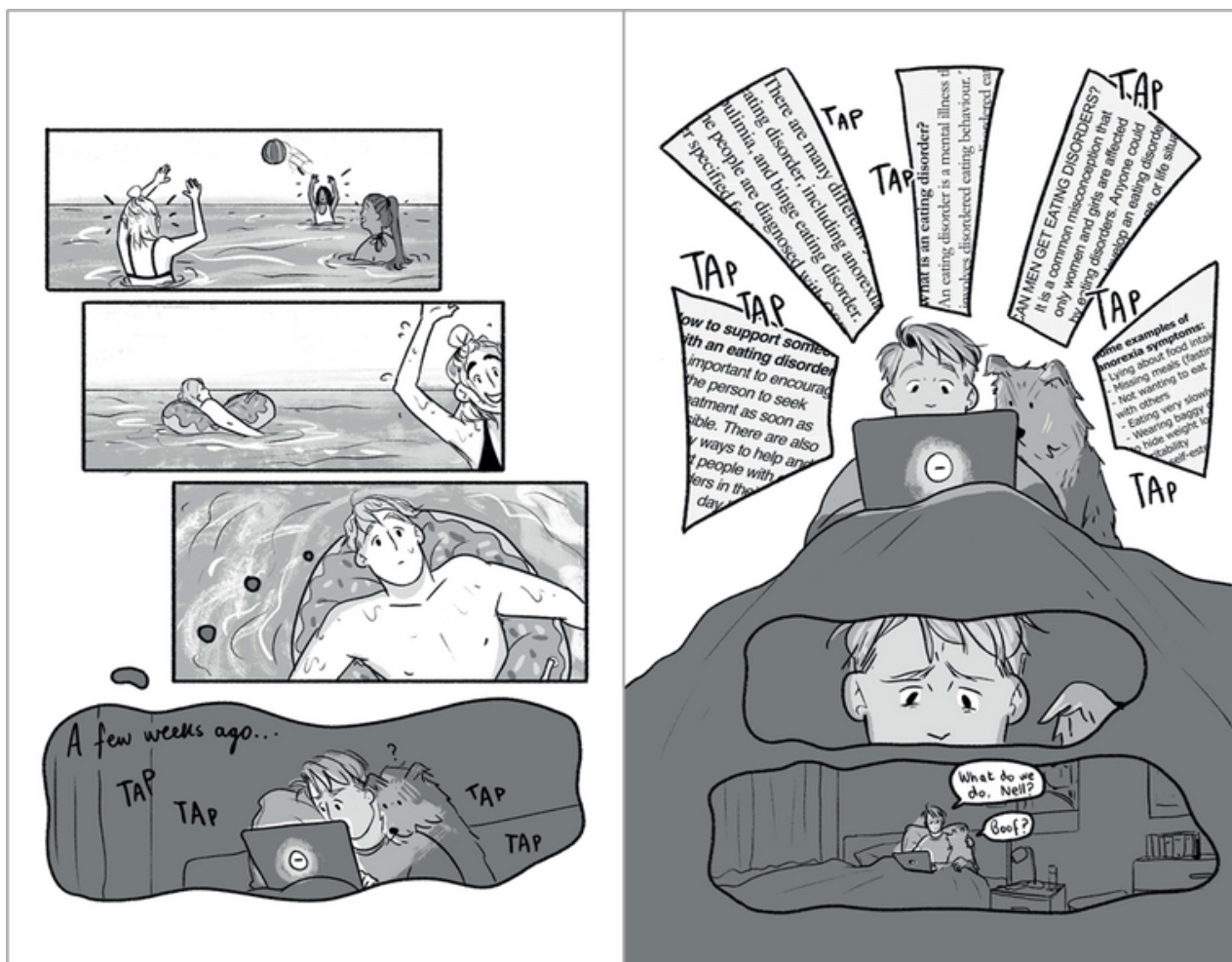
EXTRACT PACK 3 HEARTSTOPPER – VOLUME 3



Discussion questions:

- How has Charlie's and Nick's relationship evolved over the course of their trip to Paris? Explain your ideas.
- Which other characters have faced challenges in their love lives? Give examples.
- Which characters have changed their views or behaviour towards the LGBTQ+ community in the novel? Give examples.
- Do you think Charlie and Nick make a good couple? What other examples are there of positive same-sex relationships?
- Who do you think has learned the most about themselves over the *Heartstopper* books? Explain your ideas.
- What do you think are the key messages behind the *Heartstopper* series?
- Do you think that we need more books, films, and tv series that explore similar themes to *Heartstopper*?
- What have you learned over the course of these lessons? What questions do you still have? Discuss them.

EXTRACT PACK 4 HEARTSTOPPER – VOLUME 4



Discussion questions:

- What are the different worries for Charlie and Nick? How are these worries linked?
- Read pages 46–51. What does Charlie want to tell Nick? Why is it so hard for him to say what he wants to say?
- Why do you think 'love' is sometimes the hardest thing to show or express?
- Even though Nick and Charlie are in a relationship, how do both of them sometimes feel isolated? How does Alice Oseman show these feelings of isolation in her illustrations?
- What does it mean to have an eating disorder? What is Charlie's eating disorder? How does it impact his daily life?
- Read pages 46–51. How does Nick feel about Charlie's eating disorder?
- Looking at these pages, how does Alice Oseman show Nick's concern for Charlie?
- How much of this story is about communication and being able to communicate sensitively and with empathy?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Which volume of *Heartstopper* did you enjoy the most and why?
- Who was your favourite character and why?
- Which was your favourite illustration and why?
- Which was your favourite discussion or activity? What did you learn from it?

Look out for further volumes of *Heartstopper*!

FURTHER READING

Fiction:

Only Mostly Devastated by Sophie Gonzales

The Black Flamingo by Dean Atta

Paper & Hearts Society: Read With Pride by Lucy Powrie

Wonderland by Juno Dawson

Only on the Weekends by Dean Atta

Afterlove by Tanya Byrne

Non-fiction:

From Prejudice to Pride: A History of the LGBTQ+ Movement by Amy Lamé

Rainbow Revolutions by Jamie Lawson

What's the T? by Juno Dawson