Neville No-Phone - Overview

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Neville is the only kid in his whole class without a mobile phone. Or so he tells his parents. When it’s clear that Neville’s parents can’t be persuaded to get him a phone, Neville enlists the help of his mate, Enzo. Neville and Enzo are determined. Humans have walked on the moon; they have built the pyramids – surely if they put their minds to it, they can find a way. Surely?

Neville No-Phone is a laugh-out-loud story about not giving up, from the author of the CBCA shortlisted Violet Mackerel series. Complemented by lively black-and-white illustrations, this accessible novel will appeal to both male and female readers. The story is perfect for promoting discussion about family, values and character traits such as persistence, ingenuity and resourcefulness.

Anna Branford was born in the Isle of Man and spent her early childhood in Sudan and Papua New Guinea before moving to Australia. Creative writing was her favourite subject at school. Anna is a doll maker and a sociology lecturer at Victoria University. Anna is the author of the popular Violet Mackerel books.

Kat Chadwick was born in Pahiatua, New Zealand. She completed a Diploma in Fine Arts (majoring in print making), then spent a few years exhibiting and travelling the world. In 1995 she moved to Melbourne to study Graphic Design at Swinburne University. After gaining an Honours degree, she worked at various Melbourne design studios before establishing her own business, Designland, with her partner in life and design, Andrew Budge.

How to Use These Notes:

These notes provide a variety of discussion questions and activities that can be used with Neville No-Phone. Please select according to the level, learning style and targeted outcomes of your students.

These notes were created by Anna Branford & Leonie Jordan (Walker Books Australia).
Anna Branford on Neville No-Phone

The idea for Neville No-Phone came from two places. One was a boy I knew who was about Neville’s age, who was absolutely longing for a mobile phone of his own. He and I did some brainstorming about ways he might be able to get one in the future and it was good fun. (Note: He now has a mobile phone.) The other place the ideas came from was my best friend when I was about Neville’s age. Like Neville and Enzo, we spent quite a lot of our time together hatching plans and strategies. Also, like Neville and Enzo, not all of them worked out quite as we had hoped.

Classroom Ideas for Neville No-Phone:

Before Reading

- From the title and front cover of the book, what genre do you think Neville No-Phone will be? (A “genre” is a category of book or film such as horror, comedy, thriller or western.)
- The title of the book makes reference to a popular schoolyard saying or expression. Can you identify this expression? From the title, what do you think the plot of the story will be about?
- Look at the picture of Neville on the cover. What is your impression of him? Try to analyse the cover like a detective, looking for clues about his age, personality etc.

While Reading

- Chapters 1-3: Conduct a survey to discover how many students in the class have a mobile phone. Create a pie chart to display this information. How does your class compare to Neville’s?
- Neville’s goal is to get a mobile phone. Think of a time you had a goal. Did you reach it successfully? What were some of the factors that contributed to this? How did you feel after you achieved it?
- Make a list of goals for the future and keep this somewhere that you can refer to it regularly. Include short- term (within the next week), mid-term (over the next few years) and long-term goals (when you are grown up). Choose one goal from each section and write a strategy (plan) for how you can achieve it.
- Neville and Enzo use a number of arguments to try and persuade their parents to buy them a mobile phone. Which of these do you think your parents would be most persuaded by? Make a list of their arguments and arrange them from those you consider most convincing to those you consider least convincing.
- In chapter 2, Enzo says, “If I did have a mobile phone … I would use it to call the Society Against Unnecessary Meanness and Unfairness to Children”. Imagine that you were the president of this society.

Create a pamphlet to promote it. You could include information about the society’s aim, its history, upcoming events, how to join, quotes from existing members etc. Design a logo to put on the front of the pamphlet and include images.

- On page 25 Neville discusses his ideas about how people will communicate in the future. How do you think people will communicate in ten years time? 100 years time? 1000 years time?
- Dennis calls Neville and Enzo “Tweedledum and Tweedledee”. What is this a reference to? Why does he call them this?

Chapters 4-6: In chapter 4, Neville tells his mother all the things he could have used a mobile phone for on a trip to the shops. Make a list of the things you use/ would use a mobile phone for during a typical week. What could you do in each instance if you didn’t have a mobile phone?

- Enzo and Neville find a mobile phone at the bus shelter in chapter 4. What would you do if you found a lost mobile phone? Why?
- Neville describes a technique he and Enzo sometimes use when they have to tell their parents something that might get them into trouble. They make up a pretend story which would get them into terrible trouble and only afterwards tell the truth. Working in pairs, write a scene for a play or film script in which a character is using this same technique. What is the real truth? What story do they tell to make it seem better by comparison?

- Neville and Enzo’s teacher, Miss Hegarty, has two very different sides to her personality. One is quiet and gentle and the other is angry and scary. You can see these two different aspects in the illustration on pages 47 and 52. Do you have any contradictions in your own personality? Draw or paint two self-portraits that show two different sides of your character.

- Neville’s teacher, Miss Hegarty, says “bleeping” in the classroom in “DIRECT contravention of Section 452, Part 7.98 of the rules … regarding inappropriate usage of technological devices in educational settings.” (49)

What rules do you have at your school regarding the use of technology (mobile phones, iPods, laptops, USBs etc)? Why do you think these policies exist? Do they work? Can you think of any ways they could be improved? Choose one form of technology and write a letter to the Student Representative Council or school principal evaluating the effectiveness of school policy in relation to this.

- Chapters 7-9: In chapter 8 the boys learn that the phone belongs to someone called “Ape”. What do you think this character will be like? Write a description of them. Revisit your description at the end of the book. Was Ape what you expected? What has this activity taught you?

At the end of chapter 8, Neville announces that “something is going on” with Dennis, “the kind of something that I bet we can figure out with a bit of careful detective work”. In pairs, imagine that you are Neville and Enzo and develop a plan to work out what is going on.

Read Neville’s plan in chapter 9. Did he take a similar or different strategy to you? Was his plan a good one in your opinion?

- Neville tries to distract Dennis with “the most distracting sandwich the world has ever seen” (70). If someone was making such a sandwich for you, what would it have on it? Draw a picture of this sandwich.

- Neville adopts his grandma’s idea about making a phone out of paper cups and a bit of string. Use the worksheet provided to make your own paper cup phone, experimenting with different lengths of string. Does your phone work? What are some of the factors that have an impact on its success? What is the furthest distance it works effectively across?

Research the scientific principle behind this experiment on the internet. Write a science report about the experiment in your workbook.

- Neville’s parents read lots of books with “How to” titles, such as Peaceful Sibling Relationships: 101 creative ways to help your children get along and How to Prepare Your Teen for Dating. Think of a title for a “how to” book that you would like to read. (e.g How to Make a Million Dollars, How to Become a Famous Artist, How to Persuade Your Parents to Get a Dog) and write it at the top of a piece of paper. Then pass all the papers around and ask everyone to write down one idea to go inside the book.

- Look at the picture on pages 102-103 which show how Neville and Enzo’s pulley works. Working in pairs, use string and whatever props, tools and supplies you can find in the classroom and see if you can design and make a pulley system of your own. What kinds of things can you transport via your pulley?

In pairs, devise a morse code system like Neville and Enzo. Send a message in your code in front of the class and see if anyone is able to crack the code.

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- Compose a diary entry as Dennis before he goes on his date with April. What are his plans for the evening? Consider what he might be feeling. What are some of the things he might be worried or excited about?

- What twist is revealed in the last few pages of the book? How do the boys respond to this new information? Is this what you expected? Why do you think they respond in this way?

Towards the end of the story Neville’s attitude begins to change towards his brother Dennis. Why do you think this happens? See if you can pinpoint the moment in the story when Neville stops seeking revenge on his brother and starts wanting to help him.

- Neville and Enzo plot to get a motorbike. Write an additional chapter to the book where Neville and Enzo plot to get a motorbike.

In chapter 11 Neville tries to mime his amazing discovery to Enzo. Practise doing this mime!
Further Activities

Character

- Discuss the concept of main characters (protagonists) and supporting characters, and the role that each plays in a novel. Identify the main characters and supporting characters in *Neville No-Phone*, then:
  - choose a character and write five questions you'd like to ask him or her
  - choose a character and explain why you would or wouldn't like to have him or her as a friend.

- In small groups, create a character map for a person from the book. Make sure each group chooses a different character and that the key characters from the book are covered (Neville, Enzo, Dennis, Neville's Mum and Dad, Ape, Maria Matizzi and Miss Hegarty).

Persuasion

- As a class, brainstorm a list of persuasive techniques. For example, appealing to guilt, appealing to a sense of responsibility, descriptive language, rhetorical questions, inclusive language (“us”, “we”), exaggeration, flattery, facts and statistics and logic and reasoning. Which of these do Neville and Enzo use in the book? What examples can you find?

- Choose something that you would desperately like to have or do. Compose a clever argument to try and convince your parents to allow you to have or do this thing. Deliver your speech to the class using your most persuasive tone. Also consider how you can use volume, pace, pauses, facial expression and body language to be as convincing as possible.

Humour

- As a class, discuss the things that made *Neville No-Phone* humourous. What did you consider the funniest part of the novel overall?

- Do you think the book was purely humorous or did it also raise some important issues? Have a “moveable debate” on the topic.

Research

- Research some of the ways people communicated over distances in the past. For example, smoke signals, drums, courier pigeon, semaphore, morse code etc. Create a poster displaying this information.

- Designate one side of the classroom “Humourous” and one side “Raised important issues”.
- Ask students to stand somewhere between the two walls, to represent their point of view.
- Have students explain their opinion, while other students move position as their attitude to the book changes.

Art

- How do Kat Chadwick’s illustrations enhance the novel? Would the book have been as enjoyable without them?

- Choose a page of the book without pictures and create your own illustration for it. Explain your choice of colour and style to the class.

Other Books You May Enjoy

- **Violet Mackerel’s Brilliant Plot**
  Anna Branford & Sarah Davis (illus.)
  9781921529177
  AU$19.95/ NZ$24.99

- **Violet Mackerel’s Remarkable Recovery**
  Anna Branford & Sarah Davis (illus.)
  9781921529184
  AU$19.95/ NZ$24.99

- **Duck for a Day**
  Meg McKinlay & Leila Rudge (illus.)
  9781921529283
  AU$13.95/ NZ$15.99

- **Lightning Strikes: Camp Croc**
  Trudie Trewin
  9781921720031
  AU$12.95/ NZ$15.99

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Try making a cup phone like the one Neville and Enzo use to communicate with each other from their rooms.

**YOU WILL NEED:**
- Two disposable cups
- String (you can experiment with different lengths, depending on how far apart you would like to stand)
- Scissors
- A thick needle (such as a darning needle)
- Another person to try out the phone with

**INSTRUCTIONS:**
1. Using the needle, pierce a small hole in the bottom of each cup.
2. Thread the end of a piece of string through the hole of one of the cups and tie a knot in it, large enough so that it doesn’t go back through the hole if you pull it tight.
3. Thread the other end of the string through the other cup and knot it in the same way.
4. Give one cup to a friend and hold the other yourself. Stand far enough apart that the string is pulled taut. Now try talking into the cup while your friend holds it to their ear.