

# *Fear wrapped in a metaphor*

Based on the **Dragon Skin** by *Karen Foxlee*

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Teachers' Notes: *Dragon Skin* provides a range of themes to delve into with your class; loss, hope, friendship both old and new, opportunities seized, and subtly, the underlying issue of domestic violence.

**However, not once does Karen Foxlee use the words coercive control or domestic violence.** Matt, Pip's mum's partner, is psychologically abusive. The author uses rich language features peppered with similes, metaphors and some idiom to describe the abusive household. She even includes a more dangerous character, Mika's mum's boyfriend, Marty to show the spectrum of violence that can exist in many Australian households.

**The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports one in 6 Australian women and 1 in 16 men have been subjected, since the age of 15, to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabiting partner (ABS 2017b). See the diagram for more statistics.**

These statistics highlight the fact, you **will** teach a child, possibly several who deal with these situations daily.

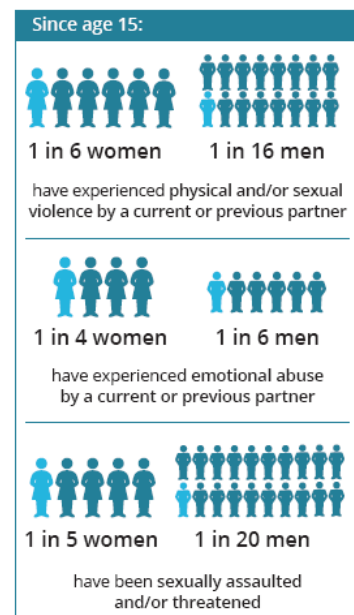
Fiction is an ideal medium for addressing these issues.

**You may prefer to begin with one of the other *Dragon Skin* activities to set the scene of the novel without diving deep into this contentious topic. Or you may have a relationship with students that allows you to begin with these resources.**

Alternative pages have been selected for you to determine which perspective you feel suits your class best.

1. The first perspective is focussing upon Matt, the emotionally violent boyfriend who exerts coercive control over Pip's mother.
2. The second focuses upon Pip's mum and the changes Matt caused in their lives.

Grouping students: This is an activity where friendship groups are more likely to provide support to students in need. If you have students who are isolated by the group, choose carefully and join this group to support these individuals.



## ALTERNATIVE 1: **Pip's perspective**

Provide students with a blank A3 sheet to draw or write as you read the excerpts.

Read this summary to students: **Pip is made to feel invisible at home, at least that's what Matt her Mum's boyfriend wants her to feel. As you listen to the descriptions of Matt, make notes. After listening, discuss in your group how this character would make you feel, if you lived with him. Pip had Little Fella to care for to help her. Brainstorm a list of activities you can do if you were in this situation.**

Listen to Karen Foxlee's descriptions of Matt on pp.11-12 from 'Eat up...'

Check out pp.23-26 to '...like a vent had been opened.' to hear the rich language the author uses.

Read p.199 to find rich language about how Matt wakes up.

On p.205 from 'Your grandmother...' to 'to be squished' we see how Matt despises Pip's grandmother.

Check out pp.258-260 from 'The second year...' to '...On the inside.' to read about the impact Matt has had on Pip's life.

On these pages we see Matt around his mates and how he treats Pip and her mum. pp.263-266 to '...weeks old.'

Check out pp.274-276 to 'blood-red letters.' to learn how Pip deals with her dilemma.

Explain to students that Matt is sadly not unique. Pip's friend Mika had to leave his mother and flee to his great-grandmother because of someone similar to Matt.

Finish with an excerpt from Pip's memory about Mika's story of his step-father, Marty on pp.223-224 from 'He was, like...'

Provide a blank A4 page to list possible strategies after reading.

Use group created lists to collaboratively create a class list of strategies to deal with violence.

At the end of the lesson read Karen Foxlee's Acknowledgments page at the end of the novel to support students' understanding and distribute helpline cards. <https://bit.ly/HLineC>

## ALTERNATIVE 2: **Missing mum**

Print graphic organiser on A3 for groups. <https://bit.ly/GOPMDS> Read the following summary to provide an overview of how Pip feels. Students complete the graphic organiser as the teacher reads. Students use a blank A4 page to brainstorm strategies Pip could use to survive this situation and create a class list of strategies to deal with violence in the home. At the end of the lesson read Karen Foxlee's Acknowledgments page at the end of the novel to support students' understanding and distribute helpline cards.

Read this summary to students: **Pip misses her mum, the old one with the real laugh. She sees her Mum as two different people: before Matt and after Matt. In your group, use the graphic organizer to list characteristics before and after Matt.**

Read the paragraph on p.18 beginning, 'The light..' to see how Pip views her mum.

See how their relationship is struggling on pp.48-49'...looked darker.' as well as pp.50-53 from 'You never used...' to 'bit her bottom lip.' and a few paragraphs on p.63 to 'I'm going to school', said Pip.'

Check out paragraphs on pp. 82-83 from 'You're not as hot..'to '...the bedroom door.' to get a glimpse of their life before Matt.

The last two paragraphs on p.97 to p.98 '*If only*, thought Pip.'

See how Pip's Mum is beginning to admit the problem on pp.101-103 from 'Sorry...'

pp. 110-112 from 'It was her mum...' to '...jack-hammering in her chest.' show how Matt affects their home.

Some great pages to explore that it's okay for boys to cry pp.118-121 from 'I thought...' to 'every time they cried.'

These pages show how Pip's mum copes pp.156-157 from 'Her mother was thinking...' to '..bad tomorrow.' as well as pp. 183-185 from 'Shhh...',

Compare Matt to Mika's stepfather Marty on pp.224-225.

Check out pp.253-256 from 'Hey...' to see how it takes time for Pip's mum to change.

On p.291 the friends contemplate Little Fella's mum and compare to their own and Pip fondly remembers her old mum to '...the Double Delight.'

These last pages come with a spoiler alert to show this story has a happy ending on pp.322-325.

## Notes for teachers

Source of Domestic Violence statistics quoted: <https://bit.ly/AIHW-stats>

**Graphic organiser for comparing Pip’s mum.** <https://bit.ly/GOPMDS>

Screenshot below:

### *Missing Mum*

Pip misses her mum, the old one with the real laugh. She sees her Mum as two different people: before Matt and after Matt. In your group, use the graphic organizer to list characteristics before and after Matt.

<i>Mum before Matt</i>	<i>Mum after Matt</i>

**Helpline info cards** <https://bit.ly/HLineC> Print on card and cut for distributing to all students for seeking help. Page formatted with cards to be printed back-to-back for all students.

Everyone needs

help sometimes!

**1800RESPECT**

1800 737 732 [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

**Kids Helpline**

1800 55 1800 [www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

**Lifeline**

13 11 14 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)