



TEACHERS NOTES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Middle to upper primary
Ages 8+

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Health & Physical Education
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical & Creative Thinking; Personal & Social Capability; Ethical Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS SERIES

- Learning about friendship, teamwork and facing challenges in a positive, inclusive way.
- Seeing how kids come together as a team.
- Looking at the positive influence sport, particularly team sport, can have on kids.
- Encouraging imaginative thinking and writing.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Facing and overcoming challenges
- Resilience
- Being different
- Kindness and acceptance of others
- What makes a family?
- What makes a team?

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

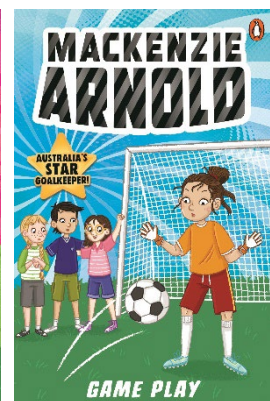
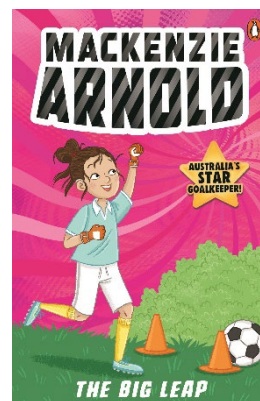
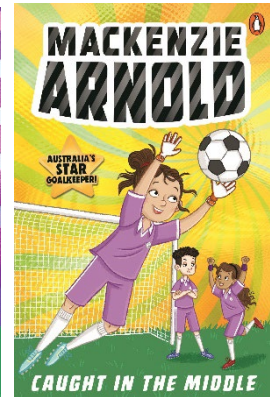
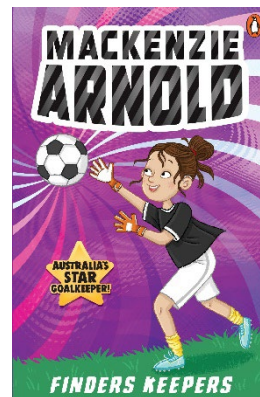
PUBLICATION DETAILS

Book 1: <i>Finders Keepers</i>	9781761346835
Book 2: <i>Caught in the Middle</i>	9781761346859
Book 3: <i>The Big Leap</i>	9781761346873
Book 4: <i>Game Play</i>	9781761346897

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Mackenzie Arnold:

Finders Keepers
Caught in the Middle
The Big Leap
Game Play

PLOT SUMMARY

Meet Matildas star goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold as a kid and follow her football and friendship adventures.

Macca is in Year 6 and loving life. She plays fullback for her beloved Seaport Strikers, skates and loves hanging out with her mates – she’s always up for a kick-around in the park and a good-natured prank. But when things go a bit pear-shaped for the Strikers and their goalie is too sick to play, Macca puts on the gloves and steps up.

This is the beginning of Macca’s journey to become a goalkeeper, developing her love of the game and her desire to achieve. Through the series we see Macca and her friends face challenges and figure out that working together is always the best way to move forward. Full of laughter and fun – and football! – this series is perfect for kids who love sport *and* kids who love books.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mackenzie Arnold is Australia’s number one goalkeeper, earning the nicknames The Brick Wall and Australia’s new Minister of Defence.

She was born on the Gold Coast and made her debut for the Matildas in 2012 when she was 18. Since then, Macca has risen to the top both at an international level and throughout her Australian W-League career.

In 2023, Macca’s heroic performance in a record-breaking penalty shootout against France to secure the Matildas a spot in the FIFA Women’s World Cup semi-finals was watched by millions of Australians. In 2024, Macca will put on the gloves at the Paris Olympics, where the Matildas will go for gold.

SERIES INSPIRATION

The stories in the Mackenzie Arnold junior fiction series are about a young Mackenzie Arnold and her football journey, but they are also about bigger themes of friendship, facing challenges, loyalty, determination, resilience, family and kids doing activities they love with other kids who love them too. Each story shows a team working together and accepting each other – if each player does their best, the team does its best. These books are about how special it is to find friends who share the same passions and interests, and about how they can work together to overcome challenges.

Questions

1. Do you have a favourite activity you do with friends?
2. How important do you think it is to have different groups of friends?
3. If you play on a sports team, how do the different members of the team interact with each other and as a group?
4. These books are made up (fiction) but are based on the childhood memories of a real person. Does knowing who Mackenzie Arnold is make you more interested to read these fictional stories?

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Look at the illustrations on the covers of the books. Based on these, what do you think the stories will be about? What does the full cover tell you about the characters? Are there any other things you can learn about the stories?
2. The illustrations are just one element of the front covers. What other elements can you find that create the full cover and why are they there?
3. Why do you think two of the covers only feature Macca and the other two include other characters?
4. Pick your favourite cover from the series. Before reading the blurb on the back cover, write your own blurb, based on the front cover. Include where the story is set, the characters’ names and what problems they are going to face in the story. Now, read the blurb on the back. It includes information about the characters, the story and a question. Why do you think a question is included? What other interesting information is highlighted on the back cover?
5. For book 1, read the first page of Chapter 1. Can you work out whose point of view the story is being told from? Why do you think the author chose to write these stories this way? Could you rewrite this opening page in the present tense to see if it would seem different? If so, how?

CHARACTERS

Mackenzie Arnold

Mackenzie Arnold – Macca to all her friends; Kenzo to her big brother; and Mackenzie to her parents and teachers – is eleven years old (almost twelve) and is in Year 6 at Mermaid Beach Public School. In book 1, she plays fullback for her beloved team, the Seaport Strikers. But when some unexpected things happen, she finds the courage to try playing goalkeeper. And she discovers that she’s pretty good at it. She plays on the team with her friends, most of whom she also goes to school with. She loves the Matildas and also loves other sports too – as well as football, she plays tennis and also skates with her friend and next-door neighbour, Hamish. She’s a sporty kid who values her friendships and loves to laugh. She enjoys playing pranks and sometimes gets in trouble for not concentrating in class or at football training. But, with help from the important people in her life, she learns how to navigate challenges and build friendships – and find the confidence to build her role as goalkeeper.

Questions and activities

1. What qualities do you admire in Macca? Does she seem like someone you would want to be friends with?



- When Macca faces challenges, she turns to her friends. Who are the people you turn to when you need help?
- Read Chapter 1. Write down what you learn about Macca. What sort of person is she? What does she enjoy? What other interesting things did you notice?
- Macca always tries her best when she is playing football with the Seaport Strikers. She loves football and it makes her feel good. Do you have an activity you love? Share the activity with your class and find out what your classmates love to do.

Ryder

Ryder is one of Macca's best friends. He is funny and likes to tease Macca and their friends. He is also loyal. And very competitive. He plays striker with the Seaport Strikers and he loves scoring goals. Sometimes his competitiveness can cause issues for his friends and their football team.

Questions and activities

- Do you have a friend who sometimes gets too competitive? Write down some examples of when this has happened and how you worked things out with this friend.
- In book 4, *Game Play*, Ryder challenges Macca to a seven-a-side football game that gets a bit out of hand. Do you think Ryder pushes things too far and risks losing friendships for the sake of beating Macca? Can you be competitive with your friends while still being loyal?
- Read chapter 4 in book 4. We see that after challenging Macca to a football match for which they will be opposing captains, Ryder immediately organises for all his favourite players to be on his team, before Macca can do anything. Can you rewrite the second half of this chapter to show how Macca might have done this, if the situation was reversed? Do you think this would come naturally to her personality?

Smiley

Smiley – whose real name is Peyton – is another of Macca's closest friends. She gets her nickname because she always has a big smile on her face. But on the football pitch, she is a weapon! She and Macca are very good friends who support each other and have lots of fun at the local park.

Question

- Who is your most loyal friend? What parts of their personality do you value most?

Sage

Sage has been close friends with Macca for a long time. They play football together for the Seaport Strikers and also go to tennis lessons together once a week.

Questions

- How do Sage and Macca's tennis lessons differ to their football training? Are there different lessons to learn through individual sport compared to team sport?
- Do you think playing more than one sport can help you develop your skills in both?

Hamish

Hamish lives next door to the Arnold family. He and Macca skateboard together on the footpath outside their houses, and Hamish is always up for a laugh with Macca. He doesn't like team sports but is a loyal fan of the Seaport Strikers and often goes to watch their Saturday games. When Macca needs an extra player for the grudge match against Team Ryder (in book 4, *Game Play*), Hamish steps up. He's very nervous! But he does it for his friend.

Question/activity

- Through the four books in this series, Hamish supports Macca and the Seaport Strikers even though he has no interest in football – or team sports! Find the sections that show how Hamish supports his friends. What do these show you about Hamish as a character?

Sofia

Macca and her friends meet Sofia at the beginning of book 2, *Caught in the Middle*. Sofia has just moved to Australia from her home in Argentina and starts school with everyone at Mermaid Beach Public School. After seeing Sofia play football in the park, Macca invites her to join the Seaport Strikers. This causes an issue with Ryder, who considers himself the team's best striker – and when Sofia gives him a run for his money, lots of drama ensues!

Questions

- In book 2, *Caught in the Middle*, Macca feels like she is stuck between her oldest friend, Ryder, and her new friend, Sofia. Have you ever been in this situation? How did you resolve the tension?
- Reading book 2, do you think the author wants you to take sides? Can you understand the perspectives of Ryder and Sofia?
- Do you think Macca handles this situation well? What does this tell us about her as a character?



Scary Mary

At the beginning of book 1, *Finders Keepers*, we see that Macca and her friends are afraid of a local neighbourhood woman they call 'Scary Mary'. We are told: 'Scary Mary didn't like sports. She didn't like noise. She definitely didn't like kids. Macca was pretty sure she didn't like *anything*.' (book 1, pg) As the story progresses, however, we see Macca and her friends develop a better understanding of Mary. By the end of book 4, Mary is an important friend in Macca's life.

Questions

1. Does it matter that Macca is 11 and Mary is in her late sixties? How is this friendship different to the friendships Macca has with her school mates and teammates?

Sam

Sam Arnold is Macca's big brother. He plays football and rugby and is very supportive of his little sister. When she needs some help improving her goalie game in book 2, *Caught in the Middle*, it's Sam she turns to – and he doesn't let her down.

Questions

1. The series explores friendships and teams. How does Sam represent family connections in each of the books? He doesn't play a big role, but he does play an important role. What are the qualities Sam shows that help Macca in her football and also in the other challenges she faces?

KEY QUOTES

'If you can't outrun them, you've gotta outplay them.' (*Finders Keepers*, p1.)

'Every player has to serve them time on the bench, but it's never pleasant.' (*Finders Keepers*, pg6.)

'Mackenzie Arnold is one to watch this season. Look at the run she's having! She is the total boss of this ball.' (*Caught in the Middle*, p1)

'Now she's really being challenged. That's exactly what young Mackenzie Arnold needs to get her mind and body back in the game.' (*Caught in the Middle*, p102.)

'I am the last line of defence, and I will *not* let this ball through.' (*The Big Leap*, p2.)

'Taking on feedback is key to development, on and off the pitch.' (*The Big Leap*, p53.)

'It's crunch time. Someone needs to make a play. It all comes down to who wants it most. Is that person Mackenzie Arnold?' (*Game Play*, p1.)

'The smallest change can turn a game around. You might not know what it is until it's all over.' (*Game Play*, p128.)

What do these quotes tell you about the character of Macca and her experiences through the books? Can you find other quotes that help show how she changes and grows? The challenges and successes she experiences?

KEY STUDY TOPICS**Friendship and teamwork**

The Mackenzie Arnold series explores themes of friendship and teamwork. The stories emphasise the importance of working together and understanding each person's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the value of fair play and sportsmanship.

In the four books, we see a range of interesting, original characters who make up the Seaport Strikers. Everyone has their own (strong!) personality but one thing they have in common is their love of football.

Mackenzie Arnold values her friendships and believes that relying on your friends can help you through challenges. In the books, we see Macca relying on, and helping, her friends and teammates when things don't go to plan. Though they experience challenges, they manage to work together in the end, and they realise that strong friends and working together is the best way forward. The friendships are there to support Macca and her friends through the positive, happy things too.

Questions and activities

1. Do you have friends who have the same interests as you? Do you have more than one group of friends? What do you like about those friendships?
2. Do friends always have to agree? Why is that?
3. Think about what makes someone a good friend. Create a mind map with you in the centre and surround yourself with words and ideas to show what friendship means to you.
4. The Mackenzie Arnold series is about football, but it is also about teamwork and friendship. Even though there are some differences, the Seaport Strikers play well as a team. Write a



story where the main character doesn't want to be a team player.

5. If you could become friends with one of the characters from the series, who would it be and why?
6. In book 2, *Caught in the Middle*, Macca initiates a new friendship with Sofia, but Ryder has trouble accepting her. What tips would you give to people about making friends?
7. In book 3, *The Big Leap*, Macca meets two new girls in her cabin at football camp. It takes a little while for them to become friends. After reading book 3 (but before reading book 4), did you think that Macca would stay friends with Ruby and Zara after the end of Goal Getters Camp? Why or why not?

Courage and resilience

Throughout all four books, the members of the Seaport Strikers face challenges on and off the football pitch. They must deal with personal fears, changes, misunderstandings, disappointments, people who don't like them and other real-life problems. In the end, they all show courage and learn how good it can feel not to give up.

Questions and activities

1. The kids in the U12s Seaport Strikers help each other when one of the team is having a hard time. Sometimes, though, there are issues within the team. Imagine if you were Macca's best friend – how would you help her solve one of her problems?
2. Can you show examples of ways Macca found solutions to her own challenges as well as examples of how she asked her friends and family for help?
3. Can you find examples of other characters besides Macca who face struggles? How do they show courage and resilience?

Empathy and understanding

It is important to look beyond first impressions and rumours. In book 1, *Finders Keepers*, Macca learns that 'Scary Mary' isn't actually all that scary. Macca initially thinks: 'Scary Mary didn't like sports. She didn't like noise. She definitely didn't like kids. Macca was pretty sure she didn't like *anything*.' (pg) But when she gets to know Mary, Macca discovers that none of this is true, and Mary has valid reasons for not wanting kids to kick balls against her fence. In book 3, *The Big Leap*, at football camp Macca initially doesn't like her roommate Zara and there is some confusion between

them that causes tension. But as the girls get to know each other, Macca sees beyond Zara's 'ice queen' exterior. In both cases, looking past first impressions leads to Macca making new and important friendships.

Questions and activities

1. Can you find examples in book 2, *Caught in the Middle*, and book 4, *Game Play*, when Macca's initial reaction to a person or experience turns out to be wrong? What was the moment she realised that trying to see things from the other person's perspective could help her?
2. Have you had similar experiences? How did you come to understand someone better?

Perseverance and problem-solving

Macca faces challenges over her journey to become a confident goalkeeper. One of her key personality traits is determination, and she perseveres as she finds ways to deal with problems that come her way.

Questions and activities

1. Can you find examples in each book that show Macca figuring out ways to deal with a problem she is facing?
2. Have you faced problems that you have found solutions for? Did you find these solutions on your own or with help from a friend or family member?

Dealing with frustration

In each book, we see Macca feel – and show – frustration when she tries to achieve something on the football pitch. She wants to improve and works hard to reach her goals, but she has to learn to regulate her emotions so she can focus. She also helps her friends, especially Ryder, when they need to stay calm when something doesn't go to plan.

A device used in the Mackenzie Arnold series is to share Macca's thoughts, where she talks to herself in moments of frustration. Sometimes we see her remind herself to breathe deeply or focus on the ball that is heading her way.

Questions and activities

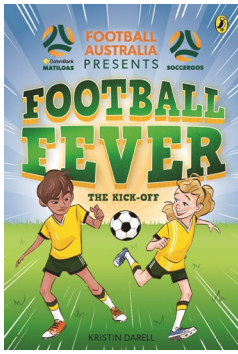
1. Can you find parts in the books where Macca helps a friend regulate their emotions when something is going wrong?
2. Now can you find parts in the books where Macca's friends help her regulate her emotions when something is going wrong?



3. How important do you think it is for Macca in her role as goalie to keep a steady mind? Are there things you need to do in sport or at school or in life that require you to shut out distractions and stay calm? How do you do this? Write down something of the things you tell yourself to help.



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

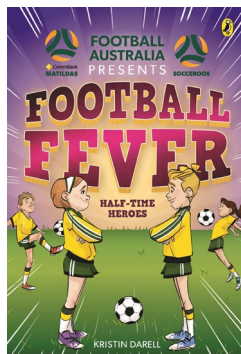


Football Fever 1: The Kick-off

Featuring Commbank Matildas and Subway Soccerroos stars Sam Kerr, Ellie Carpenter, Mary Fowler, Rhyan Grant, Joel King – and more!

It's a new season for the Under 11s Merridale Fever! Kyra's the star striker and can't wait to meet the team's new recruit, Sam – all the way from England. But Sam has a secret – he's never played on a mixed team, and it's shaking his confidence.

Will advice from some very special football superstars help Kyra and Sam join forces so the team can kick off the season with a bang, or will it end in disaster before it even begins?



Football Fever 1: Half-time Heroes

Featuring Commbank Matildas and Subway Soccerroos stars Emily van Egmond, Courtney Nevin, Awer Mabil, Marco Tilio and more!

The Under 11s Merridale Fever are back! They're having their best season ever, and even better – they have the chance to play as Half-time Heroes at a Soccerroos game. All they have to do is make a video showing what makes their team special. Instead of working together, the team take sides and try to convince each other that their way is the best way.

Can tips from some of Australia's best footballers help the Fever agree on what makes them heroes?

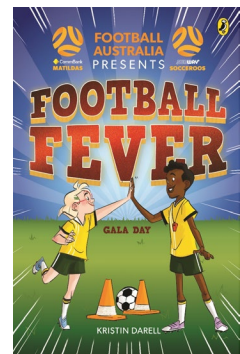


Football Fever 3: Next Level

Featuring Commbank Matildas and Subway Soccerroos stars Lydia Williams, Caitlin Foord, Milos Degenek, Andrew Redmayne and more!

It's time for the Under 11s Merridale Fever to test their skills against the most talented young footballers in Australia! The whole team has been selected for the National High Potential Pathway program and are taking part in a two-day camp. Both Kat and Crabbie are determined to be chosen for the Game of Stars match but will need to find a way to perform when they're faced with challenges on and off the field.

Can they learn from their football heroes and take it to the next level when it counts?



Football Fever 4: Gala Day

Featuring Commbank Matildas and Subway Soccerroos stars Kyah Simon, Craig Goodwin, Kyra Cooney-Cross, Garang Kuol – and more!

Following their success at the High Potential Pathway Program for Australia's future football stars, the Under 11s Merridale Fever are set to finish their season on a high – if they can win their last game against rivals Newhurst FC, the one team they have never beaten. But before this can happen, a huge storm damages the Merridale clubhouse and fields and threatens to cancel their end-of-season Gala Day.

Can help from some football greats be the motivation the team needs to be their best both on and off the pitch?



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Finders Keepers	Mackenzie Arnold	9781761346835		\$14.99		
Caught in the Middle	Mackenzie Arnold	9781761346859		\$14.99		
The Big Leap	Mackenzie Arnold	9781761346873		\$14.99		
Game Play	Mackenzie Arnold	9781761346897		\$14.99		
TOTAL						

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