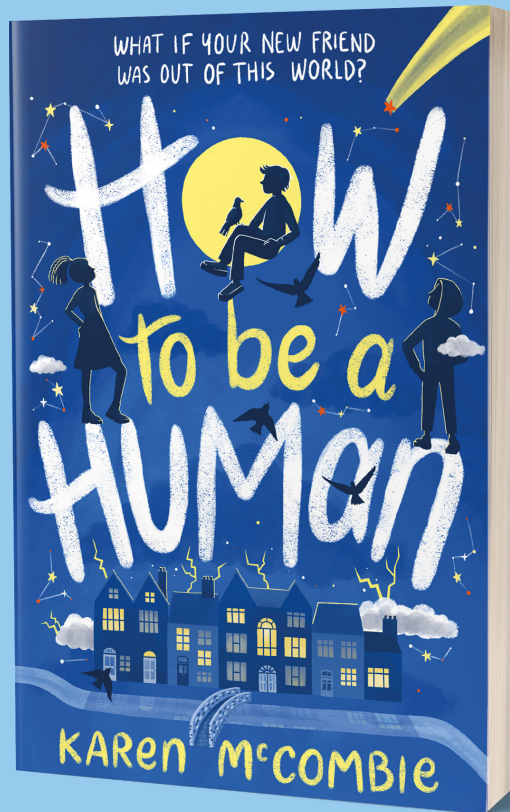


# HOW TO BE A HUMAN

by Karen McCombie



## Who said friends have to match to matter?

*When the Star Boy's space-pod crashes in the grounds of Riverside Academy he knows he must seek shelter. Taking refuge in the school's boiler room to await rescue, he discovers that the room's small window is the perfect place to watch humans go by.*

*The Star Boy knows about humans from his Earth lessons but no one from his planet has ever studied them up close. Now he has the perfect opportunity. There are two humans in particular that catch his attention – a boy called Wes and a girl named Kiki. As his curiosity grows so does his courage and, making a momentous decision, the Star Boy follows Wes and Kiki into school ... and into their lives.*

**A warm and otherworldly story about finding friendship in the most unlikely of places, for fans of Tamsin Winter, Cath Howe and Ross Welford.**



# COVER

Cover design and illustration by Thy Bui



## Comprehension Questions

Ask children the following when looking at the front cover:

- Based on the cover, what do you think the book will be about?
- What things can you see on the front cover?
- Why do you think the book has the title *How to Be a Human*?
- Look at the tagline. What would you do if your new friend was out of this world?
- Where do you think it will be set?
- What kind of story will it be? What genre do you think it belongs to?
- Who might enjoy it? Based on the cover, who might you recommend it to? Why?

Now read the blurb on the back cover:

- Does the blurb confirm your thoughts, or has it changed your mind? Why?
- Were any of your predictions correct?

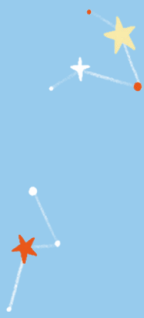
## Writing Opportunities

Complete an **Observe, Infer, Wonder** grid to encourage book talk:

- **Observe:** What can children see? Children could write their own sentences using 'I see...' to focus on descriptions.
- **Infer:** Can children make connections to the cover using their own reasoning? Children could start their sentences with 'I think ...' using 'because ...' to explain.
- **Wonder:** What questions do children have based on the front cover? They could start their sentences with 'I wonder who/what/where/when/why/how...' etc. to generate their own questions about the front cover.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **ART:** After reading the book, use what you now know to draw alternative covers for the book.



# The first storm

pages 7-9

## Comprehension Questions

- Why is the first sentence of this book '*It came out of nowhere.*' really effective in drawing the reader in?
- Where do you think this story is set? Find clues and evidence in this first chapter to explain your thinking and what you think the town of Fairfield is like.
- '*The stars twinkled and twitched...*' is an example of what kind of literary technique? (Alliteration)
- What is the name of the town's river?
- List as many effects that you can find that the storm has had on the town of Fairfield and its inhabitants.
- How do the reactions of the adults and the children of Fairfield differ in response to the storm? What might this show about them?
- Predict what you think caused this sudden storm.

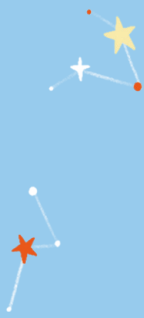
## Writing Opportunities

Write a prediction paragraph detailing what you think will happen next to the town of Fairfield and who the someone streaming through space might be and what their impact on the story will be.

Write a short account about a time when you have experienced being in a storm. Think carefully about which verbs, adjectives and adverbs you can include to make it as descriptive and atmospheric as possible.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **ART:** After reading the book, use what you now know to draw alternative covers for the book.
- **GEOGRAPHY:** Learn more about extreme weather such as how thunderstorms form and how temperature, air pressure, humidity and wind affect weather conditions.
- **HISTORY:** Research storms throughout history and their effects like the Great Storm of 1889 that happened in October like the storm in this book, and was misforecasted by a weather forecaster named Michael Fish.



# The damage next day

pages 11-22

## Comprehension Questions

- Who is the protagonist: the person telling the story in this chapter? What initial impression do we get of Kiki?
- Where does Kiki's mum work? What else do we learn about her and the rest of Kiki's family in this chapter?
- What does the word 'unprecedented' on page 16 mean?
- Who is Wes? How is he described?
- What does Tyreke - Kiki's brother - think caused the storm? How does the news reporter respond to this?
- How does Kiki feel at the end of this chapter?
- Why is this feeling compounded or made worse by the text she receives from Lola? Describe the kind of relationship that you think Kiki and Lola may have. Look back at events during the chapter and refer to the text to help you to reflect on the character of Lola.

## Writing Opportunities

During her messaging, Kiki uses the hashtag #TOTALGEEKALERT to describe Wes when she sees him on the TV. She pauses for a second, wondering if the hashtag is too mean but uses it anyway because she thinks it is something that Lola would do. Write a short paragraph explaining why Kiki should not have used this hashtag and how this is a form of cyberbullying.

Imagine you are a journalist. Write a newspaper report about the events of the storm in Fairfield. Make sure to include features like a headline and eyewitness comments from Wes and Ty.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **DRAMA:** In pairs or small groups, perform your own news broadcast like that between Lisa Garcia, Wes and Tyreke. Try to include other characters like Kiki to improvise what they might have said if they were asked.
- **COMPUTING:** It's clear that Kiki is very distracted by her mobile and modern technology. Discuss as a class the positives and negatives of using technology and knowing when to put it down or switch off.



# Friday: the night he came

pages 22-47

## Comprehension Questions

- How long had the town of Fairfield taken to start to recover from the storm and get back to normal?
- Which character is Kiki dressed up as?
- Why might Wes have an inhaler? What does this tell us about him?
- Summarise how Kiki feels in three words when Lola opens the door to find her in fancy dress.
- What does it show about the characters of Lola, Zainab and Saffron when they refuse to let Kiki borrow a top and jeans and laugh at her in front of everyone?
- Why was Kiki relieved to see that there hadn't been any comments or likes on the selfie of herself that she deletes from Instagram?
- To end this chapter, we are introduced to Star Boy. Predict who he might be and his effect on the story.

## Writing Opportunities

Write a character profile for Kiki and Wes including all that you know and can infer about them so far. How are they similar? How are they different?

Rewrite the chapter from the perspective of Lola. What would she be thinking and feeling? How can you show her influence over Kiki, and also over people like Zainab and Saffron?

Write an alternative story, where Lola shows acts of kindness towards Kiki, rather than laughing at her, when she realises her fancy dress mistake. How could she have acted instead?

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **GEOGRAPHY:** Find out how people have recovered from storms and the measures they have taken to protect themselves in the future. You may want to look at this in your local area.
- **PSHE:** Discuss the actions of Lola's bullying of Kiki, how it could be stopped and what you would do if you were at the party. How can we help people who are being bullied? Write a text message to Kiki to show that you support her.



# The first weekend on Earth

pages 49-66

## Comprehension Questions

- Why does Kiki show a 'weird kind of loyalty' to Lola, Zainab & Saffron by not telling her mum about them?
- What does Kiki realize about her feelings for her old friends Vic and Megan during this chapter?
- How does Kiki's mum behave towards Lola? Why?
- Who is described as 'freaky'? Do you agree with this?
- Find a word on page 52, which also appears on page 66, that means the same as 'a machine or device that appears strange or unnecessarily complicated, and often badly made or unsafe.' (contraption)
- Where does Star Boy find his missing data lens?
- How does Star Boy react to the drone?

## Writing Opportunities

Imagine you have just landed on Earth and are experiencing your first day. Write, in the style of Star Boy, a diary entry of your experiences. How do you feel about all the new things you see?

Star Boy can turn himself invisible. Write an explanation about what you would do if you woke up and found that you were invisible for the day. Make sure to include your feelings as well as explaining what you would do and why.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY:** Design a contraption similar to Ty's spaceship. How would you make it – what materials would you need?
- **COMPUTING:** If you have them, have a go at flying a drone.
- **PSHE:** Write a response to Lola's text message. What would you say as Kiki?



# Monday: How to spot a Human

pages 67-111

## Comprehension Questions

- What advice does Kiki's mum give her about going to school after what happened at the party?
- Why does Mr Shah, the school's site manager, make an exception for Wes with the lower playground?
- What new information do we learn about Kiki's past? Do you think she will take part in the Open Evening?
- Should Kiki have called out Harvey and his mates for their meanness towards Wes? Is there anything Kiki could or should have done differently in this situation?
- Which new feelings and emotions is Star Boy experiencing? Make a list of as many as you can find.
- How does the author create tension between Kiki and her mother when they are in the shop together?
- How does Kiki feel about herself at the end of this chapter? Summarise her feelings in three adjectives, and then explain your thinking for your choices.

## Writing Opportunities

Write a short blog as though you are Wes being bullied by the group of boys by the toilets, explaining what you wish Kiki and other children would have done to support you in that situation.

Create an Emotions Graph to plot Kiki's changing thoughts and feelings throughout this chapter. You may wish to refer to key events like: being rejected by the girls in school; seeing Wes being bullied; missing her dad; her reactions to Mum; and realising Wes is lonely.

Create a comic strip of the events in this chapter in the style of Wes's Doctor Who graphic novel that he loves to read.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **MUSIC:** There are numerous mentions of music throughout this chapter from The Planets by Gustav Holst to David Bowie and Louis Armstrong. Listen to these bands and artists and appraise these pieces of music to show what you think about them.
- **PSHE:** Both Kiki and Wes live in single parent households. Acknowledge how this feels for both characters, and point out the effects of this on both characters, like Wes having to do lots of things for himself.



# Tuesday: How to BE a Human

pages 113-164

## Comprehension Questions

- How are Kiki and Wes formally introduced to each other? How does Kiki know that Wes doesn't think much of Lola during their conversation?
- What causes the Star Boy to be seen by Kiki and Wes?
- What does an awestruck expression look like? Act it out with a partner to capture this feeling.
- Why might Mr McKenzie be surprised to see Star Boy in his classroom immediately after he has Morphed?
- What does the phrase 'hiding in plain sight' mean?
- What is the one earthly marvel that Star Boy wishes to experience? Why does this seem unusual for him?
- Why is Kiki worried at the end of this chapter about the fact that Star Boy might not be here tomorrow? Is she right to be worried?

## Writing Opportunities

Using a Venn diagram, compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the worlds of Earth and the Star Boy's planet.

Retell this chapter from Star Boy's viewpoint. Consider everything he is feeling at the moment.

Make some predictions about what might happen next.

Turn the scenes from this chapter into a playscript.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **PSHE:** The meaning of family is explored and challenged in this chapter when Kiki and Wes describe their families to Star Boy. Discuss more about the different types of families including nuclear, step, same-sex and single-parent families.
- **ART:** Draw a picture of what you think Star Boy looks like in the school uniform disguise that Wes has dressed him in, using the description provided.





# Wednesday: How to feel at home

pages 165-184

## Comprehension Questions

- Predict what earthly marvel Star Boy wants to see next.
- Explain what a 'memento' is in your own words.
- What is the significance of the sixpence and the shell that Wes has? What do these things have in common with those of Kiki's?
- Give an example of how Wes is sensitive during the story.
- Is Kiki right to say that Wes and Star Boy are not her friends? Explain your reasoning.
- Does a person have to be a human to be a friend?
- Do you think Kiki should talk to Lola, even after everything she's done to her?

## Writing Opportunities

Write a continuation of the story, predicting what happens to Kiki when she talks to Lola. What will she say?

'...Stan wasn't a person at all so they couldn't technically be described as friends, could they?'. Debate this topic. Write your points for or against the motion.

Write a balanced argument about how things that are not human can feel like friends. Think about non-human friends you have in your life like pets.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **PSHE:** Wes talks about his parents splitting up. Sensitive explore the feelings and effects associated with this experience.
- **PSHE:** Star Boy says that there are a bewildering amount of emotions on planet Earth and he acknowledges that it is hard to recognise and apply many of them. Using an emotion chart that shows expressions of faces, act out a range of emotions and describe in detail, what makes each emotion unique.



# Thursday: Enemies at close range

pages 185-232

## Comprehension Questions

- How does it feel to be 'self-conscious'? Why does Kiki feel like this at the start of this chapter?
- It says that Kiki has been 'summoned' by Lola to the usual bench where they meet. Who usually summons someone? Why is this a powerful verb to use?
- What do you think will happen to Kiki? Should she have walked away to the music room to meet Wes?
- Why does Wes repeatedly drum his fingers against something?
- Why does Wes immediately lie to Mr McKenzie about his Dad being so busy that he cannot attend the Open Evening?
- Why has Star Boy destroyed his pod's location alerter? What does this show about the relationship he has with Wes and Kiki?
- What does it mean if something is 'detonating'?

## Writing Opportunities

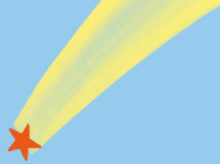
Listen to the lyrics of 'What a Wonderful World' and write about a time when you have felt glad to be a human.

Write an apology note from Kiki, sensitively saying sorry for causing upset to Wes and Star Boy for not showing up to the rehearsal and shunning them in front of the Popular Crew.

Pretend you are like Kiki and Wes. Write a truthful guide to starting secondary school for Year 6 children, explaining that it's a place where brilliant friends are found but also there are people who may seem like friends at first but are really not.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **DRAMA:** In small groups, re-enact the shunning scene. Freeze frame at different points and reflect on what each character is feeling. Don't use any dialogue. Make sure to show the reactions of Kiki, Wes, Star Boy and the Popular Crew.
- **LITERACY:** For each of the main characters in the story, write a sentence summarizing what they have learned about themselves and why.



# The last hope hideout

pages 233-241

## Comprehension Questions

- Why is Ty so animated? What is he excited about?
- Where does Eddie suggest that Stan should hide now that the school building has been damaged?
- How has Kiki developed over the course of the story? How has she become a kinder Kiki?
- Do you think that Kiki and Wes will be able to successfully teach Stan to become a human? Explain why you think this.
- Why does Stan want to stay on planet Earth?
- How does the story end on a cliffhanger and make you want to read on?
- How do you feel after reading *How to Be a Human*? What have you learned from this book?

## Writing Opportunities

Summarise the whole story in less than 100 words. Write a book review based on your thoughts about the story.

Write a letter to Karen McCombie telling her about your thoughts and feelings about the book.

Write your own continuation story about what happens to some of the characters such as Kiki, Wes, Star Boy, Ty, Eddie, Mum and the Popular Crew.

Write a set of predictions about what challenges they might face in the next book.

## Cross-Curricular Activities

- **SCIENCE:** Star Boy talks a lot about electricity. Find out more about the power of electricity, how it is created or generated and its dangers.
- **LITERACY:** Read a snippet from the start of the next book in the series at the end of the book.
- **SPEAKING AND LISTENING:** Compare your predictions from the start of the story to now – were you right about anything?