

# Viola Vincent Reporting

Author: Anna Kenna

## Synopsis

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Caitlin Nove's life is turned upside down when her mother suffers a serious bicycle accident and is paralysed. Luckily, her grandfather is there to help and between the two of them they begin to help Caitlin's mother put her life back together. Things are tough for Caitlin. Her mum Rita is a proud woman and adjusting to life in a wheelchair is not easy. Caitlin has to learn to deal with her mother's frequent depression, bad moods and anger. She also has to resolve her own anger about the accident. She believes that the bike purchased by her grandfather was faulty and that the retailers should be held accountable for her mother's accident.

Caitlin's belief that there is something wrong with the bike is confirmed when she teams up with reporter Megan Ryan and begins investigating other accidents involving the same brand of bike. Despite warnings from her mother and grandfather to leave well enough alone, Caitlin decides to follow in the footsteps of her Great Aunt Viola, a "whistle-blower" who died in mysterious circumstances while investigating the deaths of several infants who had taken Dewar's tonic. She refuses to give up her quest for justice and, although it is too late for her mother, she is determined to have the bikes removed from the market so that no one else can be injured.

## Text Type

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Viola Vincent Reporting is a fast-paced and interesting novel that will appeal particularly to girls. Set in New Zealand, the novel deals with many ideas and issues that students will be able to relate to including family, relationships, friends, peer-pressure, and dealing with change. Rita's disability is dealt with in a sympathetic and credible way and the author examines the effects of the accident not just on Caitlin's mum, but also on the whole family.

Though the story is told in third person point of view, the reader is often privy to Caitlin's private thoughts and feelings so we are able to gain a clear understanding of her motivations. Caitlin is a likeable and credible character whose refusal to give up her investigation shows determination and courage. The story is written using easy to understand colloquial language and text speak, making the story accessible to young readers. The author introduces several intriguing sub-plots including what happened to Caitlin's dad and her interesting

Aunt Viola, which adds depth to the story. Themes include family relationships, dealing with a tragedy, and persevering in the face of challenges to achieve success.

## Sharing the Novel

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The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 9- 18), Chapters 2- 16 (pp. 19- 143), Chapters 17- 25 (pp. 144- 226) and Chapters 26- 32 (pp. 227- 283).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them discuss events and make predictions about what is going to happen next. Wherever possible encourage students to relate Caitlin's adventures to their own experiences and broader knowledge. Have them analyse Caitlin's character and track the changes that she undergoes as the story progresses. Students should identify themes and explain why they are important.

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Who is the main character in the story?
- What kind of novel do you think this is? How do you know?
- What qualities and characteristics would a good reporter possess?

**Teacher reads Chapter 1 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books**

## Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 9- 18)

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- Why does Caitlin's day start so badly?
- Who is Phil?
- Why do Caitlin, her mother and Phil go to Redwood Falls?
- What does Phil call Rita's bike?
- What causes Caitlin to fall off her bike? What happens to her mother's bike when her front wheel hits something? How does Rita land?

**Discussion**

- What do we learn about Caitlin's life and her family in this chapter?
- Whose fault was the accident? How could the accident have been prevented? What do you think the effects of the accident will be?

**Students read Chapters 2- 16 (pp. 19- 143) independently before the next shared session.**

**Comprehension Chapters 2- 16 (pp. 19- 143)**

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- What period of time has elapsed at the start of Chapter 2?
- Why has Caitlin moved into her mother's room?
- Why is it hard for Caitlin to watch her mother struggle to do things?
- What news does the policeman give Caitlin and her grandfather? What suggestion does he make when he returns the bike?
- What assignment does Caitlin get given by her teacher? Who does Caitlin's grandfather suggest that she research?
- How does Caitlin's grandfather react when Phil visits? How does Rita react when Phil suggests that she visits the gym?
- Why does Caitlin feel sorry for Phil?
- Why doesn't Phil think that Caitlin shouldn't investigate the safety of the bike? Why does he feel responsible for Rita's accident? What advice does he give Caitlin before he leaves?
- Why does Caitlin get angry with her mother when Phil leaves? Is she being fair to her mother? Why/why not?
- How does Caitlin feel about having Sonya in her house?
- Why is Caitlin annoyed at Brooke and Olivia when she arrives at school? What does Brooke do to try and make it up to her? How does Caitlin feel about this?
- What information does Caitlin find out about her Great Aunt Viola when she begins her research assignment?
- In what ways has Caitlin's granddad helped her and her mother out after the accident? Why does Caitlin envy her grandfather?
- What does Caitlin find out about Viola when she begins reading her diary? In what ways are Viola's concerns similar to Caitlin's?
- What does Caitlin find in her grandfather's garage? How does her grandfather react when he sees what she is looking at? Why do you think he reacts like this?

- How does Rita feel during her first outing to the mall after the accident? Why does Caitlin feel both excited and anxious about the visit? Why is Caitlin relieved when her mother suggests that they go home?
- What happens to Rita when they get home from the mall? Why does Sonya suggest to Rita that she join a gym?
- Why is Rita reluctant to call Phil?
- What does Caitlin decide to focus her school council speech on? How does she feel when she gets up to deliver it? How do people react to her speech?
- Why does Caitlin look around the shops while her granddad is waiting for the fish and chips?
- What does Caitlin remember about when her grandfather purchased the bike for her mother? What does Caitlin find when she gets to the bike shop? What excuse does she give her granddad for being away from the car?
- Why is Rita upset when Caitlin and her granddad arrive home?
- What does Caitlin overhear her mother and grandfather talking about? Why do you think Rita is reluctant to accept help from her dad?
- What interesting article does Caitlin come across in the paper when she cleans up the broken fish bowl?
- Describe Caitlin's first school council meeting. What does Mr Gifkins say that humiliates Caitlin?
- Why does Caitlin feel sorry for herself when she gets home from school? Are her feelings warranted? Why/why not?
- What does Caitlin learn about the bike shop owner when she calls the number she got from the fish and chip shop?
- What does Mrs Weavers give Caitlin? Why do you think she gives this to her? How does Caitlin feel about Mrs Weavers' suggestion?
- Why does Caitlin become so upset during the movie? What does Ella say to Caitlin in the toilets? How does Caitlin get her back?
- Why did Viola get arrested? How did this help her cause?
- What spurs Caitlin into action over the school toilets? What is her proposal to the school council? Why do you think this action is so effective?
- Why does Megan Ryan want to interview Caitlin?
- What does Caitlin know about her father? Where did she get her information from? Why do you think Rita and granddad clam up when questioned about him?

**Discussion**

- Why would it be so hard to adjust to life in a wheelchair? What sort of feelings do you think Rita must be experiencing? What practical things need to be considered?
- In what ways does Caitlin's life change after her mother's accident?
- Describe Viola. Why does Caitlin admire her so much? What qualities and characteristics does she possess? In what ways is Caitlin similar to her?
- Why does Caitlin feel so awkward and self-conscious around Liam?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

**Students read Chapters 17- 25 (pp. 144- 226) independently before the next shared session.**

**Comprehension Chapters 17- 25 (pp. 144- 226)**

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- How did Aunt Viola die?
- What does Caitlin find out about her aunt's death at the library? Why is she so upset by her discovery? Why didn't Caitlin's mother tell her about her aunt earlier?
- What does Caitlin ask Megan to get for her from the paper?
- How does Granddad react when Megan drops the article off?
- What does Caitlin learn about her father from Rita when she comes in to tell her that her grandfather is worried about her?
- Where did Rita go after Kevin died? How long was she estranged from her father? What made her want to start talking to him again?
- Who do Megan and Caitlin meet at the café? What happened to him?
- Why is Megan so impressed when she finds out who Caitlin's aunt was?
- How does Caitlin feel when Peter presents her with the handlebars of his bike? Where did he purchase the bike from?
- What advice does Megan give Caitlin about dealing with her grandfather?
- What does Phil find out about International Importers?
- Why has Mr Gifkins started taking student council more seriously? How does he treat Caitlin since the toilet fiasco?
- What does Megan find out about Trailbitza bikes from the journalist at her work?
- What is Caitlin doing when Liam turns up? Why do you think he is so relieved to leave?
- What does the lady from Consumer Affairs tell Caitlin to do about her complaint?
- Why does Phil come and collect Caitlin from school?

- How does Caitlin feel as she watches her grandfather lying in the hospital bed? What is wrong with him?
- How does Phil help out Caitlin and her mum while granddad is in hospital?
- Why is Caitlin so disgusted when she receives a letter from Consumer Affairs? What does Caitlin have to provide before Consumer Affairs can further investigate her claim?
- Why does Granddad break down when Caitlin goes to visit him in the hospital?
- How does Liam help Caitlin find out who was selling the bikes? How does he behave when Caitlin approaches him at interval? Why is Caitlin so angry with him when he finally approaches her? Is her anger justified? Why/why not?
- Why is Caitlin so upset that Granddad got rid of the bike?

### Discussion

- Why is it so important for Rita to feel like she can still provide for herself and Caitlin? What difficulties does she face when she loses her job?
- Aside from the money, why does Caitlin believe that it is important for her mother to get another job?
- Describe Megan. Why does Caitlin like her so much?
- In what ways is Caitlin influenced by her aunt Viola? Why does Caitlin aspire to be like her?
- Caitlin finds it difficult to make people take her seriously because they perceive her to be a kid. Why do some people fail to listen to young people? What are some things that you could do to ensure that you are listened to?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

**Students read Chapters 26- 32 (pp. 227- 283) independently before the next shared session.**

### Comprehension 26- 32 (pp. 227- 283)

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- What does Liam give Caitlin after she apologises to him? What does Liam tell Caitlin about Connor Sampson when she tells him that her granddad got rid of the bike? What plans do Caitlin and Liam make for Sunday?
- Describe Sampson's house. Where do Caitlin and Liam wait for Sampson to leave? What do Caitlin and Liam see in the garage? Who interrupts their snooping?
- How does Rita react when Caitlin is brought home in a police car? Why is Caitlin so surprised by her grandfather's reaction?

- Why does the policeman who calls feel partially responsible for Caitlin's predicament? What does he promise to do for her?
- What new rules does Caitlin's mother impose after she gets caught trespassing?
- Why does Megan decide that it's time to go public? Why is her editor reluctant to run the story?
- Why does Caitlin have to come up with a pseudonym? What does she come up with? Why is this a spooky coincidence?
- How does Caitlin feel when she reads her article in the paper? Who contacts the paper after the story runs? Why does Caitlin feel so emotional when it is revealed that she was right about the bikes?
- Where does Rita get a new job?
- Why is Megan so shaken when Phil and Caitlin return from the shop? How does Caitlin prove that Sampson swapped the bikes in his garage?
- What is the outcome of the article and television report? Where did the bikes come from?
- In what way does the nosy neighbour turn out to be helpful? Where did the police find the bikes?
- What is the next issue that Mrs Weavers suggests that Caitlin sink her teeth into?

### Discussion

- Why is it important to stand up for what you believe in? What are the best ways to bring about change?
- What does the novel suggest about the power of the media in exposing issues and bringing about change?
- What sort of penalty do you think Sampson should face for importing the faulty bikes? What does the fact that he knowingly put people at risk suggest about his character?
- How might the story have turned out differently if Liam had deleted the photo?
- What do you think Caitlin learned from her experiences?

### Activities

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**Writing** - Rewrite the ending of the story.

**Plot** - Design a storyboard that illustrates 10 important events from the story in the order that they occur. Under each illustration write a brief explanation about what is happening.

**Book Review** - Write a book review for Viola Vincent Reporting. Include a brief plot summary and describe the setting. Describe the characters and explain how they develop and change as the story progresses. Identify major themes and ideas in the story. Remember to give your personal opinion about the book.

**Character** - Devise 5 questions with answers for Rita.

**Theme** - Identify an important theme in the story and design a static image that depicts it. Include quotes and images from the story to back up your ideas.

**News Article** - Write a news article that details what happened after Sampson was caught with the faulty bikes. Include quotes from Caitlin, Rita and other victims.

**Character** - Imagine that you are Caitlin. Write an account of her experiences that you can present to the class in role.

**Drama** - Choose an exciting event that occurs in the novel and write a script for it. Remember to include a cast list and stage directions. Practise your scene and present it to the class.

**Letter** - You are an advice columnist. Imagine that Caitlin has written to you asking for advice on how to deal with her mother's accident and her concerns about the faulty bikes. Write a reply letter offering her some solutions to her problems.

**Writing** - Write a paragraph explaining why Viola is such an important character in the story (despite the fact that she is no longer living). In what ways does Viola influence Caitlin and her actions?

Notes written by Vicki Ladd