

Teacher's Notes



Triple Threat

Written by Katy Warner

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Older readers (ages 12+, grades 7+)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - Language for interaction (ACELA1551)
 - Responding to literature (ACELT1635)

THEMES

- Family and friendship
- Loyalty
- Respect

SYNOPSIS

Edie Emerson is one of the shining stars at Arcadia Grammar, an exclusive performing arts school. She can do it all – singing, dancing, acting – but she's poor. Unlike her wealthy peers, who can afford to follow their dreams beyond high school, Edie is constantly reminded that as a scholarship student her place hinges on her behaviour and how well she follows the rules. Edie wants to be a success more than anything, but everyone seems to have their own idea of what that looks like for her.

Edie's best friend Will, wants her to be the lead in the musical he's written. The principal, Mr Healy, wants her to take the role of Juliet in the school's production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Her friend Aubrey wants her to commit to an overseas trip that Edie knows she'll never be able to afford. It's her final year at Arcadia and Edie can feel the dream slipping away. When infamous director, Toby Swan, is brought in to direct *Romeo and Juliet*, it should be the opportunity Edie's dreamed of. But Toby is volatile and cruel, and soon rehearsals fill Edie with anxiety. On top of that, she's fighting with Will and Aubrey, and her Pop is sick. Edie needs to figure out what she wants, fast, and stand up for what she believes in.

It's a year where everything changes, and Edie tries desperately to navigate the shifting sands of family, friendship and romance without letting it all fall apart. *Triple Threat* is a timely novel about creativity and identity, and the choices we make for our future.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katy Warner always thought she wanted to be an actor and for a big part of her life that's what she did – until she realised she actually preferred writing the words herself. Now, she's an award-winning playwright and the author of many short stories and a young adult novel. Even though she misses the costumes, Katy is much happier as a writer. Her plays have been performed across Australia and in New Zealand, London and Edinburgh. Katy lives in Melbourne with her husband, their cat and a lot of books. Her debut novel, *Everywhere, Everything, Everyone*, was shortlisted for the Readings Young Adult Book Prize.

THEMES

In the wake of #MeToo, Katy Warner explores the way that intimacy and respect have too often been sacrificed to one person's artistic method or vision. The high school setting allows Warner to explore the way that these themes interact with others such as power and privilege. The novel is light-hearted, avoiding overt portrayals of abuse, making it a good starting point for students to consider their own experiences to whatever extent they feel comfortable. Possible talking points include:

- What respectful relationships look like and what to say if something feels wrong
- The way that privilege shapes the opportunities we see for ourselves
- The expectations we have for ourselves and each other
- What creative careers look like
- How to articulate and establish boundaries
- Navigating conflict and changing friendships

WRITING STYLE

Katy Warner's background is as a playwright, and although *Triple Threat* is written as a conventional novel, it is easy to see the writers' dramatic influences in the text. Discuss the meaning of **jargon** in class. Why do we have language that is specific to particular professions or industries? Make a list of the theatre jargon used in the book – is any of it unfamiliar? How do you understand its meaning? When can jargon be useful? When can it be a hindrance? How does the writer use jargon in the book to create a sense of character and setting?

Students might also like to consider some of the similarities between scripts and novels, particularly dialogue. Explore the way that dialogue functions as a tool to create character, develop conflict and tension and avoid exposition. Why is it more interesting to read a scene with dialogue than without? Is dialogue always reliable? What other cues do we rely on in a novel to judge whether or not what someone is saying matches up with what they really mean?

COMPREHENSION

- What makes Edie different from the other students at Arcadia Grammar? What are some of the conditions (both explicit and implied) of her enrolment?



- What is the reason Edie gives her friends for her mother's absence? What is the real reason? How do her friends react when they find out?
- Why is Will's musical so important to him? What is it about?
- Will gets angry with Edie in the car because she doesn't see how hard drama school has been for him, saying, 'I'd look at those cast lists and think. *Nope. There's no-one on here like me.* And if someone like me isn't there, then they clearly don't want me' (p279). Why is it so important for us to see ourselves represented in books and movies?
- Are Noah's feelings for Edie genuine? Why does she get so angry when she discovers that he forced Toby to give her the role?
- Who is responsible for ensuring that rehearsals are a safe space? How does Toby Swan damage the safety of the rehearsal room?
- Why doesn't Edie want to admit to herself that she has feelings for Will?
- Why does Aubrey call Edie naïve? How does this make Edie feel? Do you imagine that their friendship will survive beyond high school?
- Does it surprise you that Imogen supports Edie when she stands up to Toby Swan? Why/why not?
- When Edie gives her opening night speech, some people clap, while others stand up and leave in anger. Why do you think some people are angry? Is their anger justified? What about Edie and Imogen – should they be allowed to express their anger at the way they've been treated?
- How does Edie's mum react to her speech? Does this surprise you? What does this help Edie realise about her relationship with her nan?

WRITING EXERCISE

What does it mean to find your voice? Edie says 'I've spent so long speaking the lines and singing the songs of characters that I forgot I have a voice, too. I think I lost it somewhere along the way. Lost it and had it taken from me.' (p294)

- How does Edie lose or have her voice taken from her in the novel?
- What makes it hard for people to speak up?
- How does Edie find the courage to take a stand?

Write about a time that you didn't say something but wished you had. Rewrite the story imagining that you'd spoken up. What would you have said? How would this have changed what happened? Reflect on how this piece of writing helps to give you confidence to speak up in future.



CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Choose a chapter of the book and rewrite it as a script. What do you need to take out or change? How would you stage the piece? Who are the main characters in the scene and what motivates each of them? Would you make any changes from the book to the stage?
2. Edie suggests to Will that his script might be more relatable and interesting if he makes the female lead a superhero as well. Do you agree with her? Choose a story (a book/film/comic) that you think would be made more interesting by flipping the gender of the lead character and see what happens when you recreate it. Does anything surprise you?
3. Discuss the importance of women supporting other women in the #MeToo movement. Share a time that you've been supported to do something brave by a woman in your life. Brainstorm a list of ways that we can support women at school and in the arts.
4. Will's musical allows him to write the story he needed to see. If you had the freedom to tell your story (or perform it, or draw it), what would it be? Come up with an outline for the story that you'd tell.
5. Sometimes in the heat of the moment we don't say all the things we later wish we had. What do you think Edie would like to tell her mum? Write a letter from Edie to her mum following their fight at the end of the book.

RELATED READING

- *Everywhere, Everything, Everyone* by Katy Warner
- *Libby Lawrence is Good at Pretending* by Jodi McAlister

