



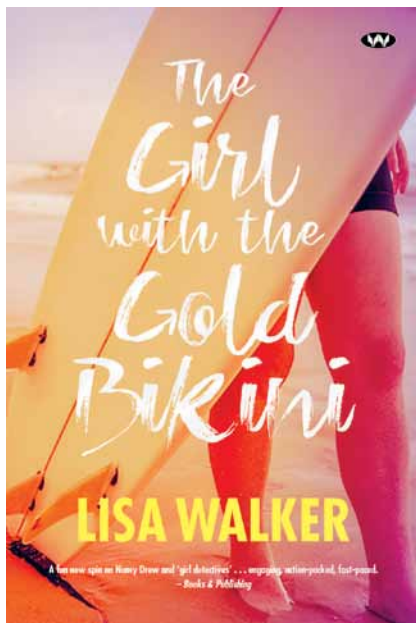
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TEACHERS' NOTES

The Girl with the Gold Bikini

By Lisa Walker

Notes prepared by Lisa Walker © 2019



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1. Introduction to *The Girl with the Gold Bikini*

Whenever I see a girl with a gold bikini, I think of Princess Leia. Here on the Gold Coast, gold bikinis are common, so I think of Princess Leia a lot.

Eighteen-year-old Olivia Grace has deferred her law degree and ducked out of her friends' gap-year tour of Asia. Instead, she's fulfilling her childhood dream of becoming a private investigator, following in the footsteps of Nancy Drew and Veronica Mars – who taught her everything she knows, including a solid line in quick-quipping repartee, the importance of a handbag full of disguises, and a way of mixing business with inconvenient chemistry.

Playing Watson to the Sherlock of her childhood friend, detective agency owner Rosco (once the Han Solo to her Princess Leia), Olivia pursues a routine cheating husband case from the glitzy Gold Coast to Insta-perfect Byron Bay, where she faces yoga wars, dirty whale activism, and a guru who's kind of a creep.

Olivia Grace is a teenage screwball heroine for the #metoo era, and *The Girl with the Gold Bikini* is a body-positive detective romp, rich with pop-culture pleasures.

Winner of the Varuna Writers House Litlink Residency

Winner of the Byron Writers Festival Residential Mentorship

Advance Praise for *The Girl with the Gold Bikini*

'Olivia is strong, compelling, witty, irreverent, determined, intelligent and gutsy. Originality and a fresh perspective are provided through the setting, the whacky characters and comedic aspects ... unique, catchy, intriguing and appealing.' **Connie Spanos, editor and reviewer, *Kids' Book Review***

'*The Girl with the Gold Bikini* is a great book for the High School English classroom at any level. While students will enjoy it as a comedic mystery, it also raises a number of issues including gender equity and animal rights. The novel lends itself to a wide range of classroom activities and discussions.' **Simon Eddy, High School English teacher**

2. About the author

Lisa Walker writes novels for adults and young adults. She has also written an ABC Radio National play and been published in the *Age*, *Griffith Review*, *Big Issue* and the *Review of Australian Fiction*. Her recent novels include a young adult coming-of-age story, *Paris Syndrome* (HarperCollins, 2018), and a climate change comedy, *Melt* (Lacuna, 2018). She has worked in environmental communication and as a wilderness guide and recently spent six months in a Kmart tent in outback Australia. Lisa lives, surfs and writes on the north coast of New South Wales. *The Girl with the Gold Bikini* is her sixth novel.

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Photo by Tim Eddy

3. Inspiration behind the novel

In developing Olivia, my teenage Private Investigator, I was inspired by teen detectives Veronica Mars and Nancy Drew. Veronica Mars is such a great character – sassy and smart, but with hidden vulnerability. Nancy Drew might be an immaculately turned-out society girl, but she is also a super-woman who always catches her villain. I wanted my own teenage PI to have flaws, eccentricities and weaknesses. Olivia is a bit of an anti-hero who often doesn't recognise her own strengths. It was important to me that Olivia doesn't strive to be perfect in any way. Like Princess Leia – another source of inspiration – she won't stand for any nonsense.

The novel's setting was also crucial to its development. I spent a lot of time on the Gold Coast as a teenager. I find it a fascinating place and Olivia's mixture of feelings about the location match my own. While researching the novel, I returned to the Gold Coast several times and found it very similar to the place I remembered as a teenager. The beach-ready bikini body was still a big thing. I struggled to fit in with this image as a teenager as I'm very fair-skinned and not really a bikini person. Hence, Olivia's vexed relationship with the gold bikini of the title.

4. Style

The story has a comedic tone and follows the detective fiction genre, but also explores a range of deeper issues. It is written from Olivia's point of view, allowing the reader to become close to the character. The use of present tense allows the action to unfold in the moment, creating a sense of immediacy.

5. Discussion questions and activities while you are reading the book

a. After reading chapter five

Mysteries

- Write down the different mysteries that have emerged in the story to date.
- Make predictions on how these mysteries might be resolved.

Gender traits

- How do the characters fit into traditional representations of femininity or masculinity?

Setting

- How is the setting revealed through **a.** the characters' feelings, and **b.** description?
- What does the setting add to this detective novel?
- Describe your own home without using visual description. Instead describe how you feel about it and other senses such as hearing, smell and touch.

b. After reading chapter eight

Dialogue

- Read the speed-dating scene, then write your own scene of a meeting between strangers.
- Remove all dialogue tags such as 'he said' and 'she said' then give it to a partner and see if they can guess the tone of the interaction and who is talking.
- In the book, what does the dialogue tell us about the characters?

c. After reading chapter sixteen

Characters

- Draw a 'family tree' that shows the relationships between the characters.
- Sketch the characters, using the descriptions given in the book (include a page number and a descriptive word or quote used in the story) then draw lines to show their relationship to Olivia and to each other. Use a colour scheme such as red for 'don't like' and green for 'like'.

d. After reading chapter eighteen

Discovering secrets

- Write your own mystery where you discover that someone you trust has been hiding something from you. Write this in first person. Make sure the way you discover this secret is interesting. Did you find a photo? See something over their shoulder?

e. After reading chapter twenty-one

Creating suspense

- Divide chapters one to twenty-one up among the class. Take note of what happens at the beginning, middle and end of each chapter. Look for revelations, narrative hooks and cliff hangers. How has the writer structured the chapter to maintain your interest?

Writing a newspaper article



- As a class, fill in a newspaper template about Ajay going missing. Consider the five W's – who, what, where, when, why. Include a title, by-line, subheading, image, image caption and pull quotes. Use an objective factual tone, statistics, and quotes from an expert (you can make these up).
- Create a newspaper article for the short story you wrote earlier about the mystery.

f. After reading chapter thirty-one

Predictions

- Choose three characters and make predictions for what is going to happen to them in the end. Write these on post-it notes. The teacher will collect these and return them at the end of the book. Who got three out of three right?

g. After reading chapter thirty-seven

Animals in captivity

- Have a debate about animals in captivity. Assign the students to sides and have them research their positions. Discussion questions include: How intelligent are dolphins? Do they suffer in captivity? Would you take part in a protest? Why, or why not? What are the benefits of seeing animals in captivity? Can captivity help threatened species? Do dolphins enjoy interacting with humans?

h. After reading chapters forty and forty-one

Tension

- Create a graph. The Y axis is the amount of tension from one (not tense) to ten (very tense). The X axis is the page numbers of chapters forty and forty-one. For each page, plot whether tension goes up or down and by how much. Swap graphs with a partner. Do you agree? If you disagree, why? Justify your decisions.

6. Questions to consider after finishing the book

a. Author's note

- How does the author's note at the end relate to the story?
- Do you think that Ajay got what he deserved?
- How might being judged on appearance affect your schooling and your work?
- Do you think Olivia has a healthy body image? What about her Nan?
- How do other characters in the book subvert expectations about their appearance?
- The gold bikini is a recurring motif throughout the novel. What do you think it symbolises?

b. Self-discovery

- In coming of age stories, the protagonist moves from childhood to adulthood and from innocence to wisdom. Would you describe *The Girl with the Gold Bikini* as a coming of age story? Why, or why not? How does Olivia change over the course of the novel?
- What are some of the ways in which Olivia demonstrates courage and resilience in the story?
- What do Olivia's relationships with her sister Jacq and her grandmother show us about her character?

c. Detective fiction

- What are some of the plot elements, or tropes, of the detective genre which are used in the novel? Brainstorm some other novels and films that also use these tropes.
- Does Olivia conform to the usual image of a private investigator?

d. The purpose of fiction

- Olivia uses *Star Wars* as a blueprint for life. How do you think fictional stories can help us to find our way? What stories have given you inspiration or guidance in your life?

7. Key curriculum links

The Girl with the Gold Bikini is best studied in secondary years (grades 9 to 12) and can be used to teach all three strands of the Australian English curriculum (Language, Literature and Literacy). It is particularly relevant to investigating how social, moral and ethical positions are represented in texts and also explores interpersonal relationships.

8. Related exts

Veronica Mars, television series, 2004

Nancy Drew, book series 1930-present and movies 2007 and 2019

Beauty Queens, Libba Bray, 2011

Raw Blue, Kirsty Eager, 2009