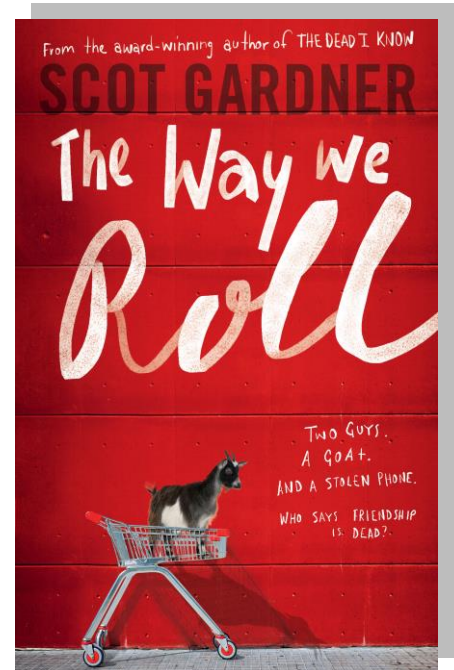


The Way We Roll

By Scot Gardner

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Summary

The Way We Roll, is a wildly enjoyable buddy romp, featuring a boy from the upper end of town who finds refuge and friendship in the rough-as-guts western suburbs. Will owns a genuine Rolex and has bigger secrets than ASIO. He meets the tattooed Julian at work – pushing trolleys in a shopping centre car park. They're both seventeen and it seems that's about the only thing they have in common.

As Will's web of secrets begins to unravel, Julian offers a hand. A home. Hope. The kindness of others has a way of bringing trust issues to the surface and Will begins to understand that his biggest battle has always been with himself.

Scot Gardner effortlessly weaves in themes of family, class, manhood and friendship, while also giving us a cast of compelling characters we care about. One constant throughout Scot's work is his focus on the importance of human connection, and of facing up to the worst that life can throw at us. He is brilliant at inhabiting complex young male characters, and Will is no exception. The language and story in *The Way We Roll* is simple, honest and accessible for 12-16 year-olds.

Scot's previous novel with Allen & Unwin was the award-winning *The Dead I Know*.

I have never read a book more gripping, nor a book more triumphantly alive. I love how it haunts me still. I swear, I will never forget The Dead I Know.

- John Marsden

Links to the curriculum

Language

Students can explore contemporary Australian English in a variety of registers, from Will's formal register to Jelat and Tafari's English as a Second Language. Will and Julian compare and contrast the use of formal and informal registers and the social implications of their use. Accents and styles of speech are represented through spelling and word choices.

Literature

The accessible and everyday nature of the setting and characters allows readers to explore and reflect on their personal understanding of the world. Trolley boys are not mysterious; they're public and readily identifiable. The cast of characters comes from a variety of backgrounds: compare and contrast their representation in the text.

Literacy

Analyse and explain how language choices and conventions are used to influence an audience. The shifting tones in the novel – from slapstick to black despair – allow students to explore the literary devices used to manipulate tone.

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Themes

'Bromance'

The author has said: 'I think the bromance is the major theme—how guys from very different backgrounds can become the best of friends. It dances on the line between brotherly love and homosexuality. At its heart, it whispers about love and money, honesty, identity and forgiveness. Will and Julian have endured blighted childhoods and dealt with them in different ways.'

Masculinity

Will and Julian explore various facets of masculine identity: the lines between love and sex, needs and wants, autonomy and community. They ponder family loyalty, commitment and what it means to be a good father.

Physical violence

Will and Julian have a rough-and-tumble beginning to their relationship. For them, fighting has been normalised and as the story progresses they attempt to redefine the role of physical violence. Lovers, not fighters. Fighting for the things they believe in.

Privilege and Prejudice

Will carries a thinly veiled sense of entitlement. He comes from a place of privilege but the car park and the trolley boys represent a meritocratic environment where friendship and loyalty are defined by actions, not birthright or how much money you have. Will's Sudanese co-workers experience racial vilification. Some of the incidental 'Westie' characters are cruel and judgemental.

Secrets and Lies

Will's secrets separate him from others. Julian demonstrates openhearted sharing (and OVER sharing) and applies subtle pressure on Will to unburden himself. Julian's acceptance of Will's shortcomings eventually gives him the confidence to speak his truth.

Family Dynamics

The contrast between Will's dysfunctional family and Julian's fractured-but-loyal one provide a thematic core for the exploration of family dynamics. Will becomes increasingly aware that his family dynamic has impacted his development. His acceptance in Julian's home helps him redefine the idea of family.

First Love

Will is deeply wounded by his relationship with Claire ending. The break up is the catalyst for upheaval in his home/school life and has a seismic effect on his sense of self.

Leaving School

Julian believes that school 'sucks arse' and Will's decision to leave school also means leaving his boarding house. Over the course of the novel, their relationship to education changes.

First Job

For both Will and Julian, pushing trolleys is their first full-time job since leaving school (or juvenile detention in Julian's case). They enjoy the responsibility and income that comes with working for Milton's, though the differences in their work ethic is contentious at times.



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Discussion questions

1. Will and Julian's 'first date' happens in the food court at the shopping centre (pp. 1-5). Their game of 'twenty questions' reveals they come from very different backgrounds. What other devices has the author used to reinforce these differences?
2. Will's discovery of the lost purse in the shopping trolley eventually leads to a fight with Julian (pp. 6-10). How did the fight start? Why is Will concerned by the fact that there were witnesses?
3. Will feeds the stray cat that sometimes shares his home beneath the bowling alley (p. 12). The cat becomes a symbol for Will (pp. 39, 111 and 133). What does the cat represent?
4. Julian says, 'We all lie, hey? Some are better at it than others.' (p. 23). In your opinion, what are the ingredients for a convincing lie?
5. Will collects shopping lists (pp. 30, 91). Why? Write a shopping list containing eleven supermarket items, one of which stands out and suggests something about the author.
6. Will has been on the run for several months at the time of the story (pp. 26 and 27). What are the tricks he has used to remain 'invisible'?
7. Jelat's story (pp. 43 – 45) helps Will think differently about his own situation. Discuss.
8. Will's first encounter with Julian's dad, Sandy, is competitive (pp. 57 – 66). Why does Will end up feeling that Julian was the real winner?
9. The story is populated by non-nuclear families – Julian and Duane's parents are divorced, Will's mother died when he was young and Nishi grew up in foster care. Prior to meeting the Hillmans, where did Will feel most at home?
10. After thwarting the escape of milkshake man (p. 93), one of the guys from the coffee stand says to Will, 'We shopkeepers love your work even if nobody else does.' What is he implying about the trolley crew? What do you think are some of the pros and cons of pushing trolleys for a living?
11. When a gang of Westies steal Ricky's wallet to torment him, the boys come to the rescue (pp. 102-103). Who does Julian say 'Equal rights, bitch.' to and what does it mean in this context?
12. While collecting wayward trolleys from West Tennant, the boys are confronted by a grandmother who threatens to call the police (pp. 106 – 107). What does Doug say that calms the situation? Why might the fact that Doug said it influence the grandmother?
13. 'Betraying someone and being betrayed made the same noise in my head.' Why does the thought that he'd slept with Nishi cause Will to have a 'panic attack' (pp. 124-129)? When had he been betrayed and by whom?
14. 'There was a huge fountain of hormones and history that made me feel like smashing my father, but the hormones and history don't do the punching. Violence is a choice.' Is violence ever the right choice? Discuss.
15. Claire's Instagram wall contains 'an endless homage to celebrity, punctuated by images of diamonds the size of grapes, European sports cars and Disney princesses.' (p. 175). What do those images suggest to Will about her? Why would Will remember them in the light of their conversation?
16. 'Love's everywhere if your heart is open to it. It's important and deserves to be high on the shopping list of life, but so does kindness and respect and honesty.' (p. 188) Make a 'shopping list of life' and include twelve personality traits you value in others.



Related texts/Further reading

Other novels for older teenagers by Scot Gardner

The Dead I Know, Allen & Unwin 2011

Happy as Larry, Allen & Unwin 2010

The Lost King, Pearson 2008

Gravity, Pan Macmillan 2006

The Legend of Kevin the Plumber, Pan Macmillan 2004

Burning Eddy, Pan Macmillan 2003

The Other Madonna, Pan Macmillan 2003

White Ute Dreaming, Pan Macmillan 2002

One Dead Seagull, Pan Macmillan 2001

Similar novels with female protagonists

All I Ever Wanted (2011) and *Friday Brown* (2012) by Vicki Wakefield, Text Publishing

Notes from the Teenage Underground (2006) and *Girl Defective* (2013) by Simmone Howell, Pan Australia

Graffiti Moon by Cath Crowley, Pan Macmillan Australia 2010

Holier than Thou by Laura Buzo(2012), Allen & Unwin

Novels that feature teenagers and work

Love and Other Perishable Items [also known as *The Good Oil*] by Laura Buzo, Allen & Unwin 2010

Shelf Life by Robert Corbet, Allen & Unwin 2004 - SHORT STORY COLLECTION

A Straight Line to My Heart, Allen & Unwin 2011

About the author

Scot wasn't born reading and writing; in fact he left school in year eleven to undertake an apprenticeship in gardening with the local council. He has worked as a waiter, masseur, delivery truck driver, home dad, counsellor, musician and teacher. **Scot says:**

'Where do I start? I grew up (with two younger brothers) in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Greensborough. When we lived there in the 70s you could still catch snakes at the back of the primary school. I had a natural history museum in my cubby house—from feathers and bones to live spiders and a not-so-alive cat. (I found it dead in the gutter and dragged it to the cubby house to observe its decomposition). The guy over the road, Mark, shot a raven with his air rifle and I rescued it, fed it and treated its wounds, but it died anyway and my heart broke a little. Mum and Dad grew vegetables in the back yard and we had a pool, so I had friends in summer. We ran marathons around the block in our Speedos and stayed in the pool until we wrinkled and turned purple then warmed ourselves on the sunbaked footpath at the front of the house. We moved to the country the year I turned thirteen and I loved the place. The rubbish tip became our playground. We made new friends and we camped, fished, walked and hunted more often than we didn't. I know what snake tastes like. Sleeping rough was part of the game.

'I became a writer mostly by happy accident. A bloke picked me up while I was hitchhiking in East Gippsland and he suggested I should write something for his hippy gardening magazine. It took me a few years to work out what I was going to write, but he published it. And several other pieces I wrote. I then wrote a few op-ed pieces for major newspapers before I realised I had a bigger story to tell. Around that time, my wife went back to work and I left my job as a counsellor to be a home dad. I began writing while my young son slept in the afternoons and in a year completed a manuscript. A friend spotted an advertisement for a writers' camp with John Marsden and we went along together. I came home feeling like I could write and over



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the following twelve months rewrote the novel. John invited me to a conference to workshop a manuscript with a real editor. The editor liked what I'd written and offered me a contract.

'Mostly, I write in my home office—a mudbrick studio a few hundred metres from where I sleep. There are bats in the roof and I'm often distracted by wildlife outside (snakes and echidnas, wallabies and koalas), but it suits my process. Sometimes I visit libraries and cafés, shopping centres and parks to write. The critical thing is that I don't have people talking directly to me. Having said that, like most writers, I'm a shameless eavesdropper. I use pen and paper for my first drafts—it's a little slower than typing straight into the computer, but my notebooks never run out of batteries, have never been stolen and shall remain a hardcopy long after my mortal remains have become unrecognizable. I keep a spare blank book and a few pens. I like felt tip pens, but I'm not really fussy about that. I like to think I make good use of the fact that my job is portable and low-tech and I've written novels in the outback, on empty beaches and high in the mountains. A massive goanna once fell asleep in the shade of my camp chair while I was writing. It didn't move for more than an hour. I kept writing.'

About writing this novel

Scot says: '*The Way We Roll* began as a bromance between two teen guys with disparate families. Two very separate and striking observations I made in real life set up the tension for me. At an elite Sydney school's 'dads and sons' breakfast, I endured an hour of a dad running his son down every time he opened his mouth. It seemed cruel and unrelenting, even after I made comment about it. At a writer's camp, I saw a teenaged boy hug and kiss his father and tell him that he loved him. When those images sat beside each other, it was clear that love has nothing to do with wealth or privilege. I took a couple of years off writing novels to retrain as a teacher and I got to work with some incredibly gifted, loving and smart kids who hated school. I remember hating school myself. What if two kids (from different sides of the tracks) became friends through humble work? How could they help/hurt each other? I realised that I was writing a book for kids who didn't typically like to read, which isn't a good marketing ploy, but I have had success with books like that in the past. School librarians, English teachers and diligent parents have praised previous stories of a similar nature for their crusty honesty.'

'I'm motivated to write for this audience because as a young man, I was one of them—reluctant reader until I found myself on the page. My most pleasing feedback comes from young people who tell me 'I don't really read books, but I got sucked into yours'.

'I set the bulk of the story in a big suburban shopping centre because I wanted my characters to be everyday and identifiable. And a little invisible. I spent a day with Australia's biggest shopping trolley collection company for research—they told me stories and fed me details of what life is like for people who've made a career out of collecting carts. Lots of anecdotes they shared made their way into the book. They have thirty-seven nationalities represented on their list of supervisors and many more in their collection staff. It's a true 'United Colors of Benetton' crew.'

'I begin the writing process with the main character's voice. Once I've lived with them for a while and worked out what their problems are, I'll start making notes and eventually a rough timeline for the narrative. I write my first draft with pen on paper and then use speech recognition software to transcribe. I read everything aloud and the transcription to the computer is my first window for editing. I print the manuscript, edit again on paper and then submit the book for consideration.'