

# FUTURE GIRL

By Asphyxia

**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Ages 13-16

**THEMES:** Deafness: oral communication and signed communication, Deaf community, discrimination, experience of deafness. Sustainability: peak oil, food growing, resilience, danger of dominance by big corporations. Definition of 'success' in work/life pathways – finding meaningful work. Art journaling and expression through art.

**NOTES WRITTEN BY:** Asphyxia

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# INTRODUCTION

*Future Girl* is a forward-thinking vision around equal rights and the future of our world as we know it, by Asphyxia, a trailblazing Australian Deaf activist, a prominent sustainability champion, and a passionate artist and writer. She is a popular speaker in schools and universities since 2000, and has inspired thousands of students to make permanent changes to their lives in response to her presentations about Deafness, sustainable living and art journaling.

With this novel, presented as 16-year-old Piper's stunning visual-art journal, Asphyxia deftly weaves her detailed insight into Deaf culture and what it feels like to be d/Deaf throughout a compelling story set in near-future Melbourne. *Future Girl* combines these passions into a similarly motivating, instructional book that will galvanise students into action.

## STORY SUMMARY

As peak oil hits and Melbourne collapses into environmental catastrophe, what does it look like to be a Deaf teenager already struggling to fit into a hearing world?

Piper's mum wants Piper to be 'normal' – to put up with the tension headaches, the constant misunderstandings, and the herculean daily effort it takes for her to pass as hearing, so she can grow up to be 'successful' like her scientist mother. But when disaster hits Melbourne, Piper has more important things to worry about, starting with her stomach. The personalised, ultra-processed meals from her mum's company that used to land on their doorstep so reliably have halved in quantity, transport costs sky-rocket overnight, and businesses everywhere start to collapse.

Piper's best friend and lifeline at school goes AWOL, and she and her mum lose everything. And then there's Marley – a CODA (child of Deaf adult), who opens a door for Piper into a new world – a world where Deafness is something to celebrate, not to hide, full of beautifully expressive Auslan (Australian sign language). As Piper begins to explore her love of art, discovers a new passion for guerrilla gardening, and pushes back remorselessly against her mum, all while becoming more and more immersed in Deaf culture, she falls hard for Marley – but Marley is struggling with some big questions of his own...

## KEY THEMES

- Deafness: oral communication (lipreading and speaking) and signed communication, Deaf community, discrimination, experience of deafness.
- Sustainability: peak oil, food growing, resilience, danger of dominance by big corporations.
- Art: self-expression through art journaling, using emotions as a starting point for art-making, presenting social issues as art, art as protest.
- Definition of 'success' in work/life pathways – finding meaningful work.



# CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

## DEVELOPMENT OF GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Piper herself is developing her general capabilities and documenting progress in her journal. She provides excellent modelling for students to do the same.

- **Critical and creative thinking:** Piper critically examines the world in which she lives and makes changes to her internal value system, prompting readers to do the same. The art journal process stimulates creative thinking through using visual symbols to represent experiences and emotions.
- **Personal and social capability:** Piper works on how to handle her Deafness socially – balancing her drive to be polite, to conform to social expectations and to gain social acceptance against her need for inclusion and freedom from the pressure to pass as hearing. The art journaling process develops insight into her behaviour and motivations, increasing self-awareness.
- **Ethical understanding:** the book will assist students in developing empathy for those who are d/Deaf or have a disability and taking responsibility for inclusion.
- **Intercultural understanding:** the book provides insights into the Deaf community and highlights differences between the Deaf community and the hearing world.



## CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY

- *Future Girl* gives an immediate example of the need for sustainability, where sustainable actions lead to immediate benefit. It is easy for readers to make the leap from similar recent chaos created by coronavirus to the chaos shown in the book, and see the value of preparation for environmental crises. The book provides a positive model for a pathway towards resilience.

## SUBJECTS

*Future Girl* is suitable for studies of History, Society and Its Environment, English and Visual Arts.

# STUDIES OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

## BEFORE READING *FUTURE GIRL*

Write down: what do you know about deafness? Imagine a day in your life if you were d/Deaf. How would it affect you? If you are d/Deaf, write about your experience of d/Deafness – what it feels like, what barriers you face and what benefits you enjoy.

Picture yourself as a 'successful' adult, fifteen years in the future. What are you doing with your days? What does your daily life look like?

Learn: what is peak oil? Look it up online and write a brief summary.

## AFTER READING *FUTURE GIRL*

### Cultural understanding

Revisit your notes showing what you imagined about d/Deafness before reading *Future Girl*. What did you learn about d/Deafness, that you didn't know before? If you are d/Deaf, did you notice Piper describing some aspect of d/Deafness that you experience but hadn't articulated before? Adjust your description of a day in your life if you were d/Deaf to make it more detailed/realistic, based on what you know now.

### The concept of success

Having read *Future Girl*, ask yourself if your image of what it means to be 'successful' has changed. If Piper, prior to meeting Marley, had done this exercise, her image of herself as a 'successful adult' would probably have mirrored her mum's idea of success, though she couldn't see how to get there, but by the end of the book, Piper has found an entirely new path which offers a more meaningful experience for her. Was the 'successful' life you imagined for yourself based on others' ideas of success or your own internal success? Would that life actually feel meaningful to you? Write a new description of yourself as a 'successful adult,' fifteen years in the future, that focuses on a life that feels rich with meaning and passion to you. What would your daily life look like?

### Unsustainable energy

In *Future Girl*, the price of petrol has suddenly risen dramatically, making it unaffordable to the average Australian.

- What are some of the reasons why this may have occurred?
- Is this a realistic, likely scenario that could happen to us some time in the future? Why/why not?
- Why would electricity and gas prices suddenly rise at the same time as petrol prices? What is the link?
- Why would there suddenly be shortages of food and consumer goods soon after? What is the link?
- If Piper had known that there was a high risk of oil prices rising, what might she have done beforehand, to prepare?

## CURRICULUM

### SUSTAINABILITY

In the book, Kelsey runs a branch of an organisation called Transition Towns. This is an actual organisation whose aim is to help people become more resilient in the face of possible upcoming disasters like the one Piper faces.

- Look up Transition Towns – how did it start, and what are some of the ideas and initiatives undertaken by groups of members?
- What could you do as an individual, to become more resilient and to be prepared for scenarios such as suddenly rising petrol prices?
- What could happen at a community / council level, to strengthen resilience?
- Are there other benefits to undertaking resilience measures, besides being prepared for a disaster? Discuss some of the benefits that Piper and others experience in *Future Girl*, as well as benefits that could occur in your area / community.

## **EXPLORING VIEWPOINTS, ETHICS AND INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING**

Asphyxia presents differing points of view through characters with extremely different values and opinions from each other. In *Future Girl*, Marley talks about his anger/frustration with big corporations. Do you feel this is justified in the context of the story?

- Read *Fast Food Nation* for an insight into fast food companies such as McDonald's and their influence in today's world. Do you see a link between what is happening with processed food today and *Future Girl*?
- Consider how Piper's mum, Irene, has a very different view of recon than Marley. Why does Irene believe recon is the answer to many of the world's problems? Why is Marley proud that he has never eaten recon in his life, and doesn't want to break this record? If recon were available now, what would be your attitude towards this food?
- Look up Monsanto on the internet – are there parallels between Monsanto's behaviour and that of Organicore in *Future Girl*?
- What are the risks/dangers of big corporations gaining too much power?
- Discuss the measures Organicore takes to gain power/profit, and how ethical they are. For example, hiring someone to run as an 'independent' candidate for prime minister, rolling out a kitchenless welfare programme, rolling out 'Cesspool' (the nickname for QuestTool), the new internet.
- Discuss the ramifications of the government rolling out Cesspool. What does this mean for the school curriculum and for access to a range of topics such as pornography, food growing and organising rallies?
- What does the book say about our corporate world today and where we may be heading? What might we do to change the course, if we don't like the direction we are going in? What does Marley do to try to change course?

Examine the differing viewpoints held by characters in the book and your own responses on the following topics:

- Whether or not Piper should use sign language versus passing as hearing.
- What Piper should do for her vocation in the future.

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

How has Asphyxia used language and imagery to bring Piper to life? Consider:

- How Piper's 'voice' contributes to an understanding of her character.
- What motivates Piper – do you understand why she does what she does? How does Asphyxia convey Piper's motivations?
- What Piper's artworks tell you about Piper, which cannot be discerned from the text alone.
- How Asphyxia conveys Piper's emotional world, through text and through artwork.
- What the handwritten words in the book tell you about Piper.



How has Asphyxia used language to give varying impressions of d/Deafness?

- Consider how the language chosen demonstrates Piper's perspective of her Deafness. On page 239, Piper says 'I thought that Deafness was meant to be like having freckles – something that fades into the background so you don't really notice it after a bit. Do people with freckles seek to spend time with other freckled people?' Note that she says that 'Deafness was meant to be like...' – she had an idea that there was a certain way that a person should be Deaf, and that she should strive to be like that. What does the comparison of Deafness with freckles suggest about Deafness? Can you find other examples of language in *Future Girl* that show a similar perspective of Deafness?
- Look at how Marley talks about Deafness and the different impression he creates through the language he uses. Marley has grown up in the Deaf community where Deaf people have a higher status than hearing people, and his 'passport' to the Deaf community is somewhat tenuous. How does Asphyxia show that through the language she chooses for Marley's words? For an example, consider page 286. Can you find other examples of language in *Future Girl* that show a similar perspective of Deafness?
- Towards the end of the book, Piper talks differently about Deafness – consider how her word choices reflect her changing attitude, such as on pages 347, 351–2 and 359.
- Go back to your own writing about a day in the life of a d/Deaf person – what does the language you used say about your own attitudes to Deafness? Does this reflect your actual attitude? If not, edit your writing to use language that does.
- If you were raising a d/Deaf child, what language choices could you make to ensure they grow up without feeling defective?

## **MICRO-AGRESSIONS**

Consider these micro-aggressions (little irritations from other people) that Piper faces on a regular basis due to her d/Deafness:

- People expecting her to lipread and shoulder the entire burden of communication
- Gary making an assessment of her speech and patronisingly telling her that she speaks really well
- Her mum throwing things at her to get her attention
- A lack of accommodation for her deafness – she has no interpreters at school, her classmates chanting her name over and over to get her attention rather than finding a deaf-friendly way to communicate
- Announcements made at the police station when Piper is in a queue, with the assumption that everyone in the queue is hearing
- Cyclists riding past too close, ringing their bell, assuming that Piper will hear them and move out of their way
- Being told she should get a bio-engineered ear even though it would not fix her deafness, by well-meaning people who are uneducated on the topic
- People asking if she was born deaf

- In these instances do you think the person involved is deliberately subjecting Piper to a micro-aggression?
- What do you think is their point of view?
- What micro-aggressions do you experience in your daily life?
- Research micro-aggressions experienced by people with other forms of disability – a great starting point could be reading the blog of Carly Findlay ([carlyfindlay.com.au](http://carlyfindlay.com.au)).
- Consider how micro-aggressions affect the person who receives them.

## Censorship

In *Future Girl*, there are several articles from News Melbourne, a heavily censored organisation. When Piper meets journalist Amber, she learns of the challenges Amber faces in saying what she really wants to say, and witnesses Amber tweaking her stories to pass censorship, while trying to retain some integrity. Imagine there was no censorship. Rewrite the various news articles expressing what you imagine to be the real views of the journalists.

## Coping with frustration

- Piper has grown up without knowing other d/Deaf people. How has this affected her? What changes for her when she meets Robbie and other Deaf people? How do you think her upbringing might have been different if she had had d/Deaf friends and mentors? Consider how Piper's life changes after she meets Robbie and the influence Robbie has on her.
- Twice in the book, Piper starts crying because she is frustrated she cannot hear what is happening around her. She writes that she has never cried about being deaf before, and doesn't understand why this is happening now. Why do you think Piper is upset about her deafness now, when she wasn't before? How do factors such as her age, upbringing, education, and desire to learn explain her reaction?
- Piper's mum regularly corrects her speech and behaviour. Piper feels annoyed by this and says, 'Does it really matter?' What do you think? Do you think Piper's mum is being helpful and that this is good education for Piper, or do you think it would be more respectful to leave her alone? Would your answer be the same if Piper was much younger and learning to speak? At what point do you think things need to change? If you were raising a d/Deaf child, how would you navigate this in a respectful way?

## Applying learnt knowledge

- Having read *Future Girl*, if you had a deaf child, how would you raise them in terms of their deafness? Would you focus on oralism and passing as 'normal'? Would you ensure your child learns to sign? Would you learn to sign yourself? Do you think it is important for your child to regularly see other d/Deaf people? Why/why not? In answering this, consider:
  - The role of Deaf adult mentors
  - The role of Deaf friends
  - The role of sign language
  - The role of the Deaf community and Deaf pride
  - The pressure created by a goal to be 'normal'.  
Is it really okay to be different? Who decides this, and who should decide this?
  - Learning how to ask for access, to get needs met to enable independence
  - What support might be necessary when transitioning to new hearing environments, e.g. consider what might have helped Piper transition to her new high school
- In the book, Piper learns that the Deaf community has a different culture than the hearing world. What are some examples of the way that the Deaf community is different from mainstream hearing culture? Draw knowledge both from the book, *Future Girl*, and by researching further online. Why do you think Deaf communities have evolved to have their own distinct culture?
- Piper has the opportunity to change her identity from 'deaf' to 'Deaf'. What does this mean? Why might Piper want to do this? What are some potential benefits and drawbacks to identifying as Deaf? Prior to meeting Marley and Robbie, Piper has no idea that the Deaf community even exists, and doesn't understand the option of a Deaf identity – how has this affected her? Do you think all deaf people should receive the exposure and information to make the choice as to whether they want to identify as Deaf?
- Although at the start of the book Piper does not identify as Deaf nor belong to the Deaf community, her deafness still shapes her life, her experiences, her values and attitudes. How is Piper different from her hearing peers because of her deafness, and what strategies does she employ to survive in a hearing world?

## **THE POWER OF UNDERLYING MESSAGES**

In *Future Girl*, Asphyxia has used the story to communicate key messages about Deafness, the environment, art, big corporations and politics, and what it means to be 'successful'. What do you think some of these messages are? As an example, consider the scene where Piper goes to a food-growing workshop and leaves crying. This scene could send a message about the importance of considering inclusion when presenting a workshop – the teacher has clearly not taken into account the possibility that a deaf person might attend. It could send a message about the importance of teaching young deaf people how to prepare for such events and ask for their needs to be met. Write a list of other messages conveyed in *Future Girl*.

Consider the final paragraphs in *Future Girl*:

*Taylor nudges me and indicates the stew with her eyes. 'YUM,' she fingerspells, and I'm thrilled to see her diving into this and making an effort. Not bad for a complete beginner!*

*I show her the sign for delicious, kissing my index finger and ending with my thumb up – a combination of the signs for taste and good. She copies me and laughs, doing the sign with a dramatic flourish.*

*Putting down her bowl, she concentrates hard to remember the right letters. 'WI SHOILD HAVE DINE THIS YEARS AGO! OT'S FUN.'*

*And as I lean sideways and tuck my head onto Marley's shoulder, chewing the last of my bread with my eyes closed, I have to agree.*

- What message(s) does Asphyxia convey with this ending? Do you think she chose an effective way to do it? How else could she have conveyed this same message? How does the tone of these final moments influence the underlying message? Consider the tone of how various messages are imparted and how effective or ineffective the tone is in supporting the message.
- How do you think the messages in *Future Girl* could be differently interpreted by different audiences? For example, consider how d/Deaf readers might receive very different messages than hearing readers. Do you think someone involved in the Transition Towns movement would receive different messages from *Future Girl* than those who are not focused on developing resilience?
- What do you think of Asphyxia's messages? Pick a couple and do some online research to get a feel for more than one viewpoint about these messages. Create a personal critical response – in what way do you agree this message has merit and needs to be shared with the world, and/or in what way do you feel this message is wrong or inappropriate?
- How has Asphyxia used the story to get her messages across? In the above example of the food-growing workshop, Asphyxia gives us an intimate window into Piper's emotional experience as she realises she cannot learn in this environment. For Piper, it is overwhelming and tragic. Throughout the story she mentions the experience multiple times, with a sense of trauma about it. In this way Asphyxia illustrates through emotional experience the ramifications of a non-inclusive society. What other ways does Asphyxia use the story to communicate her messages? How does the journal format assist with or hinder the communication of Asphyxia's methods? What other formats could be used and how effective do you think they would be?

## **VISUAL LITERACY**

Look at the front cover of *Future Girl*:

- How does the artwork tell you about what is inside the book? Consider the content of the artwork, and also the style and mood.

Consider the artwork on pages 178–9:

- What does the art tell you about Piper's mood and feelings that she doesn't explicitly state in the text on that page? Compare this to the artwork on pages 196–7. What does the artwork suggest about Piper's mood and feelings now? How has Asphyxia achieved the contrasting emotions/mood on these two pages? Consider the use of colour, the materials used, the textures and style of each artwork. Pick a few other pages and describe how the art adds to the mood and emotional experience of the book.



Think about the artwork and visual elements used throughout the book:

- How has Asphyxia used art, imagery and colour in other areas of the book to strengthen the underlying messages she conveys?
- Is there an artwork in *Future Girl* that created an emotional response in you when you saw it? If there was nothing in *Future Girl*, find an artwork elsewhere that elicits an emotional response and consider that instead. Why do you think it affected you emotionally? Was it the technique, the colours, the content, the idea behind it, the underlying message...?
- While most of the text is in a typed font, in some cases Asphyxia has chosen to use handwriting. Why do you think she chose handwriting? How does that change the feeling of those snippets of text?
- On pages 48–9, Piper writes, 'I dump the contents of my brain onto a page in my diary – a grid, a symbol for each thing bothering me, wresting order from the chaos – working fast, messy, smearing layers of paint upon paint, until slowly everything settles.' Look at the artwork on the spread and analyse what is on Piper's mind. Having read the text, do you feel the artwork accurately reflects what she is focused on at that point? Why/why not?
- Follow Piper's process to create an artwork in your journal to dump the contents of your brain. Use a loose grid format that has some elements breaking away from the grid, and a symbol for each thing you are focused on. Work fast and messy, using lots of layers of paint.

Consider the following passage in the book:

*Kelsey's mouth drops open when she sees Karen Kildare as Organicore's puppet. 'How did you get it to look exactly like her?'*

*I mime tracing a photo.*

*'Isn't that cheating?' Marley signs, and for a moment I think it's his words, but then I realise he's interpreting for Kelsey.*

*I shrug. 'I don't think so. Tracing is just a tool to help me get down what I want to say.'*

- Do you agree with Kelsey, that tracing is cheating? What do you think of Piper's methods for creating stencils of people with an accurate likeness – should she be drawing them by hand?

# AUTHOR BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Asphyxia is an artist, writer and public speaker. Author of the much-loved junior fiction series the *Grimstones*, Asphyxia has also been a circus performer and puppeteer. As an avid art-journal creator, she loves to share her process and help others benefit from this amazing tool for self-expression, problem-solving, planning, goal-tracking and self-esteem.

Deaf since the age of three, Asphyxia learnt to sign when she was eighteen, which changed her life. She is now a Deaf activist, sharing details of Deaf experience. She raises awareness of oppression of Deaf people and what we can do to change this. Her free online Auslan course ([www.asphyxia.com.au](http://www.asphyxia.com.au)) has had over 15,000 students.

Asphyxia is kept busy with her small farm where she combines food-growing with art – creating a magical aesthetic with plants and natural elements. *Future Girl*, combines all these passions.

## IN THE WORDS OF THE AUTHOR

'I made Piper d/Deaf in *Future Girl* because I realised how little most hearing people know about d/Deafness. When I first tried to write about Piper's experience, I found myself stuck, as being Deaf is something I don't think about a lot. I found I didn't know how to articulate it. So I started jotting down my everyday experiences – the little annoyances, the benefits, confusion, the irritating things people say and do, and the complex feelings that arise when someone has tried to provide access but misses the mark.

'For example, here's a Deaf dilemma: Imagine you are standing with a group of hearing people who are laughing, but you have no idea what they are laughing about. Should you laugh along to be friendly (and if you do, are you somehow "lying" about having understood?), or stand there with a stony face even though it could seem rude and unfriendly?

'I had never realised I was making these difficult decisions on the fly, every day, without analysing how I wanted to approach them. My responses were automatic: I laughed along. But did I really want to do this? Perhaps it would be better to let people know that I felt left out.

'If you are a hearing reader, I hope that reading about Piper's experiences gives you some insight into what it can be like to be d/Deaf, and an understanding of what a huge difference it can make if you demonstrate inclusive, thoughtful behaviour. If you are d/Deaf, I hope that you can relate to some of Piper's experiences, and that seeing them written down makes it easier for you to explain your own experiences to other people. I hope it also helps you to build a sense of entitlement to ask for access.'

## REVIEW QUOTES

'Brilliantly imaginative, totally immersive – Asphyxia tilts the world sideways and invites you to see what was always there. Don't miss this book.' AMIE KAUFMAN, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Illuminae*

'Beautiful, immersive...a sensory feast.' JACLYN MORIARTY

'Asphyxia's work is brilliant: a deep, original insight, and a book that everyone should read.' JACKIE FRENCH, AM

'*Future Girl* will be a life-changing book for young Deaf and disabled people. It's a book of personal growth and pride – demonstrating the importance of the #OwnVoices movement. Asphyxia's illustrations are exquisite, and they complement her writing perfectly. This book is beautiful – congratulations, Asphyxia.' CARLY FINDLAY, OAM

'*Future Girl* confronts the challenges ahead of us and will open minds and hearts to the possibility of other worlds.'  
SEAN WILLIAMS

'I really enjoyed this gorgeous book and related to so many things. That is rare. It has inspired me to write down my experiences and to do more visual art. The story's really strong, with such a nice-feeling ending, and I loved the note to readers at the end – it gave me goosebumps. I can't wait for the world to read *Future Girl*.' ANNA SEYMOUR

'*Future Girl* is a must-read for Deaf people, who will identify with Piper, and for those who are hearing, offering an understanding of what it's like to be Deaf. It takes me back to my own struggle to fit in and my transformation into loving myself as I am: a signing Deaf woman with a place in both the Deaf and hearing worlds. Piper's journey shows that self-esteem created by the ability to communicate effectively trumps the ideology of assimilation – that Deaf people do not have to pretend to be hearing in order to succeed in the world. This book captures the epitome of being human, and the amazing feeling of belonging to a culture with its own language, community, history and traditions.' DRISANA LEVITZKE-GRAY, Young Australian of the Year 2015

### **Review by Joanne Tarpey, teacher of the Deaf:**

Deaf/HH (hard of hearing) teenagers are going to devour *Future Girl*, with its depiction of the daily obstacles and shared experiences that they rarely see on the written page. They will feel included and acknowledged, often for the first time, in this exciting story of Piper trying to find her identity in a world where few understand what life is like to be Deaf/HH. These teenagers rarely get to share a feeling of inclusivity in a predominantly hearing world, and especially in such a visually 'cool' text as Asphyxia's *Future Girl*. Piper's lived experience of being Deaf/HH will be shared and appreciated by many.

Throughout Piper's journey, Deaf/HH readers will witness and share how someone like them feels and navigates a hearing world. They will experience a life so familiar to their own and relate to so many of the complex situations Piper finds herself in while trying to work out if she is hearing, Deaf, deaf or oral. Most of us struggle with our identity in learning who we are, especially as teens, but we are surrounded by relatable experiences, hearing peers and mostly people who understand us. Piper is not, and nor are many other Deaf/HH teens.

Having taught Deaf/HH teenagers for many years, watching each as they try to navigate and fit into a hearing world, there is only so much they can do to try to understand what is being spoken. I see in my students what Piper sees and feels every day. Like Piper, they try so hard to communicate and adapt, but there is only so much they can do to adjust to the hearing world, yet there is so much hearing people can do to help them adjust. Through Asphyxia's novel we explore many positive changes hearing people can make to adapt, adjust and communicate clearly and visually to fit into Piper's life.

It is not every day that Deaf/HH readers can absorb themselves in a story as relatable as *Future Girl*. I am thrilled Asphyxia has written a book that illustrates so poignantly a Deaf teenager's existence in a hearing world of family, school, friendships and connectivity. Asphyxia beautifully communicates through her drawings and artwork on every page throughout this story. These images add texture, communication and visual stimulus for the reader to absorb and enjoy.

Asphyxia has touched upon so many of the current and long-standing issues faced by Deaf people in our society today.



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**Recommended for 13-16 year olds**

**TEACHERS' NOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR LITERARY STUDY OF FUTURE GIRL.**

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## Summary

As peak oil hits and Melbourne collapses into environmental catastrophe, what does it look like to be a Deaf teenager already struggling to fit into a hearing world?

Piper's mum wants Piper to be 'normal' – to put up with the tension headaches, the constant misunderstandings, and the herculean daily efforts it takes for her to pass as hearing, so she can grow up to be 'successful' like her scientist mother. But when disaster hits Melbourne, Piper has more important things to worry about, starting with her stomach. The personalised, ultra-processed meals from her mum's company that used to land on their doorstep so reliably have halved in quantity, transport costs skyrocket overnight, and businesses everywhere start to collapse.

Piper's best friend and lifeline at school goes AWOL, and she and her mum lose everything. And then there's Marley – a CODA (child of Deaf adult), who opens a door for Piper into a new world – a world where Deafness is something to celebrate, not to hide, full of beautifully expressive Auslan (Australian sign language). As Piper begins to explore her love of art, discovers a new passion for guerrilla gardening, and pushes back remorselessly against her mum, all while becoming more and more immersed in Deaf culture, she falls hard for Marley – but Marley is struggling with some big questions of his own...

## Author style

Asphyxia deftly weaves her detailed insight into Deaf culture and what it feels like to be d/Deaf throughout this compelling story set in near-future Melbourne. A popular speaker in schools and universities since 2000, she has inspired thousands of students to make permanent changes to their lives in response to her presentations about Deafness, sustainable living and art journaling.

*Future Girl* combines these passions into a similarly motivating, instructional book that will galvanise students into action.

Visit <https://www.allenandunwin.com/resources/for-teachers> for free downloadable teachers' notes, reviews by teachers, extracts and more. Sign up to receive the Allen & Unwin e-newsletter for monthly updates on new resources!

Contact Carolyn Walsh, Education Marketing Manager: Tel: +02 8425 0150, Email: [education@allenandunwin.com](mailto:education@allenandunwin.com)

## Themes

Deafness • sustainability • near-future • speculative fiction • identity • romance • gardening • Own Voices publishing • self-expression through art journaling

## Use in the curriculum

*Future Girl* is presented as 16-year-old Piper's stunning visual-art journal. As well as providing a comprehensive platform for insight into Deaf culture, sustainability and related themes, this book is a perfect opportunity to share the benefits of creative journaling with students within the Visual Arts curriculum, particularly for Years 7 and 8.

**Critical and creative thinking:** Piper critically examines the world in which she lives and makes changes to her internal value system, prompting readers to do the same. The art journal process stimulates creative thinking through using visual symbols to represent experiences and emotions.

Students can analyse how artists use visual conventions in artworks (ACAVAR123).

**Personal and social capability:** Piper works on how to handle her Deafness socially – balancing her drive to be polite, to conform to social expectations and to gain social acceptance against her need for inclusion and freedom from the pressure to pass as hearing. Her art journaling process helps her develop insight into her behaviour and motivations, increasing her self-awareness.

Students can experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork (ACAVAM118)

## English studies – art journaling

### Before reading *Future Girl*

Consider what you think an art journal is? What are some of the benefits to keeping an art journal?

### After reading *Future Girl*

Add to your notes about art journaling – did Piper experience any benefits to keeping an art journal that you did not already list? What are potential benefits for you if you establish an ongoing art journaling habit?

After spreading plaster over a page in her journal, Piper writes:

*I decide I'll add layers...collage some stuff over it. I take a sheet of plastic and paint it blue. Then, using black, I add stripes. I tear the sheet into strips and glue it down randomly onto empty pages. The effect is strangely appealing.*

### Creating your art journal

Use Piper's process (or adapt your own) to create your own art journal. Here are some suggestions:

- Create backgrounds on a number of different pages, using varying colours of paint, sticking down lined notepaper or other textured paper, and smearing on plaster or other textures.
- Create some patterned papers by painting a background and adding stripes, dots or other motifs. Tear these papers into strips or pieces and glue onto background pages you have already created. You might work randomly or make judgements about which patterns look good on which backgrounds.

- Write about your day, your feelings, what's inspiring you, what you want, and what your goals are.
- Draw or paint images that represent key aspects of what you have written. You could also print images sourced from the internet, cut them out and stick them in.
- Add doodles and paint and play around to see what works.

Consider some of the ways you could adapt your art journal to benefit you personally. For example, do you have a specific skill that you could explore in your journal, resulting in your journal becoming a folio of sorts? Do you have a hobby or topic you are keen to learn more about, and if so could your journal form a place to record all you have learnt? Do you have lots of ideas that could be set down in your journal so that later you remember them? Would you like to capture parts of your life – things people say, milestones, important moments – as a treasury of memories? Write yourself a page of journal-prompts to remind yourself and stick it in the front or back of your journal for easy reference.

### **Sharing your message**

Through the process of writing *Future Girl*, Asphyxia began to articulate aspects of Deafness she had never seen described before:

*I found writing about Deaf experience challenging, because Deafness was such an ordinary part of my existence that I rarely thought about it. I began jotting down my daily Deaf encounters – the little annoyances, benefits, confusing moments, the irritating things people say, and the complex feelings that arise when someone has tried to provide access but missed the mark.*

Identify some messages that are important to you. What would you like to say to the world, about things that matter to you? Consider parts of yourself that feel unacceptable – is there a message that would sum up the importance of accepting these parts of yourself? Consider barriers faced by you or others in your life/community – what messages might help break through those barriers? Consider topics you are passionate about that others may not know much about – what messages might be valuable for others to learn?

Increase your capacity for articulating your message(s) through daily journaling. Keep a daily journal about key issues important to you and a message you would like to share.

### **Using art journaling to create a narrative**

Consider the scene where Piper goes to a food-growing workshop and leaves crying. Here, the teacher has clearly not taken into account the possibility that a deaf person might attend. This part of the narrative could send a message about the importance of teaching young deaf people how to prepare for such events and ask for their needs to be met.

Using the art journal format, create a fictional story that communicates one or more of the key messages you identified that are important to you. Use some of the same methods Asphyxia used to communicate her messages, such as showing the emotional consequences of not following the message. Here are some guidelines to create a story using your art journal.

- In planning your story, first list the messages, then write ideas for how they could be shown in various scenes. Plan to influence your readers to believe your message.
- Consider the tone of your story and how that will work with the messages to make them more effective.

- Consider the language of your story. Brainstorm ideas for words, metaphors and analogies that convey your message, and choose language that will present it powerfully.
- Add visual imagery to strengthen your messages, which may include artworks and stencils you have already created. You may wish to adapt them to suit your story.

### **Getting it right vs getting it written**

A multi-layered story like this can be difficult to create, so do it in stages:

- Write a first draft, then go back and adjust the writing, thinking about the tone. Go back and adjust it again, this time thinking about language, metaphors and analogies. Continue this process of refinement until you are happy with the story.

Asphyxia wrote *Future Girl* three times from scratch as well as doing significant edits on each draft, in order to refine the story into the finished book. Expecting yourself to write a perfect story first goes adds unnecessary pressure and stress to the writing process. For the first draft, write quickly and focus on getting down the key ideas without worrying if it is well-written. Relax and enjoy the process. Then polish.

### **Shining up your diamond in the rough and creating a cover**

When you have your ideas down on paper, edit your story so that the message is not actually stated directly anywhere in the text. How can you show the message through scenes without actually stating it?

Create the cover artwork for your story – it should give an indication of what to expect of the story in terms of content and mood.

### **Creating a presentation to communicate your message**

Use the key message you've communicated in your story as the basis for a presentation. Focus on how you can inspire your audience to see that this message is important. It's fine to state the message explicitly here. Tell a personal story that illustrates the importance of your message. Afterwards, reflect – which medium was more effective for your message? The presentation? The art journal story? Do you think another medium would be more effective still?

## **Visual arts**

### **Art as expression**

After graffiti-ing on a public wall, Piper writes, 'I feel excited. Like I've finally found a voice. A tiny voice, but one that will be heard, at least, by anyone who walks past this wall.' If you were to find a public voice, what would you like to say? What do you feel is wrong with this world that you wish could be fixed?

- Design an artwork that shares this or one of your other messages with the world.
- Consider the text in your artwork, if any. How can you condense your message down to minimal text? Should you include text in your artwork, as in some of those created by Piper, such as *Grow Food Not Concrete*, and *Don't Delete My Voice*? If so, what imagery could go with it to most powerfully impart your message? Could you communicate it entirely visually, with no text at all? Another option is to have the text as the title of the artwork.

## Techniques, materials and technology

- What techniques, materials, technologies and art making processes has Asphyxia used in *Future Girl*? What techniques does Piper describe using in the book? Do you feel the multiple techniques work together as a cohesive whole? Compare the techniques used with those of other artists, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.
- In *Future Girl*, how do various techniques used represent themes, concepts and ideas in the book? Consider how Piper's artwork changes as her mood changes. Consider artworks in the book such as *Grow Food Not Concrete* or *Don't Delete My Voice*, where the same idea is presented using more than one technique. How do these artworks change with the changed technique, and how do they remain the same? What is the value of each method of presentation, regarding the core idea Piper wanted to express? How effective do you think each method is? Is one method more suitable for some circumstances/audiences than others?
- Is there an artwork in *Future Girl* that created an emotional response in you when you saw it? If there was nothing in *Future Girl*, find an artwork elsewhere that elicits an emotional response in you, and consider that instead. Why do you think it affected you emotionally? Was it the technique, the colours, the content, the idea behind it, the underlying message...? Create an artwork yourself using the same ideas.
- If you don't already have an art journal, begin one. Experiment with using the same techniques used in *Future Girl* and in a range of artworks, including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, that inspire you to express themes from your own life. How well do the various techniques express the meaning of what you want to say?
- Create pages using a range of techniques. Start with a coloured background (paint or paper), add patterns or text paper. Collage in images that inspire you. Add words that represent key issues on your mind right now. Add in a figure or animal or plant that represents you and your feelings. Add more layers of paint, doodle with pens and pencils and colour in to integrate. Stand back and look at your page objectively. What does it say? Does it appeal, visually? Does it express your emotions? How could you represent the same emotions more effectively? How could you increase the visual appeal of the page while keeping the message/emotions intact?

## Visual conventions

- What visual conventions has Asphyxia used in *Future Girl*? Do you feel they work? Do you like them? Why/why not? Check out Asphyxia's other work online at [www.asphyxia.com.au](http://www.asphyxia.com.au). How is the art in *Future Girl* similar to her other work? How is it different? What motifs has she repeated, and what value do you think the motifs have?
- Pick an artwork in *Future Girl*. Why did Piper create this piece? What does it represent about her life and emotions? What conventions are used in this piece? Do they help the piece more effectively represent Piper's life and emotions?
- Write a review of Asphyxia's work, referring to *Future Girl* and her other artworks – what is your personal opinion of her work, its messages, its effectiveness at communicating the messages, and the techniques used?
- How does Asphyxia's culture influence her artwork? How does this differ from the cultural influences of other artists who inspire you
- How does Piper's background influence her artwork in *Future Girl*? Consider street art – look at examples of street art in *Future Girl*, other art of the same style by Asphyxia, and street art by artists such as Banksy, or Northern-Territory-based Larrakia artist Hafleg, or other artists in your local area. How does their culture influence their artworks?

## About the author

Asphyxia is an artist, writer and public speaker. Author of the much-loved junior fiction series the Grimstones, Asphyxia has also been a circus performer and puppeteer. An avid art-journal creator, she loves to share her process and help others benefit from this amazing tool for self-expression, problem-solving, planning, goal-tracking and self-esteem.

Deaf since the age of three, Asphyxia learnt to sign when she was eighteen, which changed her life. She is now a Deaf activist, sharing details of Deaf experience. She raises awareness of oppression of Deaf people and what we can do to change this. Her free online Auslan course ([www.asphyxia.com.au](http://www.asphyxia.com.au)) has had over 15,000 students.

Asphyxia is kept busy with her small farm where she combines food-growing with art – creating a magical aesthetic with plants and natural elements.

*Future Girl* combines all these passions.



## A word from Asphyxia

'I made Piper d/Deaf in *Future Girl* because I realised how little most hearing people know about d/Deafness. When I first tried to write about Piper's experience, I found myself stuck, as being Deaf is something I don't think about a lot. I found I didn't know how to articulate it. So I started jotting down my everyday experiences – the little annoyances, the benefits, confusion, the irritating things people say and do, and the complex feelings that arise when someone has tried to provide access but misses the mark.

'For example, here's a Deaf dilemma: Imagine you are standing with a group of hearing people who are laughing, but you have no idea what they are laughing about. Should you laugh along to be friendly (and if you do, are you somehow "lying" about having understood?), or stand there with a stony face even though it could seem rude and unfriendly?

'I had never realised I was making these difficult decisions on the fly, every day, without analysing how I wanted to approach them. My responses were automatic: I laughed along. But did I really want to do this? Perhaps it would be better to let people know that I felt left out.

'If you are a hearing reader, I hope that reading about Piper's experiences gives you some insight into what it can be like to be d/Deaf, and an understanding of what a huge difference it can make if you demonstrate inclusive, thoughtful behaviour. If you are d/Deaf, I hope that you can relate to some of Piper's experiences, and that seeing them written down makes it easier for you to explain your own experiences to other people. I hope it also helps you to build a sense of entitlement to ask for access.'

## Review by Joanne Tarpey, teacher of the Deaf

Deaf/HH (hard of hearing) teenagers are going to devour *Future Girl*, with its depiction of the daily obstacles and shared experiences that they rarely see on the written page. They will feel included and acknowledged, often for the first time, in this exciting story of Piper trying to find her identity in a world where few understand what life is like to be Deaf/HH. These teenagers rarely get to share a feeling of inclusivity in a predominantly hearing world, and especially in such a visually 'cool' text as Asphyxia's *Future Girl*. Piper's lived experience of being Deaf/HH will be shared and appreciated by many.

Throughout Piper's journey, Deaf/HH readers will witness and share how someone like them feels and navigates a hearing world. They will experience a life so familiar to their own and relate to so many of the complex situations Piper finds herself in while trying to work out if she is hearing, Deaf, deaf or oral. Most of us struggle with our identity in learning who we are, especially as teens, but we are surrounded by relatable experiences, hearing peers and mostly people who understand us. Piper is not, and nor are many other Deaf/HH teens.

Having taught Deaf/HH teenagers for many years, watching each as they try to navigate and fit into a hearing world, there is only so much they can do to try to understand what is being spoken. I see in my students what Piper sees and feels every day. Like Piper, they try so hard to communicate and adapt, but there is only so much they can do to adjust to the hearing world, yet there is so much hearing people can do to help them adjust. Through Asphyxia's novel we explore many positive changes hearing people can make to adapt, adjust and communicate clearly and visually to fit into Piper's life.

It is not every day that Deaf/HH readers can absorb themselves in a story as relatable as *Future Girl*. I am thrilled Asphyxia has written a book that illustrates so poignantly a Deaf teenager's existence in a hearing world of family, school, friendships and connectivity. Asphyxia beautifully communicates through her drawings and artwork on every page throughout this story. These images add texture, communication and visual stimulus for the reader to absorb and enjoy.

Asphyxia has touched upon so many of the current and long-standing issues faced by Deaf people in our society today.