



TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Mandy Newman

WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK



MY WONDERFUL DISGRACE
AUTHOR: ANGOURIE RICE AND KATE RICE
ISBN 9781761600821 PAPERBACK
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A deliciously dark comedy of errors about unrequited love, manipulation, misunderstandings and the tragic fate of one innocent goat.

Amy Middleton has all her plans in place for the school ball – the perfect designer dress, the perfect dream date, the perfect night.

When Leo Prince finally agrees to go with her, success seems assured, and the night belongs to Amy.

But fate, it seems, has other plans, and with the buzz of an unexpected text, her perfect night begins to unravel.

In the second novel from acclaimed Australian mother-daughter duo Angourie Rice and Kate Rice, brutally honest journal entries, texts, interviews and school newsletters slowly reveal a night gone terribly and hilariously wrong.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Angourie Rice is an actor with international feature film and television credits, including *Mean Girls*, *Mare of Easttown*, *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, *Black Mirror* and *Ladies in Black*. Angourie also writes, produces and hosts a literary podcast, *The Community Library*.

Kate Rice is an AWGIE award-winning playwright with a PhD in ethical creative process and experience writing theatre with and for young people. Her work has been commissioned by Melbourne City of Literature, Curtin University, Deckchair Theatre, Barking Gecko Theatre, Darwin Theatre Company, Darwin High School and Corrugated Iron Youth Arts.

THEMES

Dark Humour • Coming of Age • Epistolary • Relationships • Friendships • Honesty • Manipulation • Privacy and the Digital Era • Misunderstandings • Social Pressure

PRAISE

"From a miscalculated romantic encounter to a disastrous text message that spreads too widely, Amy's carefully constructed night quickly unravels. Add an unfortunate incident involving an innocent goat and a series of betrayals from peers and teachers alike, and the perfect evening becomes a perfect storm. The mother-daughter writing duo tells the story at a lively pace, using a creative mix of diary entries, text messages, interviews and school newsletters to piece together the disastrous night.

They capture the social pressure that teenagers face, from the desire to fit in to the challenge of staying true to themselves in the digital age. *My Wonderful Disgrace* is a must read for anyone aged 14 and over who has ever pinned their hopes on a single supposedly perfect night."

- **Books + Publishing**

For ages: 14+ years

BEFORE READING

DISCUSS

- Why is the story set on the days leading up to and the night of a high school ball? Why are schools interesting places to set a novel?
 - What are the potential challenges and conflicts for individual and collective identity between students?
 - In groups/outgroups; who has social power? who hasn't?
 - Between students and teachers – clash between authority and students, relationships between students and teachers
 - Between students and the outside world?
 - Why do you think the authors chose this setting? This time?
 - List all the things that could go wrong at a high school ball:
 - Do you have to bring a date?
 - Are their unspoken rules about who asks who? What are the rules at your school?
 - How do you let someone know you want them to invite you?
 - What happens if you haven't been asked by anyone?
 - What's the dress code? Right shoes? Right dress? Right suit? Is everyone generally really kind about what people wear to a ball? Why or why not?
 - Do some students object to balls as an event? Why?
 - Which friends do you go with? How do you get there? What if there are only a limited number of seats in a vehicle?
 - What are the potential problems with social media and phones and a high school ball? What is the difference between public and private space and content? Can you exercise control over a photo taken on a phone?
 - Can there be a clash between school leadership wanting to exercise control versus students' desire to be independent at a ball? Why? What about potential drugs and alcohol use?
 - Is there a hierarchy at school between students? Who tends to be at the top and who tends to be at the bottom? Why? How does this contribute to conflict at school?
 - Make predictions about this story. What could be some of the problems that arise at such an event? How do stories work? What are the structural elements a story needs to be successful? How important is conflict? How important is character development and the ending?
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CHAPTER STUDY AND EXERCISES

CHAPTER ONE

- The story starts *in media res* or "in the midst of things" - in the middle of the action. Starting a story this way hooks the audience by placing them in the middle of the action, creating drama and a sense of curiosity.
 - What have the authors done to hook you?
 - What are the conflicting feelings Amy experiences?
 - What problems does Amy have to solve?
- Projecting forward, what will be an insight or epiphany for the character or the reader by the end of the novel? What are you going to invited to think about? How do you think the main character will be challenged?
- The multimodal format of multiple diary entries, texts, interviews with the police and letters develop the plot, allow for distinctive character development and relationships and give readers access to characters' true feelings and motivations.
 - **Exercise:** List all the different ways the authors use format to communicate the plot and the ways in which readers gain an insight into each character.

o Create a table of the main characters, the mode of communication and their tone/diction with examples. Compare the different modes, tones and forms which the authors use to tell the story – how do they shape the reader’s understanding of each character and plot? Why are they different?

- **Writing exercise:** Imagine you have been at a school assembly and your best friend told you that she doesn’t want to be your friend anymore because she has found other people who are more like her. Mirroring Amy’s tone, write a confessional diary entry about how you truly feel about what happened. Write a dialogue exchange between you and the friend the next day at school, in front of lots of other students. Create a text from the friend to her new friend. What does this tell you about how people really communicate? Do we say what we want to say all the time? Why is there a difference between our inner worlds and what we project to the outside world?

CHAPTER TWO

- Conflict drives action in fiction. The opening of chapter two starts with a newsletter from the Principal mentioning guidelines on the school website regarding: bullying policy, behaviour policy and dress code.
 - o Is there a gap between school policies and actual behaviour of students and teachers? Why? What does this tell us about the human experience? How does this gap create problems in this novel?
- Shown below is an extract from Amy’s diary about an exchange between herself, Leo and Miss Starkey – what do you think this is foreshadowing? What element of intrigue or underlying conflict does this add to the novel? How does this help you keep reading?

Quote: *She had her hair out, in a straight, shiny blow-dry, and was wearing a black wide-leg jumpsuit with a serious plunge at the front.*

‘Miss Starkey! I would never have recognised you!’

‘I hope that’s a compliment.’

‘Yes, you look amazing! Doesn’t she look amazing, Leo?’ Leo was actually looking at his phone. Ageist and rude, I thought.

‘What? Oh. Sure.’ He barely looked up.

‘Sorry Miss Starkey. He’s such a boy.’

‘He certainly is.’ She half smiled, half sadly, like an outsider at a party. (Page 42).

- Another interesting feature of this chapter is the treatment of time. How does the time period change from chapter one? Why do you think the authors made this choice? How does it impact the reader’s understanding and does it add an element of intrigue? What does the reader have to do to work out what is happening?

CHAPTER THREE

- What secret do you think Leo is keeping? Why?
- What problem does the relationship between Amy and Leo make you think about? How can this problem be resolved?
- What is the potential problem between Amy and Gabby? Make a prediction about what other things could the novel be about beyond Amy’s and Leo’s relationship.

CHAPTER FOUR

- The relationships the main character has with other characters are opportunities for the main character to grow and be challenged. Think about how Amy and the reader are challenged by all the different relationships in the novel.
- **Exercise:** Draw up a table with three headings across the top: Relationship, Challenge/Problem,

Ending/What do readers learn? How do all these relationships change as a consequence of the series of events around the ball?

- Gabby takes a picture of Amy and Amy says:
'You didn't post that. Oh no Gabby you didn't.' I grabbed the phone. Oh god. Hair, piss, undies, cellulite. It's all I could see. And she'd forwarded it to our friendship chat group. Oh my freaking god.' (Page 85).
- What are the potential moral dilemmas/problems/ conflicting feelings with the photo being forwarded to a friendship group on the night of a school ball? What is the difference between something that is private and public? What about the school policy on social media?

CHAPTER FIVE

- About the photo Gabby says:
'It was just meant to be fun!'
Fun? This was anything but fun. For the second time that night I actually felt like a movie star, but this time in the violated way, and it was not good.
'You posted porn!'
'No I didn't—' (Page 93).
- In Chapter 10, Vanessa says:
'It's a picture. It's obviously meant to be private ... Sending it is embarrassing. Looking at it is shameful.' (Page 164).
- And Amy says:
'Could it be that the crappiest thing about all crap on the internet is not the crap itself, but the people who look at it?' (Page 165).
- **Writing exercise:** Write a 600-word discursive piece about Amy's picture and what problems it presents. Finish the piece with your point of view.
- What else does the reader learn about Leo? Is your perspective changing about him? Why?

CHAPTER SIX

- What function does Choc-Top perform? How does the goat advance the plot?
- What ideas does Choc-Top allow the authors to introduce? Do you think these ideas are of interest to young people?
- What insights does Choc-Top provide the reader about Amy and other characters?

CHAPTER SEVEN

- Compare Amy's diary entries with Vanessa's letter to the manager of the Pacific Crest Hotel.
 - How do they differ? Why?
 - What does the reader learn about Vanessa?
 - What ideas does Vanessa represent?
 - What new insight does the reader gain about Amy at the end of the chapter?

CHAPTER EIGHT

- Amy comes to a new understanding about Vanessa and herself in this chapter. What is the significance of the following dialogue between Amy and Vanessa?
'Did you go to my primary school?'
'Yes. Years Four, Five and Six.'
'Were you in my class?'
'Years Four and Five I was.'
'Really?'
'No, I'm lying. Yes really.'

'Where did you sit?'

'The back.'

'Oh.'

More silence, more rattling.

'So they moved you to the ... other class in Year Six?'

She knew what I meant. There was the good class and the other class.

'I asked to be moved.'

Clearly a lie.

'Why would you do that? That was the top class,

Miss Secombe was amazing, Year Six was – just – great. With her. There was a whole gang of girls—'

'I didn't like that gang.'

I was about to defend them, but then from here, in the dark, I could see them, all curled up into a snippy, self-satisfied little pack. (Page 132-133).

- How do you think Vanessa feels when Amy asks, "Did you go to my primary school?" Is it easy to make new friends or see people as they really are at school? Why or why not? How powerful is social or collective identity? Why?
- At the end of the novel, Amy writes:
"My journey with Vanessa reached its end point: I like the girl. No, I don't just like her; I love her. She is actually quite very much the best." (Page 227).
- Why do you think Amy changed her mind? What does Vanessa teach Amy and the reader?
- How has Leo been drawn into the Choc-Top story? What question remains in your mind about Leo? Why?

CHAPTER NINE

- How do you feel about Gabby? What do her emails express?

CHAPTER TEN

- What happens between Vanessa, Elroy, Leo and Amy? How is this different from their relationship at the start of the novel?
- What is funny/tragic about how Amy, Leo and Vanessa finally arrive at the ball?
- The photo Gabby took of Amy created problems but how do you think a phone will help Leo?
- What is our relationship with technology?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

- What would be the best way to help Choc-Top at this point?

CHAPTER TWELVE

- How are these events leading to a dramatic conclusion? What do you think is going to happen?
- Amy finally makes her speech. How has she changed from the beginning of the novel? She says:
"It's part of the story, and it stopped Ms Kruger in her tracks. I stood there in my dress, ruined with rips and mud and bloodstains. A map of my disgrace. That's what they thought they wanted. More evidence to set me apart. Something more they could laugh at." (Page 199-200).
- **Writing exercise:** Write a short reflection about what you would say to your year group, on the eve of leaving school.
 - o What have you learned about yourself and other young people and school?
 - o Is there a difference between who you are as a private individual and who you are as a student, a member of a social group and hierarchy within school?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

- What is the dramatic incident at the end of this chapter? How does it invert romantic stereotypes? How is humour also used in this chapter?
- Why do the year group mostly support Amy?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

- What does the reader learn about Miss Starkey? How does she use or abuse her power?
- How does Amy help Leo? How has their relationship changed over the course of the novel? How has Amy changed?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

- How has your understanding of the relationship between Leo and Miss Starkey changed over the course of the novel?
- **Exercise:** Engage in a class discussion about the nature of consensual relationships.
- Track Leo's gradual reveal of the truth of how he feels about Miss Starkey over the course of the novel. How important are the different modes in constructing what really happened between Leo and Miss Starkey? What does this tell you about truth and when someone feels ready to tell the whole truth?
- Why does it take Leo so long to explain how he truly feels?
- What are some final insights or epiphanies for Amy and the reader at the end of the novel?
- How do perceptions of others and people change over the course of the novel? Why does Amy's perception of Vanessa, Leo and Gabby, and Miss Starkey change over the course of the novel?
- Overall, what did the novel make you think about or reconsider?

SONGS FOR THE PERFECT SCHOOL BALL

curated by **ANGOURIE** and **KATE RICE!**



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