

Loner

GEORGINA YOUNG

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED YEAR LEVELS: Years 11 and 12

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning and connect it to an audience, purpose and context. They encompass a range of forms with a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they promote the integration of ICT and life skills.

SYNOPSIS

Lona has dropped out of art school and no one is quite sure why, least of all Lona. It's just that nothing in her life seems to make sense anymore, including art. She spends her days sneaking into the darkroom at her old school to develop photographs and her nights DJ-ing at the local roller disco.

Her aimlessness terrifies her, but everyone else appears oblivious to her fears: her parents are bewildered by her sudden lack of ambition, her brother is preoccupied with his new girlfriend, and her best friend Tab seems to be drifting away. Even a budding relationship with a bass-playing, cello-shredding med student isn't enough to shake her existential angst.

Lona knows it's up to her to figure out what she wants to do with her life: the problem is, she has absolutely no idea where to start.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georgina Young is a writer and designer from Melbourne. She has previously had her work published in *Voiceworks* magazine, as well as in *Branches*, an anthology published by the Bowen Street Press. *Loner* is her first novel.

BEFORE READING

1. Refer students to the title of the novel. What are the connotations of a 'loner'? Are these positive or negative? Are there different types of loneliness? How does this title set the tone of the novel? What possible themes could the novel explore?
2. Ask students to reflect on what they would like to do after school. What is a goal or ambition that they have? What do they believe is most important when looking for a job or career?
3. Ask students to consider what a 'rite of passage' is. Get them to write down the 'rites of passage' that Australian teenagers experience. Why is it important to experience these rites of passage?

WHILE READING

1. Lona 'feels a kinship' with her Grandpa when he moves into their house. What is a 'kinship' and why does Lona feel she has one with her Grandpa?
2. Tab is first introduced to the reader through her texting. Young characterises her as someone who 'much prefers the flurry to the big chunk of text' (pg. 8). What does this indirect characterisation reveal about Tab's character? What kind of person is she?
3. What is the realisation that Lona has on page 22? Is this realisation significant?
4. 'The sound of her former classmates laughing at Tab's stories is skin peeling' (pg. 29) Why is Lona so unnerved by Tab's interaction with her peers?



Why does it make her uncomfortable that Tab gets along with them?

- How does Lona come to have the role of pushing the trolleys at Coles? What does this event reveal about Lona's views and values?
- One of the chapters within the novel is titled 'Semiotics' and Young elaborates that: 'Red flowers with green leaves can be stamped on anything and the connotation is clear because of the semiotics'. Look up what 'semiotics' refers to. Why are semiotics important in the context of this particular novel?
- Lona describes Christmas in the hospital as 'bleakly Dickensian'. What does she mean by this phrase and how does it apply to this scene?
- What does the room divider represent to Lona and her developing relationship with George?
- Why do George and Lona break up?
- Why does the car accident affect Tab and Lona so differently?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

- Is Lona a static or dynamic character? How does she change or remain the same over the course of the novel?
- 'So this is how Lona records herself, in distorted, underexposed images.' (pg. 1) How does Lona's fascination with photography reflect her introverted nature?
- On page 45, Lona investigates Sampson's girlfriend Felicity on Facebook. Is Facebook an accurate platform to gain an understanding of who someone truly is?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- Lona continues to return to Planet Skate throughout the novel. What does this setting represent with reference to Lona's personal and emotional development?
- There are several allusions to pop culture throughout the novel. What are the effects of these allusions with regards to character development but also themes and ideas?
- The novel is told in third-person omniscient narration. How does this structural decision enhance the themes of the novel?

THEMES

Feminism

- 'Tab would say: this is due to social conditioning to value the respect of men more than the respect of women.' (pg. 163) Do you agree with Tab's comment? Do you believe people value the respect

of men more than women? What societal problems may this lead to?

- 'The deflection of compliment: equally critical enactment of the girl law.' (pg. 190) Why do women deflect flattery and compliments?
- 'She was stupid and stupidity is dangerous when you're a girl. The world doesn't let girls be stupid. If they're stupid then whatever happens to them is their own fault.' (pg. 195) How can 'stupidity' be dangerous for a girl? Is 'stupidity' dangerous for boys in the same way?
- 'Like most girls, Lona has made an art form of making herself seem smaller than she is.' (pg. 198) How and why are women taught to occupy less space? What are the implications of this?

Identity

- Can a person have multiple personalities? Which characters in the novel inhabit multiple versions of themselves? Is it important to recognise that human identity is complex and ever changing?
- 'Lona is a patchwork doll.' (pg. 166) What does this metaphor reveal about Lona's identity?
- 'Don't let the air of arty pretentiousness deceive you. I'm actually the most basic bitch alive.' (pg. 84) Is it normal for aspects of our identity to contradict themselves? Is it important to remember that we are not always the sum of our parts?

Coming of age

- 'Lona wants to know what the rules are, the rules to being an adult.' (pg. 55) As children and teenagers our world is shaped by rules and boundaries. Are there rules for growing up and being an adult? What are the implications if there are suddenly no rules for us to follow?
- 'Like alienation in coming-of-age narratives. Like, what's more abstracting: abstraction or being abstracted from abstraction.' (pg. 137) What does Lona mean by this quote? What does abstraction mean? Is it a common theme in bildungsroman novels? Do you think this is a common experience for teenagers?
- 'It's not enough, she realizes. It's not enough to respond to a prompt. It's not enough to subvert or to push back on the assessment criteria. Not when she relied on the rubric in the first place, to know what she should be pushing back on, to define the trajectory of her small artistic and conceptual rebellions.' (pg. 176) What kind of loss of innocence is Lona experiencing? How has her worldview matured and changed?

RESPONDING

- What advice would you give to Lona in managing her social anxiety? Create a pamphlet with reliable resources to present this advice.



2. What is the 'real reason' why Lona dropped out of art school? Why does it take Lona so long to finally admit the real reason? Respond to these questions in a reflective piece of writing and utilising textual evidence.
3. 'Tab likes turning into Holden Caulfield at parties'. In a comparative piece of writing, compare the coming of age story *Loner* with the original bildungsroman; *The Catcher in the Rye*.
4. One page 37, Lona provides a scathing criticism of Facebook. Do you agree with these criticisms? Do you have criticisms of your own? Write your own opinion piece about the topic of Facebook.
5. 'She uses the smirking face and the flexed biceps to indicate irony and self-awareness.' (pg. 75) Lona uses emojis in her texts to establish her personality but also subtly to convey her true emotions. How do you use emojis? Do you find them useful in explaining your emotions? Create a series of conversations only using emojis. Share these with a peer and see if your message is lost in translation or communicated clearly.
6. 'She is making' (pg. 205). Create your own artwork inspired by the themes and ideas in *Loner*.