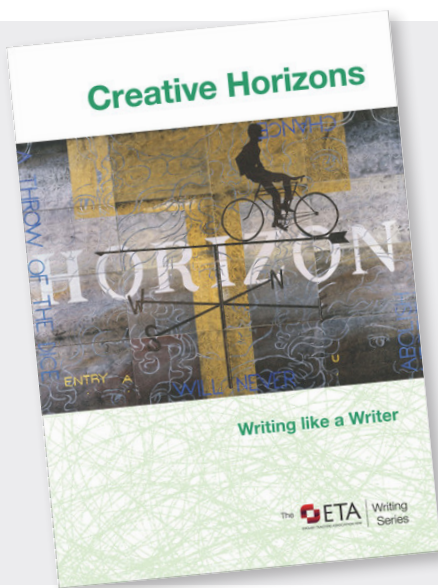


VATE member book reviews

December 2023



Creative Horizons Book 3: Writing like a Writer

Reviewed by Stephanie Burrafato, Taylors Lakes Secondary College

EDITORS: Melpomene Dixon (series Editor) and Kate Murphy |

PUBLISHER: ETANSW, 2023, 137 pages | **RRP:** \$65

As the third instalment in the series, *Creative Horizons: Writing like a Writer* builds on the skills developed and established in its predecessors, focusing on the different forms of writing. For the new VCE English Area of Study 'Crafting texts', this text will be a great support for both teachers and students, as they work to select and refine their ideas in this unit of work using different modes and forms of writing.

It is important to note that this text can be read and used as a standalone resource, and does not require the first two books to be able to attain the skills taught in this text. However, to foster passion and creativity, completing the set will build stronger student writers.

This text is clearly divided and labelled into different forms of writing with samples from notable writers such as John Marsden and Kirsty Everett, amongst others. Each contributor has focused on a form of writing, providing either a broken-down structure, annotations, commentary, or carefully guided questions that prompt the writer to reflect on the style of writing. The strength of this text is that for each form, there are carefully constructed activities

and tasks for the student/writer to complete to understand how to create that particular form. Teachers can be selective about the forms they would like to focus on in class, and have students unpack the annotated examples and discuss the author's writing process and craft, before attempting to emulate it themselves.

Each contributor has carefully unpacked their examples, prompting the students to critically consider the audience, context and purpose of each form. These parameters are essential for students to engage with and develop for their own writing in the Crafting texts unit of work. The fact that each contribution begins with a statement or reflection of these elements further highlights the benefits of this text in the classroom as students will be able to create their own reflections in the statement of intentions or explanations for their own pieces as they track their own writing development.

Further to this, what is clear is the passion and mastery these writers have embedded in their 'mini-lessons' for their chosen form. This text does not provide formulas for creating a particular form, instead, you will find deep reflections from each author as they guide students through the process for writing instead.

This will foster deeper and richer creative responses from writers who learn from each master.

However, I wanted there to be more variety in digital text forms, not just one: a blog post. With the growing dominance of online writing platforms, and young people accessing more texts digitally than in previous generations, naturally, our students will be gravitating towards creating digital texts for their responses in this unit of work – if not for their assessments, then for their own leisure. Having taught the Crafting texts unit this year, I had many students wanting to write transcripts for YouTube videos, or interview questions and responses for a podcast. Adding these forms would have enriched the resource and demonstrated a strong understanding of the focus of the current (and future) cohorts of students. As teachers and writers, we should be considering how students, as future writers, can structure an engaging Instagram post, or be deliberate with the selection of an image/graphics and a caption, or create succinct headlines for social media posts.

Whilst the Editor notes that writers 'still want to read and write' despite 'so many new technologies communicating to [readers] through every sense', we



ultimately cannot ignore the platforms students are accessing frequently in their day-to-day lives or what they will no doubt be expected to use and create in their future careers. As we found, when teaching the Crafting Texts unit, our students are gravitating towards blended or hybrid texts.

Ultimately, *Creative Horizons: Writing like a Writer* will be a great resource for English educators to gather inspiration for teaching mentor texts and particular forms of writing in their classrooms. Teachers will be able to structure explicit teaching or modelling around a form, easily implement the textbook's use within the classroom, and set tasks for students to practise in their own time. If schools were to put this text on the booklist for VCE students, it would be a beneficial resource that students can take with them from Year 11 into Year 12, as the skills can be revisited many times. This text provides a strong blueprint for each form of writing that will save time for educators trying to create resources themselves, and writers trying to learn a form in a short amount of time.



Running with Ivan

Reviewed by Daniel O'Shea, Star of the Sea College

WRITER: Suzanne Leal | PUBLISHER: HarperCollins, 2023, 320 pages | RRP: \$17.99

Running With Ivan is a compelling timeslip novel inspired by true events. The story focuses on thirteen-year-old Leo Arnold. Leo is an unsettled teenager – moving in with his stepfamily only two years after his mother passed away. He doesn't want a new school, a new house or a shared bedroom with his new stepbrother, Cooper. What he wants is an escape. To be as far away as possible from his current life.

Leo gets his wish when he discovers an old music box that transports him from the twenty-first century to wartime Prague. In Prague, Leo forms an unlikely friendship with a Czech boy called Ivan. However, when WWII becomes a reality, Leo is confronted with problems he had only read about in his history lessons. Leo and Ivan frantically search for an escape from a very different set of concerns, a search that sends them running against time.

Targeting an audience of 10+, the novel serves as an introduction to the atrocities of WWII and the Holocaust. It is no mean feat for Leal to get readers

to imagine themselves in the midst of such horror, whilst still maintaining a connection to the concerns of modern-day teens. In Leal's own words:

The enormity of the Holocaust makes it almost impossible to comprehend. Mindful of this, I wanted to bring an immediacy to wartime Europe when writing *Running With Ivan*. That is why Leo – a boy from the twenty-first century with little understanding of the war and its impact – needed to find himself dropped right in the middle of it. Only then could he begin to understand what actually happened.

Throughout *Running With Ivan*, Leo learns about the othering of Jews through the enforced wearing of the yellow star, daily life in the ghettos, and culminating in the transportation of trainloads of people to Auschwitz. The authenticity of Leal's writing is also enhanced via her research interviews with her neighbour Fred Perger, a Holocaust survivor.

The struggles of Leo's Jewish friends, Ivan and Olinda, allow him to put his own problems into perspective. Leo also returns to his twenty-first century life with a new attitude and sense

of strength. His running coach Mr Livingston articulates as much when he states:

Take it from me, Leo, at thirteen, you can do almost anything. Never forget this. Difficult things, courageous things: they are all possible, even at thirteen. No, especially at thirteen.

In this respect, the novel would be an excellent choice for a junior English Craft of Writing unit on resilience or identity. Leal's accessible and reflective writing style provides students with an exemplar for their own short story or memoir writing. Teachers could also very easily teach *Running With Ivan* alongside Anne Franks' *The Diary of a Young Girl*, already a popular English text studied across the state. The scope to engage in cross curricular content and skills with a school's Humanities faculty is also an appealing prospect.

Due to the nature of the content of *Running With Ivan*, teachers would need to provide appropriate context to the events of WWII before jumping into the study of this text. Additionally, schools need to be wary about developing students' vocabulary to be able to speak respectfully on the events of the Holocaust. It is important



that the English classroom is a space to be teaching emotionally challenging content, so these factors should not serve as a road block to putting this text onto your school's booklist.

Overall, this novel deftly brings hope and purpose into the life of a grief-stricken young boy. The fact that this hope can emerge from, of all places, the horror of Hitler's Germany is a testament to humanity's ability to survive and to connect. *Running With Ivan* is an important book for every school library – lest the next generation forget about the dangers of prejudice, discrimination, and dehumanisation.



Nightbirds

Reviewed by Stephanie Burrafato, Taylors Lakes Secondary College

WRITER: Kate J. Armstrong | **PUBLISHER:** Allen and Unwin, 2023, 462 pages | **RRP:** \$24.99

Kate J. Armstrong harnesses the features of the fantasy genre to take her readers on a magical adventure through Simta where young girls who possess magic are forced to hide it due to the political tension that is rife in their society. Readers are sure to connect with one of the three Nightbirds, Matilde, Sayer or Æsa, who must be brave enough to leave their gilded cages and uncover the political scheme that has worked to trap them for so long.

Opening the text with a detailed map of where the characters' lives begin to change offers a focal point for fantasy lovers to dissect with a keen eye. The strength of this text lies in Armstrong's world-building. Immediately, readers are whisked away into this whimsical world in which they discover 'a thousand layers of secrets' not only within the society, but also in the characters themselves. It is *Bridgerton* but with alchemical magic and cunning female characters who all fight for their place in society and to have autonomy over their own bodies and lives. Thus, Armstrong embeds the theme of equality and female empowerment, especially with wise reflections from notable characters such as Epinine, a woman in a position

of political power, who reflects on her role, telling Matilde, 'They wouldn't pull such tricks if I were a man, of course. But a woman has to work twice as hard to make people respect or fear her. She has to be much tougher than the men.'

While the publisher recommends this text for students aged 13 years and over, the complex nature of some of the themes it addresses requires a sophisticated level of maturity to be able to comprehend, digest and appreciate Armstrong's intricate attention to detail. In addition, the allusion behind the Nightbirds' profession can lead to mature discussions about the selling of one's magic through their body, namely, a kiss. Further, she explores the nature of politics and their design on the society that they govern. Through this, students will be able to explore the nature and impact of segregation and then evaluate the influence that religion has on politics and the people. This will allow readers to then discuss what is required in order to overcome such arduous conditions: friendship or rivalry. However, for the analysis to have depth, attaining a certain level of historical and political knowledge first will better support students' understanding of the complex nature of the ideas presented in this book.

As such, this text has the perfect premise and character development for a lunchtime book club or a Year 10 Literature Circle. Armstrong's development of symbolism and motif involves intricate details which will set these discussions up with substance and depth. There are layers to be unpacked here by students able to grasp and appreciate these. Armstrong presents imagery of beauty, and young women being trapped in a cage, which could prompt students to identify and discuss parallels in their own world/s. Readers will also enjoy discussing the literal and metaphorical meaning behind the masks that these Nightbirds wear – one of the many symbolic features in the text – helping students to develop their understanding and skills of inference.

At times, due to the number of characters and their complex back stories, it was hard as a reader to remain connected with them. You felt you were being pulled away to another focus just as you were slowly uncovering an important layer to them. That is not to say that each character is not interesting, but I hope that Armstrong will keep developing them in the sequel to this novel.

If students are not reading this text as part of a book club or literature circle,



I would recommend it to my Year 10 students for their Reader's Notebook activities during independent reading, as students will be able to analyse the writer's craft and authorial intention.

Long after I have concluded my reading of *Nightbirds*, I am still finding myself wondering what is next in the journeys of Matilde, Æsa and Sayer. Young female readers especially are sure to connect with one of the three, whether it be to discover what Matilde will do next with her resolve, how Sayer will harness her fierceness, or how Æsa will overcome her fears. Luckily, we can tell our students that this is only the first instalment of an ongoing series that Allen and Unwin have promised their readers. I suggest that school libraries have the next text on their shelves ready for students to check out.

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Every Exquisite Thing

Reviewed by Melissa Wray, Newcomb Secondary College

WRITER: Laura Steven | PUBLISHER: HarperCollins, 2023, 352 pages | RRP: \$19.99

Every Exquisite Thing is a deliciously crafted novel about being on the cusp of adulthood, choosing your own pathway, and living with the choices and consequences made. It also bravely tackles issues and behaviour linked to eating disorders, depression and the perceived societal expectations placed on girls and women. Along the journey, the story is infused with intrigue, hidden agendas, complex family dynamics, and a sprinkle of the supernatural. A perfect combination to capture the attention of the reader.

Penny Paxton begins her first year at Dorian Drama School. It is only for the most elite, most determined, and most talented of students. It is also where her famous mother attended but left, amid a cloud of mystery at the time. Nobody knew for certain the real reasons behind her hasty departure. The complex relationship between mother and daughter is played out in a way that slowly peels back both women's flaws and insecurities for the reader.

Penny and her mother have always had a complicated relationship, one in which Penny has never really felt the love, warmth and support of her mother – deep down, that is what she craves.

When Penny secures the lead role in the performance through deception, she also receives mentorship from a Dorian alumnus; one who offers her more than just glowing reviews. Penny is given the opportunity to sit for a portrait by the Masked Painter. This decision has far reaching consequences that force Penny to question everything she knows about herself, her mother and those around her. Steven creates a raft of characters, but in particular, a rival for Penny. Davina is confident, talented, beautiful and ruthless in her actions – a gritty contrast to Penny who exudes similar traits to the world, but with a forced, fake and exhausting manner.

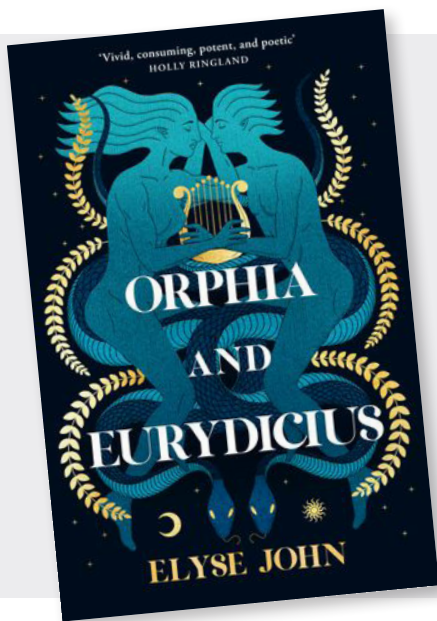
Steven creates a beautifully addictive bohemian world for the characters. This challenges Penny and forces her to confront her darkest fears and deepest desires. The infusion of magical realism envelopes the story without overpowering it. It adds to the intrigue and wonder in a perfectly balanced

way as the story shifts between real life and impossible imaginations. As well as mystery and rivalry, this is a tender story of first love and the opportunity to experience it. Penny must be honest with herself and kind to herself to find out what she really wants and whether to put her heart on the line to get it, no matter the cost.

Every Exquisite Thing forces the reader to ask questions of themselves. How far would they go to get what they want? What lengths would they go to if it meant protecting the people they love? But also, why do we succumb to things of superficial significance when our hearts and minds could be filled with much more substantial things?

Overall, the most important message in this text for the reader is about self-worth, being enough for the world as you are and ignoring the unrealistic expectations imposed by society and, sadly, by oneself; an important message for everyone to learn as soon as they can, but sadly, a lesson that can take the longest amount of time.

Every Exquisite Thing is suitable for the 15+ age group.



Orphia and Eurydice

Reviewed by Amber Partington, Coburg High School

WRITER: Elyse John | PUBLISHER: HarperCollins, 2023, 400 pages | RRP: \$32.99

Spies and reviews of *Orphia and Eurydice* claim that it is perfect reading for fans of Madeline Miller (which I am), Pat Barker, Natalie Haines and their like – it is a feminist retelling of a Greek myth, a woman's story from a time when men's voices and deeds prevailed. In this 'gender-bended' version of the tragic love story of 'Orpheus and Eurydice', Orphia, daughter of Apollo and Calliope, is living on a remote island under the guardianship of a formidable king, mastering the art of combat.

Her true passion is poetry, but Apollo has forbidden it. Her story takes a twist when she is whisked away to Mount Olympus and meets her long-lost mother, and is offered the opportunity to reside among the Muses on the lofty heights of Mount Parnassus. There, she nurtures her poetic talents, but she often thinks of the young man, Eurydice, who she met briefly back on the island. When they reunite their bond grows, but Orphia is about to be thrust into an epic adventure, accompanying Jason

on his quest for the coveted Golden Fleece. She returns to find that she has another quest waiting for her – to the Underworld, to reclaim her beloved ...

The 'gender-bending' aspect of this story is not only present in the recasting of Orpheus as Orphia (and vice-versa with Euridice), it also seeks to challenge conventional gender norms, particularly those of its historical context. Orphia is a strong woman, both in character and physically. She is muscular and regularly wears armour, she is skilled on the battlefield and forward in the bedroom (or grove, as the case may be). She craves fame and knows that it is her legacy to sing the songs of 'men (like Eurydice) who were soft when they were supposed to be hard; of women who were loud when they were supposed to be docile ...'

This exploration of gender stereotypes presents a positive message, however the execution is at times quite awkward. Their love is depicted as 'perfection', 'blessed with every felicity on this earth, thanks to the virtues of an equal match', yet the stereotypical dichotomy of masculine and feminine not only still exists, but is reinforced by so many of their key interactions each other, notable

examples being Orphia's attempt to look 'at anything but his bare ankles', and Eurydice's confession that he has dreamed of 'a woman who would seize me hard and kiss me.' The equality message is not entirely lost, but nor is it particularly strong.

There are potential applications for a text like this within the secondary English classroom, starting with an analysis of narrative structure and exploration of The Hero's Journey. A focus on the craft of writing, as seen in Unit 1 English and EAL, or genre (Unit 1 Literature) could create the space for a mythological retelling. *Orphia and Eurydice*, however, is probably not suitable for the classroom.

At both levels, but particularly the junior level, the main concern would be with the sexual content. Many of the gender stereotype reversals occur within their physical relationship, and whilst the language used to convey their interactions is fairly subtle and poetic, it is obviously sexual – not overtly, but obviously. This book is too adult and too long (at almost 400 pages) to be considered as a set text for the junior classroom.

For the senior students, additionally, it lacks the level of literary merit that is preferred/required for VCE text selection. A common point of praise for this text is its evocative and poetic language, but at times this is somewhat marred by excess. It is a story about poetry and is written by a poet, but the focus on figurative language is sometimes overwhelming and distracting. An enthusiastic fan might be able to find excerpts for use within Unit 1 English/EAL/Literature, depending on their school's approach to the aforementioned 'crafting texts' and genre studies elements of the respective Study Designs. But as a complete text or a mentor text to be studied in detail, it is lacking in literary depth.

Orphia and Eurydicus is worthy of reading, though, if not studying, and would sit quite nicely in the senior section of a school library. It has myth and monsters, love and adventure, and importantly, representation. Whilst the gender-reversal was lacking in nuance, the challenging of stereotypes and acceptance of sexual orientations is still a positive and many students – and their teachers! – will find it refreshing and engaging (and might swoon just a little).



Herc

Reviewed by Stephanie Burrafato, Taylors Lakes Secondary College

WRITER: Phoenicia Rogerson | PUBLISHER: HarperCollins, 2023, 416 pages | RRP: \$32.99

Herc. Before he was known as a hero, he was a volatile boy. He grew up to be a husband, lacking warmth, then a father for a brief period which only brought to light his villainous tendencies and monstrosity.

Phoenicia Rogerson has carefully peeled back the layers of our famous hero, choosing instead to delve into the lives of those surrounding him. It is her careful construction of characters and their development, wherein Herc lies as a catalyst for their epiphanies or demise, that make this story interesting.

Those looking for a book to satiate the hole left after reading *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller and painstakingly awaiting a new mythical relationship to fawn over, should look no further than this text.

Despite its eponymous title, not once do we read Herc's own perspective on the events that unfold in his life outside of his letters to H, which lends itself to the nature of mythology and legends: one's story told and glorified through others. However, Rogerson makes it quickly known that one's glory, namely Herc's, does not come without guts and gore. The text does cover LGBTQI+ themes, due to the nature of Herc's

relationships across his life. Rogerson also does not shy away from detailing the violence that Herc is no stranger to as a result of his inability to regulate his emotions. Herc's true nature is revealed in pivotal moments: the murder of his music teacher and later, his children with his long-suffering first wife Megara. Readers are forced to remove their rose-coloured glasses and change their perspective from the Disney Hercules to one that is wicked.

As such, readers learn about the pressure that comes with having a name and a reputation. They will question the origins of Herc's nature and dig deeper into understanding his behaviour by carefully reflecting on the observations of those surrounding him. Through this, Rogerson is able to give voice to those silenced by Hercules' status and nature who are so often omitted from stories as great as these, providing the readers with a feminist and inclusive lens.

Those looking for poetic waxing should be warned, however. Herc provides a modern lens on the famous and often inaccurately represented demi-god, and Rogerson utilises modern language. This is most notable when detailing Herc's exchanges with Hylas. The series of letters between Herc and his lover, who endearingly call each other H as

a means of defying the fates enforced upon them and taking control of their own identities, read as juvenile and naïve. While this book rewards readers with insight into how much Herc has to grow before he can truly rise to fame, the voices of the other characters are difficult, at times, to discern from each other as a result of this language struggling to be distinct. Yet, as readers progress through the text, they learn just how far Herc can fall from his pedestal, and still climb back up.

The strength of this retelling lies in its unique approach to Herc's life story – telling it through the perspectives of all those in Herc's life and those affected by his actions. Readers will enjoy learning about the different figures in Greek mythology and how their stories intertwine due to the multiple points-of-view style of writing. Ultimately, those passionate about Greek mythology will enjoy recognising popularised figures, delving deeper into their stories, and reading new perspectives on age-old myths.

While as a teacher I do not see a place for this text in my teaching and classroom, I would recommend it to readers who have a love for reading and a passion for Greek mythology.



Where You Left Us

Reviewed by Melissa Wray, Newcomb Secondary College

WRITER: Rhiannon Wilde | **PUBLISHER:** University of Queensland Press, 2022
328 pages | **RRP:** \$19.99

Where You Left Us is a novel that presents complex family dynamics, long hidden secrets and young love. Cinnamon and Scarlett Prince are sisters with little in common besides their separated parents. Over the summer break, all four members of the family come together to spend time at their seaside home.

Cinnamon, the older sister, is angry, disappointed and bitter with the world. She remained at home, long after her mother and sister left, to care for her rock star father who sinks into bouts of depression for extended periods of time. Scarlett, the younger sister, returns home from being away at school but suffers from anxiety and, more often than not, the wrath of her older sister. Their free-loving mother also comes to visit them but not long after, decides to stay. The history between all four members of the family bubbles along through each chapter depicting the complexities between family members and the fine line between the love and hate that unites them.

The Prince family has been the subject of whispers and speculation for years, mostly due to the mysterious disappearance of their Aunt Sadie years before, but also because of their former rock star dad. They are used to the town gossip and pay little attention until one night a thunderstorm splits open the start of a secret long buried. Over the course of the summer holidays, this story is set against the backdrop of a house on a cliff overlooking a wild ocean. At times, the setting mimics the characters within the story. Cinnamon can be unpredictable, angry and mesmerising, much like the ocean. Scarlett can be aloof, intriguing and stoic, much like their home on top of the hill. The summer break not only begins to uncover the mystery behind the disappearance of Aunt Sadie, but the tensions long buried between each of the family members.

Wilde introduces us to two very different sisters. Cinnamon is lost on the outside whilst Scarlett is lost on the inside. Both are trying to find their way in the world without too much guidance from an absent mother (physically) and

an absent father (mentally). As both sisters reunite at the family home over the summer break, they also begin to uncover a mystery about their family – one that might just hold the key to some of the wonderings about the history of their family.

Along the journey, Cinnamon and Scarlett also both begin a subtle romantic journey with people neither thought would be the kind of person they would become attracted to. Wilde uses the love interests of each sister to nurture Cinnamon and Scarlett into uncovering more about themselves ultimately helping both sisters to move forward with their lives and in their relationships with their family members.

The clever and talented contemporary writing style of the chapters shines a light on each sister so the reader gets to know them better and understand each one, long before the other sister does. Wilde has carefully crafted two seemingly opposite sisters when really, they both just want the same thing.

Where You Left Us is suitable for the 14+ age group.



The Crossing

Reviewed by Lauren Maserow, McKinnon Secondary College

WRITER: Ernie Rijs | PUBLISHER: Brolga Publishing, 2023, 298 pages | RRP: \$24.99

The premise of *The Crossing* sounds very promising and I was excited to read it and have the opportunity to review it. Unfortunately, I have to say that I felt it didn't live up to its potential or entirely match up to what was written in the blurb.

The Crossing is about two teenage boys from vastly different backgrounds. One is Tim, a white Australian with divorced parents, who feels as though he can't live up to the standard set by his big brother Ben but who also struggles with the suppressed trauma of his younger sister's death at the hands of a distracted driver when they were kids. The other is Gabriel, a young man from South Sudan who has come to Melbourne with his father as refugees and who has lived through numerous horrific experiences.

Tim is tasked with being Gabriel's buddy by the principal of his school, something that apparently Tim's dad asked for (this is never explained, however, despite a few red herrings left dangling). Tim does an admittedly mediocre job of being Gabriel's buddy, and stands by quietly when his friends make racist remarks about Gabriel. Gabriel joins

the school soccer team that Tim is also on, but sport is not the great unifier we think it will be, and Gabriel continues to be abused. Gabriel ends up in a coma following a seemingly random attack which was not random at all as it was a message for his father about the debt he owes for the money to get to Australia.

What disappointed me about this novel was the poor execution of an excellent premise. It feels like the exposition of the story takes too long and the conflict of the attack comes much later than it should have (almost halfway into the story, about 150 pages in). It feels like there is too much time spent on Tim's concussion, acquired while filling in for a friend's weekend soccer team, and his fractured relationship with his mostly absent father. There are a lot of loose ends and starts of the story that don't go anywhere including: the dynamic between Tim and his older brother, or the friendship with Catherine (Cat) where they maybe like each other but it isn't really explored; or the friendship with his mate Ryan who by all accounts is a racist jerk, but who makes a panicked call to Tim to come to the hospital because his parents have been in a car accident; or the alluded

to connection between Tim's dad and the principal which is what led to Tim being Gabriel's buddy in the first place. There are some dream sequences that feel like they touch on African folklore or mythology but, again, these feel underdeveloped or just go unexplained.

The narrative jumps between many of the characters: Tim, Gabriel, Tim's mum, Gabriel's dad, the principal. Generally, I love a polyvocal narrative, however, these jumps don't happen at the start of each chapter, or after a paragraph break within the chapters, so it can be difficult at times to work out who is speaking when.

I admire the author's intentions to create and share a story that shows a cross-cultural divide being bridged, and love that it was set locally in Melbourne and has a number of voices. I am concerned though that the narrative of the Sudanese gangs, pushed by certain media outlets, has been perpetuated in this story as it does the community no favours.

Ultimately, this story had a lot of potential but it lacked the deftness required to pull it off successfully



Ash Barty: Champion

a memoir of tennis and teamwork

Reviewed by Daniel O'Shea, Star of the Sea College

WRITER: Ash Barty | **PUBLISHER:** HarperCollins Children's Books, 2023
288 pages | **RRP:** \$22.99 (Young Readers Edition)

Ash Barty: Champion is the official young readers edition of Ash Barty's award-winning memoir, My Dream Time. It serves as a compelling testament to the power of determination, sportsmanship, and collaboration. At its core, the memoir chronicles Barty's rise to tennis stardom, detailing her victories, challenges, and the pivotal role of her team in bringing about her success.

The book begins with an exploration of Barty's early years, offering insights into the less than glamorous lifestyle of a professional tennis player on tour. Loneliness, isolation from schoolmates, and debilitating homesickness have her questioning her chosen pathway on numerous occasions. Barty's reflections on these topics sets this memoir apart from your average sports autobiography. Her struggles with body image, depression, and her mental 'Wolves of Wimbledon' are handled sensitively. The turning point for Barty is seeking the guidance of mindset coach Ben Crowe, with the memoir identifying practical mental health strategies that could also be incorporated into a school's wellbeing program.

Barty also shares with her readers the proud story of her First Nations heritage.

Her chapter entitled 'Black Skin, Red Rocks' details how Barty was seven years old when her father told her that she was a member of the Ngarigo Nation. Her olive skin and her 'squishy nose' always made her feel different growing up, so she found comfort, connection and understanding through this discovery. Her relationship with prominent Indigenous sports women Evonne Goolagong Cawley and Cathy Freeman also provide an entry point to share the stories of these inspiring individuals. Barty draws on these role models to navigate the 'bitter edge of racism' that she has experienced as a proud Ngarigo woman.

Another teachable moment is evident in Barty's decision to retire from professional tennis as the #1 ranked women's player in the world. Her humility and self-awareness to put her happiness above external measures of success is an important message to pass onto teenagers who are increasingly anxious about the expectations that are placed on them.

The memoir is pitched at ages 10+, and would work most effectively in the junior English classroom. It is an especially good choice for reluctant readers who may be more inclined to reach for a ball, bat, or racquet, than a book from their school library. The writing is very

accessible, and Barty's personable voice makes young readers feel like they are getting direct guidance from a sports hero. Extracts of the text could also be used to teach memoir writing in the English classroom, or as a mentor text for a Framework of Ideas style unit at the junior level.

Although many of the themes of this memoir will resonate with a large cross section of teenagers, the text will be most appreciated by those who have a strong interest in the sporting arena. The detailed recounts of her most famous victories on the Tennis Court, including her Wimbledon and Australian Open titles, could alienate students who are tired of tales that prioritise athletic prowess over other skills. The non-linear structure also made it tricky at times to identify which part of Barty's career she was providing commentary on.

Overall, *Ash Barty: Champion* provides a fascinating insight into one of our country's greatest and most humble sporting legends. The mass appeal of the Matildas this year proved that there is a strong appetite for more inspiring female sporting stories to be told. Barty is an equally worthy role model, who will no doubt motivate young readers to become champions in their own right.



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