

Teacher's Notes



INTO THE MOUTH OF THE WOLF

Written by Erin Gough

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

12+ aged readers (grades 7+)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - AC9E8LA03
 - AC9E7LE02
 - AC9E8LE02

THEMES

- Love
- Survival
- Climate change
- Displacement
- Family
- Grief/loss

SYNOPSIS

Like so many others, Iris and her mother, Rohan, live on the road – it's much easier to escape the quakes when everything you own is in your car. But unlike the other families on the road, Iris and Rohan are also on the run, trying to avoid the sinister strangers who have been following them.

For a while it seems as if they've lost them, but a stupid mistake puts them right back in the thick of things, and the next day Rohan disappears. Abandoned and hunted in an unknown town, Iris is forced to trust a stranger, Lena, who works at Glassy Bay hostel and responds when Iris emails the hostel regarding her mother. Lena wants to help, but she's also found herself in the middle of a mystery – a body has just washed up on Glassy Bay beach and Lena suspects that her estranged best friend might know something about it.

The more Iris and Lena communicate with each other, the clearer it becomes that their two mysteries are connected. It's obvious that they have to meet, but finding each other in a world split apart by greed and corruption is going to be more difficult than either of them realises. They'll have to go into the mouth of the wolf ...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erin Gough is a Sydney-based writer whose award-winning novels for young adults have been published internationally. Her first novel, *The Flywheel*, won the Hardie Grant Ampersand Prize, and her second, *Amelia Westlake*, was the winner of the Readings Young Adult Book Prize and the NSW Premier's Ethel Turner Prize for Young Adult Fiction. Erin's short fiction has appeared in journals and anthologies including *The Griffith Review*, *Kindred: 12 Queer #LoveOzYA Stories*, and *Best Australian Stories*. *Into the Mouth of the Wolf* is her third novel.

THEMES

Family

In the novel, writer Erin Gough explores themes of family, loyalty and loss. Iris and her mother, Rohan, are as close as family can be, so Rohan's disappearance leaves Iris feeling completely alone and unsure who to trust. Lena's family, on the other hand, is more conventional on the surface, but as their secrets are revealed, loyalties and trust are tested. Gough also explores the loyalty of friends and found family, raising questions about where trust comes from and who deserves it.

Climate change

Into the Mouth of the Wolf is set in an alternative world where Clean Machines have 'solved' the rubbish problem, allowing people to simply dispose of their rubbish into the earth's core. But the technology is having serious repercussions on the environment and, as a result, on people's lives – although the corporations and governments swear Clean Machines are not responsible for the ecological impact. Discuss the way this speculative future acts as an allegory for the ways we're currently experiencing climate change. Why do you think the author has chosen to set the book in this speculative future?

WRITING STYLE

Climate fiction, or 'cli-fi', is a speculative fiction sub-genre defined by its concerns with climate change, often explored within the scope of an alternative future. They are, in many ways, a kind of cautionary tale of how society might end up if we don't heed the current warnings of climate change.

Anthony Doerr, author of *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, reflects on the importance of cli-fi, saying: 'The world we're handing our kids brims with challenges: climate instability, pandemics, disinformation. I wanted [*Cloud Cuckoo Land*] to reflect those anxieties, but also offer meaningful hope.'

In *Into the Mouth of the Wolf*, Erin Gough uses this genre to not only explore these themes for a teenage audience, but also through the experience of a teenage character.

Discuss the relationship between genre and theme – invite students to express their own concerns for the future, and their response to any themes or genres that are explored in the book.

What other common elements might you expect to find in a cli-fi novel?



COMPREHENSION

- What climate crisis has led to an increase in people living on the road, and why?
- How does Iris feel about life on the road? What does she miss the most about her old life?
- What does the phrase 'into the mouth of the wolf' mean? What's its significance?
- How do the Clean Machines work? What's the problem with them?
- What does the wolf fish coin represent?
- What's the version of events that Iris's father tells her? Do you understand or agree with his actions? Why/why not?
- Why did Prash's family leave Glassy Bay? Why does he come back?
- How would you describe Marty? What makes her angry?
- What draws Lena and Iris together? What do you think will happen to them?
- Which world do you think is closer to our current world, and why?
- What are some of the similarities and differences between Iris's world and Lena's? Where would you rather live and why?
- How does Prash respond to Marty's kiss? What does she assume this means? What does it really mean?
- Would you describe the ending of the novel as happy? Why/why not?

WRITING EXERCISE

Speculative fiction uses 'what if' questions to transport the reader from the familiar to the unfamiliar, often picking up on present concerns or anxieties about particular issues and taking them to an extreme conclusion.

What do you think the 'what if' question is at the heart of this novel?

Come up with a list of possible 'what if' questions, beginning with students' concerns about the future of the planet and climate change. Write a short blurb for a possible speculative novel that explores one of these questions.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Compare *Into the Mouth of the Wolf* to a news report about climate change. What is the difference in the language between the two? What do you think the purpose of each style of writing is? Choose an event from the book and rewrite it as if you were a journalist.
2. The Clean Machines were created with good intentions to solve the waste issue. Come up with your own solution to waste – how would it work? What might some of the unintended side-effects be, and how would you deal with them?
3. The book ends with a letter from Rohan to Iris. How do you think Iris feels when she reads it? Imagine she was able to send a letter back – what do you think she'd say?



4. 'In all her wonderings Iris wonders most about Kazumi' (p367). Write a scene in which you imagine what happened to Kazumi immediately after they said goodbye to Iris.
5. Write a description (or draw a picture) of what the world might look like five years after the end of the book. Do you think anything will be different?
6. Write and record an episode of Marty's podcast using events from the novel as inspiration.

RELATED READING

After the Lights Go Out
By Lili Wilkinson

Dry
By Neal Shusterman

Glimpse
By Jane Higgins

If You Could See the Sun
By Ann Liang

Station Eleven
By Emily St. John Mandel

