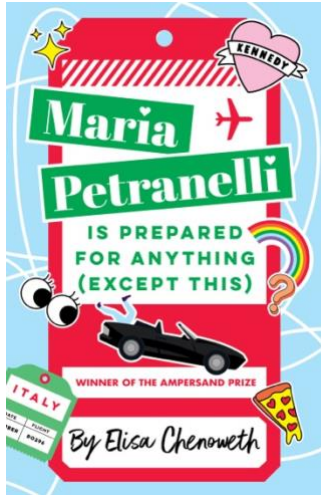


Teacher's Notes



MARIA PETRANELLI IS PREPARED FOR ANYTHING (EXCEPT THIS) Written by Elisa Chenoweth

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

secondary-aged readers (ages 12+, grades 7–9)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - AC9E7LA01
 - AC9E8LA01
 - AC9E7LE03

THEMES

- Queer romance
- Independence
- Travel
- Danger
- Family
- First love

SYNOPSIS

Maria doesn't mean to go to Italy. She's just so sick of her whole family underestimating her that she finds herself committing to a student exchange just to prove a point.

Can't speak Italian? Doesn't matter, there's a month-long intensive at an Italian language school when she lands.

Socially awkward? Maria's not worried. She's well-practised at keeping people at arm's length. If Maria's mum has taught her anything, it's that other girls aren't to be trusted.

Maria's thought of everything. Except the thought that she might find herself witness to not one, but *two* murders, becomes the target of an international crime boss, and falls in love (finally), with Kennedy – a *girl*. Maria Petranelli isn't prepared for any of this, but she's going to have to figure it out anyway. If she can only survive long enough to tell Kennedy how she really feels, everything might turn out okay.

Maria Petranelli is Prepared for Anything (Except This) is a heart-warming, action-packed rom-com that brings together all the chaos of a big Italian-Australian family, first love, and learning how to navigate the world alone.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elisa Chenoweth is a high school teacher from Adelaide. She writes queer stories that are funny, uplifting, and reflective of the cultures she grew up with. Her debut novel, *Maria Petranelli is Prepared for Anything (Except This)* won Hardie Grant's Ampersand Prize.

THEMES

Independence

'Maria had changed a lot in the past few days. She had begun to realise that the world was a lot bigger, and more dangerous, than she'd ever thought. And – despite all her planning for worst-case scenarios – she was slowly starting to understand that she might not be able to take the whole world head on, all by herself' (p203).

- What does Maria learn about herself over the course of the novel?
- How does this make her more independent?
- What does independence mean to you? How does this change as you get older?

First Love

Maria is under a lot of pressure to fall in love and find a husband, but when she finally does find love, it's not at all what she imagines. Why is Maria so reluctant to fall in love? Make a list of some of the things she loves about Kennedy.

WRITING STYLE

'**In medias res**' is a Latin term that means to start 'in the middle'. In the case of a story, this means to start in the middle of the action. It's a particularly useful technique to help engage the reader immediately, filling the details and backstory in as we go. Other ways to start the story are to hook the reader through voice, or setting, or exposition.

Consider the prologue of *Maria Petranelli* – what is the action of this scene? Where in the story are we? What questions does the prologue raise?

Where else might the story have started? Discuss the different effects that different types of beginnings can have on a reader, and experiment with writing your own.



COMPREHENSION

- Discuss the difference between the way Maria sees herself and the way her family sees her. What makes her sign up for the exchange?
- What are some of the warnings Anna has given Maria about teenage girls? Do you agree with them? Why/why not?
- Maria is often mistaken for a snob. Is she? Why does she come across that way?
- What are some of the things that Maria does to cope with her self-doubt?
- What is Maria afraid of?
- How is Maria's Italian family different to the Italy she experiences overseas? How does this change the way she sees her own family?
- How does Chris respond to Maria's rejection of him? What's wrong with his reaction? What would you have said to Chris if you were Maria?
- What role do misunderstandings play in the novel?
- Why doesn't Maria tell Kennedy how she feels?
- Who does Bertoluccio mistake Maria for?
- How has Maria changed by the end of the novel?
- Who ends up being a surprising advocate for Maria and Kennedy's relationship?

WRITING EXERCISE

Foreshadowing hints towards future events in a novel and helps to build suspense for the reader. Find one example of foreshadowing in the novel.

Imagine that you're writing a story in which the main character discovers something terrible about their best friend. What is the discovery? Write a scene that foreshadows this discovery for the reader.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Writers create memorable characters by choosing specific 'telling' details that reveal a character. For example, the fact that everyone believes Maria is in need of protection tells us something about how other people see her (as vulnerable, and reliant on other people), *and* sets up the theme of her craving independence. Find an example of a telling detail for Kennedy and one other character in the book. Now think of someone you know well and create three telling details for them. Swap your character with another person and use the new character as inspiration for a story.
2. Consider some of the scenarios in the novel where Maria struggles with self-doubt. What does she do? What is the outcome? What might she have done instead? Write an alternative ending for a scene where Maria wishes that she'd done or said something different.



3. Imagine you're a fly on the wall when Maria's family discovers that she's gone missing and write the scene that unfolds.
4. Write a letter from Maria to her family at the beginning of the novel. Write another from Maria at the end of the novel.

RELATED READING

Looking for Alibrandi

By Melina Marchetta

The First Third

By Will Kostakis

Dancing Barefoot

By Alice Boyle

