



The Flywheel Teacher's Notes

Written by Erin Gough

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont, February 2015

SYNOPSIS

Seventeen-year-old Sydneysider Delilah Woolwich-Green should be in year eleven, but while her dad is travelling overseas, she's struggling to run the family's cafe without him. She was supposed to have help – until the cafe's manager got deported. Del quickly realises the only way she can keep the business afloat until her dad gets back is to drop out of school and run the cafe herself. Del used to love school, but after a brief flirtation with one of her classmates – Georgina Trump, now known as 'the Evil Bitch' – goes sour, she's being bullied so much she's happy to have a reason not to go.

With all that's on her plate Del barely has time for her favourite distraction – spying on the beautiful Rosa Barea, her secret crush, who dances flamenco at the tapas bar across the road.

Only her best friend Charlie knows how she feels about Rosa, and he has romantic problems of his own. Charlie is always falling in and out of love. When he devises a plan to win an older woman's heart, Del agrees to help, despite having a bad feeling about the whole thing. Sure enough, the plan goes horribly wrong, and now Charlie is asking Del's help to keep him out of jail.

Del lets Charlie hide out at the Flywheel, on the condition that he helps her in the kitchen. As it happens, he's actually a terrific cook, and at first it seems like things are turning around. But when Adrian Hibbert, owner of rival cafe Crunch, hires Hamish, the thieving employee Del recently had to fire, things start going south. Soon the Flywheel's food supplies are going missing, and Crunch is stealing all Del's ideas. As Del watches her dad's business fall apart, everything else begins to unravel, too, and suddenly she finds herself very much alone.

Del's going to have to admit some hard truths – both to herself and those she loves – if she's got any chance of putting her life back together.



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KEY THEMES

While taking readers on a bittersweet, funny and heart-warming ride, *The Flywheel* also tackles several key themes along the way. Central to the book is the notion of identity. This is explored on many levels, and doesn't only relate to sexuality, but also to several other issues particularly relevant to students in their late teens. Del and her friends are all struggling to choose their paths while surviving high school, experiencing their first loves, managing their parents' expectations and deciding what comes after high school – or indeed, if they should bother finishing school at all.

Sexual identity is explored through several key characters. There is Del, who is sure she is gay and has come out to her parents and friends. There is also Georgina, who is attracted to Del but doesn't necessarily identify as gay, and isn't willing to go public with their relationship. Then there is Rosa, who is in love with Del but unwilling to come out to her family. Charlie is accepting of Del's sexuality (he gets it – he likes girls too), but he still wonders how she can be sure she doesn't like guys – even though he's never been with a guy, either.

Themes of understanding and acceptance are also threaded through the plot, in the story's exploration of relationships. It isn't until Del starts to consider other points of view that she realises how her own certainty can be problematic for others. As readers, we see how she inadvertently isolates those she cares about (Rosa, Georgina) by assuming that they will act in the same way she chooses to, despite their different personalities and circumstances. This carries echoes of Del's mum, who left Del's father to be with another man, moving first to Melbourne and then to the US, seemingly oblivious to the effect this would have on Del and her father.

Responsibility is another key concept that resonates throughout the story. Del feels responsible for the future of the Flywheel, and feels like a failure when she is forced to shut the cafe down. Charlie, by contrast, has always been protected by his father, who regularly persuades schools to let Charlie back in after both suspension and expulsion. So it's not surprising that, when faced with assault charges, Charlie refuses to admit he's in the wrong. He even tries to coerce Del into testifying for him (and in doing so, lying under oath), and refuses to accept responsibility and face the consequences. Rosa, by contrast, is enslaved to her sense of responsibility, having danced in her family's restaurant six nights a week for ten years. Each character experiences their own arc throughout the story, all moving slowly towards balance, and independence.



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WRITING STYLE

The Flywheel is written in the first person, from Del's point of view. This gives us a strong sense of her personality and helps us understand (and empathise with) what she is going through. We experience Del's tempestuous outbursts, her passion, her bloody-mindedness and determination first-hand. The first-person narrative also cleverly illustrates Del's own struggle to empathise with others, and her eventual triumph in doing so.

The story is written primarily in present tense, enabling readers to experience the immediacy and intensity of Del's experiences as she lives them, but it deftly moves into past tense when Del is recalling past events. This device enables the author to provide vital back story without breaking character or losing the immediacy and pace of the story.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Erin Gough says she wrote *The Flywheel* because she wanted to write the sort of novel that she would have liked to have read when she was a young adult dealing with her own questions of sexuality, identity and ambition. She wanted it to be something that was fun to read (so many coming-out stories are full of tragedy and angst) while still acknowledging the challenges that this period in your life can throw at you.

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Erin Gough is a Sydney writer who's had her short stories published in a number of journals and anthologies, including Black Inc's *Best Australian Stories*, *The Age*, and *Overland*. Erin has received several awards for her short fiction, including first place in the Banjo Paterson National Short Story Competition, the Wimmera Literary Competition, the University of British Columbia 'Ubyyssey' Literary Competition and the FAW Frank Page Award for Short Story Writing. She has also been placed in the *Age* Short Story Competition and the University of Canberra Literary Competition.

Erin is a past recipient of the Varuna Eleanor Dark Flagship Fellowship for Fiction, an Australian Society of Authors Mentorship, a Bundanon residency and an Australia Council Emerging Writers grant. She has also worked as a freelance writer and columnist. *The Flywheel*, published as part of The Ampersand Project, Hardie Grant Egmont's initiative for emerging YA writers, is her first novel.

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MARKETING & PROMOTION

Will be reviewed widely and available where all good books are sold.

STUDY NOTES

1. Writing activity: Consider another perspective

A key factor in the events in *The Flywheel* is Del's reluctance to stop and consider another person's perspective. While *The Flywheel* is told from Del's point of view, we also gain some insights into the issues other characters are grappling with. Del's school friends are juggling their own pressures – study, their parents' expectations, decisions about the future. Others, such as Mandy and Tom, have other responsibilities and concerns.

Choose one of the following characters and write half a page exploring their point of view. Outline the issues that concern them, and any triumphs or heartbreaks they experience throughout the story. Consider also these questions. How do you think they feel about Del's decisions? How do Del's actions affect them?

Characters: Lauren Crawley, Charlie McFarlane, Rosa Barea, Mischa, Lucas, Georgina Trump, Mandy, Tom Vuong, Hamish Creel, Adrian Hibbert

2. Class discussions: Sexual identity

Del tells Charlie she's been forced to question her identity as a lesbian because 'it's not exactly encouraged', but that when she kissed Georgina, she knew for sure that she was gay. As a class, discuss the following questions.

- a.) Del's coming out is met with a range of different reactions. Why do you think Del's mum treats **her** coming out as 'a phase'? What might have made it hard for Lauren to talk to Del about girls in the same way they used to talk about boys?
- b.) Despite their growing closeness in private, Georgina baulks at the idea of going public about her relationship with Del. Brainstorm all the possible reasons why Georgina might not have wanted people to know.
- c.) Rosa wants to have a relationship with Del, but she wants to keep it secret. Do you think this is fair on Del? Is Del's initial refusal fair on Rosa?
- d.) Del tells Rosa, 'Being honest about who I am is *part* of who I am, regardless of the consequences.' Do you think Del is brave? Or is she merely being uncompromising?



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3. Small-group discussions

Break into small groups and pick one of the following topics to discuss.

a) Bullying and popularity

After Georgina turns on Del to protect herself, denying their relationship and calling her a perve, Del suffers merciless bullying. Do you think it would have been different if Georgina was less popular, instead of being an oval-side girl? During the 'dancing dyke' episode in the corridor Del says, 'Mark Wellington isn't even a sporto.' What do you think she means by this? Why would he join in the bullying if he's not one of the popular kids? Why do you think so many students were so quick to join in the laughter?

b) Parent-child dynamics

Del, Charlie, Rosa and Lauren each have very different relationships with their parents. How do these relationships differ? How do you think these relationships affect the way each character thinks, feels and acts? Why does Del assume that Lauren is only trying to get into law to please her parents? Why do you think Charlie is so supportive of Del leaving school to run the Flywheel?

c) Anger and violence

Charlie is shocked when his lawyer tells him that assault occasioning actual bodily harm attracts a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment. Why do you think assault attracts such a high maximum sentence? Imagine you were the man Charlie punched, being attacked by a stranger in your own home. How would you feel? Do you think the man would still be affected even after his broken nose had healed? How does Del react when Elvio is cold to her? ('Rosa needs to stay away from girls like you.') How do you think his comment made her feel? Do you think her behaviour was justified?

d) Expectation and obligation

Lauren says 'Del doesn't want to spend the rest of her life running a cafe. She's got too much potential for that.' Why does Del feel compelled to drop out of school and run the Flywheel? Do you think she can see herself doing this long-term? Is there any indication that she's thought about what else she might do instead? Think about the reason Rosa dances at Charada six nights a week, even though she would prefer to spend that time studying. How do you think Charlie felt when his dad agreed to let him quit school and go to TAFE instead? Discuss the influence that other people's hopes and expectations can have.

4. Bonus activity: Community activism

Rosa is passionate in her campaign to save the local library, believing that resources should be available and accessible to everyone, not just the rich. She saves the library, and also saves the Flywheel by raising awareness of the underhanded tactics employed by the Crunch staff.

Conduct research to find out about the resources and small businesses in your local community. Are any of them under threat? What can you do to help support these organisations, to ensure that they continue to thrive?