

CRASHING DOWN KATE MCCAFFREY

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Themes: High School Graduation, Friendship, Love, Teenage Pregnancy, Reckless Driving

Year Levels: Y8, Y9, Y10, Y11, Y12

Cross Curriculum: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Health and Physical Education



ABOUT THE BOOK

Lucy is in Year 12 and under pressure to succeed. The last thing she needs now is an intense boyfriend. Breaking up with Carl feels like the only way to keep her dreams on track. But good decisions can have bad consequences. And leaving Carl is going to be a whole lot harder than Lucy could ever have imagined ...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate McCaffrey grew up in Perth's northern suburbs and is the author of three award-winning novels for young adults: *Destroying Avalon* (2006), winner of the WAYBRA Award for older readers and the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Young Adults; *In Ecstasy* (2008), winner of the Australian Family Therapists Children's Literature Award; and *Beautiful Monster* (2010), named a 2011 White Raven and selected as a noteworthy text by the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany.



STUDY NOTES

LITERACY: COMPREHENDING TEXTS THROUGH LISTENING, READING AND VIEWING

A. Before reading: predicting

1. Explore the front cover and blurb as a class. Brainstorm possible connotations of the title.
2. Create a prediction chart detailing what students think may happen in the novel. (Note: It is often interesting to keep this chart to look over at the end – false predictions inevitably arise!)

B. During reading: language and textual analysis; engaging and responding; reflecting

Suggested reading plan: alternate between ...

- reading chapters together as a class (allocating one page or one paragraph per student)
- allowing students to read to one another in pairs or small groups
- assigning independent reading for homework

Comprehension strategies to model and practise:

- Inferring
- Summarising
- Identifying key ideas/themes
- Drawing conclusions

Reader response journal

3. Have students keep a reader response journal throughout their study of the text. This document should record any important quotes and emotional reactions to each chapter, as well as any questions or discussion topics they may wish to raise in class.

The reader response journal can also be used at the end of the unit to help students in planning critical responses to essay questions. It functions as a bank of important quotes from which to select and structure a convincing argument.

Discussion points

Below is a list of questions for a selection of chapters throughout the novel you may wish to discuss with your students.

Chapter 1

4. *This is the last week of school, the mocks are two later, and then, after that, the big ones. The final exams. University entrance or – what? She can't even consider the possibility of not making it.* (pp. 5–6)
What can you infer about the personality of the protagonist, Lucy Wishart, from these few lines? What type of student do you think she might be?
5. Do you personally plan to go to university after graduating from high school?
 - a. What universities/courses have you considered?
 - b. How many universities are there in your state/territory? Where are they located in relation to your high school?
6. *University entrance – or what?* (p. 6)
What other options do high school graduates pursue? (e.g. TAFE, an apprenticeship, a full-time job)
7. *She can't even consider the possibility of not making it.* (p. 6)
 - a. Do you think Lucy displays a healthy mindset? Why/why not?
 - b. Create a class definition of the term 'perfectionism'.
 - c. What are some of the health risks associated with this?
 - d. Do you think Lucy will reveal herself as a perfectionist as the novel progresses? Why/why not? Support your answer with a quote from the first chapter.
 - e. Are high school final exams the only way to secure a place at university? Create a list of alternative pathways to higher education (e.g. bridging courses, portfolio entrance)
8. The novel is narrated in third-person from Lucy's point of view. There are three main types of third-person narration, as well as 'free-indirect discourse' (a style of third-person narration with the essence of first-person direct speech).
 - a. Create a list of the three types of third-person narration (third-person objective, third-person omniscient and third-person limited). How are they different?
 - b. Why do you think the author has chosen to write in the third-person?
 - c. How else could Lucy's story have been narrated?
 - d. Rewrite Lucy's experience of getting ready for the Thrift-shop Ball in first-person. How does it change the 'reading experience'? Which style of narration do you prefer and why?

Chapter 2

9. *The ball had cost her over seven hundred dollars, and that was cheap by her friends' standards. 'White, middle-class extravagance,' her dad had said, coughing up half the money for her dress. 'It really is a crime.'* (pp. 10–11)
 - a. Do you agree with Lucy's dad? Why/why not?
 - b. What do you think Lucy's dad means by 'white, middle-class extravagance'?
 - c. What other examples of this can you think of?
10. *He puts his arm around her, but she is wooden in his embrace. That puerile behaviour he exhibits with his mates is a total turn-off. She feels so confused: one minute, smothered by him; the next, angry with him for neglecting her, for acting 'one of the boys'.* (p. 16)
 - a. How is Lucy's boyfriend Carl portrayed in the early chapters?
 - b. How are readers positioned to view him?

Chapter 3

11. Consider the representations of masculinity and femininity in the following quotes. How are power relations between the genders portrayed? Does this representation challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes?
 - a. *Suddenly she realises she is on the back foot, the power balance has shifted. He has it all.* (p. 16)
 - b. *As his mouth descends on hers, she feels like she can't breathe. She feels owned. She pushes him off, more roughly than intended.* (p. 17)

Chapter 4

12. *He is happy with this, plodding along together – no real direction or goal – rolling with it, probably forever. Forever. That's not the vision she has for her future ... She needs to think about ... what she really wants out of life. Not his vision but hers. Any deviation from that would be a mistake.* (p. 32)
- Do you agree with this? Why/why not?

Chapter 6

13. *What if JD's a quadriplegic for the rest of his life? How will Carl handle that? What if Carl never wakes up? How will she handle that? What has she done?* (p. 41)
- Do you think the accident was Lucy's fault?
 - Why do you think she feels guilty?
 - Create a definition for the term 'misplaced guilt'.

Chapter 10

14. *JD had been in Lucy's classes since Year 8, when he arrived at the school from Sydney (via China, the red-necks always added). He was academic and dedicated, working harder than anyone, and always vying to beat Lucy as top English student.* (p. 60)
- Create a definition for the term 'red-neck'.
 - Can you find any examples of a 'red-neck' attitude towards non-Caucasian characters in this text?
 - Which character/s exhibit such attitudes, if any?
 - In your opinion, does the character JD challenge or reinforce stereotypes of Chinese-Australians? In what ways?

Chapter 11

15. *She considers googling terms like coma, broken neck, but remembers the time she googled stomach pain and it came back with frightening results like bowel cancer, intestinal cancer, Crohn's disease. Despite this, she finds herself typing prognosis for coma patients into the search box. Better to be prepared for the worst.* (p. 65)
- Create a list of common websites people can use to self-diagnose.
 - What are some of the dangers of using such websites?
 - What are some advantages of having such websites readily accessible?

Chapter 14

16. *She should be concentrating on the road, but her thoughts keep wandering off track. She can't stop thinking about their first time. Where all of this began.* (p. 75)
- This is an example of a 'flashback' structure. Find other examples of this structural device throughout the novel.
 - Why do you think the author has chosen to construct the story in this way? What effect is created?
 - Write your own short story incorporating the use of 'flashbacks' or 'flash-forwards'.
 - Write a short story that exhibits a nonlinear structure.
17. *'I love you, Luce,' he said, kissing her. 'Love you too,' she said. It was actually done. Afterwards, in the shower, she knew there was no going back to just holding hands.* (p. 78)
- Why do you think Lucy feels there can be 'no going back to just holding hands' after she chooses to become sexually active in her relationship with Carl?
 - In what ways do you think being sexually active impacts on teenage relationships?

Chapter 15

18. *'It's a baby,' Lucy says suddenly. 'I've been thinking of it as a pregnancy – but at the end there's a baby.' She feels foolish and naïve. Of course it's a baby. She'd only got as far as nausea and getting fat and everyone knowing and judging her. She hadn't considered nappies, sleepless nights, feeding, a baby seat in the back of her P-plate car. The birth. 'Oh, God.'* (p. 85)
- Why do you think Lucy thought of it 'as a pregnancy' and not as a baby?
 - What 'judgments' do you think she was afraid of from her peers? From society?

Chapter 17

19. Consider Carl's violent reaction to the nurse on page 100. Compare and contrast the characterisation of

Carl at the beginning of the novel and his current state.

20. Research common symptoms displayed by patients who awake from a coma. Which of these does Carl exhibit?

Chapter 19

21. Reread page 119, then answer the following.
- Research different opinions voiced in Australia regarding refugees: where do people in your class stand on this issue?
 - What is your opinion on global warming? Is it a hoax as Carl believes, or a real threat as Lucy believes? Research statistics to back up your claims.
 - What does 'dole bludger' mean and why is the term offensive? Why do you think Lucy believes Indigenous Australians are entitled to 'land and some form of compensation'? (Research the history of colonisation and the Stolen Generations in Australia.)
22. Reread page 120 and the characterisation of suburban life in Perth. In your opinion, are these accurate stereotypes of suburban Australian life? Why/why not?

Chapter 20

23. *Lydia doesn't get it. 'A baby!' she says again. 'We can dress her up. Play with her. Oh my God.'* Her eyes widen in alarm. Now, Lucy thinks, the reality is setting in. *'You have to push it out your virginia.'* 'It's vagina, Lydia,' Georgia corrects. (p. 124)
- Why do you think Lydia is clueless about the female body?
 - Do you think it is important for teenagers to be educated about safe sex and pregnancy?
 - List three reputable sources through which teenagers can learn about sexual health matters.
24. *'Oh, the baby – it'll be so cute.'* Lydia twirls her glass. *'Hey!'* Her eyes widen. *'Maybe you could be on a documentary – you know, Teen Mom or something. We could be on it, too. As your BFFs.'* (pp. 124–125)
- Watch an episode of *Teen Mom* as a class.
 - Do you think this show glamorises teenage pregnancy? In what ways?
 - Conversely, do you think the show succeeds as a deterrent to teenage pregnancy? Is it educative regarding contraceptive methods? Why/why not?
25. *'It's half his,'* Lydia insists. *'Why do you get to make the decision? What if he wants it? What if he says he'll look after it?'* 'Lydia!' Lucy shouts. *She feels ill, the coffee bringing her nausea on. 'It's my body! When did I become a baby-making factory? When did other people have the right to decide what happens to my body?'* 'I'd suggest when you had unprotected sex,' Lydia says. *And, hurtful as those words are, Lucy knows Lydia doesn't mean to be spiteful.* (p. 126)
- Do you agree with Lydia? Why/why not?
 - What rights are fathers entitled to under Australian Law with regard to preventing an abortion?
26. *Lucy blinks the tears. 'The longer I wait, the more it becomes a person.'* 'It's a person already,' Lydia says. *Lucy shakes her head, thinks of her Biology classes. 'It's not, it's just a bunch of cells. It can't exist without me. It's like a parasite.'* (p. 128)
- Do you agree with Lucy? Why/why not?
27. *When does an embryo become a foetus, become a baby? When does life begin? And if so, when is there ever a time when someone can take that life away?* (pp. 129–130)
- Create a definition for the term 'ethical dilemma'.
 - What is your opinion on the dilemma Lucy struggles with above? Why do you personally hold this belief (i.e. what values underpin your stance)?

Chapter 22

28. Reread pages 146–147 and discuss the following:
- What are some of the reasons a fertilised egg 'may or may not' in fact 'turn into a person' (p. 146)?
 - Why do you think the IUD is under less scrutiny than abortion? (p. 146–147)
 - At how many weeks is it too late to have a chemical abortion? At how many weeks is it too late to have a surgical abortion?
 - In which countries is abortion legal/illegal?
 - Do you agree with Lucy's father's logic: that the life of a person begins around five months (p. 147)? Why/why not?
29. *'It may not even be about the right choice, Rabbit; it may come down to the least worst one,'* her dad says

finally. (p. 149)

- a. Do you believe there is a 'least worst' choice in Lucy's situation? If so, what do you think it is? Why?

Chapter 33

30. *'It's my baby. My baby. And she just gets to chuck it away? I want my baby.'* He pushes his fists into his eyes. ... *'I'll have it,'* he says eventually, *'even if she doesn't want it. I'll have it and raise it on my own.'* (p. 197)

- a. Research statistics on single parenthood in Australia. How many fathers take on this role as opposed to mothers?
- b. Why do you think this might be the case?

Chapter 35

31. *In the morning, rain thunders down, an unexpected spring storm. It's grey and dreary. Exactly like me, Lucy thinks, drinking tea with her dad.* (p. 202)

- a. What is the significance of the setting in these lines?
- b. What might the storm symbolise?

Chapter 40

32. *Legal action – it's all they've got. Or not having the abortion. But that isn't the issue right now. The issue is bigger than her. How can the Kapulettis force her into having a baby? How can anyone demand that of a person? The arguments are endless.* (p. 223)

- a. What arguments do you think Lucy is envisaging? Create a list.
- b. Do you think one person can demand another to have a baby? Why/why not?

Chapter 46

33. *'They wave placards and try and guilt you out of your freedom when you're probably at your most fragile. It's like emotional terrorism – they should be stopped.'* (p. 256)

- a. Do you agree with this statement from Lucy's father regarding protestors out the front of clinics that practise abortion? Why/why not?
34. *Lucy nods. It sounds so clinical – vacuum aspirate the contents. She notes they never refer to it as a baby, a foetus, even. It is merely contents.* (p. 262)
- a. Why do you think the counsellor chooses to use such 'clinical' language in her session with Lucy?

Chapter 47

35. *'It's over,'* she tells Lydia and Georgia. *'Finished yesterday. Dad says another pregnancy test next week and that's it.'* *'Awesome,'* Lydia says. *'You get what you want but don't have to feel bad about it.'* (p. 269)

- a. Do you agree with Lydia? Why/why not?

Chapter 48

36. *She thinks of Atticus Finch's words in To Kill a Mockingbird: 'You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.' If there is one thing she has learned, it's that there is no such thing as black and white, only shades in between. Perhaps this is what it means when you turn grey as you get older – less convinced and more unsure.* (p. 272)

- a. What does Lucy mean by 'no such thing as black and white'?
 - b. Do you agree with this outlook? Why/why not?
37. *Mrs K bristles – won't break eye contact with Lucy. She speaks to her husband. 'That girl, she kill my Carlo. She not want his baby. She make his head hurt. She make his baby die. I never forgiving her. May she burn.'* *And to everyone's horror, she spits on the floor and walks off to sit in the rows near the front.* (pp. 278–279)
- a. Compare and contrast the characterisation of Mrs Kapuletti at the beginning of the novel with the end.

LITERACY: COMPOSING TEXTS THROUGH SPEAKING, WRITING AND CREATING

Written comprehension activities

Have students write paragraph answers for the questions above, providing at least one quote from the text to support their claims.

Suggested essay questions

The following questions can be adapted for in-class assessment or used for a take-home research essay:

38. Critically discuss the representation of one or more of the following in *Crashing Down*: morality, freedom of choice, gender, guilt, family, love, loss, regret, childhood, manipulation or trauma.
39. 'All narrators are unreliable; they cannot escape personal bias when framing narrative structure.' Critically analyse this claim with reference to *Crashing Down*.
40. '*Crashing Down* is essentially a novel about the struggle to know right from wrong. But who defines what is right?' Discuss.

Oral presentations

44. Create a three-minute presentation discussing the representation of one of the following themes in the text: morality, ethical dilemmas, freedom of choice, gender, guilt, family, love, loss, regret, childhood, manipulation or trauma.

Debate

In teams of three, have students debate for/against the validity of the following claims:

41. 'Life begins at five months pregnant (with the first sign of brain activity).'
42. 'Abortion should be made illegal in Australia.'
43. 'The IUD is equally as controversial as chemical and surgical abortion.'
44. 'A woman should not be allowed to have an abortion without both signatures of consent (i.e. both her own signature and the biological father's signature).'
45. 'In the case of the death of the biological father before the birth of a child, if said father has expressed his intent to prevent his partner from having an abortion (in writing), then the woman should not be allowed to terminate the pregnancy without the consent of his parents (the biological grandparents).'

Documentary study

Teen Mom (MTV) – www.mtv.com.au/shows/teen-mom

46. *Lydia twirls her glass. 'Hey!' Her eyes widen. 'Maybe you could be on a documentary – you know, Teen Mom or something. We could be on it, too. As your BFFs.'* (pp. 124–125)
 - a. Watch an episode of *Teen Mom* as a class.
 - b. Do you think this show glamorises teenage pregnancy? In what ways?
 - c. Conversely, do you think the show succeeds as a deterrent to teenage pregnancy? Is it educative regarding contraceptive methods available to young couples? Why/why not?

Creative writing

47. Write either an epilogue or a prologue for *Crashing Down*. Depending on which you choose, set your prologue/epilogue five years into the past or future. You may do this from any character's point of view.
48. Write a free verse poem on one of the key themes of the novel: love, loss, forgiveness, guilt, youth or morality.

General skills to revise in creating texts (through study of *Crashing Down*)

- Model appropriate planning and drafting strategies, including underlining and highlighting key words in an essay question, and analysing the 'directive words' that instruct you how to answer the question (e.g. evaluate, compare and contrast, critically discuss etc.).
- Provide an essay-planning template. Revise how to structure an effective proposition.
- Use the text as stimulus for teaching a number of points of spelling and grammar to improve students' ability to effectively proofread their own work.

General skills to revise in interpreting, analysing, evaluating texts (through study of *Crashing Down*)

- Set small reading activities to encourage students to practise a variety of reading strategies. For example: skimming through a page to find a relevant quote.
- Set comprehension tasks requiring the students to justify their response with appropriate evidence from the text or their wider reading and viewing.
- Set compare-and-contrast activities to encourage students to make connections between the text and their wider reading and viewing.

Australian Curriculum level descriptors, Years 9–10

Literary texts that support and extend students in Years 9 and 10 as independent readers are drawn from a range of genres ... these texts explore themes of human experience and cultural significance, interpersonal relationships, and ethical and global dilemmas within real-world and fictional settings and represent a variety of perspectives.

Crashing Down meets these criteria as it:

- Explores 'common themes of human experience' such as friendship, love, death, teenage pregnancy, post traumatic stress and mental health
- Explores 'inter-personal relationships' amongst teenagers, and amongst teenagers and the adults in their lives
- Explores some of the 'ethical dilemmas' raised by abortion and presents a 'variety of perspectives' on such issues

CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

49. Create a book trailer using iMovie/Windows Movie Maker: students create a storyboard and advertisement for *Crashing Down*.
- a. Source copyright free images at: www.imagebase.net
 - b. Source creative commons licensed music at: creativecommons.org/legalmusicforvideos

Health and Physical Education

Health literacy can be understood as an individual's ability to gain access to, understand and use health information and services in ways that promote and maintain health and wellbeing. (Australian Curriculum Health and Physical Education Rationale)

In conjunction with reading *Crashing Down*, have students complete a unit on healthy relationships and sexuality. The following resources are recommended:

- **Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships:** www.gdhr.wa.gov.au
- **Family Planning Western Australia:** www.fpwa.org.au/educationtraining/schools
- **Get the Facts (Government of Western Australia):** www.getthefacts.health.wa.gov.au
- **Government of Western Australia Department of Health:** www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/233/2/schoolbased_sex.pm
- **Teenage Pregnancy Indicators Australia – Live Births and Abortions (2012 statistics):** www.fpq.com.au/pdf/Teen_pregnancy_indicator.pdf
- **Diagnosis of coma:** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Coma

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit the author's blog at katemccaffrey.wordpress.com.