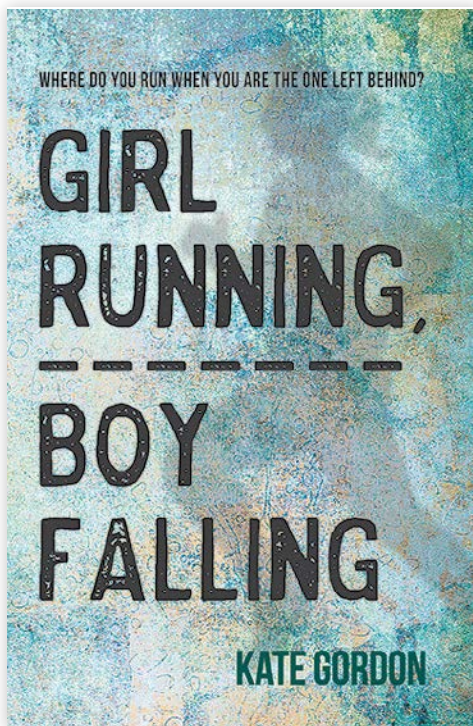




TEACHING NOTES



Girl Running, Boy Falling

By Kate Gordon

ISBN: 9781925563528
Reading Level: 15+ years

Sixteen-year-old Therese lives in a small town on a small island. Her Aunt Kath calls her Tiger. Her friends call her Resey. The boy she loves calls her Champ. She's a lot of different things for a lot of different people.

Therese has always had her feet on the ground. She's running through high school, but someone in her life is about to fall ...

And when he does, her perfect world falls with him. For the first time in her life, Therese can't stand being on the ground.

Themes

- Mental Health • Family, Friendship and Relationships
- Community • Grief and Loss • Self-identity • Suicide

Note to Teachers: Please take into consideration that *Girl Running, Boy Falling* contains themes (i.e. suicide) that are sensitive and might upset students. We encourage teachers to speak with the school counsellor before embarking upon the study of this novel with their students.

Discussion Questions & Classroom Activities:

CHARACTER

1. Secondary characters support Therese and influence her journey in *Girl Running, Boy Falling*. These relationships evolve/change after Wally's suicide.
 - Ask students to construct a Character Table to identify and analyse how secondary characters have been constructed in the novel.

| Character | Personality Traits | Relationship with Therese before Wally's suicide | Relationship with Therese after Wally's suicide |
|-----------|--------------------|--|---|
| Melody | | | |
| Roz | | | |
| Peter | | | |
| Rhino | | | |
| Aunt Kath | | | |

2. Wally is a silence in the text, except through letters and poetry. However, throughout the plot we can see 'cracks' in his 'sunny' personality. Give evidence from the plot to support this claim. How does it foreshadow his suicide?
3. In Chapter 16, Wally gifts his friends some of his possessions. List each possession and its significance to the receiver. Why do you think he gifts these objects?

THEMES

Mental Health

1. Wally writes poetry to his father. Choose any poem from the novel. How does the imagery and figurative language describe how Wally is feeling? How does it foreshadow his later choices?
2. In an interview, the author, Kate Gordon, said: "We sweep the issue [teenage suicide] under the carpet, believing this will help to prevent more deaths. If teens can't see it, they can't copy it. Clearly, that approach is not working."
 - Have you heard of the term "suicide contagion"? What do you think it means?
 - Do you think young people find it difficult to talk about mental health? Why do you think this is the case?
3. *Girl Running, Boy Falling* is an intimate window into the things we hide, but the conversations we shouldn't. Give evidence from the text to support this claim.
4. Read this article [here](#) from *ABC News*. How are readers positioned in the article to think/feel about suicide?
 - Ask students to consider the words usually used in conversations around suicide. Are they euphemistic? Are they emotional or logical terms?
 - Ask students to list the words used to describe Wally's suicide in *Girl Running, Boy Falling*. Are they euphemistic? Are they emotional or logical terms? Use evidence from the text.

5. “Do you ever look at the sky and think that’s where we belong? Like maybe the world is the wrong way around and we’re meant to be up there, floating?” (p.2). What does Wally mean by the “wrong way around”? What do you think he’s referring to?
6. “I hear him say something that sounds like, ‘Make it feel okay.’” (p.79). Do you think you rely on others to feel happy? How does that compare to how much you rely on yourself to feel happy? Discuss your insight with the class.
7. “‘I actually don’t care,’ Rhino says. ‘Life is about the things we don’t plan, not the things we do.’” (p.141). Do you agree with Rhino’s statement? Should Therese agree with Rhino’s statement?

Community

1. Define what a community is. Do they still hold influence over individuals? Use examples from the text.
2. List the different communities (i.e. Woolies, school) Therese is involved in.
 - How does each community respond to Wally’s suicide? Do you think their responses are ‘right’ for Therese?
 - Do you think community is important for individuals to overcome tragedy or deal with grief?
 - How do you think each of these communities influence Therese’s self-identity?
3. How has the definition of ‘community’ been changed in the digital age? Has it strengthened or weakened communities? Ask students to think about digital communities.

Family, Friendship and Relationships

1. “And I want to. I want to sit and gaze up at him and feel his warmth; the sunshine that radiates off him because he is golden.” (p.53). Would you describe Therese’s idolatry love of Wally healthy? Why or why not? Use examples from the text.
2. On P.68, why do you think Therese doesn’t tell Wally about her father? Explain
3. Therese has an ‘unconventional’ family structure, while Roz has a ‘conventional’ family structure. Discuss and compare the different relationships each of these characters have with their family. How are we positioned as readers to embrace these family structures?

Grief and Loss

1. Therese is adamant that she does not want to speak to the school counsellor after Wally’s suicide. Do you think this is a good decision? Why or why not?
2. “Why can’t I be the good griever, who goes to therapy and leans on her friends and cries?” (p.185). Many characters in the novel are concerned with how Therese is processing her grief by closing off from her loved ones and community. Do you think they should be concerned? Do you think Therese should express her grief openly with others? Explain.
3. Each character deals with their grief over the loss of Wally in a different way. Make a list of secondary characters and how they process their grief using evidence from the text. Include Melody, Roz, Hannah, Peter, Auntie Kath and Grandma T.

4. “In death, they know him. In death, he belongs to them.” (p.125). What do you think Therese means by this?
5. “I want you to know I’m okay/ And that I’ll always think / You’re golden.” (p.231). Therese has moved past her grief over Wally at the end of the novel. How much do you agree with this statement?

Self-identity

1. “I have lots of names because I am lots of things.” (p.3). Explain what Therese means by this statement. List all the nicknames for Therese and the identities/connotations associated with each.
2. “I never want to be a flying thing, like she is. I want to stay on the ground with you.” (p.20). The flight metaphor is used throughout the novel for characters.
 - Find other text examples of this in the novel. What do they mean? Do they reflect the character?
 - Do you think there’s a connection with human fight/flight reactivity?
3. “Doing the sensible thing always makes me feel hollow inside, but at least it’s not scary.” (p.26). Ask students to reflect upon a time when they’ve had a similar decision. What did they choose? Why? Have students consider the pros/cons/implications for the decision.
4. Anyway, who says I can’t be both? Who says I can’t love footy, and know how to talk good?’ (p.47). Teens feel pressured to have one identity. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
5. “Skinny chook legs, wide hips, boobs that still struggle to fill a crop top made for tweens. Boobs that made Emma Houston look at me with that smug little smile. The one that says, You’re faulty.” (p.60). Therese struggles with her body image, believing it to be inadequate. She often compares her body to her peers and what she thinks others would like. Who or what do you think determines the ‘norm’ for a ‘good’ body in teens? Do you agree with this?

STRUCTURE

1. Consider why Kate Gordon chose to narrate the story from two perspectives. Ask students to consider a significant event in the book. Write a short creative piece about it from a secondary character’s perspective.
 - Does this new character perspective change the reader’s position on that event?
2. Kate Gordon has used poetry also to narrate the story. How does poetry capture the characters’ voices? Discuss the literary devices used to convey emotion, i.e. metaphor, etc.
3. “What use is poetry? All it does is show us beauty, but nothing is beautiful.” (p.107). To what extent do you agree with Therese’s statement? Explain.
4. Ask students to write a poem from a secondary characters’ perspective on their grief over the loss of Wally. (i.e. Melody, Peter, Roz, Auntie Kath).

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

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|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| ACEEN004 | ACEEN005 | ACEEN007 | ACEEN008 |
| ACEEN009 | ACEEN018 | ACEEN021 | ACEEN024 |
| ACEEN025 | ACEEN027 | ACEEN028 | ACEEN029 |
| ACEEN035 | ACEEN038 | ACEEN039 | ACEEN040 |

About the Author

Kate Gordon grew up in a very booky house, with two librarian parents, in a small town by the sea in Tasmania. After studying performing arts and realising she was a terrible actor, Kate decided to give in to genetics and study to be a librarian herself. She never stopped writing and, in 2009, she applied for and won a Varuna fellowship, which led to all sorts of lovely writer things happening.

Kate's first book, *Three Things About Daisy Blue*—a young Adult novel about travel, love, self-acceptance and letting go—was published in the Girlfriend series by Allen and Unwin in 2010. She's also written *Thyla* (Random House Australia), *Vulpi*, the sequel to *Thyla* (Random House Australia), *Writing Clementine* (Allen and Unwin) and *Twenty-five Memories of Viggo MacDuff* (Odyssey Books). In 2018, Kate was shortlisted in the Dorothy Hewett Awards for an Unpublished Manuscript.



Author Note

I have been working on various incarnations of *Girl Running, Boy Falling* for many years. When I was nineteen, one of my friends killed himself. He was a hugely popular kid – funny, incredibly smart, handsome, popular, athletic, completely beloved. Everyone who knew him was in utter shock at his passing, and it rocked our close-knit world. Three years ago, another childhood friend took his own life. He, too, was so loved, and I was completely shaken to the core at his loss. I began *Girl Running, Boy Falling*, as a way of dealing with his passing, and of – finally – examining the impact that my other friend's death had on me, at an early age. I wanted to look at the things we tell other people, and the things we hide; how we can never truly know people – even in this world of social media communication, where we feel like we know everything. I also wanted to look at the ways a community might deal with the death of one of its favourite sons; and how we “should” process grief. Word to the wise: there is no “right” way. *Girl Running, Boy Falling* is a deeply personal book for me, but I am so hopeful that it might be able to help others, too, who are going through a similar tragedy.

According to 2017 data, suicide is the leading underlying cause of deaths among persons aged 25–44 (20% of deaths) and persons aged 15–24 (31% of deaths). That's a national tragedy and a national crisis. Why aren't we talking about it more? I think the answer is that people are afraid. The concept of “suicide contagion” leads to fear of further deaths – fear that young people will glamorise the idea of suicide and carry out “copycat” acts. And so, we sweep the issue under the carpet, believing this will help to prevent more deaths. If they can't see it, they can't copy it. Clearly, that approach is not working. Mental health disorders should be treated with the same approach we use for all illnesses. Why are we so squeamish about discussing these diseases, just because they affect the brain, and not the stomach, or the liver, or the breast? We discuss the prostate – a gland that surrounds the urethra, in men, and whose health is tested by rectal examination – with less prudishness than we do depression or anxiety. And so, because we are afraid, or queasy, or embarrassed people die. In this book, I made a deliberate decision to have the characters talk about what happens to Wally. Because I believe that it needs to be talked about. It's only through talking – and awareness campaigns – that we can begin to resolve this national tragedy.