

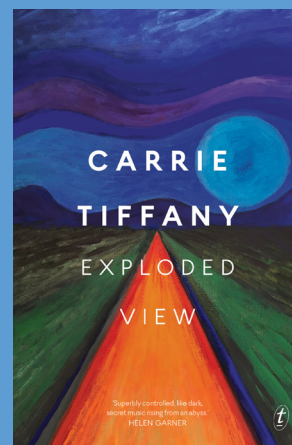
Exploded View



Carrie Tiffany

ISBN 9781925773415
FICTION, HARDBACK

www.textpublishing.com.au/book-clubs



PRAISE FOR *EXPLODED VIEW*

'Superbly controlled, like dark, secret music rising from an abyss.'

HELEN GARNER

'An adolescent girl's terrifying tale of family life; I have never read a novel like *Exploded View*.'

JOAN LONDON

'This is a powerful book and can't be ignored.'

BOOKS + PUBLISHING

ABOUT CARRIE TIFFANY

Carrie Tiffany was born in West Yorkshire and grew up in Western Australia. She spent her early twenties working as a park ranger in Central Australia. Her first novel, *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* (2005), was shortlisted for the Orange Prize, the Miles Franklin Literary Award, the *Guardian* First Book Award and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and won the Dobbie Literary Award and the WA Premier's Award for Fiction. *Mateship with Birds* (2012) won the inaugural Stella Prize and the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. She lives and works in Melbourne.

A READER'S INTRODUCTION TO *EXPLODED VIEW*

Exploded View is the third novel by acclaimed author Carrie Tiffany, whose unique talent is in full force here. As the book begins, we are introduced to the members of a family: 'Morning. Here is father man off to the office...Mother is at the bus stop down on the highway... The football slaps into my brother's hands...' The rhythm of these sentences, which calls to mind the direct

simplicity of a children's reading primer, belies the dark portrait that is to unfold.

The narrator of *Exploded View* is an unnamed early-adolescent girl who has chosen to stop speaking. The reason for her silence soon becomes apparent: violence hovers at the edges of family life, and it lashes out in cruel and unexpected ways. Her mother's new partner, whom the narrator refers to as 'father man', is the primary perpetrator of this violence. Despite her acts of revenge, the narrator's power is ultimately limited.

Over the course of the novel, the narrator keenly observes that this power imbalance is not contained to her family. Even at her young age, she has learned that society has vastly different expectations for men and women, for boys and girls.

The one precious item in the narrator's life is her copy of *Scientific Publications Holden Workshop Manual Series No. 51*, which contains the titular 'exploded view' diagrams of the car. Engines, machines and tools are all rich metaphors in this novel, and provide a rare place of safety for the protagonist.

With its simmering restraint, *Exploded View* is an indictment of the rigidity of our culture and the injustices that girls and women suffer. It is a work of unflinching, poetic power that speaks to contemporary social concerns.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider the passage in which the title first appears in the narrative: 'When the creamy paper rears up at me I can see how the parts fit together. I can see the exploded view...It means you are part of something but it also means that you can't get free.' (pp. 27–28) How does the title—as well as the diagrams it speaks of—reflect the ideas of the novel?

2. From early on, the protagonist has a very strong sense of what being female does and doesn't entail (e.g. p. 14, 'There isn't much that's female in an engine. Oils and rubbers, acids and waters—these are the first places to look for faults.'). Discuss the ways in which children become aware of these social constraints. To what extent does the late-1970s setting shape the protagonist's experience?
3. 'It is always possible to draw a line around a man. There's the edge of him; there's him on one side of the chalk, the world on the other, but not for a woman, or a girl like me.' (p. 84) What does this quote reveal about the differences between women and men in society?
4. What role does the fat lady play in the narrative, and how does the narrator feel towards her? Discuss the narrator's act of putting empty envelopes in the fat lady's letterbox: how might it be 'an experiment about hope' (p. 28)?
5. The narrator regularly skips school. What can you glean from her description of a schoolday on page 51?
6. On pp. 41–43, we are given some insight into father man's childhood. What is revealed in these pages, and how does this influence your understanding of his character?
7. 'What you know about a mother is that she loves you...A mother doesn't have a choice...[Our mother's] searching for something in her red handbag. She's been searching for it all of my life.' (pp. 73–74) How does the narrator perceive her mother? How did you respond to this character and her relationship with her children?
8. How would you describe the relationship between the narrator and her brother? You may want to consider the following scenes: the siblings playing in the storm drain (pp. 87–88), the pulling of his tooth (p. 107), and the narrator's feelings when she's driving the fat lady's Mini (p. 162 'I write a letter to my brother in my mind—an explanation, just in case').
9. In the middle section of the novel, the family goes on a road trip. Discuss this section while considering the ideals of a road trip—freedom, novelty, a time for bonding. What does the narrator see of the wider world?
10. Hands are a key image in *Exploded View*. For example, the narrator is drawn to the model's hands in the Holden manual (pp. 81–83, 91–92, 172–173). What is the significance of this?
11. What does the narrator think of romance and desire? Discuss the scene where she imagines being in the Best Western motel with the tyre boy (pp. 99–101).
12. 'You have to stop listening to yourself to be able to speak...You are lost to others—not inside yourself.' (p. 15) Discuss the narrator's silence, what she gains from this resistance, and what happens when she finally speaks to someone—the woman on the bus who's dropped her ticket (p. 172).
13. What did you think of the ending—was it inevitable?
14. Re-read the opening paragraphs of the book on page 9. How has their significance changed since the first time you read them?