

The Unidentified

Rae Mariz

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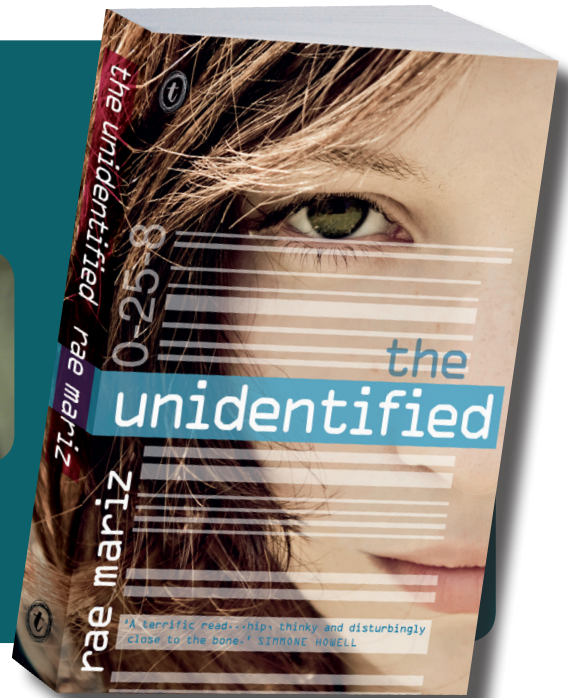
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Fiction, B paperback

Recommended for Secondary

Resource Kit Contains

- Praise
- Synopsis
- Author information
- Author statement
- Pre-reading exercises
- Reading, writing and research activities
- Drama activities



Praise

'A terrific read...hip, thinky, disturbingly close to the bone.' **Simonne Howell**

'Subversive, cleverly written, challenging, and surprising.' **Cory Doctorow**

Synopsis

Katey—or 'Kid', as she prefers to be known—is fifteen years old. She lives in a dystopian future where the education system has been taken over by corporations. School is now known as 'The Game', and takes place in a shopping mall converted into a school, where video cameras are in operation 24/7. To progress through school, students must play their way through video game levels, and they can achieve extra credit—and popularity—by being 'branded' by the corporate sponsors.

While most of the 'players' accept their strange existence, Kid has a vague sense of uneasiness about 'The Game'. However, it is not until she witnesses a shocking anti-corporate prank that her unease turns into a greater sense of the wrongness of 'The Game'. A group, calling themselves The Unidentified, stages a mock suicide to protest against the power structure of 'The Game'. Kid is disturbed to find out that she is the only one who finds this stunt confronting—the rest of her game-mates seem desensitised. Kid decides to find out the identities of The Unidentified, and follows a chain of cyber-clues to infiltrate the group.

Kid soon finds herself intoxicated by the group and its enigmatic leader—even though she has now been 'branded' herself. Kid learns through The Unidentified that she doesn't have the rights to her creations, her opinions, her privacy or her own identity. However, The Unidentified are not what they seem, and a series of

shocking events involving Kid's best friends lead Kid to make a decision that will change her life. She is going to do something about the situation she and her peers are in. Something that will change the rules of 'The Game' forever.

This funny, scary and confronting novel is the young adult debut of American author Rae Mariz. It is a story that will stick with the reader for quite some time, and have them questioning their own ideas about privacy, technology, corporations, freedom and identity.

About the Author

US writer Rae Mariz has lived in Stockholm for the past eight years where she has worked as an English translator for film companies. *The Unidentified* is her first novel.

Author Statement

From Rae's website: <http://raemariz.com>

What inspired you to write The Unidentified?

Short answer: The Young Adult librarian I worked with at Seattle Public Library gave me *Feed* by MT Anderson to read and I was impressed with and inspired by the kinds of social topics and experiments with language that were being explored in YA. So, indirectly, *The Unidentified* was a result of me wanting to read 'more books like that,' but with more focus on the inherent creativity and defiance in youth cultures, I guess. Because what's NOT inspiring about that time in your life when you're discovering how the adult world really works and trying to figure out how to be a part of it, even if you're not sure you want to be a part of it?

I was 25 when I started writing what would later become *The Unidentified*. I intended to describe an optimal

learning environment for functioning in a hyper-contemporary world and it turned into what people are calling a dystopia, so I hope no one hands me the controls to their society. I obviously don't know what I'm doing. But building up a world with words was a really fun way to work through ideas and share stuff I think is interesting at least. I didn't set out to write a novel (because I didn't know how). It was a long process of learning the art of story-telling before the words I was writing ever even got close to resembling a novel.

But I wrote it to see if I could. I was inspired by the challenge.

Reading Journal

As you read this novel, keep a journal or blog, and update this blog with your thoughts and feelings on it. Which characters ring true? Do any of them seem unbelievable? Does your opinion of the characters and the corporations and sponsors change as you move through the text? Are there any elements of the story that are difficult to decipher or ambiguous. Why is this?

Keep a record as you read of your reactions to the characters and the plot, of any questions you have, and any predictions you would like to make about the coming events.

Pre-reading Activities

1. Read the book's blurb and look closely at its cover. What are your reactions to these? Do they give you an idea of what atmosphere the book will have? Do you find the design and blurb appealing? Why or why not?
2. *The Unidentified* is a book about advertising and corporations. What do you think of the way products are marketed to teenagers?
3. In *The Unidentified*, the school is full of cliques. Are there cliques at your school? If so, describe them.
4. In *The Unidentified*, cameras follow every movement the students make, like a reality TV program. Do you think it would be fun to have cameras recording your every move? Why or why not? Do you think your school would make an interesting setting for a reality TV program? Why or why not?
5. Make a list of your favourite products or brands. Why do these brands appeal to you?
6. Do you have a favourite television advertisement, or is there one that particularly stuck in your head? Why do you think this was?
7. *The Unidentified* is also a book about loss of privacy. Do you have a Twitter or Facebook account? How do you feel about their privacy controls? Do you worry about the things you say, and photographs of you, being broadcast online?
8. In *The Unidentified*, masks play a central role. What do you think masks can symbolise?
9. The idea of freedom is also central to *The Unidentified*. Write a short piece about the concept of freedom. What does it mean to you?
10. Think about corporate sponsorship of sports players and celebrities. In this book, any student can become 'branded'. They are sponsored by that brand and must undertake sometimes demeaning activities to fulfil their obligations to the brand. In exchange they get popularity, celebrity and all the perks that come along with it. Does the idea of branding appeal to you? Why or why not.

Reading Activities and Essay Topics

1. In *The Unidentified*, Rae Mariz uses words in creative contexts to give a new lingo to the characters. 'Cool' becomes 'grab'. Daggy people are 'anti-scenesters'. As you go through the book, make a note of this new terminology to create a *The Unidentified* glossary.
2. As you read the novel, compare and contrast yourself with the main characters. Which one do you most identify with and why?
3. On page 7, Kid says, 'Maybe boredom is retro'. Write about your reaction to this. Are there other emotions or character traits applied to teenagers that you think might go out of fashion? Or become cool again?
4. On page 9, Ari becomes distressed when her 'notebook' computer becomes wet. Her gadgets seem more important to her than people. Do you have a favourite gadget? How would you feel if it was destroyed? Write a short piece in which your gadget is personified and is killed. How is it killed? What is your reaction to its death?
5. After the mock suicide, Kid is distressed, but Ari doesn't seem to react. Why do you think this is? Write a journal entry about your take on the desensitisation of teenagers towards violence.
6. On page 17, Kid says, 'The Game gave us everything we wanted. It was *designed* to do that'. What do you think life would be like if you were given everything you wanted?
7. On the same page, Kid says that the corporations 'saved all the best toys for the kids'. Write a journal entry about your feelings towards marketing to teenagers after having read the beginning of the book.
8. The teenagers perform much of their communication through technology. Is this true for teenagers today? What impact do you think this has on friendships and on society?
9. On page 22, Winterson tells Kid that 'the administrators need to have more insight into your interests to better tailor the Game to your needs'. Does this remind you of any aspect of current social media applications? How do you feel about corporations tailoring the content

- of these applications to your interests? Do you feel comfortable with corporations knowing your personal information? Write a discussion on the benefits and drawbacks of this.
10. On the same page, Kid says 'Oh Google, she thought I was suicidal'. She seems to be using the word 'Google' as a replacement for 'God'. What are your thoughts on this? Write a piece discussing whether technology will replace God or religion.
 11. On page 28, Kid says, 'Talent or skill wasn't how you recognised a genius. A genius was a person giving the world the eff you salute while doing the impossible'. Write a journal entry about your idea of genius. Is there a high profile person who you think is a genius? Why?
 12. On page 32, Kid describes Ari in the following way: 'She could probably single-handedly play parts for an entire geek orchestra, but she would rather be in an *Idol* band winning votes and fame'. Do you think that, today, fame is more important than achievement? Are there any celebrities you think are famous just for being famous? Do you think this is a good goal to have? Write about a celebrity who you believe does not deserve fame.
 13. The 'Craftsters' make flyers protesting the symbol of the handbag being appropriated by high fashion designers. Do you think that, today, teenagers have stopped protesting against things that are really important? Make a list of, or a flyer for, things that you think are important enough to stand up for or protest against.
 14. On page 89, Kid says, 'Forbidden knowledge had its allure'. In the age of the internet, where most 'knowledge' seems to be available for free, do you think the concept of forbidden knowledge still exists? Is there any forbidden knowledge that fascinates you?
 15. On Page 92, Kid says, 'She didn't even look away when I caught her staring, which was the accepted social norm'. Make a list of five 'social norms' in today's society and whether or not you think they should be followed.
 16. Draw a picture of a Fashion Fascist and a Craftster. What do you think makes them different (or are they so different after all)?
 17. On page 152, Kid says, 'This was, like, my mom's worst fear, me chatting with strangers on the internet'. Do you think your parents worry about what you do on the internet? Do you think it's a legitimate concern?
 18. On page 169, Kid sees a downside to fame when she realises everybody is watching her. What do you think about celebrities being on constant watch by paparazzi?
 19. On page 196, Kid describes how Ari's eyes are dull but her teeth are bright. Write about your reaction to this sentence.
 20. Kid becomes worried, on page 212, about the 'cynical backstory' to the clothes she is given. Read about the concept of clothing 'sweatshops'. Does it bother you to think about the history of your clothes, for example if they were made in sweatshops? Why or why not?
 21. On page 235, Mrs Bond says that turning children into consumers is giving them power. Do you think this is real power? Make a list of ways children could actually be given power in a meaningful way.
 22. The Game has a Wikipedia-like web encyclopaedia called 'The Archive'. Make an Archive entry for one of the characters in *The Unidentified*.
 23. On page 279, Cayenne says, 'I don't want to believe it's impossible to do something real'. Write about your reaction to this sentence. Do you think it's impossible to do anything real in today's society?
 24. Ari is presented as something of a villain in this story. Try and think about some positives to her character, or reasons why she behaves the way she does.
 25. Write a journal entry about a time when you have been disappointed in a friend, or realised that a friendship was over.
 26. How would you characterise Kid's relationship with her mother? Do you think it's realistic? Make a list of descriptive words that apply to their relationship.
 27. Often, in life, it can take a shocking event to make you realise who you are, what you stand for, and what's important to you. Is this true in your life? Write about the event that changed your perception of yourself and your beliefs.
 28. Music is very important in Kid's life. Make a list of contemporary songs that you think Kid would like, and list your reasons why.
 29. *The Unidentified* presents an alternative view of the future. What are some other books you have read, or movies you have watched, that do something similar? Which movie or book do you think presents most believable representation?
 30. Write about your reaction to the ending of the book. Do you think it tied up the events and storylines of the book in an effective manner? Was there any character or storyline you would have liked to be examined in more depth?

Creative Writing Activities

1. Rewrite a crucial scene in the book from the point of view of another major character, for example Mikey or Ari.
2. Create a 'Game' profile page for one of the characters in the book.
3. Write some lyrics to accompany one of Kid's songs.
4. Write a letter from Ari to Kid explaining why she acted the way she did.

5. Write an alternative ending to the novel—one where either the corporations or The Unidentified triumph.
6. Each of the characters in the story has a passion. For Ari it is fashion, for Mikey it's robots, and for Kid it's music. Write a piece from the point of view of one of the characters talking about their passion.
7. *The Unidentified* presents a vision of the future—one where paper does not exist and most communication is carried out via technology. Elaborate on this view of the future. Write a list of things you think might have changed in the not-too-distant future.
8. In the book, the characters think The Unidentified are 'selling' suicide. Write a script for an advertisement selling something 'unsellable', like poverty, dog poo, used bandaids or belly button fluff! Be creative.
9. Write an Instant Message conversation between two of the characters on the night that Mikey is attacked.
10. Write an event invitation to a protest against (or for) something you feel strongly about.

Research Questions

1. Research the history of a famous social networking site like Facebook or Twitter. Write a short synopsis on their creation and history
2. Research privacy settings on Facebook, Twitter or Myspace. Compare and contrast them.
3. Do some research about instances where people's actions on the internet have got them into trouble.
4. Research corporate sponsorship of a particular sporting star, team, or league—for example the NRL or AFL.
5. Research celebrity endorsements. Pick one brand or celebrity to research in depth.
6. Using at least two forms of media, look at the way the media tackles cyber crime, cyber bullying, or 'hacking'.
7. Research laws regarding advertising to young people and teenagers.
8. Research laws regarding video game violence in Australia.
9. Using at least two different forms of media, look at the ways in which the media represents video game violence.
10. Discuss the meaning of the word 'theme'. What are some of the themes of *The Unidentified*? Research one of these themes in depth.
11. Do some research into famous endings of books or movies. Write about one famous ending that has been controversial.

Drama Activities

- Choose one character—apart from Kid—and write a monologue from their perspective. Be creative with the use of props and costume.
- Make an ad for one of the products in the book.
- Act out one of Kid's songs, using different ambient noises to create music.
- Write and perform a duologue between Kid and Mikey, set after the book and discussing The Unidentified's next move.
- Appoint someone as a journalist to interview any one of the main characters after Kid's stunt.