

## All I Ever Wanted

Vikki Wakefield

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Fiction, B paperback

Recommended for Secondary School

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### Praise

'I read this novel in one gulp, loving every moment of the narrator's voice and the strangeness of her impoverished life...Though Mim makes mistakes, and plenty of them, this novel contains none. *All I Ever Wanted* is a brilliant coming-of-age novel. Five stars.' *Australian Bookseller and Publisher*

'While it's both a thriller and a gritty romance, for me *All I Ever Wanted* is first and foremost a sparkling journey into hope. As the story drives toward its surprising conclusion, we're left as stunned as Mim as she discovers "that there are so many ways to tell a person you love them." I loved this book.' Paul Griffin, author of *Ten Mile River*

### Synopsis

Mim Dodd is sixteen years old. She lives in a lost street, in a forgotten suburb on the edge of suburbia, an hour from the city. Her brothers are on remand for dealing drugs and her mother is in the business too. Mim is desperate to get away.

She creates rules to help her escape and writes them on the wall of the old signal tower. I will finish school. I will not take drugs. I will not get tattoos. I will not drink alcohol. I will not say 'fuck' all the time. I will not have sex. I will not be like everybody else. I will only trust myself. One day I will leave this place and never come back. I will not turn out like my mother.

Nine days before Mim's seventeenth birthday, when the weather is hot and unstable, she is sent by her mother to deliver a package. It's the first time she's ever done a drug run and when the boy she loves steals it from her, things change. She begins to break her rules. Life shifts.

*All I Ever Wanted* explores how we perceive and sometimes misperceive the world. Mim describes her neighbourhood and the people in it with close, unforgiving detail. As the novel progresses, the narrator's focus widens. Along with Mim, the reader sees that things can be distorted when they are viewed too closely.

Mim is a strong girl with a voice that's authentically teen; it's both cruel and sympathetic. The novel will invite some readers into a different world, allowing for a range of discussions on how socio-economic factors impact on the individual. Some students, though, will see their lives in Mim's story. Regardless of background, most teens will have to navigate some of the problems and dangers that Mim faces. For these reasons, *All I Ever Wanted* is an important book to study.

### About the Author

Vikki Wakefield lives in Adelaide. She writes late at night and if she can't read, she can't breathe. *All I Ever Wanted* is her first novel.

*'As a teenager, I always had one leg dangling over the wrong side of the tracks.'*

*When I was seventeen I went to house-sit for a friend who was an unmarried teenage mother. It was a half-house in a lost street in a forgotten suburb—just like the book. It wasn't hard to dredge up memories of that month—I lived in a perpetual state of fear and desperation. I dared myself to stay there. During the day the street was deserted; at night it was alive and menacing and I was terrified. Law seemed to exist outside of that street, but by the end of the month I was braver, wiser and I'd changed my mind about some of the residents. The people who lived there didn't have*

money or material things—but what they did have was pride, a sense of community and bucketloads of humanity.'

### Reading Journal

As you read *All I Ever Wanted*, keep a journal. Make notes on the scenes that have the greatest impact on you. (These might be the ones that are the most memorable.) Make note of any issues that you think are particularly relevant to teenagers and any questions about these issues that you would like to discuss.

### Pre-reading Activities

1. *Rule number one: I will not turn out like my mother.* Mim, the narrator of *All I Ever Wanted*, tries to live by strict rules. What are some of your life rules? Make a list of them in your journal. If you don't have any, write a journal entry about why you don't.
2. Why are rules necessary? Do they always have a positive effect on the individual and society? In what ways do rules limit an individual? Can you think of any rules that limit you? Can you think of a society where rules do not protect the individual?
3. Make a list of things that you want. What things on your list could you live without? What things are essential?
4. The narrator is a sixteen-year-old girl who has grown up in a family of drug dealers. What assumptions do you make about her? Make a list of things that you will have in common with her, regardless of her family situation.
5. In what ways do you think Mim's life is predetermined? Is your life predetermined in any way? How?

### Reading Activities

- Re-read chapter one. How does the author create vivid images of her characters? Give some examples.
- Describe the rhythm of Wakefield's language in this chapter. Why might she have chosen this rhythm?
- What wars between and within characters are explored in the second and third chapters?
- As you read the novel, discuss the dangers that might be ahead for the characters.
- Re-read chapter three. As a class, discuss Mick Tarrant. What might Donna Tarrant's life be like? What reasons can you suggest for her staying in a situation like this?
- What do Mim's rules reveal about her? Look back at your life rules. Do you have any of the same ones? Mark the rules that you think will limit Mim. Mark the ones that might help set her free.

- What's your opinion of Mim doing the drug deal? How much choice did she have in breaking this rule?
- Mim describes a place of escape in chapter three. Describe a place where you go to escape. If there were things written on the wall, what would they be?
- On page 28 Mim describes herself in three words. Choose three positive words to describe her. Describe yourself in three words.
- Discuss Mim's relationship with her mum. What are some positive aspects? What are some negative ones?
- What do you think of Tahnee's life motto? Discuss some of the dangers that might be ahead for her in the novel. What's your life motto? Or don't you have one?
- 'But if sex was part of the deal, I'd probably do it. If that was what it took to call him mine.' Discuss how Mim feels about Jordan. What do you think of her comment?
- Discuss chapter nine. What signs are there that the party is not going to go well for Mim? Is there any significance in Gargoyle being gone at the end of the chapter?
- What boxes are opened up for Mim in chapter nineteen?
- Why does Mim feel strong and beautiful in chapter twenty? What changes her self-image?
- The scene at the signal tower is full of suspense and emotion. Make a list of emotions that you feel while you read the scene. Now, find the sentences and words that you think make you feel these emotions. How has Wakefield used language and sentence structure to create emotion?
- How has your opinion of the characters shifted? Or do you feel the same? Explain your answer.

### Discussion Topics

1. *All I Ever Wanted* explores some issues that are important to discuss. As a class, make a list of scenes that you believe have the greatest impact on the reader. What issues arise from these scenes?
2. Re-read chapter seventeen. What would you say to Jordan and Mim at the end of this scene?
3. 'We do what we do to survive, Mim. Sometimes, there's no getting out.' Do you agree? Can Mim follow a few simple steps and cook up her own shiny destiny? What factors limit a person's ability to change their future?
4. As a class, discuss your opinion of drug carrying and selling. Has the novel altered any of your opinions? How?
5. 'Responsibility is a detachable burden easily shifted to the shoulders of God, Fate, Fortune, Luck or one's neighbour.' Ambrose Bierce. Why has this

quote been included in the novel? To what extent are we all responsible for our own actions?

6. Do you agree that there are no neat little boxes in life?
7. In *All I Ever Wanted*, our perceptions of the world are shifted, along with Mim's perceptions. Discuss how Mim's perceptions have shifted. To what degree do you agree with her shifts?

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### Essay Questions

- *All I Ever Wanted* is about preconceptions and misconceptions. In what ways does Mim's view of the world change during the novel?
- Discuss the different forms of courage that are explored in *All I Ever Wanted*.
- *All I Ever Wanted* shows that in life there are no neat little boxes. Discuss.
- Who, being loved, is poor? Discuss the extent to which poverty impacts on characters in the novel.
- Mim's rules are about the things she can't do, not about the things she should be doing. What do you think her rules would be at the end of the novel?
- Compare and contrast Kate, Mim, Tahnee and Lola/Melinda. They have different backgrounds, but they have many things in common. To what extent do you agree?
- The real heroes in this novel are not the ones we expect. Discuss.

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### Drama Activity

- Choose one character from *All I Ever Wanted*. Write a monologue in which the character explains their life motto. Use one prop to symbolise what you see as the most important thing about this character.
- Re-read the scene between Mim and the drunken man outside of the jail. Write a scene between two characters where very little is said, but much happens. Include one prop that symbolises the change that occurs in your scene. Perform this for the class.

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### Symbolism

- Re-read the passages about the wood pigeons and Gargoyle. What do they symbolise?
- Find examples in the novel where Wakefield uses the weather as a metaphor. To what purpose has it been used?

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### Writing Activities

1. Vikki Wakefield describes the setting with clear, sharp detail. Describe your own neighbourhood, and make every word count.

2. Write a story about a character that lives in a world with no rules.
3. Write a story about a character in a world with too many rules. Or, a character that lives in a world with only a few rules, but ones that are frighteningly wrong.
4. *All I Ever Wanted* is a story about friendship. Write a descriptive piece about an important friendship in your life.
5. The pages of Mim's travel books are worn and underlined. Write a personal piece about an object that reveals something important about you.

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### Research Questions

- Mim finds herself in an awful situation in Jordan's bedroom in chapter seventeen. Do some research and find out some facts about this situation. Give Mim some practical advice about her rights.
- Research the wider impact of drug trafficking on the local and global community.
- Research poverty:
  - How is it defined?
  - Who is most likely to be poor?
  - How is it measured?
  - What are some effects of poverty?
  - What are some community attitudes towards poverty?
- Donna Tarrant is the victim of domestic violence. What are some reasons she might stay in this situation? Locate information that might help her in this situation.