

Girl Saves Boy

Steph Bowe

ISBN 9781921656590
RRP AU\$19.95, NZ\$25.00
Fiction, B paperback
Recommended for Secondary

Resource Kit Contains

- Praise
- Synopsis
- Author information
- Author statement
- Reading, writing and drama exercises
- Questions for discussion/essay topics
- Research subjects



Praise

'Steph Bowe's debut is charming and quirky and heartfelt enough to make you catch your breath when you least expect it. Readers will adore *Girl Saves Boy* and I can't wait to see what comes next.'

Simmone Howell

'Beautiful and fresh, *Girl Saves Boy* is full of the absolute truth: life is complicated. I could not put it down.'

Rebecca Stead

Synopsis

The first time we met, Jewel Valentine saved my life.

Isn't it enough having your very own terminal disease, without your mother dying? Or your father dating your Art teacher?

No wonder Sacha Thomas ends up in the lake that Saturday evening...

But the real question is: how does he end up in love with Jewel Valentine?

With the help of quirky teenage prodigies Little Al and True Grisham, Sacha and Jewel have a crazy adventure, with a little lobster emancipation along the way.

But Sacha's running out of time, and Jewel has secrets of her own.

Girl Saves Boy is a hugely talented debut novel, funny and sad, silly and wise. It's a story of life, death, love... and garden gnomes.

About the Author

Steph Bowe was born in 1994 and lives in Melbourne. She writes a blog called Hey! Teenager of the Year.

Girl Saves Boy is her first novel. She does not condone the theft of garden gnomes.

Website: <http://heyteenager.blogspot.com>

Author Statement

Published in the Age, 14 May, 2010

'When I tell people that I write for teenagers, I get all sorts of interesting responses. There are the people who think that I'm doing a great service to society, and enriching the lives and imaginations of our youth. There are the people who think that books for teenagers aren't really books at all, because apparently writing for kids is easy. Then there are the people who just ask me if I've read *Twilight*.

I don't write young adult (YA) novels because I'm a good samaritan or because I can't write for adults or because *Twilight* inspired me. I write for young people because it's something I've been drawn to, and because the teenage experience is something I'm so familiar with. It comes easily to me because I'm going through it right now. I'm not in a position to patronise teenage readers, because I am a teenager, and, for me, my audience is also my peers.

As a writer, blogs are brilliant for connecting with your audience. While plenty of adults are computer literate, the internet is really the realm of the young person. We're constantly told of the horrors of the internet, the kids revealing too much about themselves—but there's an upside to it as well. The intelligent kids eager to learn, the ones who live for books, are able to contact their favourite authors in moments—something unheard of a couple of decades ago. This is fantastic for me, and for other authors, because we can connect with our audience instantaneously. I can write a blog post and

within seconds have a response from someone on the other side of the world.

If there's one thing I've learnt from blogging and being able to communicate with teens online, it's that irrespective of where in the world they live, and their circumstances, there's a common theme to their experiences, and the way they feel about themselves and the world around them is pretty much the same. I may never meet any of these kids, but I know their hunger for new experiences. I know their fear about the future.

Universally these teenagers rely on books. They make sense of their world through novels written for them. They can learn about things they haven't experienced and lives they'll never live. Books help them escape from their reality. Books move them and amaze them and inspire them and maybe help them become better people. Books for teenagers are real books because teenagers are real people. Writing for them is great, because everything is so new and big and scary—your teenage years are full of risks and first experiences and everything seems so profound.

I love writing YA. Blogging is a fantastic forum for bringing issues to light that couldn't comfortably be brought up within normal conversations. There's a veil of anonymity that allows people to be more honest online than they would be with people they knew well in the physical world. I've received so many wonderful responses to posts about difficult issues that youth need to talk about, but don't get the opportunity to. When you want to connect with people online, you have to be honest, respectful and non-judgmental. You have to reveal some of yourself.

I know what it's like to be a teenager today. I know what aggravates us, the things we worry about and angst over. I know that so many young people in so many different situations feel the exact same feelings I do about things. And because I'm a teenager—because I'm experiencing this all right now, because I don't know anything apart from this uncertainty, this great unknown thing in front of me that's going to be my life—I have compassion and respect for the youth I write for. And if you don't respect your audience, there's really no use writing at all.'

READING QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

The characters in *Girl Saves Boy* are plagued by emotions and questions that are particularly relevant to teenagers. In fact, the protagonists have had to deal with particularly difficult experiences, perhaps beyond the norm, which heightens these emotions. As you read the novel, keep a journal. Note your thoughts and reactions to the text as you read. What do you relate to? What makes sense? What doesn't?

Pre-reading Activities

1. In essence, *Girl Saves Boy* is about a couple of teens figuring out how to be themselves while grappling

with big issues of life, death and love. They face issues that may also concern you.

2. Before reading the novel, make a list of the things that most concern you. These issues may be personal, social, political, economic or environmental. Number your choices in order of importance, giving reasons for where each choice falls in the list.
3. Make a list of the things you believe are most important to your parents or teachers. Is there a discrepancy between your two lists? How do you account for this? Do these differences affect how you relate to these people? Do you think your list will change over time?
4. Read the book's blurb and note the cover design. What do you think the book might be about? Make some predictions based on these cues.
5. Have you been affected by death or personal loss? Write a list of emotions that you associate with this experience, or write a short piece describing this experience.
6. Love can affect us in strange ways. Have you ever done anything strange or desperate in the pursuit of love? Have you ever tried to avoid it? Have you ever been transformed by it—has it turned your world around?
7. Write a journal entry about a time when you have been disappointed in someone. What did you do to address the situation?

Reading Activities

1. After you have finished reading the novel, compare and contrast yourself with the teenage characters in *Girl Saves Boy*. Are your thoughts, experiences and beliefs similar in any way? Do you think Jewel and Sacha have had to take a particularly difficult path to date, or can you relate to their experiences of death and loss?
2. The novel is contemporary in language and feel. However, do you think the themes would have been relevant to teenagers 20 years ago? 50 years ago? 100 years ago? Discuss as a group, listing the key themes of the novel as you go.
3. Reread the first few chapters. Note your reactions to the introduction of Jewel and Sacha. List the key characteristics conveyed by each. How do they differ? What are their similarities? Jewel believes 'you can judge nearly everything about a person from their opening lines.' (p.5) How would you judge each of these characters based on their opening entries?
4. Why do you think Jewel aspires to being homeless and anonymous in a big city 'owning nothing but a sketchbook' (p.7)? Do you think this is a real goal, or is it one she uses to protect herself in some way? If so, from what? Life? Daring to dream big? Ambition?

- Is this goal somewhat romanticised? What do you think it would be like in reality?
5. What do you think Jewel means when she speaks of 'the happy memories hurting me more than the sad ones' (p.25)? Is this a view you think Sacha also shares? Discuss this concept with a partner.
 6. Sacha observes, 'In hospital, my past felt uncomfortably close. Elsewhere, it could be kept at arm's length but, here, like at the cemetery and walking past our old house, things I'd rather forget breathed down my neck.' Write a short piece in your journal reflecting on this statement. How does one keep their past at arm's length? Is it possible to escape your past? Is this a natural coping mechanism?
 7. Both characters use self-deprecating and observational humour beautifully. List five examples from both Jewel and Sacha. How does their humour differ in tone?
 8. Many of Sacha's entries are peppered with lists: 'Signs in shop windows along High Street', 'Strange Ways to Die' etc. What do you think is the purpose of these lists? Do they change in tone throughout the novel? Pick three of Sacha's topics from the novel and create your own lists.
 9. Consider the language used in the novel. Does the dialogue ring true? The author of the novel is herself a teenager. Do you think this helps her connect with her key audience? Or do you think a good writer can write convincing characters from any age, gender and perspective? Write a short journal entry about your morning, but from the perspective of an 80-year-old. Now try again as a 30-year-old. Finally, try as a 15-year-old. Which was the most convincing? Was this more difficult a task than you anticipated? Compare your entries with those of a classmate.
 10. When Jewel is first re-acquainted with her childhood friend True Grisham, she observes 'it wasn't the little-girl True Grisham that I knew. There were ten years between little-girl True Grisham and this True Grisham, grown up. And I didn't know True Grisham, full grown, at all.' Have you ever experienced this before? Do you think people can intrinsically change? Do you think time and/or experiences can affect us in unfathomable ways?
 11. Sacha observes, 'Even though Al's family were kind of obnoxious and dirt poor and so big you could get lost among it...I wished that it was my own.'(p.146) How did you react when Little Al's family is first introduced? Can you see why Sacha and Jewel are drawn to them? Make a list of other such families you've encountered in literature, film or television and the attributes that make them so appealing.
 12. Little Al asks Sacha, 'You know you can talk to me, right?'(p.70) Do you think that the friendship between the two is representative of boys their age, or do you think they are emotionally mature beyond their years? Why do you think Sacha believes he'd never be ready to talk? List in your journal the key things affecting Sacha. Now make a list of emotions you'd associate with these problems. Write a conversation between Sacha and Big Al in which they discuss Sacha's problems and concerns in depth. Difficult?
 13. Jewel reflects on her brother's death, believing that 'even though I was an eight-year-old, someone needed to be blamed.'(p.96) Do you think this is true? If so, is this perceived need to place blame reflected in your world? In your journal list some examples from your own experiences, and broader society. Who do you think Jewel and Sacha blame above all, and how is this exhibited in their actions?
 14. 'People always say all the right things...All these words are empty.'(p.98) Do you think such platitudes are indeed hollow? In your journal, write a piece on how such sentiments are offered and received in difficult circumstances. Can one ever really say the right thing?
 15. Death is obviously something that haunts the protagonists in this novel. Do you think this novel is particularly affecting because it portrays many instances of people dying 'before their time', and of children and teens coping with grief at such a young age? Do you think death is easier to cope with as you age? Why?
 16. Why do you think Sacha couldn't tell True about his illness when they went out for dinner? Why was he desperate to emancipate the lobster? Why do you think True went along with it, out of character?
 17. Write a journal entry describing the troubled relationship between Jewel and her mother. List at least five adjectives to describe their relationship. What do you think each needs from the other? How would you characterise Sacha's relationship with his father? How do you think the roles of parent and offspring best function? What are the key things you feel a teen and a parent can do to best get along?
 18. 'Jesus Christ, it was beautiful'(p.124). Why do you think Sacha enjoyed the school fair so much? In your journal describe a special day that you've experienced—one in which your appreciation of the world around you has been heightened.
 19. Though Jewel's and Sacha's coping mechanisms are different, there are similarities. They both feel out of synch with the world, and both want to try to avoid feeling things too deeply. Write a journal entry about how their lives, and their attitudes change after meeting each other.
 20. 'Sometimes the hardest person in the world to talk to is your best friend, because it matters so much.'(p.129) Write a journal entry reflecting on Sacha's observation. What do you think he means? Can you relate to this?
 21. Jewel observes, 'There were heaps of people around us making lots of noise, but we were quiet: like the eye of a storm, I guess.'(p.133) Make a list of other similes you recall from the book. Now come up with

some of your own that would help portray these moments or ideas in the novel.

22. 'You didn't fail anyone, Mum...stop blaming yourself and I'll stop blaming me.'(p.213) Does Jewel really mean this? Is this an epiphany of sorts?
23. Why do Sacha and Jewel get nasty towards each other after Sacha reveals that he is dying? Is it fair for Jewel to feel betrayed by Sacha? Is it fair of Sacha to have fallen in love with Jewel? Discuss with a partner and list the positives and negatives of the situation in which these characters find themselves.
24. How did you react to the garden gnome fiasco? What do you think it helped to illustrate? Consider Sacha's support network. Who does it include?
25. 'I feel happy with you Sacha...and I feel like I've been depriving myself of the right to be happy for as long as I remember.'(p.269) Do you think this happiness can last given the circumstances? Is Jewel kidding herself, or is this the path to some type of emotional healing for her?
26. How did the closing chapters of the novel make you feel? Do you think all the loose ends were tied-up effectively? Consider Sacha's final statement, 'We probably looked like stupid kids, but I didn't mind because I was so happy. What people thought didn't matter any more.' Discuss as a class.

Debate Topics

- Love is transformative
- Truth is changeable
- 'Old people die...Not kids full of life and vitality'(p.96)
- Everything happens for a reason

Drama Activities

- Choose one character from *Girl Saves Boy*. Write a monologue or poem from their perspective—where the character explains what they fear, desire and regret. Perform this to the class, using props to enhance the piece.
- Form groups. Appoint someone to be a journalist who reports on one of the key incidents in the novel—the sad death of Jewel's brother, or when Jewel saves Sacha from drowning, for instance. Interview neighbours, 'friends close to the source', etc., about the incident. Present the report to the class in two manners—a report from ABC TV news compared to, say, a report from one of the popular commercial news programs. Use clothing/costume, posture, and language to help flesh-out the reporters and interview subjects.

Themes

- As a class, discuss the meaning of the word 'theme'. In groups brainstorm the themes from the book. Collate the various lists as a class.

- Death, personal loss, love, truth, honesty, peer pressure, identity, acceptance, understanding, etc., are just a few of the recurring themes. What do you think is the significance of each of these? Choose your favourite character and write a short piece from their perspective, reflecting on one of the key themes from the book.
- Grief, awkward adolescence, first love, disengaged and complicated parents, and complex friendships emerge within the worlds of the key characters in *Girl Saves Boy*. What impact do these very human concerns have on the reader? Do you relate to the characters? Do you think older readers will? Are these themes universal?

Structure/ Plot

- As a class discuss the structure of a novel. Without referring to the book, construct a timeline or order of key events for *Girl Saves Boy*. Now compare your timelines in groups. Are your timelines similar? Did you find it difficult to plot out what happened and when? Did you need to refer back to the novel?
- Many novels have clear endings or resolutions. What do you think is the purpose of this? What effect does this have on the reader? Despite this, are you left hankering for more? Did you find the resolution in this novel affecting? Uplifting? Positive? Negative? Realistic? Did you want to know what happened next? Discuss your reactions as a class.

Creative Responses

1. Write a final chapter for the book from either Jewel or Sacha's perspective, describing how Sacha spent the remainder of his birthday, or set the chapter one week or one year on from the novel's conclusion.
2. Write three blog entries from the perspective of one of the characters, reflecting their thoughts at key times throughout the novel. Alternatively write a week's worth of Twitter comments, documenting their thoughts and actions throughout the novel.
3. 'I was nervous the whole time. I worried my palms were sweaty or my breath was bad. That this close it'd be completely obvious how terrible my skin was.'(p.159). 'She kissed me. I couldn't believe there'd ever been a time before Jewel Valentine had come into my life.'(p.197)
4. Write a chapter from Little Al's or True Grisham's perspective on how they feel about one another. Alternatively write a short story or poem about falling in love.
5. Write a review of *Girl Saves Boy*. Stick to a limit of 500 words or less, and remember to consider who your audience will be.
6. Read Steph Bowe's piece from the *Age* newspaper, on writing for a YA audience. Expand on the idea that 'books for teenagers are real books because teenagers are real people. Writing for them is

great, because everything is so new and big and scary—your teenage years are full of risks and first experiences and everything seems so profound.'

Discussion/Essay topics

1. Is the idea that life is complicated, an absolute truth?
2. 'Sometimes you see someone doing something that does not fit at all with your idea of that person. You realise that, a lot of the time, you don't really know people, even one of your best friends. Instead, you get to know a little bit about that person—the things they want to reveal, or inadvertently reveal—and then you make up a whole lot of rubbish that's your idea of the person.'(p.126) Discuss the nature of identity as a class. What does it mean? Is it a fluid concept? How would you define your own identity? Why does it matter how others see us? Can one's identity be copied or stolen? How do your expectations and prejudices play into your sense of your own and other people's identity? Can one's public identity differ from their private selves? Choose a politician or celebrity to tease out this idea.
3. Discuss the writing style and structure the author adopts to portray the different perspectives of Jewel and Sacha. Do you think the approach of writing from different points of view has worked? Do you think it helps to clearly define the two characters or does the change of style detract from the reading experience? Is there a sufficient change in style to clearly define the characters? Do you think the style of either of the characters changes throughout the novel? Did you find one perspective easier to read than the other? If so, which did you prefer?
4. 'Some people aren't meant to live' Sacha says to Little Al, (p.221). Discuss this concept as a class. Do you think there is some truth to it?
5. 'I thought of death—my mother's, Jewel's brother's, True's father's, my own—and I wondered, again, about the possibility of an afterlife...'(p. 228) Do you believe in an afterlife? What do you believe happens when we die? Tease out your beliefs in a short essay on the subject of death and what comes after.
6. Are there any 'baddies' in *Girl Saves Boy*? Are there simply people who do the wrong thing, who get scared and make mistakes, who can't cope with grief, who can't cope with life? Discuss in relation to Jewel and Sacha's parents. And what of Jewel and Sacha's friendship? Do you think this is a reflection of how things are in real life?
7. Male friendship is explored in this novel through the characters of Little Al and Sacha. Write a short piece on the nature of male friendship. Can it be generalised? Are there certain qualities you notice? How would you describe or qualify it?

Research Subjects

In small groups research one of the following and report back to the class:

- Great literary romances
- Your favourite Young Adult author
- A religion of your choice and its philosophy on life and death
- Leukaemia
- Anorexia