

About *DEEP GIRLS*

Deep Girls tells stories that defy the conventions of young adult literature. The clichés of fictional relationships are tossed aside, and instead we read about girls whose relationships with their families are like the real relationships readers see in the world around them.

There are stories showing family members at their worst: a girl must stand up against expectations put on her by her parents and boyfriend; a sibling's assault on a parent drives a young woman to dark thoughts, and admiration for a rule-bending classmate; an ill grandmother is cruel to her daughter.

There are stories about the search for strength: a father and daughter try to survive as a family after a tragedy; a family friend who was victimized by violence returns from a mental hospital; a mother shows her daughter the heart that lies beneath a passive exterior.

And there are stories about young women adjusting to their emerging sexuality (while reluctantly caring for a neighbour's children, a teen turns her eyes to the kids' father), and that of their parents (a father and daughter take a trip to a bar, and each turns their attention elsewhere).

About LORI WEBER

Lori Weber is the author of several books for children, middle-grade readers, and young adults, including *Klepto*, *If You Live Like Me*, *My Granny Loves Hockey*, *Strange Beauty*, and *Tattoo Heaven*. A native of Montreal, Weber lives in Pointe-Claire and teaches English and Creative Writing at John Abbott College.

Curriculum

Grade 9, 10, 11, 12 English (Reading and Literature Studies)

Grade 9, 10 Social Sciences and Humanities (Family Studies)

Grade 9, 10 Health and Physical Education (Healthy Living — Human Development and Sexual Health)

Grade 11, 12 Social Sciences and Humanities (Gender Studies; Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice; Family Studies)

Student Objectives

After reading *Deep Girls*, students should be able to:

Grade 9-10:

- Describe important changes that are associated with adolescent development, and explain their influence on the behaviour and needs of young people
- Describe lifestyles in diverse families and the impact of a range of factors, including social and cultural factors, on these lifestyles
- Demonstrate their understanding, and build upon the skills needed to form what constitutes a “healthy” relationship — be that between peers, family, or in an intimate relationship

Grade 11-12:

- Demonstrate an understanding of how attitudes, behaviours, roles, and norms relating to gender are socially constructed, and of the complexity of gender as a concept and as a lived experience
- Analyse representations of women and men in media, popular culture, and the arts, and assess the effects of these representations
- Demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of power relations in various social contexts
- Demonstrate an understanding of how self-concept influences an individual's interactions with others
- Demonstrate an understanding of various dynamics and challenges that can affect relationships
- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of norms, roles, and social institutions on intimate relationships

Getting Started

1. Discuss different family constructs and the role gender plays in their dynamics.
2. Discuss social relationships and expectations placed on adolescents.

Discussion Questions

1. How do the expectations placed on Lizzie by her family and boyfriend adhere to gender norms? (“Deep Girls”)
2. What are some strategies Lizzie could use to form healthier relationships with her family? (“Deep Girls”)
3. How does Steph describe the Girl in the Purple Pants? What does the description reveal about Steph herself? (“The Girl in the Purple Pants”)
4. What factors prevent Steph from admitting she loves her sister? (“The Girl in the Purple Pants”)
5. Compare Miranda’s descriptions of her family to Mitchell’s family. What do these descriptions tell us about Miranda’s place in each family? (“Captivity”)
6. Why does Miranda release the sharks Mitchell caught back into the ocean? (“Captivity”)
7. In “Out of the Woods,” Joan suffers from agoraphobia. How do the other characters deal with her fear? How is her illness treated differently than her mother’s breast cancer? (“Out of the Woods”)
8. How does Kathy deal with the tension between her mother and grandmother? (“Out of the Woods”)
9. In what ways are things used to express love in “Out of the Woods”? (“Out of the Woods”)
10. Is Cal’s relationship with Tim healthy? (“Ice”)
11. Examine the imagery used in “Ice.” What images are repeated? What do they reveal about Cal? (“Ice”)
12. What stereotypes and gender norms inform the family dynamic in “My Cousin Jack”? Are their relationships healthy or harmful? (“My Cousin Jack”)
13. What does Dutchie’s necklace say about his character and his relationship with Jody? (“My Cousin Jack”)
14. How does Jody respond to the homophobic attack on Jack? (“My Cousin Jack”)
15. How is Amanda’s conception of Manhattan and her own sexuality influenced by popular culture? (“Pink Lady”)
16. How does Amanda describe the men in the story? In what ways do her descriptions reveal gender norms? (“Pink Lady”)

17. Why does Ruth try to make her mother hate the squirrels? (“Smart Aleck”)
18. How does Ruth’s self-concept change after the squirrel is killed? (“Smart Aleck”)
19. How does Alberta’s description of Mrs. Dwight shape your understanding of her character? Does Mr. Dwight’s description of his wife change this understanding? Why? (“Relativity”)
20. How do gender norms influence how Alberta views each family and her relationships with them? (“Relativity”)

Worksheet on “The Girl in the Purple Pants” From Deep Girls, DCB 2018 By Lori Weber

1. Showing and not telling is a wonderful technique for strong writing. When we read the first three pages of the story, we sense that Steph has a lot on her mind and that her homelife is troubled. The author never tells us this, but many details and plot points show this. Can you find a few examples?
2. The girl in the purple pants is only a secondary character, but she is hugely important to Steph's story. Why is Steph so drawn to her? What does she represent to Steph at the beginning? Why does Steph only sit back and watch her, instead of joining her? Does she represent the same thing to Steph all the way through the story, or does this change? Is she a foil to Steph: a deliberate opposite? Why do you think she is never given a name?
3. We finally learn the source of Steph's problems: the family situation with her sister. Look at the use of metaphor on the bottom of page 19, where Steph describes her sister as a project. What sort of meaning is created by comparing her sister to the Styrofoam girl? Do you see any other metaphors or similes in the story that add meaning?
4. Flashback is a great technique to use to add information about your main character's life and motivations. In this case, there is a long flashback in the second part of the story that helps the reader understand why Steph is so upset. It also shows the family dynamic. How would you describe the atmosphere at this meeting with the social worker? What small details, especially about the mother and father, help create this atmosphere?
5. Setting can be used to reflect and reveal your characters' moods. On the bottom of 21 and top of 22 we get some description of the part of the neighborhood Steph walks around in to avoid being at home. How do these descriptions reflect both Steph's situation and the situation of the girl in the purple pants?
6. Contrast is a great technique to bring meaning to your story. Look at the descriptions of the family that has had to flee their apartment because of physical violence. What actions point to their closeness? There has been physical violence in Steph's house too, but their family dynamic is the complete opposite. How so?
7. The South African writer, Nadine Gordimer, said that “short fiction turns on a dime.” It contains one small moment that can entirely change a main character's life, or perspective on life. That turn is normally at the climax of the story, the place where the character changes, or has an epiphany. What is the “dime” in this story, and what is the change?
8. Making connections between beginnings and endings is a solid technique to bring a short story full circle. In this case, the idea of keeping “the lines of communication open,” which we see in the opening paragraph, returns on page 23. How is this second reference different? Does Steph see it the same way? Do you think she would use the same tone of voice in both places when saying it out loud?

9. Including a key symbol is a technique that will enrich your story. In this case it is the color purple. Look at its evolution through the story and how it represents something very different to Steph at different stages. The last line of the story is, “The purple explodes in my mind like a bouquet.” What is your interpretation of this image?
10. The theme of a story comes when we read it and think about what it suggests about life. It’s not something the writer can plan, or deliberately work into a story. It comes through the characters and their words and actions, their interactions with other characters in the story, and all the subtext created by the setting and symbolism. What are some of the themes or main ideas in this story?