



**OUR AUSTRALIAN GIRL SERIES – LINA, by Sally Rippin
TEACHING NOTES**



MEET LINA BOOK 1

It's 1956 and Lina dreams of being a writer, but her strict Italian parents have different ideas. Now that she's won a scholarship to an expensive girls' school, Lina has other troubles too. To fit in, she must keep her home life a secret, and even her best friend Mary can't know the truth. But how long can Lina keep her two worlds apart?

Meet Lina and join her adventure in the first of four exciting stories about a passionate girl finding a place to belong.

CONTEXT

1. Have the children read "what life was like in 1956" at the back of the book. In 1956 Australia was becoming a prosperous country. It was ten years after the end of World War Two, and Australia was stable and peaceful. It still had very strong cultural religious and social bonds with Great Britain and Ireland. Soon after the War ended, the Government had introduced a program to encourage migrants from Southern Europe as a way of rapidly increasing the population and to provide labour on projects like the Snowy Mountains Scheme which would provide electric power to Australia's east coast into the future. Most of the migrants were keen to escape their war-damaged homelands. They were hard working but poorly educated people, often from Italy and Greece; Melbourne was a popular destination for many, and family connections in Melbourne

became a further incentive for new arrivals. Language barriers and the lack of common education and training standards made it difficult for most people to find work in other than menial jobs. Some people started their own businesses. Australians did not readily accept the new migrants or their customs; and life was often difficult for them and their children (ACELT1602).

2. The children could be asked to try to research Australia's migration programs in the nineteen fifties and sixties. Some may be able to interview family members who migrated to Australia at that time. Some may be able to research the topic in the school library or on the internet under such headings as why Australia wanted migrants and why they wanted to come, the numbers of migrants from various countries, the work they did and where and how they lived, tell stories of the hardship people faced and of discrimination against them. Is there still discrimination against people of Italian or Greek origin in Australia? Why or why not? A class discussion could result with groups of children presenting what they have found and explaining their sources (ACHHK062; ACHH5066, ACHH5215, ACHH K115)(ACELT1676).

3. Older children could be asked to consider whether Australia's present day migrants, say from the Sudan or India, face similar difficulties. What causes these difficulties for new migrants (ACELY 1709)?

4. On a map of Melbourne, ask the children to find the street and place names mentioned as the story proceeds. Mary lives in Ivanhoe. Can they work out approximately where Lina's family may have lived? Clue: Lygon Street is in the distance and there is Rathdowne Street not too far away (p82).The girls at St Brigid's seem to think Carlton isn't a very nice place to live. Is Carlton still a place that people don't want to live? Why do you think Carlton was regarded so badly in 1956? Notice how Sarah explains it on p26. (ACHGK014)(ACELT 1603)

5. Ask the children to compare St Brigid's with their own school in a group discussion. What is different? What is similar? If appropriate ask them to consider whether Catholic Girls Schools have changed very much since Lina's time (ACELT 1696) (ACELT 1603).

LANGUAGE

6. Keep a class glossary of words and phrases that people use in the book series that are unfamiliar, including technical terms. Children can contribute to the list as the books are read. Each group of words offers an opportunity to discuss the way everyday language has changed, as well as the change in domestic appliances-including telephones and typewriters- that we use every day. Such a list also offers opportunity to talk about what clothing was fashionable, and how girls' hobbies, school life, entertainments and interests have changed or remained the same(ACELA 1500) (ACELA 1498).

7. Some of the vocabulary and phrases the class might explore include "break a leg" (p21); a "duffer" (p46) (ACELY 1792).

8. Have the class identify as they read examples of metaphors and similes. Her father would have stood out against other parents “like a pock marked tomato” (p22). Notice that similes intensify the emotion for both the character and the reader. What if the simile had been a positive one, say “like a flower in a circle of weeds”? The author would have achieved the same strong effect with quite a different meaning. Help the children to construct some positive and negative similes of their own for a person isolated yet part of a group of people (ACELT 1611).

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

9. This story is told in the **third person**. An author decides at the beginning of her work whether she will write in the first person or the third. In third person writing, there is an invisible narrator who tells us what happens to the characters, identifiable by the use of the third person pronouns...he she her his they them...to identify the characters. Sometimes third person stories seem to be at more of a distance from the characters than first person stories but the advantage is they can tell the story from different points of view (ACELY 1698 and 1675)(ACELA 1504).

10. Contrast this with stories told in the first person by a character in the story or by a visible narrator. Stories written like diaries or about first hand experiences are usually in the first person, that is, the person telling the story uses the pronouns “I” “me” and “we” and “us”(e.g. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank) and you generally only get to know about what that person has observed or felt about other characters and events. Letters are another form of first person writing. Some first person stories switch between first person story tellers so you can get different points of view. Newspaper articles can be written in either first or third person (ACELY 1675 and 1698).

11. Children in all age groups could be asked to write a first person story and then tell the same story in third person. What differences do they notice? Ask older children to record the items, books, articles and poems and other texts they read and write over a period of two weeks and to put them in a chart labelling them first person or third person. At the end of the two weeks ask them to discuss whether and why some texts lend themselves better to third person and others to first (ACELA 1490) (ACELY 1698).

12. Look at the structure of the book with the class. Notice that Chapter One is mostly concerned with establishing the family situation and introducing us to Lina’s family. Chapters Two and Three introduce us to Lina’s school life and her friendship with Mary as well as the internal conflict between Lina’s love for her family and her need to be accepted by the other girls at this new school. We are also introduced to Lina herself, we begin to understand what kind of person she is, what her talents are and her hopes for herself. Some of the things we learn about Lina and Mary are not only from what they do and say but from the way adults and children around them react. This is a method writers use to help us to work out for ourselves what a book’s characters and relationships with others are like without the narrator directly telling us (ACELT 1604 and 1605).

13. In a class discussion, ask the children to describe how Lina's family life in the city is different from the life of most city girls her age, even today (morning chores; the backyard vegetable garden; Nonna living with them and taking a strong role in the management of the household; sharing of bedrooms; the absence of a telephone or television set; Lina's responsibilities to her baby brother; the sharing of the house with an uncle who is allowed to take over the living room; the food they eat and take to school; using up the old bread; caring for chooks and goats(Ch. 1); visits from family friends, the way they spend Sundays (Ch. 10). Why do they think there are these differences? (Look for answers relating to cultural difference, poverty, both parents working at low paid jobs, technological developments, family expectations and roles, rural backgrounds). Ask them to compare Lina's life with Mary's in Chapters 4 and 5(ACELY1676) (ACHH5069) (ACELT 1608).

14. Why would Lina attending St Brigid's after primary school make such a difference to the way Lina felt about her family? What were the expectations of the other girls that she couldn't meet? Lina lies to her family and betrays them even when she knows it is wrong. List the things that Lina says and does that she knows are wrong. Why does she do that? Does she love her family? How do you know? Discuss with the children how sometimes we are conflicted in making decisions how to behave. Ask them to think of times they have done things to fit in with their friends even when they knew it was wrong or against their family expectations or rules. Do you think you would have done the same? If not, what would you have done or said? (ACELY1680) (ACELT 1596 and ACELT 1609).

15. At the end of the book did you want to find out what happened next to Lina? Or didn't you care much? Why do you think the story had this effect on you? (ACELT1598)

CHARACTERISATION

16. But the plot isn't all there is to the story. We care about Lina and hope she solves her problems (ACELT 1605).

17. The cover of the book describes Lina as "passionate". What does "passionate" mean? Do you have any friends you would describe as passionate? What does Lina say, do or think that make her fit the description of passionate? Have the children notice that when Lina loses her temper there is a "fizzing" in her head (p27) Do you think a bad temper is common with people who are passionate about being excellent? Do you like her? Why? Why not? (ACELY1792) (ACELT1609)

18. Do you think everything Lina does or says is the right thing? Give some examples of Lina being rude, bad tempered or dishonest. Can you explain why she does some things she shouldn't? When you understand why people do bad things does that help you to forgive them? (ACELT1604 and 1605)(ACELT 1609)

19. How do the actions or words of other characters in the book affect Lina? As a group or as individuals the class could make a list of the people who appear in the book who have an effect on Lina's life for good or bad. Then they could write (or agree on) a sentence for each person telling us what they did and why. Older children could pretend to be Mary or Sarah or Sister Rosemary or Lina's dad and tell part of the story from their point of view (ACELY1675) (ACELT 1605).

20. Has Lina changed as a person by the end of the book? When she is angry and betrayed by Mary do you like her just as well as when she was happy in the heart of her family? Why? Why not? (ACELT 1604 and ACELT1605)(ACELT 1795)

DISCUSSIONS FOR EACH CHAPTER

Ch. 1. Frosty Mornings

This chapter introduces us to Lina's family and the way they live. Although some of the family's ways may seem strange to some children there is a familiarity to the conversations and feelings in the family. Underneath, after all, it is just like every loving family.

Have the children look at what happens between Lina and Enzo and Lina and Bruno and Lina and her Dad to see how much love and teasing there is in this normal family. Then draw their attention to Lina's lies to her Dad. Here at the beginning of the story is its heart – the conflict every child of migrants feels as they struggle on the one hand to do the right thing by their family and on the other to make their way in a new land with new opportunities and new ways of doing things. Ask them to list the words and phrases that tell us that Lina is ashamed of her lie. Ask the class if they think her Dad knows it is a lie. How? (He hears her voice, he stands quietly and seems to think what to say or do. These are only hints, when we read a story we interpret it for ourselves and a good writer lets us do so without spelling everything out for us. It keeps us thinking as we read and adds to our pleasure.)(ACELT 1608)

Lina's relationship with her Dad is a very important one in the story. Have older children rewrite the story of the lie using Dad as the narrator. We should be looking for hints of his love for his daughter, his pride in her achievement, and his sadness that she is locking him out from her life (ACELY 1675)(ACELT1607).

Ch. 2. St Brigid's Ladies College

We are introduced to the school and to Sister Rosemary in the library. Sister Rosemary believes in Lina and is an important adult in her world. Sister Rosemary seems to know what is wrong and right. And now we meet Mary, Lina's best friend, who is a whirlwind. Sister Rosemary does not approve of Mary, as she makes plain. Does this give us a hint that this friendship might not be all it seems to be?

Mary makes demands on Lina to show her friendship that press on Lina the gulf in wealth between their families and puts Lina again into a terrible dilemma

between her need to belong in this new world and the duties and expectations of her at home.

Ch. 3. My Heart, My Home

Lina has a great success reading her story out in Assembly. She finds her writing can make people laugh and cry and hold their breath. Ask the children to think whether they have ever laughed or cried or had their hearts race with excitement or fear while they were reading. Perhaps they could write about an occasion when this has happened to them. Other girls congratulate Lina and she is soaring with happiness (ACELT 1598).

So when Sarah makes comments about the filth of migrants who live in Lina's suburb a terrible thing happens. Lina loses her temper. Her head fizzes. She pushes Sarah. Mary takes her side and promises not to go to Sarah's party.

Can people help losing their temper? We understand why Lina felt insulted and why she reacted in this way, but was it the best thing to do? Have the children consider other ways Lina could have responded. (ACELY 1675) (ACELT 1596, 1603 and 1609).

Ch. 4. A Brand New World

This chapter uses Lina's newfound popularity to contrast with the difficulties Lina usually has in fitting in. She has a taste of acceptance and it feels wonderful. As she prepares to go to Mary's house after school, Mary suggests telephoning home to say she will be late and Lina playacts the lie for Mary's benefit. It is clear that Miss Spencer knows there is no telephone at the other end. But Lina's cheeks "are on fire". What does that tell us about how she is feeling (ACELT 1609)?

At Mary's house Lina experiences how well-off families live and her heart is "crushed with envy". When she can bear it no longer she makes a suggestion to change the activity that will change the course of the story...they will make a magazine together.

Ch. 5. The Magazine

The two girls work at Mary's house on the magazine. What doubts does Lina have about the friendship with Mary? Why does she push them aside? Ask the children to discuss in pairs. (ACELY 1680, 1676 and 1792)

Lina lets Mr. Doveton think that a big house on a different street is hers when he gives her a lift home, another lie.

Then she is accosted by her mother, angry that she has not done her chores. Lina argues back, yelling at her mother, and her mother slaps her. Lina runs to the back shed and weeps until she is done. The author has let us see, through the dialogue between mother and daughter, and by telling us Lina's own self-doubts,

that there are two points of view. Encourage the children to redraft some of this dialogue into indirect speech, perhaps reading it aloud, and ask them to consider what difference it makes to the emotions we are hearing expressed (ACELA 1494).

The chapter ends on a note of comfort for Lina. She hears the stars singing and she knows this is an experience that everyone can have, no matter who they are or where they live. Compare this metaphor of the stars as a uniting experience with the reference to stars in Chapter 9 (ACELT 1611).

Ch. 6. An Apology

The chapter begins by showing us what a strong relationship Lina has with her Dad and we hear how wise and loving he is. Lina reads the newspaper to him as she does each evening and we thereby get a glimpse of the important things that were happening in Australia and the world in 1956. We hear about Lina's admiration for a woman newspaper columnist called Stella Davis, the beginning of a strand in the narrative that will influence Lina in later books.

Lina apologises to her mother for being so rude, but it is clear things are not yet mended between them. Lina experiences fresh anger as she feels she is treated differently to her brothers. At the same time she sees that she has hurt her baby brother who thinks she doesn't want to look after him and they cuddle until he falls asleep.

The children could discuss the status of girls in different countries. Sometimes girls, particularly those from migrant families, feel they are treated differently to their brothers, that more is expected of them and that they do not have the same freedoms. Lina is reflecting the feelings of many young girls, but she is in a family where her talents and abilities are being recognised and her family is proud of her. In some countries around the world families still protect their girls until they marry and expect them to have less education and do more domestic work, not because they are loved less, but because of deep seated cultural beliefs and traditions about the role of women and girls (ACELT 1603).

Ch. 7. A Quiet Conversation

Lina interrupts a special moment between her parents and she has a foreboding that something is going on she doesn't yet understand. Her mother offers to walk with her to the bus stop. On the way her mother tries to show her why she is being treated differently. She talks about how her father should be working in a profession, not in a car factory. Lina is the child they see as having the abilities to fulfil her father's hopes for one of his children to have the career he cannot have. Lina feels a great sense of responsibility and wonders if their dreams for her might stop her fulfilling her own dreams.

"In Italy a girl can only be a wife. Here you can be whatever you want to be". Have the children discuss what they would like to be in their lives. What do they

think might help them meet their dreams? What might stop them getting there? Is it easier for them than it is for Lina to be what they want to be (ACELT 1596)?

Notice how the chapter ends on a loving note for Lina and her mother.

Ch. 8. Sister Rosemary

In this chapter Lina is introduced to *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. Older children should be encouraged to read this book too and to come back to class and discuss it (ACELY 1602) .

Lina has an opportunity to talk to Sister Rosemary and feels better for it. Again Sister Rosemary shows her reservations about Mary as the girls work in the library on their magazine.

Then we learn something new about Lina as she reacts to Betty Pascoe's interest in the magazine project. She is secretive and she resents other people giving ideas for her project. Is this the downside to a passionate person? Why does Lina behave like this? Do you like her better or less for this? Rewrite the dialogue on pages 74 and 75 to show how you would have reacted (ACELT 1596 and 1609).

Ch. 9. The Betrayal

It is Saturday afternoon, the girls are working at Mary's place, and the magazine is almost finished. Then Lina discovers that Mary is planning to go to Sarah's party after all, a betrayal of Mary's earlier promise not to attend out of loyalty to Lina. Again Lina feels "a hot fizz fill her head", but this time she behaves. She is unable to talk with shock and disappointment and Mr. Doveton drives her home. There is a family event at home – the Cantileri family is visiting and everyone is sharing food and wine so Lina isn't able to get her mind together until she is in bed that night. She thinks about her friendship with Mary and the unfairness of life. Again the stars become a metaphor –This time they are part of a curtain that separates Lina from a better life in another world (ACELT 1611).

Ch. 10. In Trouble Again!

We experience the warmth and family happiness of a typical Italian Sunday in Lina's family. Ask the children to compare Lina's Sunday with Sunday at their house. Which family has the most fun (ACHHS 069)?

On Monday Lina and Mary meet again and reconcile. Mary tells Lina that the party at Sarah's was boring. She would rather have been with Lina. Everyone was talking about the school magazine at the party and Lina is thrilled to think she was the star of the conversation. However after assembly Sarah approaches them and asks to see the magazine. Lina tells her it is private. When the teacher approaches, Sarah complains that she isn't being included in the magazine project. Miss Spring is shocked when the magazine falls open at a page displaying a lady in underwear and sends the girls to the Mother Superior's office. Lina calls

Sarah a horrible cow and it appears Mary has told each of the other girls that the other is boring.

Ch. 11. The Mother Superior

Surprisingly, the Mother Superior is impressed by the girls' work on their magazine and invites all three girls to develop a magazine for the school, an Olympics special edition. Although Lina protests Sarah's inclusion she is overruled. The Mother Superior has a special message for Lina which she delivers in private: that Lina will reach her potential if she controls her anger, her passions, and lets her writing do the talking. The book ends with Lina vowing to herself that she will prove she is as good as any other girl at St Brigid's; and not to let Sarah upset her again.

At the end of the book we know that Lina is determined to become a calmer person. She has been entrusted with a very big project so clearly the Mother Superior has faith in her. Do you think she will succeed? Has she already changed? How? Or does she still have to learn some lessons (ACELY 1680) (ACELT 1605 and 1609)?

WRITING STYLE

Written in the third person and providing excellent opportunities for studying dialogue, *Meet Lina* encourages empathetic identification. At the same time Lina is a complex character and there are moral and ethical dilemmas to study, including those based around the friendships of young girls and the dilemma of growing up in a migrant family whose cultural mores are strongly held and quite different from those in the outside world that Lina is facing.

OVERALL MESSAGE

It is good to feel passionately about things. Passion can lead to excellence, but it needs to be channeled so it doesn't spill over and have unintended consequences.

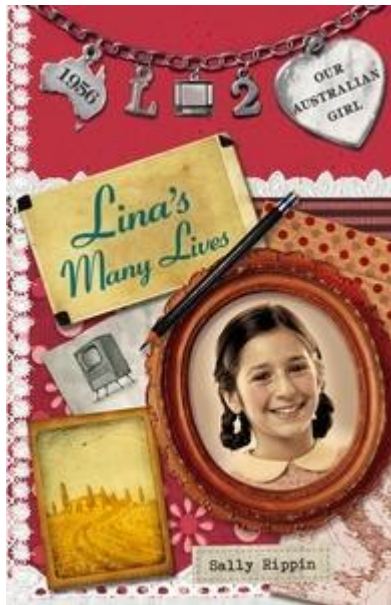
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FURTHER READING

- *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Anne Frank
- Text Publishing 2012 *They're a Weird Mob* by Nino Culotta(aka John O'Grady).

A comic novel about an Italian journalist in Australia in the nineteen fifties trying to make sense of the Australian idiom.

- There was also 1966 film production of *They're a Weird Mob*. Clips can be watched on *australianscreen*, a website operated by the National Film and Sound Archive.



Lina's Many Lives BOOK 2

It's 1956 and Lina is working hard on the school newspaper. But mean Sarah Buttersworth isn't making it easy, and when Lina's best friend Mary gets distracted by her new television, things begin to fall apart. Meanwhile, at home, Lina starts to uncover some dark family secrets. Living in two such different worlds isn't easy, and when tragedy strikes, she makes a decision that causes her many lives to collide...

Follow Lina on her adventure in the second of four exciting stories about a passionate girl finding a place to belong.

CONTEXT

1. Have the children read "what life was like in 1956" at the back of the book. This was the time when Australians first had access to television, and it changed their world. Mary's reaction was not uncommon. Ask the children to think about what life was like for Australian children before the availability of television (they had radio, cinema, sport, outdoor games, board games like monopoly and ludo, a narrower view of the world and dinner with the family, not in front of television).

2. Book Two deepens our understanding of Italian migrant family and social life as we are given the opportunity through the stories about the loss of the baby, the uncovering of Zio's deception and through hearing Bruno's and Lina's dad's stories to deepen our understanding of different migrant experiences in the 1950s. At each point children could be given opportunities to compare these experiences with those of their own families, through group discussions and presentations and through their own creative writing (ACELT 1596).

3. Ask the children to compare St Brigid's with their own school in a group discussion. What is different? What is similar? If appropriate ask them to

consider whether Catholic Girls Schools have changed very much since Lina's time (ACELT 1696) (ACELT 1603).

LANGUAGE

4. Keep a class glossary of words and phrases that people use in the book series that are unfamiliar, including technical terms. Children can contribute to the list as the books are read. Each group of words offers an opportunity to discuss the way everyday language has changed, as well as the change in domestic appliances-including telephones and typewriters- that we use every day. Such a list also offers opportunity to define fabric terms like gingham, seersucker and plaid, and to talk about what clothing was fashionable, and how girls' hobbies, school life, entertainments and interests have changed or remained the same(ACELA 1500) (ACELA 1498).

5. Some of the vocabulary and phrases the class might explore include "dago" and "woggy"p23. "our turf" (p24)" theatrically" and "conjugating verbs" (p34) "leered" (p52); proxy; and "the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree" (ACELY 1792).

6. Have the class identify as they read examples of imagery and poetic language. In particular there are contrasting mood pieces in Chapters 6 and 12. Encourage them to try writing some mood creating texts themselves (ACELT 1611 and 1800) (ACELY 1714).

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

7. This story is told in the **third person**. An author decides at the beginning of her work whether she will write in the first person or the third. In third person writing, there is an invisible narrator who tells us what happens to the characters, identifiable by the use of the third person pronouns...he, she, her, his, they, them...to identify the characters. Sometimes third person stories seem to be at more of a distance from the characters than first person stories but the advantage is they can tell the story from different points of view (ACELY 1698 and 1675)(ACELA 1504).

8. Contrast this with stories told in the first person by a character in the story or by a visible narrator. Stories written like diaries or about first hand experiences are usually in the first person, that is, the person telling the story uses the pronouns "I" "me" and "we" and "us" (e.g. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank) and you generally only get to know about what that person has observed or felt about other characters and events. Letters are another form of first person writing. Some first person stories switch between first person story tellers so you can get different points of view. Newspaper articles can be written in either first or third person (ACELY 1675 and 1698).

9. Children in all age groups could be asked to write a first person story and then tell the same story in third person. What differences do they notice? Ask older children to record the items, books, articles and poems and other texts they read

and write over a period of two weeks and to put them in a chart labelling them first person or third person. At the end of the two weeks ask them to discuss whether and why some texts lend themselves better to third person and others to first (ACELA 1490) (ACELY 1625 and 1698).

10. Look at the structure of the book with the class. Notice that this book focuses very much on the pressures on Lina’s character in the face of plot challenges to her talents, hopes and family life...Some of the things we learn about Lina and other significant characters are not only from what they do and say but from how they react to various pressures. In Book 2 there is a clear comparison with the ways Lina and Lina’s father cope with life’s difficulties and threats. Lina discovers she has a role model.

11. Ask the children to list the things that Lina says and does in Book 2 that she knows are wrong. Why does she do them anyway? Ask the children to think of times they have done things that they knew were wrong or would get them into trouble but have done them anyway. Discuss with the children how sometimes we are conflicted in making decisions how to behave. Do you think you would have done the same as Lina? If not, what would you have done or said? (ACELY1680) (ACELT 1596 and ACELT 1609)(ACELA 1484).

12. At the end of the book did you want to find out what happened next to Lina and Bruno? Notice that chapters in the book (and at the ending of the book itself) sometimes end with a new thing happening or something different to think about. In each case this is the way an author encourages us to want to read on. She is creating *plot tension* (ACELT1598).

CHARACTERISATION

13. But the plot isn’t all there is to the story. We care about Lina and hope she solves her problems. Why do we like Lina? Give examples. (ACELT 1605).

17. The cover of the book describes Lina as “passionate”. What does “passionate” mean? Do you have any friends you would describe as passionate? What does Lina say, do or think that make her fit the description of passionate? Have the children notice that when Lina loses her temper there is a “fizzing” in her head (p27) Do you think a bad temper is common with people who are passionate about being excellent? Do you like her? Why? Why not? (ACELY1792) (ACELT1609)(ACELT 1596)

18. Although she is a talented and loving person, Lina is also a moody girl who makes many mistakes in her relationships. Give some examples of Lina being rude, bad tempered, secretive or dishonest. Can you explain why she does some things she shouldn’t? When you understand why people do bad things does that help you to forgive them? (ACELT1604 and 1605)(ACELT 1609)

19. How do the actions or words of other characters in the book affect Lina? As a group or as individuals the class could make a list of the people who appear in the book who have an effect on Lina’s life for good or bad. Then they could write

(or agree on) a sentence for each person telling us what they did and why. Older children could pretend to be Mary or Sarah or Sister Rosemary and tell part of the story from their point of view (ACELY1675) (ACELT 1605).

20. How in her turn does Lina affect other people – for good or bad - by her actions? Write the story of the meeting with the Mother Superior from Lina’s dad’s point of view. (ACELT 1604, 1675 and ACELT1605)(ACELT 1795)

DISCUSSIONS FOR EACH CHAPTER

Ch. 1. Stormy Weather

Lina discovers a writing friend in Anne Frank.

The girls interview children from the school for their school magazine and Lina finds to her surprise they enjoy working together. Then it comes tumbling down. Lina is crushed to hear that Sarah wants to be a writer and also considers herself the best writer in the class. Lina can’t help herself and rages at Sarah who responds condescendingly that the teacher thinks Lina is quite good for someone from a migrant background. Lina’s head fizzes and she calls Sarah horrible mean and stupid.

This is an opportunity for the children to examine dialogue and its immediacy and emotional impact for readers compared with indirect speech (eg the summary above). The scene could be acted out, or translated into indirect speech to help them understand this (ACELA 1494 and ACELY1730). But it is also a critical moral point in Lina’s development and the children could also try creating some alternative ways this scene could have played out –Lina could have shared her dreams with someone with a similar dream instead of being secretive. Or Mary could have intervened to make peace and suggest they both could be writers (ACELT 1607 and 1610). The children could discuss if Lina should have behaved as she did and whether there is a likelihood of Sarah and Lina being friends (ACELT 1609).

Ch. 2. Best Friends Forever

Look at some of the ways the author describes Lina’s anger – *fizzing* in her head, *hot ball*, *dark hot ball of anger*. Ask the children to think of other metaphors for anger and then compare them with a direct statement that Lina felt angry (ACELT 1611). Which is more easily understood and empathised with? (ACELY 1792)

Mary offers to work with Lina and Sarah on alternate days and Lina accepts. But then she sees Sarah talking to other girls.

Ask the children to look at the word *smirked*. What is a *smirk*?(ACELY 1692) Would we have understood Lina’s decision to leave school early if the author had just described it as a smile?(ACELY 1698)(ACELT 1617) Could it have just been a smile? Could Lina have been wrong in her interpretation? Are there times in your

life when people have interpreted things wrongly because of how they are feeling at that moment (ACELT 1603)?

Notice how at the end of the chapter we are left hanging. We don't know what will happen next. This creates "plot tension" and makes us want to read on (ACELT 1605).

Ch. 3. A Nasty Encounter

Have the girls look for pictures of some of the clothing described in the Lina books. They could look at popular magazines of the time, speak to family members and draw and copy images. Have them notice that girls dressed up much more in those days than they do today. Although there were jeans, for example, frocks and skirts gloves and stockings were the popular normal clothing choices for social activities.

What were bodgies and widgeys? Can you find pictures and descriptions? Do we have groups of teenagers like them today? Notice how they talk (ACELY 1687). In her choice of language for them, is the author trying to tell us something about how people who speak the same language can use words differently? Sometimes this is because they have a poor education or they may want to distinguish themselves from others.

Lina gets a bad fright. These people hate Italians. Once again we wonder what will happen next as they let her go (ACELT 1605).

Ch. 4. Whispered Secrets

The children could discuss and compare their chores after school with Lina's. Ask them to comment on Lina's happy teasing relationship with Bruno. Are there others whose relationships with their brothers are a little like that? (ACELY 1692)

She shares with Bruno that she saw their uncle wasting time at a café instead of out looking for work as he had promised he was doing and Bruno helps by taking responsibility for solving the problem. Why does she not also share her terrifying experience with the bodgie? Is this a device used by the author to extend the suspense?

Ch. 5. The Proxy Wife

Zio's story offers an opportunity to understand a common experience of Italian migrant men and their brides at home, and the difficulties they faced. This is an opportunity for children of recent migrant descent to share some of their family stories with the wider group and to answer their questions (ACELT 1608) (ACELY 1688).

Bruno and Pierino, as young men of Italian descent, are facing their own nightmare of racial hatred and Lina is shamed into remembering she is not the only person with difficulties.

The chapter ends with Lina thinking how she could use her magazine to spread understanding between people of different backgrounds. The children could think about how written and spoken words can influence the way people think, in different text formats like press articles, speeches, films, in fictional and non-fictional narratives and in formal research reports (ACELY 1708).

Ch. 6. The Magic of Television

Mary's parents buy a television and Lina watches it with her. Both girls are entranced. They forget to work on the magazine and Lina gets home late and feeling guilty.

Ask the children to look at the words which tell us that Lina was feeling guilty and worried about what was to come. The whole world seems to be judging her and the atmosphere is very threatening. The sky is "bruising dark", a wind has "lifted", the birch trees "whisper menacingly", the building "leered" at her, a light like a "watchful eye" whispers, she shivers, Enzo is "like a little lost shadow". What is the author trying to make us feel? She is not just telling us **how** Lina feels and **what** she thinks these things are saying to her, she is **making us feel it** too.

Have the children create a text which tries to share a happy mood with its readers through the use of specially chosen words and images (See Ch. 12(ACELT 1615and 1800).

Ch. 7. A Fright in the Night

In the night while Lina's Dad is at work Lina's mum is taken ill. She is taken to hospital and Lina doesn't know what has happened. She has to listen to the confusion while her brothers and Nonna take charge.

The children might notice the role of an Italian Nonna in this and other chapters throughout the series compared with a modern Australian grandmother and take notes for a later class discussion (ACELT 1608).

Ch. 8. A Day Full of Sadness

Lina visits her mum in hospital and discovers she has lost a baby. She shares in the family sadness and feels close to her mother. When she gets home the house is full of Italian friends and neighbours providing food and sympathy.

Lina does a bad thing, the key action in the story. She forges a note from her father to explain her absence from School. Can this be explained (ACELT 1609)?

And then she writes a story which is a metaphor for her complicated love of her mother and expresses her sadness at losing her baby sister.

Ch. 9. The Absentee Note

Lina is reassured by Sister Rosemary about the honour in being a writer, even an Italian writer and she is also reassured by wise words from the Anne Frank Diary.

But the pleasure from this is cut short by an argument with Mary who is more interested in television programs than Lina's need to share her family sadness. Lina is being given an opportunity to think about the quality of Mary's friendship.

When she gives Miss Spring her absentee note Miss Spring immediately knows it is a forgery and she is sent again to the Mother Superior's office. Lina is given the choice between continuing at the School and having her father attend the school the next morning. Her editorship of the school magazine is also at risk.

As she leaves she runs into Sarah and they discover they share a concern that Mary is more interested in television than in completing the magazine. Sarah suggests they work together to get it to the next stage and Lina reluctantly agrees.

Ch. 10. A Trip to St Brigid's

This chapter explores the loving relationship between Lina and her dad even when she is in trouble, and contrasts his wisdom and kindness with his difficulty in managing even quite simple tasks in English, like buying bus tickets on the way to see the Mother Superior at St Brigid's. Two or three children could be asked to explain the sadness of this to the class in their own words (ACELY 1709).

Ch. 11. A Father's Story

Lina's Dad apologises to the Mother Superior and the matter is closed. But when Lina says to her dad as they leave that maybe that wasn't so bad, he explodes. She has been ashamed of him and treated him as if he was stupid. He tells her about her parents' past in Italy. He was a journalist who got into trouble for his political views and his young wife has had to give up a comfortable life to come with him to Australia. What does he mean when he says to Lina: "I guess the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree"? Lina is amazed to find he was a writer too and she realizes some of what he has given up to come to Australia.

Ch. 12. Bad News Again

As Lina dances home relieved that the deceptions and lies are over she is shocked to find her brother Bruno, beaten and injured, up by the Carlton Park gang. What do you think will happen next? Write your own story, taking up from the ending on p106 (ACELY 1680) (ACELT 1607).

Ask the children to compare the writing on p105 when Lina is happy (words and images) with the writing they have previously studied in Chapter 6(ACELT 1615 and1800).

WRITING STYLE

Written in the third person and providing excellent opportunities for studying dialogue, *Lina's Many Lives* encourages empathetic identification and critical analysis. There are moral and ethical dilemmas to study, including those based around the friendships of young girls and the dilemma of growing up in a migrant family whose cultural mores are strongly held and quite different from those in the outside world that Lina is facing.

OVERALL MESSAGE

Allowing yourself to react in the moment leads to consequences sometimes that you cannot predict. We all need to learn how to control our behavior, to think before we act.

FURTHER READING

- *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Anne Frank
- Text Publishing 2012 *They're a Weird Mob* by Nino Culotta(aka John O'Grady).

A comic novel about an Italian journalist in Australia in the nineteen fifties trying to make sense of the Australian idiom.

- There was also 1966 film production of *They're a Weird Mob*. Clips can be watched on *australianscreen*, a website operated by the National Film and Sound Archive.



LINA AT THE GAMES BOOK 3

It's 1956 and the Melbourne Olympic Games has finally arrived! The whole city is buzzing with excitement and Lina can't wait to go along as a reporter for the school magazine. Now is her chance to prove to everyone that she's a real writer, and nothing could be more important – until Lina makes a new friend, who changes the way she sees the world....

Follow Lina on her adventure in the third of four exciting books about a passionate girl finding a place to belong.

CONTEXT

1. Have the children read “what life was like in 1956” at the back of the book. The Olympic Games brought the world to Australia and Australia to the world. It was a very exciting time for all Australians.
2. Have older children research Australia's preparation for the Olympics and see if they can find newspaper reports and old photographs that reflect the excitement of those times. Different children could bring their report of the games to school and the class could put together an Olympic Games 1956 report including reports on Dawn Fraser and other athletic stars (ACELY 1703 1712 and 1720).
3. A second phase of the project could then be to ask the class to research and compare the Olympics in Melbourne with the Olympics in Sydney in 2000, not just comparing statistics and numbers but major events in the course of the Olympics and how they reflect not only the changing times e.g. the pride of Australians in our Indigenous stars like Cathy Freeman in 2000, the Russia /Hungary row in 1956 but also the continuing character traits of Australians like friendliness, tolerance, flexibility and organizational competence (ACELY 1712 and 1713).

LANGUAGE

4. Keep a class glossary of words and phrases that people use in the book series that are unfamiliar (e.g. indigo p75), including technical terms. Children can contribute to the list as the books are read. Each group of words offers an opportunity to discuss the way everyday language has changed (“blabbing” p1) (ACELA 1528). Such a list also offers opportunity to talk about what clothing was fashionable, and how girls’ hobbies, school life, entertainments and reading interests have changed or remained the same(ACELA 1500) (ACELA 1498).

5. A major class project for older students could be the creation of a class magazine with a theme that celebrates your local community, imitating Lina’s school magazine. Roles as editors, photographers, journalists, columnists to write opinion pieces, fiction writers to contribute stories, and researchers to establish facts and histories could be assigned, interviews conducted and written up, the paper laid out and published using appropriate software (ACELY 1704, 1714, 1725 and 1728).

6. Have the class identify as they read examples of imagery and poetic language (...her green dress shimmered like an exotic beetle” p106). Encourage them to try writing some mood creating texts themselves (ACELT 1611 and 1800) (ACELY 1714).

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

7. This story is told in the **third person**. In third person writing, there is an invisible narrator who tells us what happens to the characters, identifiable by the use of the third person pronouns...he, she, her, his, they, them...to identify the characters. Sometimes third person stories seem to be at more of a distance from the characters than first person stories but the advantage is they can tell the story from different points of view (ACELY 1698 and 1675)(ACELA 1504).

8. Contrast this with stories told in the first person by a character in the story or by a visible narrator. Stories written like diaries or about first hand experiences are usually in the first person, that is, the person telling the story uses the pronouns “I” “me” and “we” and “us” (e.g. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank) and you generally only get to know about what that person has observed or felt about other characters and events (ACELY 1675 and 1698).

9. Children in all age groups could be asked to write a first person story and then tell the same story in third person. What differences do they notice? Ask older children to record the items, books, articles and poems and other texts they read and write over a period of two weeks and to put them in a chart labelling them first person or third person. At the end of the two weeks ask them to discuss whether and why some texts lend themselves better to third person and others to first (ACELA 1490) (ACELY 1625 and 1698).

10. Look at the structure of the book with the class. Notice that this book focuses very much on the pressures on Lina’s character in the face of plot challenges to

her talents, hopes and family life. Some of the things we learn about Lina and other significant characters are not only from what they do and say but from how they react to various pressures. For example, we discover Sarah is dominated by her father's aggression and bullying. We know why she is quiet and hurt in his presence. We begin to understand why she would have been influenced to attack Lina's migrant background.

11. Ask the children to list the things that Lina says and does in Book 3 that she knows are wrong. Why does she do them anyway? Ask the children to think of times they have done things that they knew were wrong or would get them into trouble but have done them anyway. Discuss with the children how sometimes we are conflicted in making decisions how to behave. Do you think you would have done the same as Lina? If not, what would you have done or said? (ACELY1680) (ACELT 1596 and ACELT 1609)(ACELA 1484).

12. At the end of the book did you want to find out what happened next to Lina? Notice that chapters in the book (and at the ending of the book itself) sometimes end with a new thing happening or something different to think about. In each case this is the way an author encourages us to want to read on. She is creating *plot tension* (ACELT1598).

CHARACTERISATION

13. Book Three is predominantly devoted to Lina's personal struggle to understand that she can make the world better not by reacting angrily to the wrongs she sees but by using her skill at writing to bring those wrongs to the world's attention. She is influenced in this not only by the loving adults around her, and the commonsense of her brother Bruno, but by meeting John Ian Wing, who changes the way Olympic Opening ceremonies are conducted with a simple, heartfelt letter. Ask the children what they think is the key message in Book 3 for Lina. How do they know (ACELY 1713) ?

14. The cover of the book describes Lina as "passionate". What does "passionate" mean? Do you have any friends you would describe as passionate? What does Lina say, do or think that make her fit the description of passionate? Have the children notice that when Lina loses her temper there is a "fizzing" in her head (p27) Do you think a bad temper is common with people who are passionate about being excellent? Perhaps it is a strong sense of right and wrong. Or is she just being protective of herself and her family (ACELY1792) (ACELT1609) (ACELT 1596)?

15. Although she is a talented and loving person, Lina is also a moody girl who makes many mistakes in her relationships. Give some examples of Lina being rude, bad tempered, secretive or dishonest. Can you explain why she does some things she shouldn't?)

16. In Book 3 we can see Lina beginning to try to take control of her temper. She takes notice of the way people she respects –like Sister Rosemary- deal with problems. We are able as readers to share her thoughts about how she can

behave better. She is trying to replace her need to react angrily and immediately to problems by thinking them through calmly; and using her talents and abilities to draw attention to problems; or, if she can't fix them, as in the case of Mr. Buttersworth's rudeness, to change the subject.

DISCUSSIONS FOR EACH CHAPTER

Ch. 1. Poor Bruno

As Lina dabs at Bruno's wounds children could examine how dialogue is made, using quotation marks and paragraphing. They could be asked write some dialogue themselves, perhaps adding some to the scene, to notice how dramatic it makes a story and how the characters come to life compared to indirect speech. The scene could be acted out, or translated into indirect speech to help them understand this (ACELA 1494 and ACELY 1730).

But this is an important ethical and moral discussion too. Why do people act violently towards people who offer them no harm? Bruno shows some youthful wisdom which could guide a discussion. Children could be offered the opportunity to discuss these issues themselves, and encouraged to listen respectfully to views they disagree with (ACELT 1607 and 1610).

The children could be reminded that Lina herself pushed Sarah in Book 1. Is this violence? Could it lead to violence? Is anger a normal and healthy thing, sometimes a good thing, or must we always condemn it? How do we manage it (ACELT 1609)?

Ch. 2. Family Secrets

Why does Lina's family go along with the lie about Bruno's injuries? Follow the discussion on the previous chapter with Lina's dad's words: "Battles are always fought better through considered words rather than thoughtless actions." This is the key theme to the book series and the lesson life is teaching Lina, but not yet. Notice that Lina does not understand her Dad's meaning. What does he mean?

But as Lina puzzles over the advice she realizes that by making up a story with different characters and using the metaphor of different coloured clothes to replace Italian versus Australian backgrounds she could fight with words against intolerance and violence, just like Anne Frank.

Her mother is wounded by Lina's secretiveness as she comes in to give her some magazines and her advice is similar- though in different words- to the words Lina's father gave her: "...Some day you will need to choose between your head and your heart." How is this related to Lina's father's advice? (One is a personal version of the same general principle). Is it possible to decide to give your head control over your heart?

We are reminded again of how difficult it is to share a bedroom with someone else, especially a grandmother. Many Australian children shared bedrooms in the

nineteen fifties, though usually with brothers and sisters. Ask the children if they share a bedroom. What changes would they have to make in their personal lives if they did (ACELT 1613)?

Ch. 3. The Mother Superior Approves

The girls are showing the Mother Superior their magazine so far. Lina begins to realize that she and Sarah can work together regardless of their personal difficulties because they are both committed to the same result.

The Mother Superior is very approving and offers them tickets to the Opening ceremony so they can complete their Olympics coverage.

But there is another test for Lina. The Mother Superior asks them to write about Dawn Fraser on the front cover, a project Lina herself wanted to do herself. She doesn't want to share her ideas or her ownership of the magazine and the article she planned to write with anyone! Ask the children to think about whether they have ever wanted to protect their ideas like that. What might happen now (ACELY 1680)? What would they do in Lina's shoes (Remind them that the author has created plot tension at the end of the chapter to keep them thinking and wondering and reading on (ACELT 1598)) (ACELT 1605)?

Ch. 4. Boy on the Bus

Lina and Sarah are still working well together. It is only three days to the Olympics and Lina is excited and happy- "springtime" happy. How does the author share Lina's happiness with the reader (ACELT 1611). There is a whole series of positive exchanges which build up to the statement of happiness...the girls are sharing excitement about the Olympics, Lina states her claim to the Dawn Fraser article and Sarah doesn't challenge her, the wind is warm, the paving stones are covered in blossom, there are butterflies and dandelion spores floating by....Lina loves Spring.

Then she gets talking to John on the bus. There is a happy conversation in which they share some family secrets which they both enjoy. We begin to suspect that Lina might be experiencing her first interest in a boy.

Ch. 5. Let the Games Begin!

The author gives us a lovely description of the Opening ceremony of the 1956 Olympic Games and how it felt to be there. Ask the children to see if they can find other reports or pictures of that opening ceremony on the internet to compare with this description. Why do they think the Mother Superior might have been crying (ACELT 1609)?

Ch. 6. Butterflies

Lina shares her day with her mum and they enjoy each other's company. Lina feels close to her mum.

On the bus next day, John and Lina again enjoy chatting. What do Lina's butterflies mean? John tells Lina he has an idea to change the way the Closing Ceremony might be arranged so that the athletes mingle like they are all from "one big nation". Although Lina likes the idea she doubts the authorities would listen to ideas from a mere boy. What do you think? Do adults listen to kids? Give some examples from your own life (ACELY 1676).

Ch. 7. A Girl Like Me

As Sarah and Lina work on the magazine in the library with Sister Rosemary some of their old differences come to the surface over whether Julia Goldbloom's story on Anne Frank should be included. Sister Rosemary explains Julia's likely interest in the book because she is a Polish Jew whose parents were refugees during the War. Lina is amazed that someone else with so similar a migrant background is at the school. She says "I thought I was the only non-Australian girl here."

Sister Rosemary assures Lina that she (Lina) is an Australian like any other girl who was born in Australia and gently teases Sarah that if her forebears were only Australian and never migrant she must be Aboriginal... or maybe convict. Lina learns that there are other ways to handle opinion differences than shouting and admires Sister Rosemary's calmness and cleverness. Do you think Sister Rosemary agrees with Lina or Sarah? How do you know (ACELY 1675)?

The children could ask their parents and family members about their own origins. As each child reports back the class could put together a frequency distribution of their different origins (ACELA 1524). How many are Aboriginal-the only true Australians? - Is the only way to determine Australianness by whether we are a new migrant or an old one? Ask the children to discuss what really makes someone Australian (ACELY 1709), giving examples of people who show Australian characteristics.

Ch. 8. Olympic Dreams

Lina's dad encourages her to think that with hard work she could become a journalist like the newspaper columnist Stella Davis.

As her dad explains about the conflict between Hungarians and Russians, Lina and he have another discussion about why people do cruel things...to feel powerful. Do you agree? Has Lina's Dad's opinion influenced you? Ask the children to think about if they or anyone they know has done something cruel so they would feel powerful (ACELY 1723) (ACELT 1621)?

When Sarah and Mr. Buttersworth pick Lina up to go to the Olympic Swimming competition Lina is surprised by his rudeness about migrants but conquers her anger by remembering Sister Rosemary. Instead of fighting back she changes the subject. Ask the children to list the occasions up to this point in the three books where Lina has lost her temper. Is this the first time she has not? Is Lina changing? Why (ACELT 1795)?

Ch. 9. Gold!

Lina learns that not all dads are like her own, supportive and kind. How does Mr. Buttersworth treat Sarah? What does the saying “not the sharpest pencil in the pack” mean?

After Dawn Fraser breaks a world record Lina is distressed to find that Mr. Buttersworth has organized for Sarah to interview Dawn. She realizes that Sarah will have the cover story, not her. Why isn't Sarah happy? And why does she look away when Lina tries to make it easier for her? Write the story from Sarah's point of view (ACELT 1609 and 1610).

Ch. 10. A Letter that Changes Everything

Ask the children to look at the descriptors and word choices that create the mood at the beginning of this chapter. What mood? What word choices (ACELT 1800 and 1611)?

On the bus Lina again has her mood lifted by meeting John. He shares the letter he has written and plans to send to the Olympic Committee and she promises to tell no-one.

At this point or later the children could have their attention drawn to the facts about John Ian Wing at the back of the book. As the sub plot progresses they can be shown how the author has taken a true story about a real person and interwoven the facts with Lina's fictional story, by giving John a character, a purpose in Lina's life, and a regular bus trip.

Good storytelling makes it difficult to know what really happened and what did not. Fiction always has its foundations in real life and real people or we would not be able to feel sympathy with its characters or share the excitement of the plot.

Ch. 11. A Surprise at the Back gate

When Lina catches Pierino and a blonde girl kissing she realizes he has broken Nonna's rules. But when she shares her discovery with Bruno she discovers that the girl is the Carlton gang leader's sister. Bruno was beaten up as a warning to Pierino. Bruno explains how impossible it is to find a just solution and tells her if she doesn't mind her own business she could also be beaten or worse. At the end of this chapter we don't know what will happen next. Can you predict it (ACELT 1605 and ACELY 1680)?

Ch. 12. An Australian Girl

Lina angrily decides to write about the injustices her family face as migrants in Australia. She is going to test if the pen is really mightier than the sword.

What does that mean? What do you think? Should we stand up and fight physically sometimes? Ask the children who take a pacifist stance to argue the

case for the warriors and vice versa using evidence from history and from other texts if possible (ACELY 1719)(ACELA 1792).

On the Monday she tells Sarah and Sister Rosemary- to their surprise - she has another story and that Sarah can do the Dawn Fraser cover story.

Ch. 13. A New Way of Looking

The last chapter combines great family happiness with a new betrayal for Lina. In celebration of Lina's achievement on the school magazine the whole family sets out to watch the closing ceremony on the television sets in Myers windows. Lina has a beautiful dress. They join the crowds of people also sharing the occasion in the city and have a wonderful picnic, enjoying beautiful Italian food and the excitement. What do we learn about Italian culture from this scene (ACELT 1608)? There is a great surprise – the Olympic Committee has adopted John's idea for a closing ceremony and John is famous.

Lina daydreams about telling Sarah about John as she prepares for school the next day and thinks about their friendship. There is a rude shock for her at school though. She overhears Sarah telling Mary she isn't friends with Lina, that she can't be friends with a "wog". Lina flees. She has no friends. She sits alone on the bench under the jacaranda, determined not to cry and not to forgive. How does this make you, the reader, feel? Why (ACELT 1605)?

Thank goodness there is a book 4 so we can find out what happens next! There are so many unanswered questions. This is called creating "plot tension" (ACELT 1598 and 1605).

WRITING STYLE

Written in the third person and providing excellent opportunities for studying dialogue, *Lina's at the Games* encourages empathetic identification and critical analysis. There are moral and ethical dilemmas to study, including those relating to anger and violence, and the dilemma of growing up in a migrant family whose cultural mores are strongly held and quite different from those in the outside world that Lina is facing.

The story fictionalizes from a well-researched base the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, bringing them to life and giving new life to the story of John Ian Wing who proposed a new symbolism for Olympics Closing Ceremonies, which has been practiced ever since.

OVERALL MESSAGE

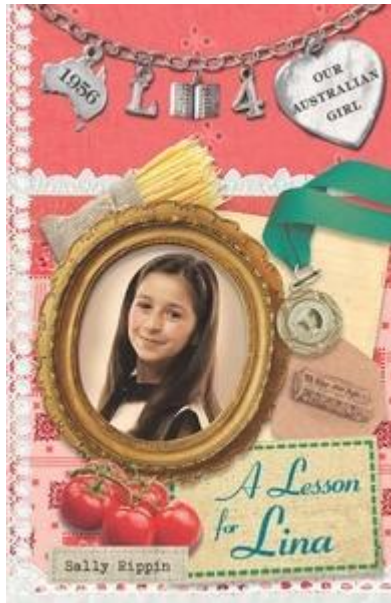
Battles are always fought better through considered words rather than thoughtless actions (pp8-9). Words used well are very powerful in showing injustice, reducing anger and persuading people to other ways of thinking.

FURTHER READING

- *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Anne Frank
- Text Publishing 2012 *They're a Weird Mob* by Nino Culotta(aka John O'Grady).

A comic novel about an Italian journalist in Australia in the nineteen fifties trying to make sense of the Australian idiom.

- There was also 1966 film production of *They're a Weird Mob*. Clips can be watched on *australianscreen*, a website operated by the National Film and Sound Archive.



A LESSON FOR LINA BOOK 4

It's 1956 and the Melbourne Olympics is over, but for Lina the excitement is just beginning. She has a new best friend, the school magazine is a huge hit, and her parents have a surprise that will change everything. When Lina has the chance to meet her idol, the famous writer Stella Davis, it seems as if all her dreams have come true – or have they?

Follow Lina on her adventure in the final of four exciting stories about a passionate girl finding a place to belong.

CONTEXT

1. Have the children read “what life was like in Lina’s Time” at the back of the book. Women were beginning to make their mark in the world of journalism, though there was still a long way to go. Many employment opportunities were closed to girls who often were compelled to resign from their careers when they married, and women were paid substantially less than men in the same occupations. Women were generally expected to stay at home and raise their children, but things were changing and many women and girls were starting to defy the expectations of their parents and society generally.

LANGUAGE

2. Keep a class glossary of words and phrases that people use in the book series that are unfamiliar (e.g. gusto, matriarch, sanctuary, intestines, ceramic, musty), including technical terms. Children can contribute to the list as the books are read. Each group of words offers an opportunity to discuss the way everyday language is used (ACELA 1528). The way the author writes Enzo’s baby contributions to dialogue in Book 4 is an example of skilful listening translated into realistic dialogue. Encourage children to listen for normal variants in the way language is used.

3. A glossary also offers opportunity to talk about what clothing was fashionable, and how girls' hobbies, school life, entertainments and reading interests have changed or remained the same(ACELA 1500) (ACELA 1498(ACELY 1676)(ACELT 1603)

4. Have the class identify, as they read, examples of imagery and poetic (the sun slanted –p29, the Mother Superior” plonked” a glass down”-p14, “rose gardens blushing”- p69) language. Ask them to consider the effects of similes (the onomatopoeic “like a great gangling giraffe”-p41; and “washed over Lina like a salty wave”, night... “in its velvet cloak -p 61”), including humorous effects. Encourage them to try writing some mood creating texts themselves (ACELT 1599, 1600, 1611 1615 and 1800) (ACELY 1714).

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

5. This story is told in the **third person**. In third person writing, there is an invisible narrator who tells us what happens to the characters, identifiable by the use of the third person pronouns...he, she, her, his, they, them...to identify the characters. Sometimes third person stories seem to be at more of a distance from the characters than first person stories but the advantage is they can tell the story from different points of view (ACELY 1698 and 1675)(ACELA 1504).

6. Contrast this with stories told in the first person by a character in the story or by a visible narrator. Stories written like diaries or about first hand experiences are usually in the first person, that is, the person telling the story uses the pronouns “I” “me” and “we” and “us” (e.g. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank) and you generally only get to know about what that person has observed or felt about characters and events. In Book 4 the postscript is written in Diary form and it gives Lina her own voice at the end, nicely tying her explanations and review of the year in to the Series' Anne Frank references (ACELY 1675 and 1698)(ACELT 1610).

7. Children in all age groups could be asked to write a first person story and then tell the same story in third person(ACELT 1794). What differences do they notice? Ask older children to record the items, books, articles and poems and other texts they read and write over a period of two weeks and to put them in a chart labelling them first person or third person. At the end of the two weeks ask them to discuss whether and why some texts lend themselves better to third person and others to first (ACELA 1490 and 1494) (ACELY 1625 and 1698).

8. Look at the structure of the book with the class. Notice that this book concentrates on Lina's final test- her ability to stick with her principles under fire from a powerful and angry adult. Apart from the Stella Davis story the plot ends are being tidied up and Lina's relationships are not under threat but being clarified and developed.

9. Was the end of the book satisfying? Why or why not (ACELT 1603)? Did you feel that all would be well from now on for Lina? List the changes she has made since the beginning of Book 1 (ACELY 1692).

CHARACTERISATION

10. By the end of this Book, Lina has conquered many of her demons. She has retained her capacity for passion and excellence but she has greater confidence about her capacity to choose well and her place in this country. She has learned to hold her tongue when she needs to and to use her talents for good. She no longer needs to be anyone else other than herself with her best friend Julia and she recognises that although she had good times with both Mary and Sarah, they both in different ways made her hide things she loved, like her family, and in Mary's case her interest in serious matters outside of clothing and parties, television and celebrities.

11. She has new confidence in her in her ability and future as a writer. She has learned that sometimes the best action when she is hurt or angry is to stay silent or to wait and fight the big battles with her ability to write. She has learned that integrity in her behavior is more important than her own needs. The adventure of the teen years beckons.

12. Ask the children to notice the people who have influenced Lina as set out in her diary entry at the end of the book. If they made a similar list for themselves, about the people who influence them, what would it look like? Ask them to describe the people and what it is about them that they respect or admire. Have them notice that sometimes people who hurt us can teach us lessons too.

DISCUSSIONS FOR EACH CHAPTER

Ch. 1. A New Day, a New Friend

Sad after she realizes she can no longer expect friendship from Sarah or Mary, Lina goes to the Library. After being comforted by Sister Rosemary, Lina goes to class and chooses a new friend, Julia Goldbloom.

What does the story show you about friendship?

The library with Sister Rosemary is a place where Lina can feel safe from all the pressures. From your experience is this something that most children need, a place and/or a person where they can feel safe and be themselves? What words and descriptions does the story use to show us what a safe place is like (ACELA 1508)?

Ch. 2. The Magazine Arrives

The magazine is a huge success and Lina is congratulated by the Mother Superior herself. She has never been more proud.

When have you felt very proud of yourself (ACELT 1596) ?

Ch. 3. Lina Makes a Choice

Lina's resolve to be friends with Julia is tested. In the excitement and congratulations from everyone both Mary and Sarah offer to be her friend again. Lina is torn (ACELT 1596). The author puts us inside Lina's head as she thinks her problem through, an opportunity we do not get anywhere in life - only in fiction, film and biography. Usually when we explain our decisions to others we give them an edited version! What was the reason for her final decision and how is she rewarded (ACELY 1692)?

Some children might like to try keeping a private diary where they write down both sides of decisions they need to make as well as recording their daily experiences and feelings.

Ch. 4. A Family Story

Lina shows the magazine to her family and translates her story about their family for them. Then she has a conversation with her Dad about next steps. How does the author set the scene for this (pp28-29) (ACELT 1599 and1600)?

Ask the children to look for other scene setting descriptions throughout the Lina books which anticipate and reflect how the characters are feeling. Ask them to try some scene setting which reflects the emotions of the characters -and deepens the reader's experience- in a story of their own (ACELT 1601)(ACELT 1794 and 1611).

Ch. 5. The Mysterious Chinese Boy

Lina catches up with John and discovers that he wants his involvement in the changing of the Closing Ceremony kept a secret. Notice how all the detail of the stout ladies and the chickens on the bus bring the scene to life.

What does it mean when John says, "It's not important to know who it was that made a difference, only that a difference was made" (ACELT 1596)?

Discuss the temptation that Lina pushes into her mind for later. What is wrong with what she is thinking? Why is it tempting (ACELT 1596)?

Meanwhile Lina's confidence is growing as her friendship with Julia grows, because she isn't pretending to be someone she isn't (as with Mary) or having to minimize her family background (as with Sarah). She can be herself. The next step is easy. She can invite Julia to her home - and her invitation is gladly accepted.

Ch. 6. A Friend to Visit

Describe the start of Julia's visit from the viewpoint of one of the other characters -Nonna, Lina's mum, Julia's Dad, Bessie the goat, or Julia. Share your

story with others who have chosen different points of view to write about (ACELY 1675).

Ch. 7. Sharing Secrets

As Lina and Julia share secrets their friendship and trust in each other increases. We discover that despite John's wish for Lina not to tell his story she is thinking of writing it and sending it to *The Age's* Stella Davis; and Julia confides a crush on Pierino.

Notice how the dialogue (pp49-53) tells the story of how well they are getting on together and how they are feeling without the author telling us directly (ACELT 1604). The children could write some dialogue between two friends, punctuating it correctly and then convert it into indirect speech (ACELA 1492 and 1494). What is the difference (ACELT 1791)?

Ch. 8. Some Happy News

Lina's Mum and Dad have bought a house for the family in Brunswick. Zio has good news too. He has a job fruit picking in Mildura, and his bride will join him in the New Year. The family celebrates in true Italian style. How does this 1950s Australian family celebrate? How does the author use language and description to help you share the celebration (ACELT 1599 and 1608)? Do you notice differences in the ways the Gattuso family and your family celebrate a joyous event (ACELT 1596)?

Ch. 9. A True Writer

Lina writes her story about John and shows it to Sister Rosemary who tells her she is a true writer and invites her to edit the school magazine next year, with Julia if she wishes.

It seems there are other kinds of friends than school friends. Describe the ways in which sister Rosemary, an elderly nun, is a good friend to Lina. Describe any special friendships you might have had with surprising people. What made the friendship special (ACELT 1596)?

Ch. 10. A Letter from *The Age*

Lina sends her story to Stella Davis at *The Age*. She receives a reply at the end of the week. Stella Davis has invited her to come to meet her the very next day. Lina basks in the glow of her father's pride and congratulations. What do you think will happen when she meets Miss Davis? Write down your predictions (ACELY 1680) and tell us why (ACELY 1692).

Ch. 11. Stella Davis

Discuss your predictions with your class (ACELY 1792). How accurate were your predictions? Lina has a great shock. And so do we.

The story builds up the excitement and anticipation as Lina and her Dad prepare and travel to the city. What descriptions and details does it give us to do that (ACELT 1599)? Is building up anticipation before a letdown a way writers help us to feel the disappointment almost as much as the protagonist?

Ask the children to research the difference between a protagonist and a hero.

What happens when Lina refuses to give Stella Davis John's name? Note that we know from the author Lina's thoughts on the way to making her decision not to give the name, even under pressure and threats. Then Lina's passionate nature comes to the fore. What emotions does she experience as Stella's intentions become clear (ACELT 1599)? And then Lina decides to do something very controversial. To keep her faith with John, she pretends her story is all a lie. Would you have thought of that, and if you had, would you have done it? Why (ACELT 1596)?

Should Stella Davis have behaved like this? Why do you think she did (ACELT 1609)?

An angry raging adult is very difficult for most twelve year olds not to buckle under. But Lina, even though she is frightened and is damaging her own future, - her most precious dream- as a writer, sticks to her guns and her principles. Most people would call that courage or heroism. But can you be doing the right thing even when you are telling a lie? What does her dad mean when he tells her she has integrity (ACELT 1596) (ACELY 1692)?

Ch. 12. Christmas Drinks

The Gattusos visit the Goldblooms for Christmas drinks. There are great differences between the lifestyles of the two families and Julia's step mother is dressed in ways that appear shocking to Lina's family..."like some kind of crazy peacock who had swallowed too many jelly beans". Find other words and phrases that describe the atmosphere of the visit (ACELT 1599).

Yet the author wants you to know that they enjoy each other's company and overcome the differences. What descriptions and words does she use to tell you this (ACELY 1678)?

Later Lina shares the story of the visit to Stella Davis' office with Julia and is comforted by her support, even to the point where she lets John's name slip. She realizes that John could have got into trouble from her story even without a name and knows she won't write that kind of story again.

Ch. 13. The New House

The Gattuso children see over the new house. Lina discovers she will have a room of her own. There is great happiness and she and Bruno have one of their teasing conversations as they think about the future in the new house. Just the same, Lina feels a hint of sadness as she thinks about leaving the old home where

all her memories are. Notice how the author shares some of those memories with us to help us understand Lina's emotion (ACELY 1675). The book closes hopefully, with Lina looking forward to all the new adventures and all the new stories she will write.

Postscript: A Secret Diary

But wait! There is a postscript. Lina got a diary for Christmas and we read the answers to all the questions we still have about Lina's adventures. Most importantly we read Lina's words on the lessons she learned during the year we have been reading about.

Why do you think the author of *A Lesson for Lina* finishes the story with this diary entry (first person, so direct -or more personal- access for the reader to the protagonist's voice, links to the Anne Frank references)(ACELY 1675(ACELT 1610)).

WRITING STYLE

Written in the third person (until the diary postscript) and providing excellent opportunities for studying dialogue, *A Lesson for Lina* encourages empathetic identification and critical analysis. There are moral and ethical dilemmas to study, including those relating to adult bullying and the ethical use of journalists' sources.

OVERALL MESSAGE

Integrity is more important than fame or popularity or success and very difficult to achieve. It needs courage and purpose. If we have a loving family and friends we trust they can give us the confidence to behave well under pressure.

FURTHER READING

- *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Anne Frank
- Text Publishing 2012 *They're a Weird Mob* by Nino Culotta(aka John O'Grady).

A comic novel about an Italian journalist in Australia in the nineteen fifties trying to make sense of the Australian idiom.

- There was also 1966 film production of *They're a Weird Mob*. Clips can be watched on *australianscreen*, a website operated by the National Film and Sound Archive.

