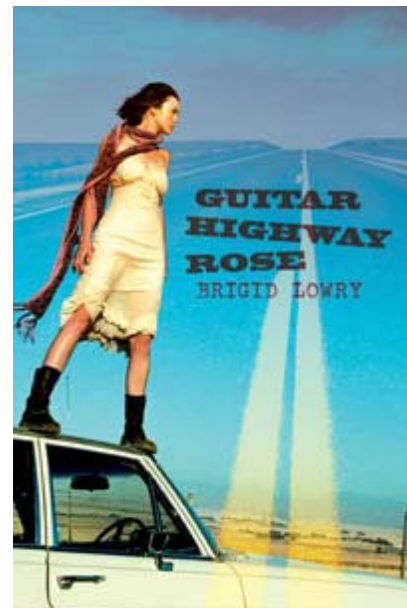


**Teachers Notes**  
**by Dr Wendy Michaels**  
**Guitar Highway Rose**  
**Brigid Lowry**  
**ISBN 9781741145250**  
**Recommended for ages 15-18**

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Introduction .....	2
Self-Portrait.....	2
Researching location and setting .....	3
Reading the novel .....	3
Narrative Structure.....	3
Issues explored in the novel .....	3
Family .....	3
Living with teenagers .....	4
Missing persons.....	4
Fitting in – adults.....	5
Fitting in – teenagers.....	5
Narrative techniques.....	5
Narrative perspective .....	5
Multiple narrators .....	5
Stream of consciousness .....	6
Allusions, Appropriations and Parody.....	6
Poetry.....	7
Wrapping up the study of the novel.....	7
Oral Task.....	7
Writing activities.....	7



## INTRODUCTION

Rosie is restless. She wants a nose-ring, and more ... she wants to do something else. Asher is the new boy in her class; He has dreadlocks, a guitar and a bad case of the gypsy blues. And he just wants to get away.

Sometimes we know we shouldn't and that's exactly why we do.

Part love story, part road story, Brigid Lowry's *Guitar Highway Rose* free-wheels through the darker and lighter sides of life with wit, charm and compassion.

Lowry's story focuses on the two main characters - Rosie and Asher - who run away together causing considerable alarm to their respective parents and resulting in their being listed by the police as "missing persons". Their return is ironically precipitated by their own involvement in the search for another "missing person" - the young girl Angel who is discovered in their tent.

Lowry deftly manages the course of this narrative employing the postmodern technique of multiple narration that enables the reader to see the events and characters from different perspectives. This is an ideal book to engage adolescent students since it addresses issues of immediate concern in a story that challenges their reading positions.

## SELF-PORTRAIT

Introduce students to the notion of a self-portrait. You might like to show some self-portraits by visual artists or photographers as well as some portraits by writers.

Encourage them to consider what a self-portrait reveals about the person from the point of view of the audience. Suggest that they consider both what a self-portrait reveals and what it might seek to conceal. They might consider what affect the audience might have on how a self-portrait is constructed.

Ask students to examine the brief self-portrait of the writer that is included in the front of the book. Brigid Lowry was born in New Zealand and lives in Perth. In previous incarnations she has been a flower child, a waitress and a schoolteacher. She loves to cook, swim and look in her letterbox, and has been known to waste whole afternoons daydreaming in the library. Her star sign is Aries, and she has a tattoo of an island, a palm tree and a planet on her left shoulder.

Ask them what this reveals about the kind of person the writer Brigid Lowry is projecting herself as. Ask them to consider what is not revealed in this self-portrait. What might Brigid Lowry include in a self-portrait if she were approaching Allen and Unwin to publish her book or the Australia Council to give her a grant for researching and writing a book?

Examine Rosie's "self" portraits (p11, 12, 12-13, 15-16). Discuss the different self-portraits that Rosie constructs. Have students discuss the notion of self or identity in relation to these self-portraits. What is the effect on the reader of the fictional portrait of "Old Time Rose"?

Have students write a series of self portraits for different audiences - eg teacher, a prospective employer, a friend, a public relations media consultant, etc. Students might also like to complete a fictional self-portrait of the person they might like to be.

Allow time for the sharing of these portraits and encourage discussion of the ways in which they have been shaped for the specific audience.

## **RESEARCHING LOCATION AND SETTING**

The novel is set in Western Australia. There are references to locations around Perth and Fremantle as well as to other towns such as Geraldton and Kalbarri up north and Eucla towards the east. Moreover, Byron Bay figures prominently as the place that Asher has come from. Have students research these places locating them on a map and finding visual images that illustrate geographical features and aspects of lifestyle. Ask them to imagine they were planning a trip to one of these places and work out what they would want to do when they arrived. Allow time for each group to present their imagined trip to the rest of the class.

## **READING THE NOVEL**

Encourage students to read the story outside of class - or allocate some class time for the reading of this novel. To assist the reading, you might like to use a variation of the instant book technique. Allocate certain pages to pairs of students or small groups and ask them to compile a précis of the story that will fit into 60 seconds telling time. Each group should identify the characters involved in their section and the main events that these characters are involved in. They should also note the various narrators for their section.

Then arrange the groups so that the telling of the story can be completed in a single lesson. From this technique everyone has the advantage of knowing the story line and more detailed examination of the text can then be made without having to go through the text page by page.

## **NARRATIVE STRUCTURE**

This novel is tightly structured despite its lack of chapters and single narrative perspective. While it is Asher and Rosie's story, it engages the perspectives of other characters in their dilemma. The narrative problem of the missing persons is well prepared for in Asher's first attempt to run away and brought to a resolution through Angel's disappearance.

Have the students work together in a small group. They are to imagine that they have purchased the rights to make a film version of the story. Their task is to map out the film's scenario in the form of a "treatment" or "brief" from which the scriptwriters and storyboarders will work. Allow time for the sharing of the various "treatments" and discussion of the elements that have been included or excluded from the novel.

## **ISSUES EXPLORED IN THE NOVEL**

### **Family**

Have students discuss in groups what family means to them. How do they see their parents? Do they really know what their parents think? What are the important values in their parents' lives? What are their parents' expectations of them?

Have students examine sections of the novel that paint a picture of family life in the different households - eg Rosie/Saturday Night p 14-15, Asher/Monday Morning p 16-17, Lily walking on the beach p 21-2, Meet Robert p 22-23, Meet Malvina p 32-34, the calm before the storm p 37-38, etc. Have students discuss the families that are represented here. Compare these representations with Angel's family (pp136-139). What ideas and issues about families are being explored in this novel?

## **Living with Teenagers**

Lowry's novel is not simply concerned with adolescence but rather with exploring the issues of adolescence from a variety of viewpoints. One way in which she does this is to include excerpts from a book named *Living with Teenagers*. These excerpts provide the sense of an "objective" perspective on the problem as they represent the voice of an authority figure commenting upon the problems faced by the parents in dealing with teenagers.

Have students examine the excerpt from *Living with Teenagers* on page 22. Discuss the advice that is being given here to the parents in relation to Asher and Rosie. Do their parents follow this advice? Have students skim through the novel to locate other sections appropriated from *Living with Teenagers*. Encourage them to discuss the issues that are raised in each of these excerpts. How do these issues relate to the actions of the teenage characters in the novel? How do these issues relate to the ways in which the parents are handling their teenage children? How do these issues relate to their own lives?

Have students use these excerpts as a model to write their own sections of *Living with Teenagers*. Have them consider the advice they would want to give parents to help them deal with teenagers in their lives.

## **Missing Persons**

Central to the story is the notion of missing persons. Guide the discussion about how young people might come to be reported missing - eg kidnap, accident, runaways. Have students consider what would make a person run away from the security of home.

Ask students to examine the first occasion on which Asher runs away - eg p.44 ff. Encourage discussion of why Asher was not able to "hack" it in the new school in Western Australia. Have them identify what aspects of Byron Bay he was missing and how the new environment made him feel. Compare this situation with the second instance when Asher runs away with Rosie. Have students discuss the incident that precipitated this action (p.87-90). We later discover that Wendy's accusation is based on a false premise since the wallet is found by her husband in her car. How do the students judge Asher's decision to take off again under these circumstances? Have them examine pages 91-93 carefully. How does the narrator invite them to judge Asher and Rosie at this point?

Discuss with students the process that is undertaken when a person is reported missing to the police. Ask them how they might react if someone close to them went missing. Have students examine the missing person's reports - eg p.47. How does this portrait relate to the way in which Asher might describe himself? Have students compare this report with those of Asher and Rosie (p.155) and Angel (p.177). Discuss the role that the police play in the recovery of the missing persons. Note Sergeant Parry's comment to Constable Bannister - "We don't pay you to think" (p.163) and Parry's persistence in the matter.

Have students examine the responses of the various parents to the missing children in the story - Asher, Asher and Rosie, and Angel. How do they account for these responses? Encourage students to also consider Asher and Rosie's awareness of the parents' responses - eg p. 111. Point out to them the ways in which Lowry depicts the parents getting on with their lives while they are unaware that their children have run away and how she contrasts this with their responses once they are made aware of the children's departures (p.151).

Have students examine the phone call between Lily and Pippa's mother, Vera (p.117-118) and Vera's interrogation of Pippa (p.118). Encourage them to discuss the lie that Pippa tells her mother. How do they judge this action in the circumstances? Vera says she is going to ring Lily back. Have students in pairs write the transcript of that phone call. Allow time for students to "perform" the call for the class and to discuss the issues raised.

## **Fitting in - Adults**

A central concern of this novel is belonging or fitting in. This issue is focused not only on the teenagers but also on the adults. Each of the key adults is having trouble fitting into their life in different ways. Allocate one of the key adult characters to small groups of students. Have the students locate parts of the novel where this problem of fitting in is highlighted. Allow time for students to share their ideas and to discuss the issues that they raise.

## **Fitting In - Teenagers**

Have students explore the issues that Asher and Rosie in particular encounter in terms of fitting in to their family and school. At the school, for instance, there is a dress code that Asher consistently breaks. Encourage students to discuss how dress and behaviour are used as indicators of conformity. Rosie's problems with fitting in to her family are highlighted in the narrator's comment - "no one wants to listen to how it really is to be fifteen and surrounded by the word no" (p.75). Compare this with the issues raised by the adults attempts to fit in.

Ask students to discuss aspects of fitting in from their own personal experience or their experiences of other texts - books, TV soapies and films. What makes fitting in difficult? What helps you to fit in? Have each student write a story that demonstrates both adults and teenagers trying to find their place.

## **NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES**

Lowry's use of various postmodern narrative techniques gives the reader a complex understanding of the issues that she is exploring in this novel.

### **Narrative Perspectives**

Despite the use of multiple narrators the writer is able to position the reader in relation to the various viewpoints that she is presenting. She does this through narrative intrusion particularly in the headings given to particular sections of the novel - eg "the shit hits the fan", "feeling guilty" and "castles in the air".

Allocate sections of the novel to particular groups of students. Have them examine the section headings to determine how these position the reader. They should take note of the icons that are also used to position the reader's response. Allow time for feedback from each group and for discussion.

Lowry also allows the narrator to intrude into the novel and offer commentary that generalizes the characters' experiences. Have students examine the narrative intrusion on page 93 - "Some ideas are not born of logic and good sense. They are made of clouds and cobwebs..." How does this commentary affect the way in which we view Rosie's decision to join Asher in his plan to run away? Have students examine the text for other moments where the narrative intrusion positions the reader in relation to the characters and their decisions.

### **Multiple Narrators**

A key feature of postmodernism is the challenge of absolutes and the emphasis on relativity. Postmodernism suggests that there are many ways in which to view people, situations and events and that the privileging of one viewpoint is always at the expense of the valuing of others.

Lowry's use of multiple narrators allows the reader to see the events from a variety of perspectives. Have students work in groups. Allocate each group one of the narrative perspectives - eg Asher, Rosie, Malvina, Lily, Pippa, Wendy etc, and have them explore the ways in which Lowry allows us to get to know this character and his or her feelings on the

events. Have each group report back on their examination. Encourage discussion of why Lowry might have chosen to tell the story using these multiple narrators. Have students speculate what would be lost by telling this story from a third person omniscient narrator's viewpoint. Students could take one section of the novel and rewrite it from the point of view of a third person narrator and compare this with the way that Lowry has told the story.

### **Stream of Consciousness**

Lowry allows the reader to get inside some of the characters' heads. She uses both stream of consciousness and interior monologue to achieve this effect. For instance, on page 99 she uses these techniques so that we can see how Rosie (interior monologue) and Asher (stream of consciousness) are responding to the situation on the bus after they have changed their hair colour and style. Have students examine this moment and compare and contrast the ways in which Lowry represents Rosie and Asher's thinking. They might note, for instance, the ways in which Asher's thoughts tend to run more freely than Rosie's thoughts.

Have students examine other moments in the text where the writer uses interior monologue and stream of consciousness to give the reader a character's inner thoughts. Encourage discussion of how this technique affects the ways in which the reader judges these characters.

## **ALLUSIONS APPROPRIATIONS AND PARODY**

TA common feature of postmodern novels is the use of allusion. Allusion involves explicit reference to people, places or texts. Some of the allusions that Lowry uses include: Leunig p.22, Horoscopes p 24, Jim Morrison p 32, Tennyson's poem "The Lotus Eaters" p.35, Kurt Cobain p.42, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* p.58, Brett Whitely p.64. Have students research these references and then examine the ways in which Lowry refers to them in her novel. How do these references affect the meaning of the text? Have students search through the text for other explicit references or allusions and their affects on the meaning of Lowry's book.

### **Appropriations**

Apart from such explicit references there are also appropriations from other texts. For instance, she uses direct address to the reader in the form of "Dear Reader" - a phrase used by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*. Have students examine Brontë's use of this device and compare the ways in which Lowry uses it (eg p.36, p.85).

Similarly, Lowry appropriates the language of the St James version of the Christian Bible in the section where Asher is called into the Headmaster's office (pp.42-43). Have students examine the language of this section. Point out to the students that this usage has the effect of parodying the school rules and the pressure to conform to them, through such comments as "the scruffy and disobedient shall not inherit the classroom".

Have students examine the text for evidence of other appropriations and discuss their effects on the meaning.

### **Parody**

In the novel Lowry through the character of Mr Epamomitis, the English teacher, defines parody as "a mocking imitation of the style of a literary work, ridiculing the stylistic habits of an author or school by exaggerated mimicry" p. 66. Lowry employs parody in various moments to highlight the issues that she is exploring - eg Angel's interrogation of Rosie and Asher (p.146-148). Have students examine this interrogation and discuss how this highlights some of the issues Lowry is exploring in this novel. Encourage students to locate other instances of parody and discuss their effects.

Parody involves playing with words and their meanings in a poetic way. Lowry introduces this playfulness early in the novel, for instance, through the "favourite quips of the rich and famous" (p.18). Have students examine this section and discuss the ways in which words and their meanings are being twisted.

## POETRY

Not only does Lowry use the notion of poetry as having relevance for students in the study of English, she also plays with words in a poetic way throughout the novel. Rosie's imaginative self portrait uses extended metaphors of flowers and planting, the imagined band names, and the bumper stickers all highlight poetic aspects of language used by Lowry. Other poetic aspects are evident in descriptions such as "Asher gathers wood, dry blond pieces of sea debris" (p.152). Have students explore the text for other examples of poetic use of language. Allow time for sharing the examples that they find and for discussion of the effect on meaning.

Have students examine the sections concerned with the poetry lesson (p.64-67). Discuss the parodies of poems that are included there. Have students select a poem or song lyric and write a parody of it. Allow time for sharing with the rest of the class.

## WRAPPING UP THE STUDY OF THE NOVEL

### Oral Task

Use one of the following ideas as the basis of a speech based either on the characters and event of the novel, or on students' personal experiences. Sometime you think you know where you are headed. Funny how things turn out. A simple kind of happiness, plain and true. Hell of an adjustment, new place, new school, separation of his parents. Thank goodness for Friday nights. Time is a foreign land. Magic happens.

### Writing Activities

The English teacher asserts that "A good way to learn about a writing style is by imitating it" (p.65). Have students select sections from the book and imitate the writing style that Lowry uses. Have students write their own personal stories or fictionalized stories based on the ideas in the novel that they have explored and responded to. Representing activities Ask students to imagine that they have been contracted to develop a storyboard for a video version of this story. Using the "treatment" developed at the beginning of the unit of work and the novel itself, have small groups work to complete a detailed storyboard for a section of the story. Allow time for presentation and discussion of the storyboard. A reflective essay The novel, in the final analysis, highlights the need for open communication. Letters, notes, postcards, telephone messages, the Internet and personal conversations run throughout the novel. Have students examine the notes, letters, postcards etc that Lowry uses to express her ideas about communication. Use one of the following statements as the basis of a piece of writing in response to the novel. "A conversation is very like a game of ping-pong, words flying back and forth." "I'm hungry for a juicy life. I lean out my window at night and I can taste it out there, just waiting for me." An essay of argument Lowry's achievement in this novel is to present both adults and teenagers in a positive and sympathetic light - despite their foibles and faults. How does she do this?



83 Alexander Street  
Crows Nest, Sydney  
NSW 2065  
Australia

PO Box 8500  
St Leonards  
NSW 1590  
Australia

ph: (61 2) 8425 0100  
fax: (61 2) 9966 0065

[info@allenandunwin.com](mailto:info@allenandunwin.com)  
[www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com)

Allen & Unwin PTY LTD  
ABN 79 003 994 278