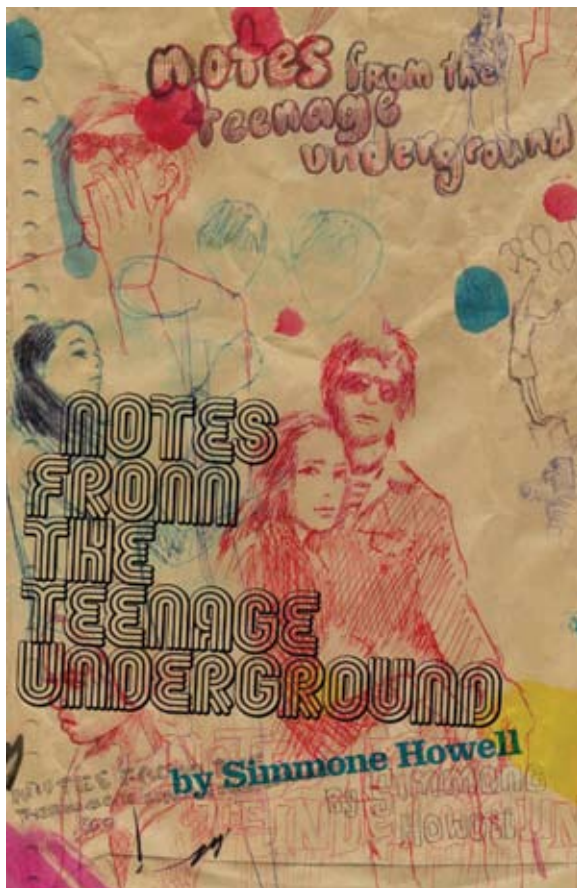


# Notes from the Teenage Underground

## Simmone Howell

### Teachers' Notes



These teachers' notes have been designed around the major themes of *Notes from the Teenage Underground*.

The suggested activities are a guideline only. Teachers should be encouraged to extend, abridge, adapt and modify the tasks depending on their students' needs and interests, the course of study and the year level of the class.

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PAN



## TEENAGE DISCOURSE/REPRESENTATION

1. Ask students to compile a list of 'slang' words that Gem, Lo and Mira use throughout the novel. Perhaps groups could be allocated chapters. Students should write a definition. (eg: 'Underground', 'Ug', 'Happening', 'barcode')
2. Brainstorm words which describe the following 'groups' and how they are represented in the novel: teenage girls, teenage boys, mothers, fathers, teachers.
  - Ask students to extend this by compiling a list of quotes from the novel typical of each of these groups.
  - Deconstruct these quotes as a class by identifying the language within them which contain the embedded cultural values, attitudes and beliefs of these represented groups. (A concept borrowed from the QLD English Syllabus.)

## SYMBOLISM – ART and FILM

Gem researches Andy Warhol to inspire their Underground project and her film.

1. Ask students to research Andy Warhol.
2. During reading, ask students to formulate a list of all Andy Warhol references.
3. As a class, discuss the possible symbolism of the artist and the artwork Gem mentions and how this might relate to Gem's discovery of 'self'.
4. Ask students to make a list of the films mentioned in the novel. Beside each title, students should write a brief plot of the story as explained by Gem.
  - Extend this work by discussing the possible symbolism of the plot of each film.
  - Decide if there are parallels between the plot of the film and the 'plot' of Gem's life at each point in the novel.



## DISCOVERY OF SELF

1. Using an open-ended mind map, brainstorm words that might describe Gem at the beginning of the novel.
  - Extend these thoughts by identifying the actions and quotes which support those original observations.
  - Complete the activity a second time focusing on Gem at the end of the novel.
  
2. Ask students to write an analytical essay on the following (these could also be developed into assessment items):
  - ‘Inez Wisdom says a person changes radically every seven years . . . I can feel myself changing at the moment.’ (Page 265.)  
How has Gem changed by the end of the novel? Discuss.
  
  - ‘He was the world I could see, but couldn’t access. But that was okay.’ (Page 276.)  
What does this quote say about how Gem has changed by the end of the novel? Discuss.
  
  - Gem must meet her father in order to accept herself.  
Evaluate this statement and write an analytical response using evidence from the novel to support your opinions.
  
3. In pairs, ask students to identify the major events and characters in the novel that played a role in Gem coming to terms with who she is.

## PEER PRESSURE

‘. . . before you could say peer group pressure I was weighing up my options.’  
(Page 185.)

1. Individually, students should make a list of the times in the novel in which Gem gives in to peer group pressure. What consequences does she face?
  
2. Ask students to write about a personal narrative of a time when being ‘cool’ came at a cost. It could be factual or imaginative.

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 The logo for PAN (Pan Macmillan Australia) features a stylized white wave or 'M' shape above the letters 'PAN' in a bold, sans-serif font.


## FEMINISM

1. Research Germaine Greer. Who was she? How does she relate to feminism?
2. Facilitate a class debate: That feminism has had its day.
  - Extend the debate above into an individual piece of writing on this topic.
  - Ask students to think about a time in which they felt discriminated against because of their sex. Construct a personal recount of this experience.
3. 'And I felt like they were laughing at Bev too, and all the great women I'd wanted to portray.' (Page 172.) Discuss.
4. Individually, make a list of the women in Gem's life that influence her. What role does Sharon Minski play in Gem's life and what does Gem come to realise about her by the end of the novel?
5. On page 98, Gem says that by wearing breast enhancers she 'felt ashamed'. In pairs, ask students to discuss what she means by this statement?

## GAPS AND SILENCES

1. At the end of the novel, Lo has met with the school counsellor. Ask students to script this scene embedding a possible reason as to why Lo cuts herself.
2. Ask students to write as Gem's mother Bev after their confrontation in the car on page 93.
3. Dodgy never gets a chance to explain himself and his actions to Gem. He is silenced by the author. Students should write a letter to Gem as Dodgy explaining himself and his actions. Students would need to decide if he is truly sorry for his actions and whether he would want to be forgiven.

