

self/less



AVIVA
WE ARE ALL OUTSIDERS

TEACHER'S NOTES



INTRODUCTION

Teddy is a 17-year-old graduate in Metropolis City. The book opens with Teddy attending her Job Placement Ceremony, the first of three Occasions, to find out what her life will be like as an adult and a ‘worker, wife and womb keeper’.

Teddy has always had a secret. She loves to draw, which is one of the many illegal things in the Metropolis – as is anything to do with creativity and self-expression. As she has grown up, Teddy has begun to question the City and its mandates.

Teddy’s father is a councillor at the Metropolis City Council. He is absent in the novel but still impacts Teddy’s world view.

On the evening of her Job Placement, her mother reveals a secret from her past. The truth behind the City’s Sanitisation program is not a ‘cleansing and reintegration’, as they teach in schools, but Council-sanctioned murder. As Teddy’s best friend Lisa has just been Sanitised, she is racked by the realisation that her friend is dead. Teddy feels trapped and knows that once she is Partnered, she won’t be able to do any of the things that she used to do because she will never be truly alone again. So, when Teddy sees a shadow outside her window, she decides to follow it, breaking the citywide curfew. She discovers that there is more to the City than she realised; there is an entire world of people living beneath the City who have escaped Sanitisation and the City’s regime.

With this new information, Teddy is forced to make big decisions about her life and her future, which ultimately cause her to leave her life in the City and become the leader of the most prominent clan of the Underground. But Teddy faces much opposition while Underground, and she realises that ‘ultimate freedom’ holds its own kind of oppression.

THEMES

FRIENDSHIP AND LOYALTY

Quote: “*Because Lisa has gone, your father believes there is now a spotlight on you,*” she says. “*You aren’t supposed to have friends, let alone –*”

“Everyone else has friends.”

“Strategic alliances are not the same as friendships,” she snaps.’ (page 23)

Discussion point: This novel has multiple references to friendship, but this is the only conversation where the reality that people aren’t supposed to have friendships in Metropolis is explicitly stated. How do you think Teddy would feel after hearing this? How would you feel if you couldn’t trust your friends?

Quote: *'Lisa was my only friend. She was different from the other girls; she was more like me. Or maybe I was like her?'* (page 11)

Discussion point: What do you think made Lisa 'different from the other girls'? Do you think this contributed to why she was Sanitised?

Quote: *'Each building is covered with Metropolis propaganda: We watch because We care! Sharing information saves lives! Your family aren't your friends.'* (page 342)

Discussion point: Why do you think the City Council would discourage people from having real friendships?

FAMILY AND LOVE

The themes of family and love are prominently explored in the novel, from Teddy's relationship with her mother to her memories of her late grandfather and best friend, Lisa. As with all people, Teddy's world view is shaped by her interaction with other people. Teddy has many vital relationships in the story. The relationships with her mother and father are both key in her relationship with herself and with the world around her, as well as her relationship with her deceased grandfather.

Quote: *"You need to watch out, Teddy," Mum murmurs as she gets up and pulls me into a hug. "There are people down here who aren't happy about your arrival."* (page 205)

Discussion point: Why do you think Luanna chooses to tell Teddy this? How does this tie into the theme of family?

Quote: *'I want to tell Lew I loved Jamie. I did love him – didn't I? . . . And I think he loved me – but I didn't even get a chance to really know him.'* (page 364)

Discussion point: Discuss Teddy's relationship with Jamie. Why do you think Teddy is confused about her feelings for Jamie? Do you think that a life where she expected her Partner to be chosen for her would have affected her ability to judge other peoples' feelings towards her, as well as her own? Why or why not?

CREATIVITY

Throughout the book, Teddy finds herself drawn to self-expression through drawing. When she first reaches the Underground, one of the first things she notices is the colour and vibrance of creative life (something illegal in the Metropolis).

Quote: *'I have been drawing since I could hold a pencil, and my grandfather, one of the original Sympathisers, encouraged me, and he was murdered for his work trying to save and protect people. People like me.'* (page 338)

Discussion point: Teddy is candid throughout the novel about the importance of her grandfather's relationship to her. Do you think he was irresponsible for encouraging her illicit behaviours growing up? Why do you think he encouraged creativity?

Quote: *'Any activities that could be identified as expressing individuality or creativity were deemed too dangerous. They were banned from Our City.'* (page xiii)

Discussion point: Create a list of activities that might have been included in the ban. Why do you think these things were deemed as 'too dangerous'?

SELF-EXPRESSION AND AUTONOMY

Quote: *"You have your Job Placement?"*

"Don't be a moron, Teddy, it doesn't suit you. Down there, we don't get placed. We pick our calling."

I stare at her, wondering what I would pick if I could choose. What if I chose wrong?' (page 60–61)

Discussion point: Why would Teddy be anxious about the idea of being able to choose her own work? Do you think losing the ability to make your own decisions affects an individual's ability to make good choices? Why or why not?

"As you dress me now, I see you as a whole," I say, my voice a whisper. We join hands and then repeat the lines I've been dreading saying all morning: "We see each other now. Now we will grow together to serve Our Great City. We, the Chosen People." (page 104)

"With this knife, we shed your blood to seal the deal and make us one." Those words – and make us one. A shiver runs down my spine . . . "Repeat after me," he says. "Blood for blood – to serve and to sacrifice." I repeat the words, feeling the weight of them sink into my bones as my blood oozes down the bright silver length of the blade. A shudder rips through me. Not so different from the Partnership, after all, I think . . . not for the first time that day.' (page 192)

Discussion point: Compare the two passages above. What are the similarities? How do these two critical moments in the book impact Teddy's autonomy?

RITE OF PASSAGE/ INITIATION

Quote: *'Today should be a time of grand celebration, my first Council Occasion: my Job Placement. Today marks the first of three ceremonies that signify the completion of my time as a child and student. According to the pamphlet, these ceremonies mark the emergence of my new life as a worker, wife and womb keeper.'* (page 4)

Discussion point: What does the phrase 'worker, wife and womb keeper' indicate to you about the world in which Teddy lives?

Discussion point: From the excerpt above, how do you think Teddy feels about these changes in her life? Is she confident about her ability to handle these new societal expectations? Why or why not?

Quote: *'I feel like I've been shot. I pull myself up from the dirt. "What are you talking about?" But I had already been thinking about it. If Sanitisation wipes my identity . . . what happens to me?'* (page 166)

Discussion point: Teddy is 17 and is forced to leave her home and the only life she's ever known to live in the Underground, where she is expected to become a leader. How do you think she feels about this sudden change? Discuss Teddy's journey. How does this force her emotional and intellectual development in the novel? Does this change how she interacts with other characters in Part Two?

GRIEF

Teddy and the other characters in this book deal with some significant grief. This affects their relationships with each other and shapes the choices that they make.

Quote: *'She's the reason Lisa is gone. The thought of my best friend has me picking at the edge of my dress . . . I still cannot work out where they are being taken.'* (page 10)

Discussion point: At this point in the story, we are aware that Teddy is starting to doubt her City. Consider the ways she interrogates Lisa's Sanitisation. Do you think she already knows that Sanitisation isn't 'cleansing and reintegration'? Teddy is unable to work out where Lisa has gone. Is this a manifestation of Teddy's denial that she's lost the only person she felt she could trust at this point in her life? What role does the grief of Lisa's absence play in her reason for choosing to break curfew?

Quote: *'I feel a giggle bubble up from inside as I sing it to myself. It catches in my throat as the gunshot still rings in my ears and my tears blur my vision again. Kit moves behind me, her breathing ragged with sobs.'* (page 349)

Discussion point: Re-read Chapter forty-three. Kit and Teddy both react differently. Why do you think their shock and grief manifests itself in such different ways?

Activity: Find an example in the text of another character who has experienced grief. Explain why you think this character is grieving.

MORAL CHOICES

Teddy is racked with choices from the beginning of the book. She talks about ‘silent protests’ (page 75) and notices these behaviours in her mother too. Her choice to leave her house after curfew and follow the shadow is a catalyst for the plot. This choice, her decision to fight back against the rules, shows her personality.

Quote: *‘Something pushes from inside me. I want to follow the shadow. To find out who it is. A sliver of my mind cries out for me to stop, begging me to climb back into my warm, safe bed, to forget everything and go on blindly, but I can’t. Now I know too much, I must go. Ignoring this isn’t an option.’* (page 33)

Discussion point: Discuss the dilemma Teddy faces in this scene. What do you think Teddy means when she says ‘ignoring this isn’t an option’?

Quote: *‘Kit speaks for the first time. “We’re literally using you to eliminate her.” . . . The laws of the Underground state that unless a Clan Leader dies of natural causes, whoever takes down the previous head becomes, by default, the next leader.’* (page 166)

Discussion point: How do you think Teddy would feel knowing that she’s sending someone to be Sanitised? We never see her express her feelings about this in the book. Do you think this decision would weigh on her and impact some of the other decisions she makes? Why or why not?

Activity: Can you list examples of when different characters in the book make questionable moral choices? Why do you think they made these decisions? Were their decisions made from self-interest or necessity?

PLOT AND STRUCTURE

1. The speculative fiction genre adheres to certain conventions.

Activity: Study these conventions and then analyse this text in relation to them, identifying tropes and features that are common to such fictions. [See Further Reading Ideas for Class Discussion.]

2. *SELF/LESS* is structured with two parts.

Discussion Point: Why do you think the author chose to structure the novel this way? How does this structure mirror Teddy’s journey?

3. Tension and suspense is essential to a novel's plot and is created by raising the stakes and keeping the characters in difficult situations.

Discussion Point: Are there unanswered questions in this novel? What are they? Do you think these questions will be answered in the second book? Discuss how this create tension and suspense.

Activity: Make a list of situations that keep the stakes raised for Teddy. For example, why doesn't Maree trust her? When will she see her father again? What if her Partner finds her notebook?

4. Pacing is integral to a novel's structure and can achieve minor and significant climaxes. In *SELF/LESS*, the beginning of each chapter is grounded firmly by action, for example, 'All I can hear are my footsteps and my heart thumping. If I'm caught, I'll be killed.' (page 34). Each chapter ends with a cliff-hanger, for example, 'I see Lisa's smiling face flash across my mind. Dead.' (page 55).

Discussion Point: Why does the author do this? Discuss. In what other ways is pacing achieved in this story?

5. The events that make up the plot of a novel trace a narrative arc.

Discussion Point: What are the conflict, climax and resolution points in the *SELF/LESS* narrative arc? How do you think the author has created a completed narrative arc while still leaving the story open for the next book in the series?

CHARACTERS

Action in this novel revolves around several major characters and a cast of minor characters.

1. The main characters are Teddy (protagonist and narrator), Kit (her friend), Luanna (her mother), and Jamie (her friend and eventual love interest).

Discussion Point: The novel is told from Teddy's point of view. How does that direct the reader's attention?

Discussion Point: How do you think Teddy's mother, Luanna, differs from parents in the Underground? Do you think her mother's background has subliminally shaped Teddy's own behaviours and attitudes towards the City Council?

Discussion Point: Jamie and Kit are both Teddy's closest friends in the story; they are both significant protagonists. Despite being from the Underground, they both have different personalities and backgrounds, as well as a different relationship with Teddy. What are the different roles they play in Teddy's life? How are both characters important in Teddy's development throughout the novel?

2. A cast of other minor characters is mentioned: Link (the antagonist), Michelle (Teddy's rival) and Lew (Teddy's confidante). There are also three minor characters we never meet, but they all play a significant role in shaping Teddy's behaviours: her grandfather, who has been Sanitised; her best friend, Lisa, who was recently Sanitised; her father, who is a senior councillor.

Discussion Point: Which of the minor characters is most intriguing and why?

3. Writers generally create a mixture of characters – some invoke sympathy in the reader, and others defy categorisation, their motives remaining obscure.

Discussion Point: Which characters did you have sympathy for and why? Which ones were unsympathetic? Were there any 'minor' characters you would have liked more information about? For example, Rita in the sorting room is mentioned a number of times, but we could know more about her. Why do you think Teddy is drawn to her?

4. Each character has distinctive traits that add to their characterisation. For example, Kit's habit of rolling her eyes (e.g. page 56) juxtaposed with her nervous habit of rubbing her arms (e.g. page 148) reveal her underlying insecurities and trauma; possibly hinting at her own mental-health concerns that explain some of the erratic behaviours she shows towards Teddy.

Discussion Point: Choose a passage of dialogue and discuss what it reveals about the characters.

5. Characters can be dynamic or static.

Discussion Point: Is Kit a dynamic or a static character? Why or why not? Consult definitions of dynamic and static characters and use examples from the text to support your conclusion.

STYLE AND USE OF LANGUAGE

1. The novel is written in the first person and present tense voice of Teddy. This narrative could also have been written in another voice. For example, each chapter could be told from the perspective of one of the three main characters Teddy, Kit or Jamie.

Discussion Point: How do you think the story would change being told from multiple perspectives?

Activity: Re-write the action from Chapter forty-three from the perspective of Kit. How does the change of voice in this scene change the emotion for the reader?

2. Voice is created by a range of devices, including syntax and the use of language.

Discussion Point: How is the way people talk and the language they use in the Metropolis different from that in the Underground? What impact do you think this has on building the world in the mind of the reader?

Activity: Write a list of Metropolis terms and phrases and their meanings. Then write a list of Underground slang and their meanings. Compare with the person next to you. Why do you think they use language differently?

Activity: What distinctive aspects of style did you notice in the crafting of Teddy's voice?

SETTING

1. Setting in speculative fiction is suggested gradually by hints and statements that all is not as we might expect it to be in a 'real' world.

Discussion point: Discuss how the following two quotes are examples of intriguing asides that build the world around Teddy:

- *'I reach across and grab Mum's gloved hand with my own bare one. My hands are uncovered, as is tradition until I'm Partnered.'* (page 7)
- *'As we got older, it wasn't the buildings that frightened us, it was the cameras. We first started to notice them there, then everywhere.'* (pages 37–38)

Activity: List other statements that were particularly suggestive of an alternative world?

2. This novel contains descriptions of the brutalist and imposing Metropolis City juxtaposed against the colourful and visceral world of the Underground. It is an imagined 'other Earth', which the author has the licence to create, but she fills it with recognisable details from our own world.

Activity: Identify any details in this imagined world which relate to our own. For example, school graduation, work and a cafe.

3. SELF/LESS is set in a futuristic time period, and the City is celebrating its 70th year. The term 'ancestor' is used to describe the people of the past.

Discussion Point: Using the page from a school text on page xiii (Exploring Metropolis 3rd Edition), we see a snippet of the origins of the City. Using that as a stimulus, what are some of the things we are currently experiencing in our own world – for example, deforestation, climate change, etc. – that could reveal us as the 'ancestors' and catalysts for the future described in the book?

Activity: Answer the 'Reading Check' questions from Exploring Metropolis 3rd Edition on page xiii. Write a list of what you think some of the other chapters in the book might be?

4. Place is evoked by beautiful description. In *Everything I Know About Writing* (Pan Macmillan, 1993), John Marsden reminds writers to use detail in describing a setting (page 113) and words that appeal to all the senses (pages 121–26) to describe what can be seen, felt, heard, touched or smelt.

Discussion point: Does the author achieve this? Discuss.

Activity: Choose a passage to illustrate your answer, then re-write the passage using a different sense.

5. Setting evokes mood and atmosphere.

Discussion point: Find passages that describe place. What mood do these descriptions convey, and why?

WRITING EXERCISES

1. Book titles are designed to intrigue and entice. One-word titles can be especially intriguing.

Discussion Point and Activity: What did this title suggest to you before/after you read the novel? Why do you think the author chose to break the word up with the slash?

Activity: Write a list of other potential titles.

2. The packaging of a book includes the cover and blurb, which offers the reader an insight into the contents without giving the ending away.

Discussion Point: Assess the book cover. What makes it engaging to a reader? What is intriguing about the blurb?

Activity: Look up the design composition term called the ‘rule of thirds’. Using the ‘rule of thirds’, design your own cover in any medium. Write your own blurb for the story. (Remember not to give anything away!)

3. When Teddy first goes into the Underground, Kit shows her through different rooms, each with its own unique activities and people.

Activity: Write a journal entry from the perspective of an Undergrunder seeing Teddy for the first time. How do you feel about the new ‘Clan Head’?

4. We learn that Teddy and her mother correspond through letters when Teddy moves into the Underground.

Activity: With a partner, write each other a letter from the perspective of either Teddy or Luanna. After you read your partner’s letter, write a response specifically for their letter.

5. The book's sequel will be called *RELENT/LESS*.

Discussion Point: Without reading the blurb for that novel, speculate what might take place in it?

Activity: Write your own synopsis or blurb for such a sequel.

QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION AFTER READING THE NOVEL

“You’re saying she doesn’t make friends easily?”

“Yeah, well, for as long as we’ve been friends, I’ve seen Kit go in and out of other friendships and phases,” Jamie says . . .

“But she’s stayed friends with you,” I say. Jamie shakes his head.

“I’ve stayed friends with her . . .”(page 127)

‘It’s hard to believe our ancestors built this place. An atomic-bomb shelter. What would they think if they could see us now?’ (page 218)

“Your warning is us here escorting you. For most people, that is enough warning.” (page 249)

“It will all work out. I promise.”

I nod, but I wish she hadn’t said it. I hate that word.

Promise.

No one ever keeps them.’ (page 283)

“You keep saying that, but it’s not your job to protect me. I made a choice to do this. Now you have to let me.” (page 284)

FURTHER READING IDEAS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. *1984* by George Orwell
2. *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley
3. *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood
4. *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro
5. *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

FURTHER IDEAS USING TECHNOLOGY

Activity: In Chapter Nineteen, Teddy hears music for the first time. In the Underground, music is a big part of life. Create a playlist of songs for Teddy. When creating the playlist, consider music in a historical and cultural context. Would you play old and new music? Would you play only songs that you like?

Activity: Pretend you are a Sympathiser. Create an interactive map (using Google Slides) that shows supply collectors around the Metropolis. Include where guard patrol routes might be, where working security cameras are, as well as the collection locations themselves. (Remember to site where pictures are sourced from.)

Activity: Using Canva, design your own Metropolis City propaganda for the City's billboards. Remember to use some of the key 'rhetoric' of the City. (See Chapter One.)

Activity: Create a 'Welcome to the Underground' video – something they show when new people move down there.

CONCLUSION

SELF/LESS is an examination of humanity from two perspectives: living with complete control and without any control at all. AVIVA has created a world to highlight the importance of balance in our lives and reminded us of the power of self-expression, the ability to share with the world who you really are. She has achieved this through crafting two worlds that, at first glance, seem diametrically opposed but, through deeper exploration, mirror each other. What happens to people when they are trying to stay alive at all costs. What will people do to survive? Teddy is a protagonist who is passionate, driven and learns to be confident in herself. She might think she now knows what she needs to do, but she might find out that she has only scratched the surface...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AViVA is a multidisciplinary artist with international success, garnering more than 3 billion global streams of her music to date.

In a past life, she was a high-school teacher in Sydney before pursuing her music and writing full time.

Having always been a lover of stories and made-up worlds, she feeds her passion for self-expression with a healthy lifestyle of creativity and writing. When not writing music or touring the world, AViVA can be found in her home library either nose deep in a good book, fingers busy writing at the keyboard or otherwise occupied in her art studio, sewing or making something else she has dreamt up.

SELF/LESS is her debut novel. The next instalment *RELENT/LESS* is due for release in October 2022.

Find out more about AViVA at www.thisisaviva.co or [@thisisaviva](https://www.instagram.com/thisisaviva)