**Title**

Shadows of Olive Trees

Author

Susanne Gervay

Publisher

Flying Elephant Media

Date of Publication

2019

ISBN

9780648203544

Length

207 pages

Category

Young Adult

Suitable for

AC Year 10 – Year 12

Key Curriculum Areas

- Year 10: English, History, Modern Greek
- Year 11/12: Literature, Modern History

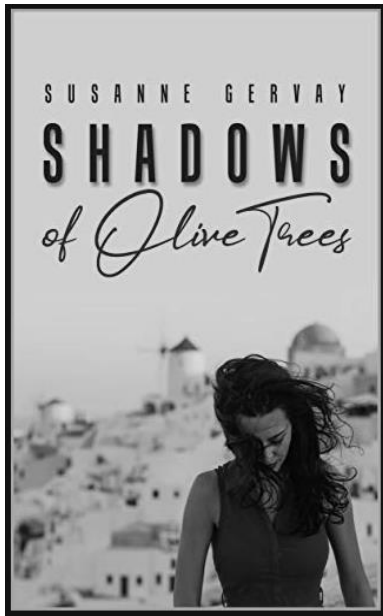
General Capabilities

Critical and Creative Thinking, Information and Communication Technology, Literacy, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding

Themes

Roles of women, relationships, family, freedom and independence, feminism, multiculturalism

Shadows of Olive Trees: synopsis



1975 was International Women's Year declared by the United Nations. 'Shadows of Olive Trees' is set in the 1970s during the turbulent time of the women's rights movement.

Although Tessa is from Greek heritage, 'Shadows of Olive Trees' reveals the conflict for many second generation women from diverse backgrounds, as they try to meld conservative cultures with the advocacy of individualism and free choice. Tessa and her friends Athena and Jenny start university together. They face the challenges of love, dependence versus independence, sexuality, free choice and the consequences as they search for identity.

'It is also a story of friendship and love, reminding me of Looking for Alibrandi.' Spectrum Sydney Morning Herald.

Considerations

- What is the meaning behind the title?
- What are the overarching themes?
- What connections are there between the 1970s Women's Movement in Australia and global feminist movements, and #MeToo?
- Were there other protest movements/social changes in Australia at play?
- What is the relevance of the setting – time and place?
- Discuss characterisation and stereotyping, e.g. Greek family/community, university students
- What relationships are there to other arts/literature/media of the time? E.g. similar titles (books, movies)
- What was the political/social context at the time? E.g. multiculturalism in Australia.
- Other related topics or issues from the 1970s, e.g. Indigenous land rights, uranium mining, White Australia Policy, conscription



Susanne Gervay: about the author

Awarded an OAM and Social Justice Award for her body of work by the International Literacy Association, Nominee for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, Susanne Gervay is an Australian children's and young adult author. The daughter of Hungarian refugees, who migrated to Australia to escape war and terrorism in their homeland, overcoming adversity is a driving force in Susanne's work. 'Shadows of Olive Trees' is inspired by her lived experiences as she grappled with traditional cultural values and rights for women.

More information can be found on her website: <https://www.sgervay.com/about/>

Considerations:

- Connection between the author's personal experiences and the themes in *Shadows of Olive Trees*. How does the Susanne Gervay's background and experiences influence and inform her writing?
- What assumptions can be made about the author from her book themes?
- Investigate other work completed by Susanne Gervay (in addition to writing).
- What is the relevance of Susanne Gervay's work to readers of today? What impacts may be felt?

Context (historical, social, political)

Shadows of Olive Trees was published in 2019 but set in the 1970s. Events took place in Sydney, Australia during the rise of the Women's Movement. Currently, we have the #MeToo movement.

Year 10: History

- Knowledge and Understanding: Continuity and Change (ACDSEH149)
Contribution of Migration (ACDSEH147)
- Historical Skills: Perspectives and Interpretations (ACHHS190)

Year 11/12: Modern History

- Unit 2 – Movements for Change: Women's Movements

Context refers to the circumstances that form the setting for an event or idea, and the terms in which it can be fully understood. Discuss the historical/social/political context in relation to:

- the novel
- the author (at the time of writing)
- the reader

Establish an understanding of the setting in terms of context:

- interviews — domestic life in the 70s, growing up as a migrant, trends, cultural demographics, social movements, reforms
- timeline of key events
- Google maps — location, where did they live/study?

Before reading:

- research what is already known about the themes (migration, women's roles and rights); consider feminist leaders, e.g. Gloria Steinem (opening quote)
- develop overarching inquiry question(s)

During reading: (make notes, subheadings, journal reflections)

- references to historical, social, political and cultural influences
- build character profiles and compare with key public figures of the time, and of now
- personal connections, identification with characters, settings, events

After reading:

- timeline/mind map response to key events in novel and in history
- character interviews (across time periods)

Context (literary)

Year 10: English

- Language for interaction: Language use has social effects (ACELA1564)
Evaluations as influenced by value systems (ACELA1565)
- Responding to literature: Endorse or refute interpretations of literature (ACELT1640)
- (Literacy) Texts in context: Analyse representation of culture, events etc (ACELY1749)

Year 11/12: Literature

- Unit 3: Literary texts represent culture and identity (ACELR 037-040)
Representations of culture and identity vary between texts (ACELR 041-044)
- Unit 4: Relationship between author, text, audience and context (ACELR 053-057)
Evaluate how literary texts can be interpreted (ACELR 058-061)

Language Use: (identify, analyse, evaluate)

- sentence structure, vocabulary, tense, symbolism, authenticity
 - How do these elements relate to and represent culture and value systems?
 - What effect do the language choices have on audience empathy and emotion?
 - How does the language challenge/support cultural/social perceptions and is it relevant over time?

Novel Structure: (identify, analyse, evaluate)

- narrative position, reliability of narrator, point of view
- genre, plot, setting (time and place)
 - What structure does the novel follow and what is the effect of the choice?
 - How do these choices affect the interpretation of the text and its themes?

Characterisation:

- Create a character wheel or table — dialogue, actions, features, relationships
 - How does the reader respond to the characters and why?
 - How do the characters represent cultural and social systems?
 - What were the most powerful choices the author made about the characters? Are they composite/recognisable characters?

Themes: (identify, analyse, evaluate)

- Universal themes — family tension, sibling relationships, feminism
- Themes that endure over time
- Themes that were particularly relevant in the 1970s
- Major themes v minor themes

History/English/Literature – significances & informed reactions

Australian Literature:

- How is the notion of 'being Australian' represented in this novel?
- What characteristics are displayed? What stereotypes? Cultural and social influences?
- What is the relevance of this novel to contemporary Australian school students?

Feminism:

- Consider point of view, male/female relationships and roles
- Discuss whether this novel is 'feminist literature'.

Comparison to other literary forms:

- Discuss influences from other texts
- Comparisons (written, multi-modal, film, fiction, non-fiction)
- How does informed reading influence the interpretation of themes?
- What is the overarching theme – feminism, culture, coming-of-age? Something else?
- What is the function (purpose, intent) of this story?

Reactions:

- Responses to:
 - Tessa's parents? Athena's parents?
 - Tessa and David? Other relationships?
 - Abortion, sexual relationships
 - The ending? Was it satisfying? Surprising? Did it provide answers?

Creative Responses:

- Rewrite sections of text set in a different time, from a different point of view, if Tessa was a male, if Tessa's mother was less traditional, if Tessa went ahead with the arranged marriage
- Tessa's parents' response to Tessa removing her engagement ring
- Select images to represent major themes – one image or a mixed media collage
- A message's power lies in the writing. Discuss the importance of story to give people a voice.
- Dramatic/musical representation of a family on the verge of chaos or breakdown

Modern Greek (Year 10)

Communicating

- Creating: Discuss imaginative texts, reflecting on theme (ACLMGC176)
Create/perform imaginative texts using imagery/sound effects (ACLMGC177)
- Reflecting: How cultural identity shapes thinking (ACLMGC181)

Understanding

- Role of language and culture: Recognise how culture impacts on attitudes/beliefs (ACLMGU187)

Cultural concepts and ideas:

- How did the author's language choices convey cultural themes and strengthen understanding of ideas?
- How was the Greek community represented? What changes have occurred over time?
- What relevant (Greek) issues were portrayed and how do these translate to the current time?

Migrant experiences:

- Greek migrants in Australia—what contributions did they make? What was their impact on Australian culture and other cultures within Australia? What impact did Australian society have on them?
- Discuss the issue of cultural identity
- How does culture and language shape attitudes and experiences?

Creative responses:

- Recreate scenes from the novel for dramatic performance, using appropriate language structures
- Adapt scenes, rewrite events to represent contemporary themes
- Collect images, sounds etc to create visual and/or aural interpretations of the text themes, major ideas, cultural aspects.

Study Notes prepared by Kellie Nissen www.justrightwords.com.au