



# FUTURE GIRL by ASPHYXIA

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**Recommended for 13-16 year olds**

**TEACHERS' NOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR LITERARY STUDY OF FUTURE GIRL.**  
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## Summary

As peak oil hits and Melbourne collapses into environmental catastrophe, what does it look like to be a Deaf teenager already struggling to fit into a hearing world?

Piper's mum wants Piper to be 'normal' – to put up with the tension headaches, the constant misunderstandings, and the herculean daily efforts it takes for her to pass as hearing, so she can grow up to be 'successful' like her scientist mother. But when disaster hits Melbourne, Piper has more important things to worry about, starting with her stomach. The personalised, ultra-processed meals from her mum's company that used to land on their doorstep so reliably have halved in quantity, transport costs skyrocket overnight, and businesses everywhere start to collapse.

Piper's best friend and lifeline at school goes AWOL, and she and her mum lose everything. And then there's Marley – a CODA (child of Deaf adult), who opens a door for Piper into a new world – a world where Deafness is something to celebrate, not to hide, full of beautifully expressive Auslan (Australian sign language). As Piper begins to explore her love of art, discovers a new passion for guerrilla gardening, and pushes back remorselessly against her mum, all while becoming more and more immersed in Deaf culture, she falls hard for Marley – but Marley is struggling with some big questions of his own...

## Author style

Asphyxia deftly weaves her detailed insight into Deaf culture and what it feels like to be d/Deaf throughout this compelling story set in near-future Melbourne. A popular speaker in schools and universities since 2000, she has inspired thousands of students to make permanent changes to their lives in response to her presentations about Deafness, sustainable living and art journaling.

*Future Girl* combines these passions into a similarly motivating, instructional book that will galvanise students into action.

## Themes

Deafness • sustainability • near-future • speculative fiction • identity • romance • gardening • Own Voices publishing • self-expression through art journaling

## Use in the curriculum

*Future Girl* is presented as 16-year-old Piper's stunning visual-art journal. As well as providing a comprehensive platform for insight into Deaf culture, sustainability and related themes, this book is a perfect opportunity to share the benefits of creative journaling with students within the Visual Arts curriculum, particularly for Years 7 and 8.

**Critical and creative thinking:** Piper critically examines the world in which she lives and makes changes to her internal value system, prompting readers to do the same. The art journal process stimulates creative thinking through using visual symbols to represent experiences and emotions.

Students can analyse how artists use visual conventions in artworks (ACAVAR123).

**Personal and social capability:** Piper works on how to handle her Deafness socially – balancing her drive to be polite, to conform to social expectations and to gain social acceptance against her need for inclusion and freedom from the pressure to pass as hearing. Her art journaling process helps her develop insight into her behaviour and motivations, increasing her self-awareness.

Students can experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork (ACAVAM118)

## English studies – art journaling

### Before reading *Future Girl*

Consider what you think an art journal is? What are some of the benefits to keeping an art journal?

### After reading *Future Girl*

Add to your notes about art journaling – did Piper experience any benefits to keeping an art journal that you did not already list? What are potential benefits for you if you establish an ongoing art journaling habit?

After spreading plaster over a page in her journal, Piper writes:

*I decide I'll add layers...collage some stuff over it. I take a sheet of plastic and paint it blue. Then, using black, I add stripes. I tear the sheet into strips and glue it down randomly onto empty pages. The effect is strangely appealing.*

### Creating your art journal

Use Piper's process (or adapt your own) to create your own art journal. Here are some suggestions:

- Create backgrounds on a number of different pages, using varying colours of paint, sticking down lined notepaper or other textured paper, and smearing on plaster or other textures.
- Create some patterned papers by painting a background and adding stripes, dots or other motifs. Tear these papers into strips or pieces and glue onto background pages you have already created. You might work randomly or make judgements about which patterns look good on which backgrounds.

- Write about your day, your feelings, what's inspiring you, what you want, and what your goals are.
- Draw or paint images that represent key aspects of what you have written. You could also print images sourced from the internet, cut them out and stick them in.
- Add doodles and paint and play around to see what works.

Consider some of the ways you could adapt your art journal to benefit you personally. For example, do you have a specific skill that you could explore in your journal, resulting in your journal becoming a folio of sorts? Do you have a hobby or topic you are keen to learn more about, and if so could your journal form a place to record all you have learnt? Do you have lots of ideas that could be set down in your journal so that later you remember them? Would you like to capture parts of your life – things people say, milestones, important moments – as a treasury of memories? Write yourself a page of journal-prompts to remind yourself and stick it in the front or back of your journal for easy reference.

### **Sharing your message**

Through the process of writing *Future Girl*, Asphyxia began to articulate aspects of Deafness she had never seen described before:

*I found writing about Deaf experience challenging, because Deafness was such an ordinary part of my existence that I rarely thought about it. I began jotting down my daily Deaf encounters – the little annoyances, benefits, confusing moments, the irritating things people say, and the complex feelings that arise when someone has tried to provide access but missed the mark.*

Identify some messages that are important to you. What would you like to say to the world, about things that matter to you? Consider parts of yourself that feel unacceptable – is there a message that would sum up the importance of accepting these parts of yourself? Consider barriers faced by you or others in your life/community – what messages might help break through those barriers? Consider topics you are passionate about that others may not know much about – what messages might be valuable for others to learn?

Increase your capacity for articulating your message(s) through daily journaling. Keep a daily journal about key issues important to you and a message you would like to share.

### **Using art journaling to create a narrative**

Consider the scene where Piper goes to a food-growing workshop and leaves crying. Here, the teacher has clearly not taken into account the possibility that a deaf person might attend. This part of the narrative could send a message about the importance of teaching young deaf people how to prepare for such events and ask for their needs to be met.

Using the art journal format, create a fictional story that communicates one or more of the key messages you identified that are important to you. Use some of the same methods Asphyxia used to communicate her messages, such as showing the emotional consequences of not following the message. Here are some guidelines to create a story using your art journal.

- In planning your story, first list the messages, then write ideas for how they could be shown in various scenes. Plan to influence your readers to believe your message.
- Consider the tone of your story and how that will work with the messages to make them more effective.

- Consider the language of your story. Brainstorm ideas for words, metaphors and analogies that convey your message, and choose language that will present it powerfully.
- Add visual imagery to strengthen your messages, which may include artworks and stencils you have already created. You may wish to adapt them to suit your story.

### **Getting it right vs getting it written**

A multi-layered story like this can be difficult to create, so do it in stages:

- Write a first draft, then go back and adjust the writing, thinking about the tone. Go back and adjust it again, this time thinking about language, metaphors and analogies. Continue this process of refinement until you are happy with the story.

Asphyxia wrote *Future Girl* three times from scratch as well as doing significant edits on each draft, in order to refine the story into the finished book. Expecting yourself to write a perfect story first goes adds unnecessary pressure and stress to the writing process. For the first draft, write quickly and focus on getting down the key ideas without worrying if it is well-written. Relax and enjoy the process. Then polish.

### **Shining up your diamond in the rough and creating a cover**

When you have your ideas down on paper, edit your story so that the message is not actually stated directly anywhere in the text. How can you show the message through scenes without actually stating it?

Create the cover artwork for your story – it should give an indication of what to expect of the story in terms of content and mood.

### **Creating a presentation to communicate your message**

Use the key message you've communicated in your story as the basis for a presentation. Focus on how you can inspire your audience to see that this message is important. It's fine to state the message explicitly here. Tell a personal story that illustrates the importance of your message. Afterwards, reflect – which medium was more effective for your message? The presentation? The art journal story? Do you think another medium would be more effective still?

## Visual arts

### **Art as expression**

After graffiti-ing on a public wall, Piper writes, 'I feel excited. Like I've finally found a voice. A tiny voice, but one that will be heard, at least, by anyone who walks past this wall.' If you were to find a public voice, what would you like to say? What do you feel is wrong with this world that you wish could be fixed?

- Design an artwork that shares this or one of your other messages with the world.
- Consider the text in your artwork, if any. How can you condense your message down to minimal text? Should you include text in your artwork, as in some of those created by Piper, such as *Grow Food Not Concrete*, and *Don't Delete My Voice*? If so, what imagery could go with it to most powerfully impart your message? Could you communicate it entirely visually, with no text at all? Another option is to have the text as the title of the artwork.

## Techniques, materials and technology

- What techniques, materials, technologies and art making processes has Asphyxia used in *Future Girl*? What techniques does Piper describe using in the book? Do you feel the multiple techniques work together as a cohesive whole? Compare the techniques used with those of other artists, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.
- In *Future Girl*, how do various techniques used represent themes, concepts and ideas in the book? Consider how Piper's artwork changes as her mood changes. Consider artworks in the book such as *Grow Food Not Concrete* or *Don't Delete My Voice*, where the same idea is presented using more than one technique. How do these artworks change with the changed technique, and how do they remain the same? What is the value of each method of presentation, regarding the core idea Piper wanted to express? How effective do you think each method is? Is one method more suitable for some circumstances/audiences than others?
- Is there an artwork in *Future Girl* that created an emotional response in you when you saw it? If there was nothing in *Future Girl*, find an artwork elsewhere that elicits an emotional response in you, and consider that instead. Why do you think it affected you emotionally? Was it the technique, the colours, the content, the idea behind it, the underlying message...? Create an artwork yourself using the same ideas.
- If you don't already have an art journal, begin one. Experiment with using the same techniques used in *Future Girl* and in a range of artworks, including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, that inspire you to express themes from your own life. How well do the various techniques express the meaning of what you want to say?
- Create pages using a range of techniques. Start with a coloured background (paint or paper), add patterns or text paper. Collage in images that inspire you. Add words that represent key issues on your mind right now. Add in a figure or animal or plant that represents you and your feelings. Add more layers of paint, doodle with pens and pencils and colour in to integrate. Stand back and look at your page objectively. What does it say? Does it appeal, visually? Does it express your emotions? How could you represent the same emotions more effectively? How could you increase the visual appeal of the page while keeping the message/emotions intact?

## Visual conventions

- What visual conventions has Asphyxia used in *Future Girl*? Do you feel they work? Do you like them? Why/why not? Check out Asphyxia's other work online at [www.asphyxia.com.au](http://www.asphyxia.com.au). How is the art in *Future Girl* similar to her other work? How is it different? What motifs has she repeated, and what value do you think the motifs have?
- Pick an artwork in *Future Girl*. Why did Piper create this piece? What does it represent about her life and emotions? What conventions are used in this piece? Do they help the piece more effectively represent Piper's life and emotions?
- Write a review of Asphyxia's work, referring to *Future Girl* and her other artworks – what is your personal opinion of her work, its messages, its effectiveness at communicating the messages, and the techniques used?
- How does Asphyxia's culture influence her artwork? How does this differ from the cultural influences of other artists who inspire you
- How does Piper's background influence her artwork in *Future Girl*? Consider street art – look at examples of street art in *Future Girl*, other art of the same style by Asphyxia, and street art by artists such as Banksy, or Northern-Territory-based Larrakia artist Hafleg, or other artists in your local area. How does their culture influence their artworks?

## About the author

Asphyxia is an artist, writer and public speaker. Author of the much-loved junior fiction series the Grimstones, Asphyxia has also been a circus performer and puppeteer. An avid art-journal creator, she loves to share her process and help others benefit from this amazing tool for self-expression, problem-solving, planning, goal-tracking and self-esteem.

Deaf since the age of three, Asphyxia learnt to sign when she was eighteen, which changed her life. She is now a Deaf activist, sharing details of Deaf experience. She raises awareness of oppression of Deaf people and what we can do to change this. Her free online Auslan course ([www.asphyxia.com.au](http://www.asphyxia.com.au)) has had over 15,000 students.

Asphyxia is kept busy with her small farm where she combines food-growing with art – creating a magical aesthetic with plants and natural elements.

*Future Girl* combines all these passions.



## A word from Asphyxia

'I made Piper d/Deaf in *Future Girl* because I realised how little most hearing people know about d/Deafness. When I first tried to write about Piper's experience, I found myself stuck, as being Deaf is something I don't think about a lot. I found I didn't know how to articulate it. So I started jotting down my everyday experiences – the little annoyances, the benefits, confusion, the irritating things people say and do, and the complex feelings that arise when someone has tried to provide access but misses the mark.

'For example, here's a Deaf dilemma: Imagine you are standing with a group of hearing people who are laughing, but you have no idea what they are laughing about. Should you laugh along to be friendly (and if you do, are you somehow "lying" about having understood?), or stand there with a stony face even though it could seem rude and unfriendly?

'I had never realised I was making these difficult decisions on the fly, every day, without analysing how I wanted to approach them. My responses were automatic: I laughed along. But did I really want to do this? Perhaps it would be better to let people know that I felt left out.

'If you are a hearing reader, I hope that reading about Piper's experiences gives you some insight into what it can be like to be d/Deaf, and an understanding of what a huge difference it can make if you demonstrate inclusive, thoughtful behaviour. If you are d/Deaf, I hope that you can relate to some of Piper's experiences, and that seeing them written down makes it easier for you to explain your own experiences to other people. I hope it also helps you to build a sense of entitlement to ask for access.'



## Review by Joanne Tarpey, teacher of the Deaf

Deaf/HH (hard of hearing) teenagers are going to devour *Future Girl*, with its depiction of the daily obstacles and shared experiences that they rarely see on the written page. They will feel included and acknowledged, often for the first time, in this exciting story of Piper trying to find her identity in a world where few understand what life is like to be Deaf/HH. These teenagers rarely get to share a feeling of inclusivity in a predominantly hearing world, and especially in such a visually 'cool' text as Asphyxia's *Future Girl*. Piper's lived experience of being Deaf/HH will be shared and appreciated by many.

Throughout Piper's journey, Deaf/HH readers will witness and share how someone like them feels and navigates a hearing world. They will experience a life so familiar to their own and relate to so many of the complex situations Piper finds herself in while trying to work out if she is hearing, Deaf, deaf or oral. Most of us struggle with our identity in learning who we are, especially as teens, but we are surrounded by relatable experiences, hearing peers and mostly people who understand us. Piper is not, and nor are many other Deaf/HH teens.

Having taught Deaf/HH teenagers for many years, watching each as they try to navigate and fit into a hearing world, there is only so much they can do to try to understand what is being spoken. I see in my students what Piper sees and feels every day. Like Piper, they try so hard to communicate and adapt, but there is only so much they can do to adjust to the hearing world, yet there is so much hearing people can do to help them adjust. Through Asphyxia's novel we explore many positive changes hearing people can make to adapt, adjust and communicate clearly and visually to fit into Piper's life.

It is not every day that Deaf/HH readers can absorb themselves in a story as relatable as *Future Girl*. I am thrilled Asphyxia has written a book that illustrates so poignantly a Deaf teenager's existence in a hearing world of family, school, friendships and connectivity. Asphyxia beautifully communicates through her drawings and artwork on every page throughout this story. These images add texture, communication and visual stimulus for the reader to absorb and enjoy.

Asphyxia has touched upon so many of the current and long-standing issues faced by Deaf people in our society today.