

AMELIA WESTLAKE TEACHERS NOTES

Written by Erin Gough

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont in April 2018

SYNOPSIS

'I've been thinking a lot lately about hoaxes. My life, for instance. Lately it feels less like a life and more like a joke. Somebody's practical joke.'

(p3)

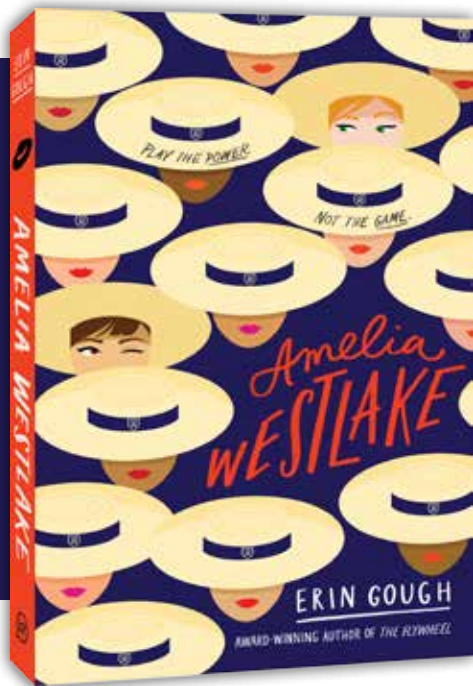
Will (Wilhelmina) Everhart is a misfit. Awkward and outspoken, her only friend at Rosemead Grammar is Nat, who runs the school paper and encourages Will's political and social stands. Will is thrown almost immediately into conflict when Coach Hadley, the notoriously sleazy swimming coach, makes a joke about her classmate Ruby Lasko's weight. When Will calls him out on it, Hadley tries to suggest he was joking, and Will calls him a prick. Her classmate Harriet Price has witnessed the entire exchange and could back up Will, but Harriet and Will couldn't be more different and Harriet isn't the type to rock the boat.

Harriet Price is a prefect. She's a star tennis player, an academic overachiever, and strives to maintain her perfect appearance. Harriet's family is wealthy, particularly in comparison to Will, who doesn't exactly encapsulate the 'Rosemead Spirit'. Harriet Price would never challenge the authority of a teacher. Never. Even if deep down she knows for sure that Hadley is every bit as sleazy as the others say.

When Harriet follows a teacher to detention, hoping to earn her respect through 'helping', she's disappointed to discover she'll be stuck with Will for the afternoon. But when Will challenges Harriet for failing to stand up to Hadley, Harriet challenges Will right back, suggesting that Will should do something to change the situation if it upsets her so much. Harriet's suggestion is simple, but brilliant. And so Will, a talented artist with a flair for caricatures, draws a cartoon of Hadley that shows his sleazy behaviour towards the girls. Harriet comes up with a witty caption that completes the cartoon. The only problem is that neither one wants to take the fall when it's published in the school paper. Will knows Nat will never take anonymous submissions, so they come up with a pseudonym – Amelia Westlake.

Amelia Westlake is the kind of name that's just bland enough to be believable. She could be a Rosemead student – but she doesn't exist.

Will and Harriet sign the cartoon with Amelia Westlake's name and submit it to the paper. Harriet starts second-guessing herself almost at once, but it's too late, the cartoon appears in the school newspaper and suddenly it's all anyone's talking about. Everyone is talking about Amelia Westlake, but no-one has any idea who she is.



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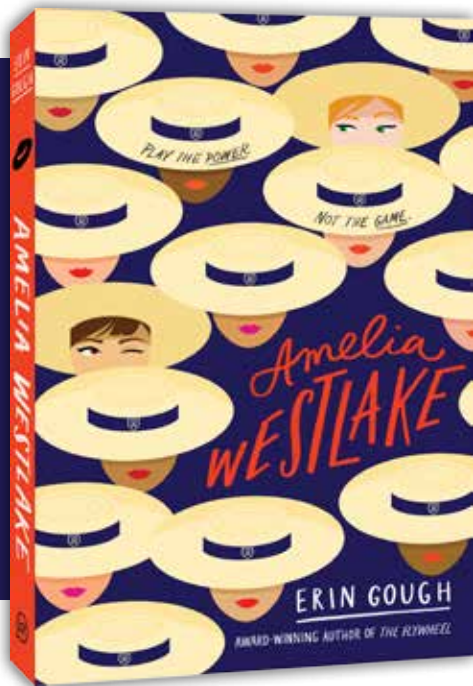
Harriet's tempted to tell her girlfriend, Edie, but Edie's busy preparing for the Tawney Shield tennis championship and the public speaking finals. Edie Marshall is Harriet's dream girl – captain of Blessingwood Girls, tennis champ, future prime minister of Australia. Harriet doesn't want to bother her, so she doesn't say anything. She's terrified of getting found out, convinced that Hadley knows she's responsible for the controversial cartoon. But, despite her fears, Harriet keeps having ideas for more Amelia Westlake pranks, each one designed to expose an injustice at the school.

Will can't help but admire Harriet's ideas. She's been subjected to plenty of injustice at Rosemead, and she loves the idea of shaking up the system. She feels bad about keeping things a secret from Nat, who has recently become something more than a friend, but she knows Nat will put the school paper's reputation above Will's desire to be involved in the Amelia Westlake hoax. So, like Harriet, Will keeps the hoax to herself. Besides, working with Harriet is the perfect cover – the two girls don't even like each other, so no-one will ever suspect them of being behind Amelia Westlake.

As Amelia, Harriet and Will expose the unfair marking practices of the English teacher and the economic monopoly of the overpriced uniform shop, and other students take notice of the unknown rebel who is giving voice to the daily unfairness of life at Rosemead. Amelia Westlake is changing the school, and she's changing Will and Harriet. Will has begun to appreciate Harriet's thoughtfulness, and her sharp, surprising sense of humour. Harriet is beginning to notice that life at Rosemead isn't as perfect as she'd thought, and she's found a drive in herself to force the school to change for the better.

Amelia Westlake is making Rosemead sit up and take notice, but when Principal Croon returns from an overseas trip, instead of righting the wrongs that have been exposed in her absence, she becomes determined to hunt down the students responsible for the hoax, convinced that Will is one of them and determined to find a good excuse to expel her. But Will has the perfect alibi. She's been in class at the time of each of the hoaxes. And Principal Croon would never suspect Harriet. Even if she did, Harriet would be safe from expulsion, because Croon needs her to win the Tawney Shield for the school.

Frustrated with the school's lack of action on its many problems, Will and Harriet up the ante with Operation Volley, a series of pranks in quick succession that will make people take notice, without giving Rosemead enough time to respond. Their increased engagement in the hoax doesn't leave Harriet and Will with much time for anything else. Will is teetering on the verge of expulsion, she is stuck behind a



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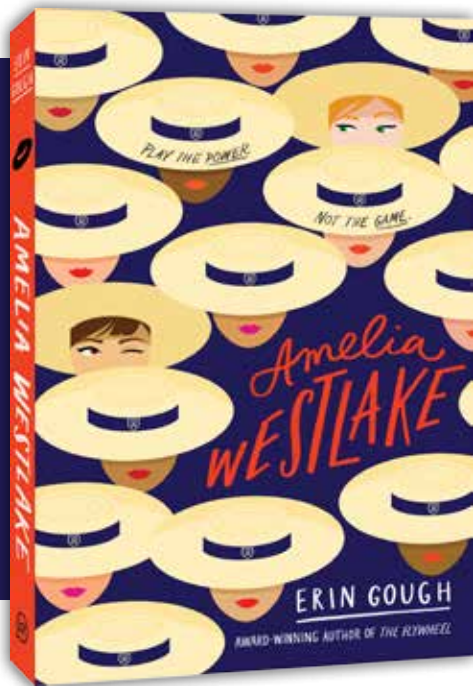
creative roadblock when it comes to her final Art project for the year, she misses her dad, who moved to the other side of the country following her parents' divorce, and is confused about her feelings for Nat – and for Harriet. And Harriet's confused about her own feelings – towards Edie, the school, her future, and Will. Both know that Amelia Westlake is becoming bigger than the two of them, but neither is willing to let go.

Then the situation explodes. Nat figures out that Will and Harriet are behind the Amelia Westlake hoax. Under threat of having her job at the paper taken from her by Principal Croon, Nat agrees to keep the hoax a secret only if she can join in. But she's mad at Will for lying to her. Really mad. And Harriet isn't speaking to Will either – not since Will kissed her and Edie found out. Harriet saved her relationship by offering to write Edie's speech for the public speaking finals, and by vowing never to speak to Will again. But although the friendships between Will, Harriet and Nat are fractured, and their hoax is on hiatus, Amelia Westlake now has a life of her own, as evidenced by the small but deliberate hoaxes that are popping up across the school – all signed 'AW'.

When Principal Croon calls Harriet into her office and tells her that the school board has banned same-sex couples from attending the formal – the formal Harriet has worked so hard to organise – Harriet knows that it's time for Amelia to pull her last big prank.

It takes guts and brains and cooperation, but Will, Harriet and Nat manage to pull the formal from under the teachers' noses. They shift the whole thing to a new, surprise venue. No teachers. No rules.

For Will, though, the success of the formal isn't enough – not when it means she has to watch Harriet and Edie dancing lovingly together. And worse, when they return to school, Principal Croon locks the whole senior class into the auditorium, facing them in an icy rage and demanding that someone accepts responsibility for the hoax. Hours pass as the senior class sit in the stony silence of the auditorium. Will is watching Harriet, and can see she's about to give in, that she's going to take responsibility for everything, just so she can escape the hall and finish writing Edie's public speaking notes for her before it's too late. Will knows that she's been selfish, with Harriet, with Nat, so she stands up and declares that she, Will, is Amelia Westlake. Will is expecting to be expelled. She isn't expecting Harriet to stand up and say that she, Harriet, is Amelia Westlake. And then Nat says the same thing. And so does another student. And another, and another, until the entire year level is claiming they are Amelia Westlake.



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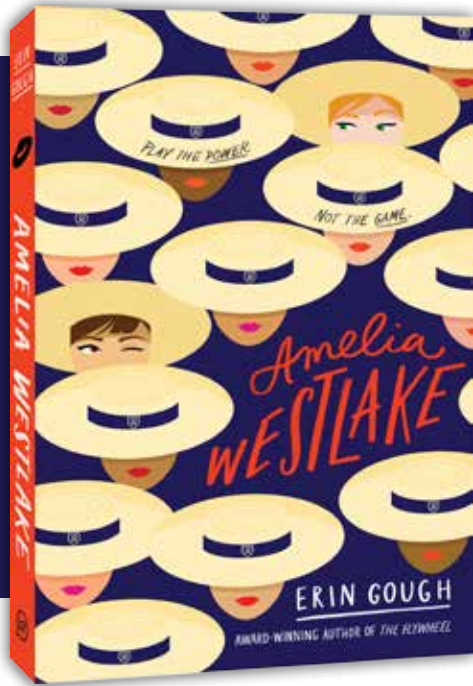
Will and Harriet are dragged to the principal's office where Principal Croon tells Will she's expelled. Harriet demands to be expelled alongside her, but Croon refuses to accept that Harriet is responsible for damaging school property. Harriet challenges Croon, demanding to know what she's going to do about Coach Hadley, and when Croon refuses to acknowledge her complaint, Harriet storms out alongside Will. When Will turns to say goodbye, Harriet takes her face in her hands and kisses her, proving that Amelia Westlake has changed something in all of them.

Here's the tricky thing about Defining Moments: they can be difficult to spot. You may think you're having one when in reality you're having something else entirely. I once believed that starting life at Rosemead Grammar was the moment that changed my life, when in fact it was simply a continuation of the course I was already on. What changed my life was not starting at Rosemead Grammar, but leaving it.
(p334)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erin Gough is a Sydney-based writer whose first novel for young adults, *The Flywheel*, won the Ampersand Prize. *The Flywheel* was published in the US as *Get it Together, Delilah!* and in Germany, and was shortlisted for the CBCA's Book of the Year for Older Readers and the Centre for Youth Literature's Gold Inky. Erin's award-winning short stories have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies, including *Best Australian Stories*, *The Age*, *Overland*, *Southerly* and *Going Down Swinging*. *Amelia Westlake* is her second novel.





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GENERAL COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

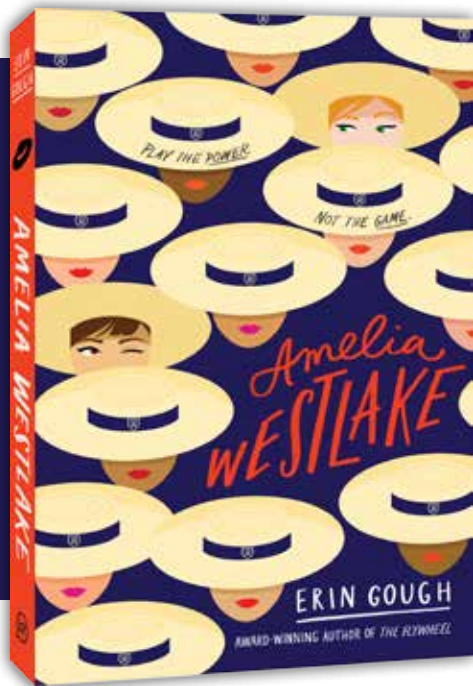
The following are some basic comprehension questions to consider before, during and after reading the book. More detailed questions and activities follow, grouped under theme and character.

Before Reading the Book

- Consider the title (Amelia Westlake) of the book. Do you think Amelia is a character in the book? How significant do you expect her to be given that her name is the title of the book? What does the cover image (of multiple female faces half-hidden by school hats) suggest to you about the contents of the book?
- Read the blurb. Does this tell you anything further about the book? What parts of the blurb make you interested in the story? Do you have any predictions about what the 'giant hoax' might be? What kind of genre do you think this book is? Why?
- Based on the genre, and other elements of the book itself (such as the cover, the author's biography and the blurb), what do you expect from the book? Do you think the hoax will be successful?
- Write down your expectations so that you can revisit them when you've finished the book, and compare what you know about the story once you've read it, to what you predicted at the beginning?

While Reading the Book

- What does Coach Hadley say to Ruby that makes Will call him a prick? Why doesn't Harriet back her up? Is Will's response appropriate? Why/why not?
- What is Harriet's Defining Moment? How do the other students react when she shares this? What does this tell you about her?
- How does Ms Bracken react when Will explains why she's in detention? What does this tell you about Ms Bracken?
- Harriet tells Will that there's no point going on about Hadley's behaviour unless she's prepared to do something about it (p19). Why does she say this? What is her suggestion about what Will could do? Why doesn't Will believe that she has any power to change the things she's unhappy with?
- Why does Will call Harriet a coward? Is she correct? Is Will a coward?
- Neither Will nor Harriet want to put their names to the cartoon they create about Coach Hadley. Why? What are the risks for each of them? How do they come up with the name 'Amelia Westlake'?
- What is Harriet's relationship like with her parents? Does this have any bearing on her attitude towards school and Will?

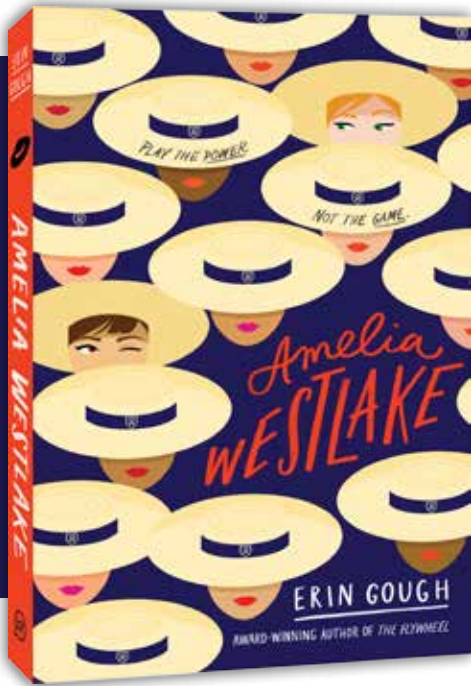


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- Why won't Will speak to her father? Why is she so hurt that he chose to move to Perth? Why does she find her parents' post-break-up relationship frustrating?
- Why is Will so angry at the mark Miss Fowler gives her for her English essay?
- Why is Harriet worried that she can't trust Will? Can she?
- What is Will's relationship with Nat?
- Why is Principal Croon looking for a reason to kick Nat off the Messenger? Why does Will feel guilty when she's reminded of this (p51)? Is Will being disloyal by not telling Nat the truth about Amelia Westlake?
- Why is Harriet surprised by the mark Will received on her English essay? Do you think this has anything to do with her suggestion to publish another Amelia Westlake cartoon?
- Why do you think Harriet doesn't tell Edie about Amelia Westlake (p66)?
- What kinds of issues do the Amelia Westlake cartoons highlight? Can you think of cartoon examples from the newspaper or online that work to highlight issues in a similar way? What is this called?
- What is the relationship between the image and the text in the Amelia Westlake cartoons? Is one more important than the other? How do they work together to deliver the message?
- Why do Harriet and Will believe that the Amelia Westlake cartoons are so important?
- Why is Will struggling to finish her creative work? What is the work about? What is she afraid of?
- Why does Nat pull one of the Amelia Westlake cartoons from the paper? Why might it be bad news for Will to have Nat investigate the true identity of Amelia Westlake?
- Are Harriet's parents supportive of her sexuality? How do you know? What could they do to be more supportive?
- What do Harriet and Will decide to do when their cartoon is pulled from the paper? What does Amelia Westlake become?
- Why does Principal Croon threaten to expel Will? Is this fair?
- When Deputy Davids admonishes the students for the Amelia Westlake pranks (p124), she suggests that the proper way to deal with problems is to discuss them with the teachers directly. Is this the best option in this scenario? Why do you think Will and Harriet have chosen not to do this?
- How does Harriet use emails to give people false impressions about who could be behind Amelia Westlake (p127-128)? Specifically, how does she use language in the emails to lead people down the wrong track?
- How does Harriet try to help Will overcome her fear (194)? Why does it make Will so angry?
- Why does Will kiss Harriet (p209)? Is that the only reason? What is the fallout of the kiss?
- What does Harriet agree to do to make amends with Edie (p235)? Is this a good choice?



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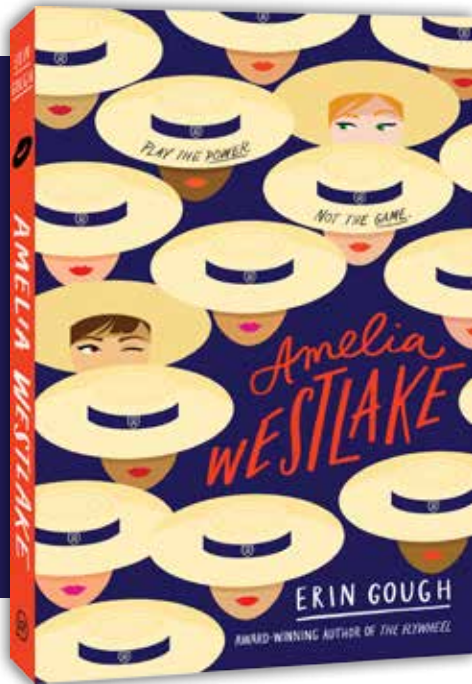
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- How does Nat discover that Will and Harriet are behind Amelia Westlake? How does she react? Why does she react this way?
- What does Principal Croon tell Harriet about the formal (p256)? How does this make you feel? What is Harriet's response?
- Who is Harriet thinking of when she comes up with the plan to stage an Amelia Westlake hoax around the school formal?
- When does Will realise that Amelia Westlake has become bigger than herself and Harriet? What does Amelia Westlake symbolise to the other students?

After Reading the Book

- How was the book different to your expectations? Did you enjoy it more or less than you thought you would? Why/why not?
- If you were recommending the book to a friend, what would you tell them? What is the book about?
- Was there anything in the book you didn't like? Why? How did this impact your reading?
- Were you happy with the outcome for each of the characters? Are there any parts of the story that you wish had been wrapped up differently?
- Discuss your thoughts on the book with a group of friends – did they enjoy the same parts as you? How were your responses to the book different? Does talking about the book with other people change the way you feel about it?



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EXPLORATION OF THE TEXT BY THEME

Overall themes

- Identity*
- Justice*
- Feminism*
- Politics
- Friendship
- Love
- Loyalty
- Hoaxes
- Overcoming anxiety

*the themes of identity, feminism and justice are explored in greater detail below.

Identity

'Amelia Westlake was a pretty great girl, wasn't she?'

'Uh-huh.'

'I'm definitely going to miss her now we're leaving school and everything.'

'Now I'm leaving, you mean.'

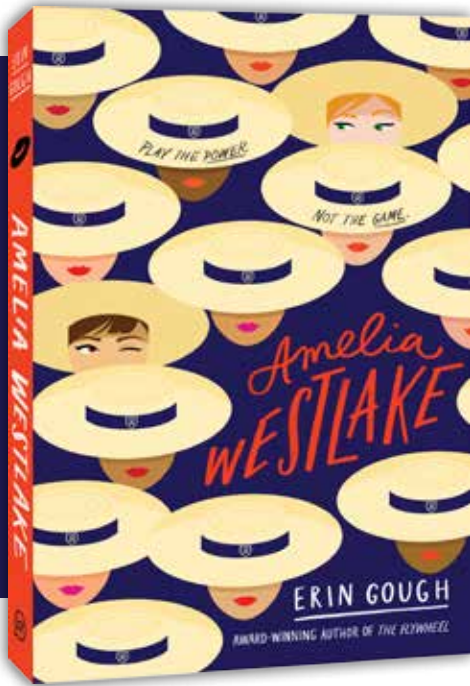
Harriet says nothing to this.

'She was the best of both of us,' I say, measuring my words. 'The best of all of us, in the end. We gave her the best of ourselves. You know that, don't you?'

(p331)

Amelia Westlake is a book that explores not only the identity of its individual characters, but also their collective identity as students. It does this through Amelia Westlake, who becomes symbolic for the entire class, representing them in their various struggles and complaints against the school.

Gough's story also explores identity on the cusp of transition. Will, Harriet, Nat and Edie are all in their final year of high school. Over the course of the novel they face changes in their relationships (friendship, romantic and familial), changes in their priorities and changes within themselves. Gough navigates this rough territory beautifully, capturing the moments of growth and change as the familiar identity of



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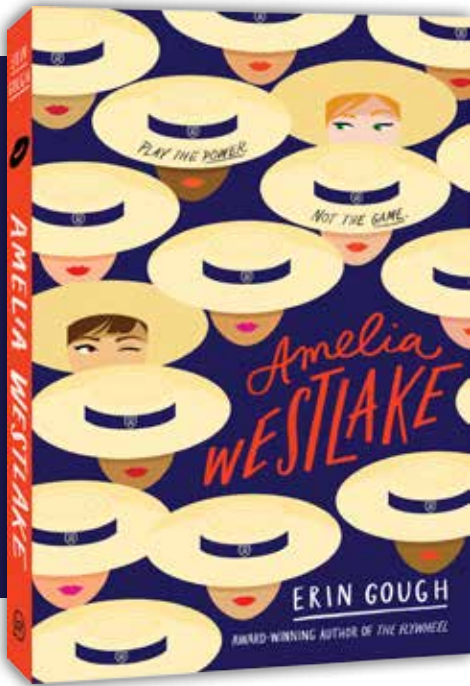
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adolescence morphs and matures into something new. The following set of questions and activities are designed to encourage discussion around these two aspects of identity as it is explored in the novel. Individual identity is covered in the 'exploration of the text by character' section of these notes.

In groups or as a class, go through the following:

- 1. Who is Amelia Westlake? Make a list of all examples in the text where a student assumes the identity of Amelia Westlake.**
 - Include the page number, name (where possible) of the student assuming the identity, or give them a number (i.e student 1) to allow you to differentiate between each. Why are they assuming the identity of Amelia Westlake?
 - What do these examples have in common?
 - How does the identity of Amelia Westlake allow students to speak out about injustices? How are these injustices both shared and individual? Why is this important?
 - Do you think Amelia Westlake speaks on behalf of all (or most) of the students? What makes you say this?
- 2. Come up with your own Amelia Westlake hoax (this could be done independently or in pairs or groups).**
 - Write an outline of your hoax (think about the hoaxes from the book – it could be an email, a letter, a notice, a cartoon or a more active prank)
 - Who would need to be involved? Who might the hoax have an impact on?
 - What point are you trying to make? (Remember that Amelia Westlake hoaxes expose injustices faced by a number of students, rather than being personal vendettas – what does your hoax aim to achieve?)
 - Share your hoax with the rest of the class and discuss whether any have managed to capture (or not) issues that affect the majority of your class. Why are some more effective than others? What do these have in common with the hoaxes that Will and Harriet are behind?
- 3. Consider the phrase 'collective identity'.**
 - What do you think this means?
 - Can you think of any examples where you are part of a collective identity? How is this different to your individual identity? Does your connection with others you share this identity with provide you



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- 4. Choose one of the main characters in the book and map the significant turning points (or their 'Defining Moments') that shape who they become.**
- Write a short paragraph outlining who your chosen character is at the beginning of the book – what's important to them, how they see themselves, how others see them, how they behave etc. Write another paragraph outlining who they are at the end.
 - How are they different? How are they the same? What has caused the changes in their character? How have they matured?
 - Consider the question that Harriet answers on page 8, where she describes her Defining Moment. What are the moments that have defined you? Like Harriet, choose one big event that has influenced your life and write about it – you may choose to write your response as straightforward prose, or explore it in another way.

Justice

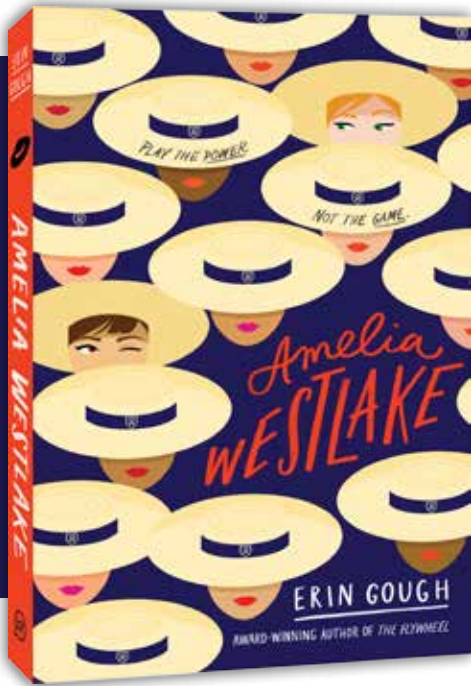
I dig my fingernails into the underside of Croon's mahogany desk. Advantage for Rosemead? How about the hard-earned fortune in fees my mother is paying, for starters?

'We have a very impressive year-twelve final average and marks like yours bring down the reputation of the school. The way I see it,' Croon continues, massaging her fingers, 'is you have two choices. One. You stop all this nonsense. You knuckle down, study hard and improve your marks. Two.' She thins her lips. 'Rosemead bids you farewell.'

I'm going through the motions of nodding numbly when I wake up to myself. This is an outrage. Croon is considering expelling me because I'm bad for Rosemead's bottom line. Never mind nurturing underperformers or encouraging independent thinking. If you can't rise to the top of the pile, and in a suitable manner, the school has no place for you.

(p103)

Will and Harriet create Amelia Westlake because they feel unable to change the injustices they witness at the school. The pseudonym offers anonymity and security that allows them to make public statements about these injustices, and not only draws the attention of the heads of school, but tells the other students that they are not alone.



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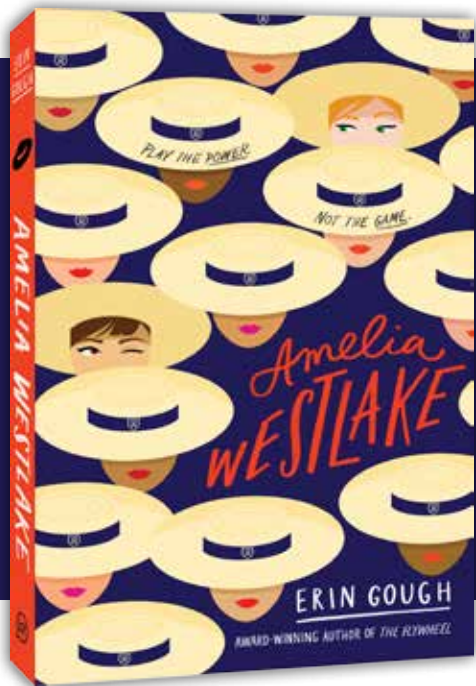
1. Research an individual who has drawn attention to an injustice.

- Who are they
- What injustice did they draw attention to?
- What platform did they use?
- How did they deliver their message to the public?
- If your subject's work was done prior to the advent of social media, consider reflecting on how they might have got their message across differently using social media.
- How were they received by the public?
- What is your personal response to the person? Do you agree with what they are saying? Write a short personal reflection to accompany your research findings.

*Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo provides good inspiration on how to present your findings.

2. Injustice often comes from an imbalance of power. Discuss the role of power in justice.

- Who has the power in the above scene between Principal Croon and Will? Is there anything Will could do to shift that power dynamic?
- What is an abuse of power? What processes do we put in place (say in schools, in governments or at home) to ensure that one person or group doesn't hold all the power?
- Think of a specific organisation or group (as outlined above) and find out what processes they use to ensure that power is not abused.
- Are these processes flawless? What could go wrong?
- What are some possible outcomes if power is abused? Who would be impacted? What risks would they face?
- Can you think of an example where the processes to avoid abuses of power have failed? What was the response of those in power? What was the response of those who had been let down by this? Whose responsibility is it to speak up?
- Make a list of things that would prevent you from speaking up in a situation such as the one you've explored. Discuss in class how you might overcome these obstacles in order to make your voice heard.



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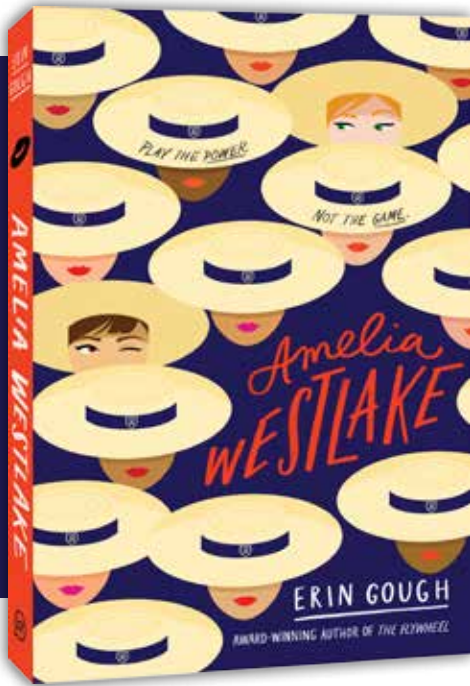
Feminism

The carton was wildly popular, and we followed it up with another in the week before Easter: one about how female authors are underrepresented on Rosemead's English syllabus. It depicts a Rosemead student reading a book by Jane Austen. Another student walking by remarks, 'Jane? That's a funny name for a fella.'
(p67)

The book explores feminism in a number of ways, both subtle and explicit. The following questions and activities are designed to stimulate critical thinking and discussion around both subtle and overt gender biases, and the role of feminism in fiction.

1. What does feminism mean to you?

- Do you see feminism as being a good thing or a bad thing?
- What connotations does the word 'feminism' carry? Why do you think some people are reluctant to call themselves a feminist?
- Is feminism only for women?
- Is Amelia Westlake a feminist? Is Will? Is Harriet?
- Is it important for women to support other women? Where can you find examples of this in Amelia Westlake?
- Consider the reaction that Will first has to Harriet. Neither of them give each other much of a chance, because both have formed firm negative opinions based on stereotypes. But as they start working together, Will and Harriet are surprised by how wrong their first impressions were, and show an incredible amount of support to each other over the course of the book. Think of a woman whose support has made you achieve something that you couldn't have achieved alone. Write her a letter sharing your memory of that moment or experience and give it to her. Have a conversation and find out if she realised what a difference she'd made. Ask if it makes a difference to her knowing that she's made an impact on someone's life.



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2. Using this bingo template, find examples in the book that challenge gender stereotypes and encourage us not to make assumptions about other people. (This can be played as a full-class game, or with independent written examples.)

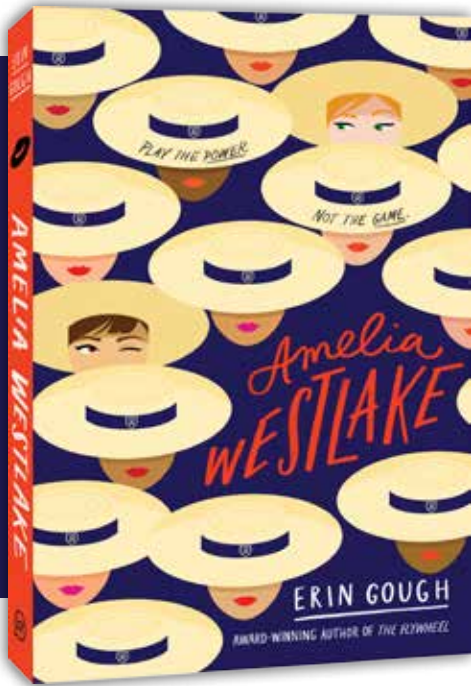
Someone is treated differently because of their gender.	A girl helps another girl achieve something.	A girl says something negative about another girl.
A positive example of female friendship.	Someone is stereotyped (wrongly) as a particular type of girl.	A girl stands up for another girl.
A boy helps a girl achieve something.	An example of mutual respect.	Someone is treated unfairly because of their sexuality.

EXPLORATION OF THE TEXT BY CHARACTER: Will

I snort. Doesn't Harriet know that drawing attention to issues is what I've been trying to do since I arrived at this school over two years ago? I've pushed for a fundraiser for Indigenous Literacy Day. I've campaigned for energy-efficient lighting. Fat lot of good that was ever going to do, given the chair of the school board is also the deputy CEO of its electricity supplier. 'Take it from me, Harriet. If it's good for the world but bad for Rosemead, they won't change a thing,' I call out to her.
(p20)

At the beginning of the book, Will doesn't believe that she has a great deal of power in her life. Consider the following examples:

Terrible stuff has been happening to me since I was born. Mum and Dad named me Wilhelmina for a start. I've had three pets hit by cars. Last winter I was mildly electrocuted by a faulty hair dryer. Then there are the elements that make up my daily slog: having separated parents on different sides of the country. Living in a shoebox beneath a flight path. Going to a school full of rich, selfish brats.
(p3)



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Dad sent me an invitation to the launch of his new art magazine a month ago. Like it never occurred to him that, short of a spare five days to drive across the desert, I'd have to spend four-and-a-half hours on a plane to get there. He knows I don't do planes anymore.

(p34)

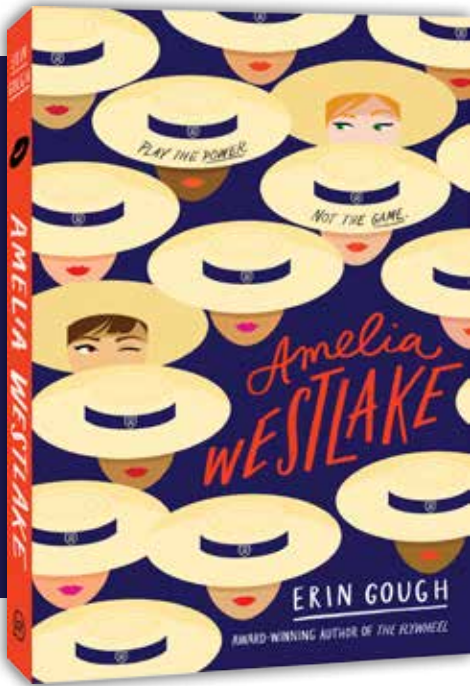
Miss Fowler is not fond of discussion points that deviate from her lesson plan. This is why, at the end of class, I am forced to endure a lecture from her about my recent academic performance.

(p38)

- What is making Will unhappy in each of these examples?
- Is she as powerless as she believes herself to be?
- What could she do to take control of the situation?
- How does Will's friendship with Harriet make her more aware of herself?
- Is Will a passive or an active person? How would you define these types of people? What positive and negative character traits can you think of for each?

Will is painted as someone who finds it difficult to connect with others. The text suggests that she left her old school due to problems with her peers and, at Rosemead, her only real friend is Nat. Her friendship with Harriet (and the onset of feelings towards her) comes as a surprise to Will.

- What qualities do you look for in a good friend?
- Does Will display any of these qualities?
- Do you like her? Why/why not?
- Does Will behave poorly in her friendships with Nat and/or Harriet?
- How does Will show a greater awareness of her responsibility in friendships towards the end of the book? How does she try to make amends to her friends?
- Do Will's problems in her relationship with her dad stem from the same issues we see in her friendships?



AMELIA WESTLAKE TEACHERS NOTES

Written by Erin Gough

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont in April 2018

Harriet

I was not comfortable with what Coach said to Ruby. Ruby was clearly upset, and understandably so. But I am sure he was only trying to make a joke, albeit one in poor taste. Anyway, how could I possibly have taken Will's side? I am Coach's chosen representative on the school's Sports Committee. An incredible honour. And as a prefect I am duty-bound to uphold the authority of Rosemead's staff.
(p12)

Opinions matter to Harriet, who puts a good deal of significance onto the way other people see her. But the way Harriet sees herself and the way others see her are often two very different things. Consider the following relationships:

Harriet and Edie:

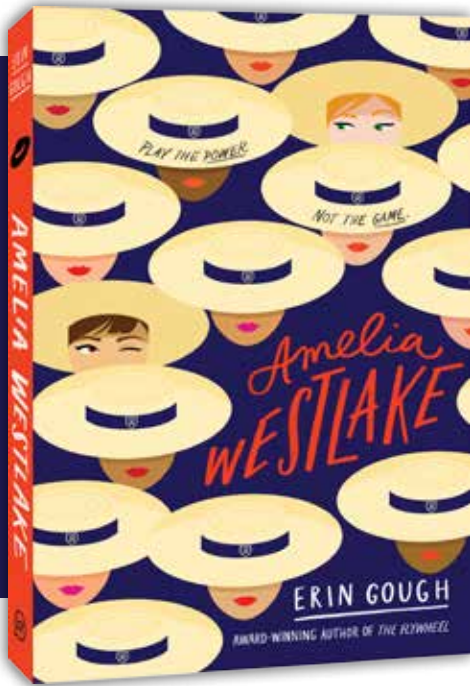
- When Harriet first describes Edie (p9), what does she say about her? What does this tell you about the things that she finds important?
- The first time we see direct communication from Edie to Harriet is via text (p29). What is the tone of the text? Does the language that Edie uses to speak to Harriet tell you anything about Edie or her feelings towards Harriet?
- Do you think Edie is as perfect as Harriet believes her to be? Why/why not?
- When we see Harriet and Edie in person together (p63), the distance between them becomes more obvious. Is Edie supportive of Harriet?
- What opinions do Harriet's brother, Arthur, and Will have of Edie? Why don't they think she's as perfect as Harriet does?
- Does Edie take advantage of Harriet? Why does Harriet accept this?

Ms Bracken (p10–13).

- How does Harriet describe her relationship with Ms Bracken? Do you think this is accurate? Why/why not?
- How does the author make use of voice and tone to show the differences in perspective in this scene?

Harriet and Beth:

- What is Beth saying when she is first introduced (p43)?
- How important is Beth's friendship to Harriet?
- When did Beth become friends with Harriet (p44)? What were her motivations?
- Do you think Harriet feels supported in this friendship?



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Will and Harriet:

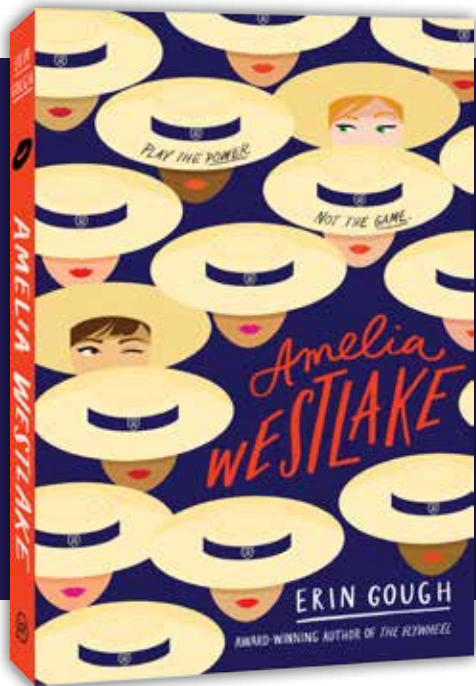
- Harriet Price wouldn't have a clue what it's like to be picked on. (p17) Is Will correct in thinking this?
- What assumptions does Will make about Harriet before she gets to know her?
- How does Will's friendship give Harriet the opportunity to be herself? What does Harriet learn about herself when she has this freedom?

In small groups, have a discussion about friendship.

- Make a list of characteristics that you look for in a friend.
- What kind of language do you and your friends use around each other?
- What do you consider most important in a friendship? Compare these things with your friends – are their priorities similar to yours?
- Why, like Harriet and Will, might it be important not to assume that we can't find friendship with people who, at first glance, seem different to us?

In many ways, Harriet is an over-the-top character, whose obsession with appearances and perfection might be unfamiliar. But these obsessions come from Harriet's anxiety, and this makes her much more relatable.

- What makes Harriet anxious?
- What physical symptoms of anxiety does she experience? Have you ever felt this way?
- How does Harriet's experience with anxiety influence the way you relate to or understand her as a character?
- Is it important for authors to explore the flaws in characters as well as their positives? Why do you think this is? How would it change your reading and enjoyment of the story if Harriet didn't struggle at all?



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PROMPTS FOR CREATIVE RESPONSES

- Use one of the hoaxes in *Amelia Westlake* as a prompt to write your own hoax story. Think about the way the author delivers (or withholds) particular information to give it the greatest impact. Consider the number of characters involved and their role in the hoax, as well as the purpose of the hoax, the fallout, and the climax of the story.
- Erin Gough makes use of text messages to show communication between her characters. Choose one of the scenes in the book and rewrite it entirely as a conversation that takes place via text. Reflect on how this changes the scene.
- What genre is *Amelia Westlake*? As a class, discuss the genre of the book and make a list of the key elements typical of that genre. What stock characters do you see? Will the ending be happy or sad? Now use your knowledge of these elements to write a story that subverts the genre.
- In many ways, *Amelia Westlake* responds to the politics around feminism and sexuality prevalent around the time of the book's publication. Choose something that's happening in the world that you feel passionate about and plot a story using it as inspiration.
- Write (or draw) an additional chapter for the book. Choose a scene featuring about two or more characters and follow one of them when they leave. Where do they go? What do they do? Why were you interested in following them?