

Unit of Work

by LAURA GORDON

**SONYA
HARTNETT**
GOLDEN
BOYS

INTRODUCTION

CAUTION: This text deals with domestic violence and an abuse of trust between an adult and a young person. Sensitivity and a delicate approach will be required for some students.

If you choose to set the text for reading individually first and then study in detail, these questions will open discussion and allow students to voice some of their feelings about the novel before beginning a close study of the text.

Discussion questions to initiate study:

- What ideas or images do you associate with the title *Golden Boys*?
- How does the opening line establish an atmosphere or theme?
- Where and when do you think this novel is set?
- Which character did you like the most? Which one did you dislike the most?
- What happens to Freya at the end?
- If you could sum up the novel in just one word what would it be?

Sticky note questions:

Invite each student to write one question they have about the text and they would like answered during the discussion. Create a space in the room with all of these questions posted on. As the question is answered, write the answer on a strip of paper and stick it on to this poster. You may allocate a few minutes at the end of each class to consider the questions and whether any have been addressed through the course of the lesson.

Private/ Personal/ Public Post-it Box:

This is an alternative to having a class blog set up online, which you can do if you prefer. In this case you design and display a box in the classroom with a slot for posting notes and easy access to remove these. You might pose a question for the class, use a question from the board, consider a scene or character development or apply the themes to something happening in the real world. Students are to write a response to this and post it in the box. They fold it in half and write on the outside whether it is private, personal or public. Private is something that students do not want shared with their classmates, but they are happy for the teacher to read. Personal refers to their own response or question that they are happy to have shared. Public is a response to someone else's idea. How much and how frequently they write can be determined according to the class and their needs, how often you discuss or share is the discretion of the teacher. It may be once a week, the start or end of each lesson, conducted in small groups or purely through a private online forum as homework.

CHARACTERS

THE JENSON FAMILY

Rex Jenson

“I wanted to be the man that could ease suffering when suffering was a person’s whole world.” (p 105)

The irony of Rex’s explanation for choosing to become a dentist is not lost on the audience. Nor is Joe’s reaction. Both men cause enormous suffering for the children they father; only Rex openly admits he is also desperate to be the hero to others. The disparity between the way Rex Jenson perceives himself, and the way others perceive him creates a palpable tension in the novel. His influence on those younger than him starkly contrasts with the hero Freya idolises and the deep menace of Colt’s existence. He is a threat to Joe, a comforter to Avery and someone who abuses their privileged position to Garrick, or as Garrick simply puts, a ‘perv’. To his wife Tabby he is the lifeblood of the family, the provider of food and shelter. To his son Bastian he is the bearer of extravagant gifts. And it is true that Rex is all of these things, but the turmoil lies in the

consideration of which of these versions is the most significant. There are a number of ways to consider Rex; the way he sees himself, the way others see him, and the version of masculinity he presents in comparison to other men in the same time and place. There is no question that the way in which he treats Garrick is an abuse of power. It is inappropriate and takes absolute advantage of a vulnerable boy. Rex's initial care and interest in Avery is also blackened once readers learn of his ulterior motives. Avery never speaks of anything inappropriate and untoward advances may never have occurred between Rex and Avery, but Garrick's experience and Declan's insight suggests it may have. Moreover, Rex's behaviour is not simply opportunistic either, it is planned and manipulated. The expensive toys, brand new BMX and enticing pool are, as Colt describes, bait. They lure the local neighbourhood boys to this house, this man, like bees to honey. These children, perhaps more so than others, are seduced by the appeal of new expensive toys, the use of a pool, the promise of delicious food. All of which is completely out of reach in their own homes and lives. Syd is willing to risk whatever threat Rex poses to get in that pool and swim. Freya, desperate for someone to come to her rescue, refuses to believe it is possible, and Tabby lives in denial. His power is consuming, even to those who are aware of the risk he presents.

1. Can someone be a hero and also the perpetrator?
2. Is the most important version of this man, the one his son's see? Or is his role as husband and provider more significant?
3. Is he a better man than Joe? Why?

4. Who suffers the most as a result of the way Rex behaves?
5. Create a profile of Rex. Divide the page into the following columns; The way he sees himself, The way others see him, The way he compares to other men in the novel.

Tabby Jenson

“Tabby smiles; she looks even prettier, on the corduroy couch, than she had in the church car park. Her skin is smooth and her dark hair is groomed into waves, and she’s wearing lipstick in the house. She doesn’t seem much like a mother – it’s impossible to imagine her wiping clean a baby’s clagged-up bottom.” (p 72)

“It cannot be easy, and he wonders how she finds the courage to do it – to unknow what she knows, and to do it for her children. To let them take the weight of the blame.” (p 142)

Freya’s younger sisters’ describe Tabby when they first meet her after church as like someone posing in a magazine, flat and lifeless. Indeed this is an apt description of her as her substance seems absent. She is all appearance and manners. To Freya she seems extraordinary, an appealing person to have as a mother and yet incapable of doing the things that mother’s need to do. To Rex she is obedient, certainly subservient and willing to pretend away the terrible things she knows by simply not acknowledging them.

For Bastian, his mother is available, comforting and present. But to Colt she is anything but. Colt knows the truth about his father. He has the wit and courage to understand and endure why they have moved, to read between the harsh whispers and speedy departure. He has to, for there is no one in this family that will actually speak the truth. Tabby refuses to acknowledge the evil lurking in her family, to consider that the man that gives them this comfortable life is someone she should protect her children from. Instead she “unknows” the unthinkable, she shrinks away from the truth, and as Colt says; lets her children take the weight of the blame. Her inaction is responsible for much of the damage to her eldest son.

1. Find an image that best represents Tabby.
2. Have Tabby describe her two sons to the school principal as they are being enrolled in the new school. What would she say about each boy?
3. If Tabby were to confront Elizabeth about Freya coming to the house, how might she word her concerns?

Colt

“He’s a slighter version of his film-star father, with the same thick chestnut hair.”(p 15)

“His father buys bait. And Colt is engulfed with such disorienting shame that he has to move away quickly,

striding the length of the room as if he's spotted something about to topple." (p 53)

"Colt is on his feet before he knows it, moving swiftly, galvanised." (p 147)

The narrative is mostly shared between the perspectives of Colt and Freya. Through Colt we learn about the newly arrived Jensen's and through Freya we learn about everyone else. The narrator is omniscient and so their insight and humiliation is punctuated by the occasional comparison to the wider world around them. Colt is described by Freya, with her cheeks burning, she flees from this first introduction and soon his presence is shadowed by his father. But ultimately it is Colt's perception of the way his father operates, the way his mother denies and the way his brother obliviously accepts that readers are privy to. Colt comes to Freya's rescue, despite his mother's caution and his father's hesitation, Colt bolts from the house and runs to protect Freya's mother from her violent father, Joe. Colt is used to paying for the sins of his father, he has been doing it his whole life and is only now realising the consequences. He knows what is at stake. He accepts the blame that is sent reeling toward him. He squares his shoulders and takes the brunt of it because he knows there is no other way.

1. Consider the opening chapters of this novel. How is Colt described in looks and personality? What is your first impression of him?

2. At what point does your impression change?
3. Is Garrick's treatment of Colt fair? What does this reveal about Garrick? What does Colt's reaction reveal about Colt?
4. Why doesn't he hesitate when Freya arrives desperate for help? What changes through the course of the next hour?
5. What does the running symbolise about Colt? Why doesn't he run anymore?
6. How do you feel about Colt at the end of the novel? Imagine it is twelve months in the future from this moment. What has changed?

Bastian

“Syd and Bastian look at each other, and it’s like a Jack Russell being introduced to a budgerigar: in theory they could be friends but in practice sooner or later there will be bright feathers on the floor.” (p 43)

Bastian is described with many animal references and it is clear he is the weakest of the species. He acts much younger than his age, is protected from any possible cruelty in the world by his mother and charmed constantly by the extravagant gifts from his father. Beside boys his own age, he seems timid, babyish even. He is easily pleased with the company of these neighbourhood boys, as long as they play by the rules and fit his expectations. Bastian is so unlike his brother it makes Colt seem much older and wiser than the boy he is.

TEACHER'S NOTES

1. Compile a list of all of the descriptions Hartnett uses to create this character. Which one is the most telling?
2. How does this character influence the way we respond to Colt? What is it about their relationship that builds the picture of Colt?
3. Why is Bastian described as much more vulnerable than Syd who is the same age as him?

THE KILEY FAMILY

Joe Kiley

“She’s never thought of him as a man with expertise”. (p 102)

“Her father is a man of silences. He never talks about himself or anyone else. He mustn’t, Freya’s long ago reasoned, be interested, not even in himself.” (p 103)

“Oh, he suffers, don’t you think? He suffers. And he’ll suffer more, in other ways, as time goes on.” (p 129)

If this novel has a villain, it is easier to describe Joe as fitting the bill than the conniving and manipulative Rex. Joe’s flaws are pulsing on the outside. They are smashed plates, gravy-bootprints in freshly washed clothes, a fallen over Christmas tree, empty promises and

foul smelling breath from another night drinking. To his children he is fear and violence. His treatment of his wife, his eldest daughter and Declan is fuelled by his alcoholism and bleeds this loathing of him through the family. Joe works hard and still they don't have much. Life is simple and monotonous; punctuated for his children by his filthy temper and violence. Life is easier for everyone when Joe isn't home, because so often when he is he demands, picks fights and fills the air with a tension that has his children clinging to the skirts of their mother, terrified about what he might do next. Freya has had enough. Trying to make sense of her father and the terror he inflicts on those he is supposed to love sees her turn to Rex for some insight. His explanation shakes her understanding of the world so completely she is dizzy with the realisation of her father as someone who has made decisions he had no choice about. Especially when she starts to view herself as the reason for his most important decision; to marry Elizabeth.

1. Describe the version of masculinity Joe represents. Has much changed in the way men are expected to behave now in current society?
2. Are there any positive qualities Joe has to offer as a husband and a father? What can his children learn from him?
3. Why does Syd describe him as 'chickenshit'?
4. Is Joe better or worse toward those around him than Rex? What is revealed when he stands up to Rex at the barbecue?

Elizabeth Kiley

"It's taken a long time to realise her parents hate one another." (p 19)

Unlike Tabby Jenson, Elizabeth Kiley has spent her adult life having babies and caring for them. She isn't maternal in the comforting, gushy way of Tabby to Bastian, but she fiercely protects them from the most significant threat facing her children; their father. Elizabeth is unhappy. She refuses to accept the violence that pervades her home on so many nights, and yet she is absolutely powerless to prevent it. All she can do is stand guard, hide her children, lock the door and resist. She defends Freya with animal instinct against the raised hand of Joe and she loves Declan more than the others as a way of compensating for the little kindness he gets from his father. Despite being the mother of six young children, Elizabeth warns her eldest daughter about the reality of caring for so many. She even tells her not to have children. Freya's world reels and crashes as the date on the wedding photo confirms her greatest fear, this marriage, this cause of great misery is because of her conception. Elizabeth has accepted this is life for now and for the future. She is unhappy, but she is strong and determined to survive it. That seems to be the best she can hope for.

1. Compare Elizabeth to Tabby in physical appearance, lifestyle, values and mothering. What are their similarities? How do they differ?

2. Write a letter Elizabeth gives to her eldest daughter on her sixteen birthday. Include the hopes Elizabeth may have had for herself at that age and some advice for Freya as she approaches adulthood.
3. Imagine it is Christmas Day. List the present she buys for each of her children. Explain why she chose each gift.

Freya

“No one else, as far as she can tell, hankers for privacy with the fretful, ceaseless restlessness that she does.” (p 31)

“Freya is finding that sometimes, when she opens a fresh door of the castle, she’s confronted by a startling but not disagreeable new version of herself.” (p 50)

“She does not want to spend her life doing laundry.” (p 149)

Readers see this suburban, impoverished childhood through the eyes of twelve year old Freya. “Mostly she worries about money”. The Kiley children do not go without food or presents for their birthdays but even the simple delight of fish and chips for dinner is tarnished with her father’s selfishness and limited resources. She is desperate for her own space, to think, to make sense of the way this world is starting to shift and keel before her. Crowded into a messy bedroom with her two younger sisters, Freya is convinced there is another baby coming, to this family where “they’re not

needed” and the thought infuriates her. She has decided she will no longer attend Church, filled with a new realisation that in fact God is not true and she will no longer tolerate the lies. Freya refers to this castle she has found herself in, where as a child she has only lived in one room, but as she gets older and wiser she discovers so much more. It is a castle filled with wonder, but also terror, forced out of one room into another, that is worse, and then trapped in the walls by the yellow-eyed monster that threatens to engulf her. Freya is brave and resilient, but she is also confused and hurt. The family she knows and loves live in fear of her father. His unpredictability, violence and terror he inflicts on them all become too much for Freya to bear. Especially as Rex Jenson opens her eyes to the truth of her parents’ marriage. In her desperation to resist, she escalates the violence to something no one in the family can stop and she runs for help. Her world has come crashing down, the monster is nipping at her heels and this man who seemed to be the knight coming to her rescue is revealed to be much, much more sinister than any imagined monster. As the eldest child, the protector, she has brought the greatest danger inside their house and now there is nowhere to flee. She has saved them this time, but at what cost?

1. Describe how her siblings might see Freya. Write a sentence for each child.
2. What are the clues that Freya is starting to ‘come of age’? Which of her beliefs are wavering? How does she make sense of her place in the family?

3. How does Freya view each of the women in this text? Find examples of the way she views Elizabeth and Tabby. Who would she rather be like?
4. Consider the symbol of the castle. Explain what this represents for Freya?
5. At what point does the relationship between Colt and Freya change?
6. What is the final enduring image of Freya? What has she realised about her father? About Rex?
7. “The yellow-eyed monster with its slinky back limbs has chased her right into her house”. Explain the significance of this quote?

Declan

“Punch me,’ says Declan again. ‘You’ve got to hit someone, so it might as well be me. Me – instead of Avery.’” (p 27)

“Declan’s face, which was bloodless, is now blazing, but he speaks again obediently, louder and more clearly. ‘No,’ he says, ‘that’s not true.’” (p 222)

Declan is the eldest son in the Kiley household, and he is the one who garners his father’s wrath more easily than any other. He is frequently told to go to bed, while all of the younger children are still awake. And often he does, just to keep the little skerrick of peace that remains. Declan is accepting of the pitiful family life

TEACHER'S NOTES

they have. He remains furious at Joe and looks after Syd as though he were his own, but he accepts this is the way life is. He takes the punishment directed at Avery because he wants to. At the mention of another baby coming he accepts it as fate, as the way it will be. He keeps Garrick Greene as an ally rather than an enemy and is intrigued with these new boys and all their toys. But Declan is savvy and when Garrick reveals the truth about Rex, he doesn't have to be told twice. He is careful, he warns Syd and he supports Garrick. The problem is, when his father finally confronts him, in the midst of another evening of fighting and threats, Declan has no choice but to keep the secret, to protect Rex. He cannot let his father win.

1. Explain Declan's response to Joe and Rex at the end of the novel. Why does he answer this way?
2. Build a profile of Declan with a selection of five key quotes about him and the way he treats the people he spends time with.
3. What might happen to Declan in the next few years?
4. Declan is a true survivor. He doesn't complain about his lot. He doesn't take it out on those around him. Instead it sharpens his sense of justice. Give some examples from the text that support this perspective.

Syd

“He had discovered at the barbeque that he likes swimming for the solitude of it: although in no way an anti-social child, he had found tranquillity in that water.” (p 116)

“Under the water, everything had stopped. Now, if the pool is gone, it will all go unrelentingly on.”(p 205)

Syd is younger than Declan and Freya. He is protected by them, but also told what to do by them. Declan won't allow Syd to swim at the Jenson's pool once he has learnt the truth about Rex. He doesn't expect Syd to understand, just to obey. All that Syd can think about is the possibility of getting a new skateboard for Christmas. And in this family, that is highly unlikely. He even musters the courage one night to sneak from his bed and plant the seed with his parents. What he discovers instead is another reason to despise his father. If the fury and the demands weren't enough, now he is a coward as well, and for Syd this is too much to bear. He too has spent his childhood witnessing the late return of his father, smelling of booze and bursting with anger. All Syd can do is promise himself to replace the smashed plate of his mother's for Christmas. Swimming is the solace Syd finds amongst this mess. The pool provides an escape, a silence that has been impossible to access before. The thought of the pool being out of his reach, becomes more frightening to Syd than any of the other threats lurking nearby.

1. How does Syd fit within this family? What is the relationship like between him and his siblings?
2. Describe his affinity with the pool. What makes it so appealing?
3. What does the skateboard become a symbol for? First as a wish and then as a possibility from Colt?

Marigold, Dorrie and Peter

These are the youngest three of the Kiley children aged 7, 5 and a baby still in stroller respectively. To Freya they are mostly a nuisance, another exhaust on the bare resources the Kiley's scrape together. Despite her disinterest, she still feels they are her responsibility and they desperately need her protection from an abusive, unpredictable father, and an exhausted mother. They are children, still fascinated by the prospect of Christmas and hopeful that their wishes will be granted. They are never the cause of their father's temper, if anything they receive a vague greeting *"as if it's the first time he's meeting them: 'Yes hello Marigold, good evening Dorrie'".* And in fact the girls defend their father against the comparison Freya makes to Rex claiming *"Dad's not nasty"*. In their eyes, he is bad tempered and unpredictable, but he is also *"spectacular and impossible, their own private circus, a man of marvels in their midst"* as he *"swigs a mouthful of petrol"* and magically breathes fire. The girls squeal in delight and demand *"do it again, Dad, do it again."* But for the reader, the overwhelming representation of these girls and the squirming toddler Petey is epitomised as they are clinging to their mother as *"the crying of the little children becomes strangled"*

shrieks of terror". They watch their father attack Freya and shrink back as Rex arrives, "*white-faced and pristinely still, they stand around their mother like children in a very old painting, impassive but on guard*".

1. Why does the author have the Kiley family have so many children?
2. What role do these two little girls play in the narrative? How do they affect the reader?
3. Why is Christmas so significant to them? How does their sense of expectation create suspense for the reader?
4. Read Chapter 20. Why is this included in the narrative? What do we learn about Avery? What do we learn about the Kiley children?

Avery Price

"Nobody ever knows where he is or what he's doing. It's like nobody owns him." (p 73)

"He's used to the freedom of neglect; he likes it." (p 136)

Avery is the most vulnerable child in the text and yet is described as being "tough as a boot". He has to be. Cared for by his grandparents, there is a sense among the children of this town that Avery Price is abandoned, forced to fend for himself. He aligns himself with the bully, the tough kid. At times he riles Garrick up as well,

but Declan steps in to defend this boy who is used to running, used to surviving. When his knee is torn to shreds and Mr Jenson comes to his aid, he willingly submits. He has never seen a first aid the likes of which Rex Jenson has, let alone received such attention. Readers are never told whether Avery is also subjected to the inappropriate advances that Garrick is. All the boys are aware of how fond Rex is with them, initially they laugh it off and mimic him. Avery joins in this, but never accuses in the way Garrick does. Freya cares for Avery, for his welfare, so too do her sisters who are infuriated when they are told off by Avery's grandfather for putting a belt around Dorrie's neck. It seems that in fact someone may care for Avery in a way these children do not know. But for them it is not enough. We don't know how Avery feels about it, his voice is silent in the text.

1. Why do the other children do all of the talking for Avery?
2. Describe Avery Price using only quotes from the text. Write a paragraph about this boy.
3. Is Avery the most vulnerable character? Why?

Garrick Greene

“Garrick is the youngest of a large family, each member of which has a toe-curling reputation.” (p 25)

As far as archetypal characters go, Garrick Greene is the bully. He is the big kid from the rough family who isn't afraid to use his fists

to get his point across. The other boys hang out with him, not out of fear or friendship, but out of survival; he is a better ally than enemy and they know it. Garrick is crude and unrelenting. His version of justice results in bloodied eyes and sore knuckles. The world is a simple place to him, disappointing, but simple. When the new family arrive with flash new bikes and toys and an offer to buy him any ice-cream he likes from the milk bar, Garrick is the first to befriend them. Along with Avery, odd but solid companions, they spend hours at the Jenson house. For Garrick the appeal is not only the huge range of toys, but also the company of Colt Jenson. This is a boy worth being friend with and not just for his possessions. This is a boy who has no fear, who is willing to test his limits without any care of how other people perceive him. But he is a boy with a secret. And when he keeps the secret to the detriment of Garrick, the adoration falters. Rex Jenson has done the unspeakable and as far as Garrick is concerned, Colt is the easiest target to accept blame. Garrick knows what has to be done and Colt accepts it must be so.

1. Create a visual representation of Garrick, label this with quotes from the text that describe his physical appearance and personality.
2. How does Garrick's home life compare to other children from this same town? What might be his cross to bear?
3. Describe the friendship between Garrick and Avery, Garrick and Declan and Garrick and Colt. Consider each relationship from both sides.

ACTIVITIES

Experts

Divide the students into six groups and allocate characters according to the following arrangements; Jenson parents, Jenson children, Kiley parents, Kiley eldest children (Freya, Declan and Syd), Kiley youngest children, Avery and Garrick. Each group is responsible for becoming the expert on their character group. They must list key information about each character, describe the relationships and find five key quotes for their group. They need to answer the questions that have been listed. Ultimately they need to become the expert on their characters. Rearrange the students so that each new group has one representative from each character group. As they are now the expert they share all of their findings with the rest of the students and record the information about each other character group. The chart at the end of the document can be used to record and keep this information.

Hot Seats

Students return to their expert groups. They write three questions to ask each of the other character groups and select one of their

own students to take the ‘Hot Seat’ and respond authentically to the questions asked of them. Use the text as much as possible to provide accurate and considered responses and challenge each other with provocative questions.

Written Responses

There are an endless amount of creative written responses that can come from character analysis. Students will inevitably come up with some excellent suggestions. Here are just a few;

- **Police Statement:** Consider someone from Rex’s past that confronted the family over the allegations of inappropriate dealings. Write the police statement from a young person describing their dealings and relationship with Rex.
- **“There’s always some small cruelty”:** Colt describes the elaborate gifts he receives from his father as always having “a hoop to jump through”. Think of another gift he may have received and in Colt’s voice, describe the trick Rex played on his sons in order to receive the gift.
- **Freya’s friend:** Assuming Freya has a friend at school that she confides in, in her words, describe Mr Jenson and his wife. What is her perception of them both?
- **The conversation:** Imagine Tabby and Elizabeth are forced to wait somewhere together. Write the conversation they might have about their husband’s and their children. Remember the kind of person each woman is and how much they would reveal about their families.

CLOSE READING OF KEY PASSAGES

There are a number of key passages within the text that require close analysis. Divide students into eight groups and provide them with the following structure to consider these key chapters. They must present their findings to the class using a range of mediums to present their insight.

Close Analysis

1. Summarise in only four sentences the key elements of this chapter.
2. List the key character developments that occur.
3. Choose five key quotes and explain their significance.
4. Select one symbol that represents the main theme or event that occurs within this chapter. (E.g. the smashed plate, swimming pool)
5. Select one short passage (no more than a page) to read aloud to the class and explain the significance of this in the context of the chapter.
6. Design an activity the students must complete. (E.g. write song lyrics as one of the characters, create a book trailer, write a Haiku poem specifically exploring that chapter etc.)

Chapter 4: Freya (p 31)

Chapter 13: The BBQ (p 97)

Chapter 15: Syd (p 115)

Chapter 18: The Pool (p 141)

Chapter 22: "Chickenshit" (p 174)

Chapter 25: "It's not our fault" (p 191)

Chapter 29: The confrontation (p 211)

THEMES

The themes require significant discussion and exploration and will lead to the analytical questions that follow. The following quote chart is useful for students to map out the themes of the text according to the characters experiences. You can use the chart as a simple way to align quotes and characters with themes.

Sticky Note Quote

As each theme is considered invite students to write an appropriate quote on a Sticky Note and stick it on the wall. Another student will take one of the sticky notes and they need to write a paragraph explaining the significance and context of the quote.

Quote Off

Divide the class into two teams. Each student must say one quote from the novel and the other team must identify the character and context. Each team gets a point for a correct quote and a correct answer. Students are only allowed to offer one quote so every student has a turn.

Fat Questions

Having students ask questions rather than merely answer them requires a higher level of thinking. A 'fat question' is something that has a big answer, rather than a skinny or single word answer. These questions start with Why, How, What If, Explain, Justify, Consider. Using paper dice or wooden dice, write each of these words on a face of the dice. Students roll the dice and must write

a sentence beginning with this word. They can be used to fuel discussion or writing pieces or set a debate topic.

One Minute Debate

Set a topic for students to consider. Divide the class in half, one affirmative and one negative. Each student has one minute only to present their argument using evidence from the text to support their perspective. They also need to include any rebuttal toward the other team's arguments in this minute. The following topics are suggestions:

- There is nothing redeemable about Joe Kiley.
- Elizabeth is the only truly courageous character in the novel.
- The version of masculinity presented in *Golden Boys* is outdated.
- Tabby is as much to blame as Rex.
- Colt and Declan are the true heroes of the text.

Sins of the father

"I don't want to," he says. 'I like you, Colt. But you knew. You knew, and you didn't tell us. You let him do it.'" (p 233)

"Maybe this is the first of a life's worth of strange deals he will make, atoning any way he can because his mother and father will not, and Bastian should not have to." (p 234)

As the eldest sons in dysfunctional families, Declan and Colt suffer significantly. Joe's violence is not directed toward Declan, although his fury often is, and Rex Jenson preys on the boys his sons befriend. But both of these boys must pay for the sins of their fathers'. For Colt it is at the hands of Garrick and he accepts the beating as the only way to make things right. He understands Garrick's sense of betrayal toward Colt. Colt agrees, he should have warned them, he feared what would happen, but he couldn't, how could a boy his age do such a thing. So he takes the fall, to protect his brother, to buy some time. It is cruel and unjust that this child should have to suffer physically at the hands of his father's victim, but he knows this may not be the last time someone will blame him for what Rex does. Like Colt, Declan protects his siblings from the horrible reality that is life with their father. The tell-tale signs are so familiar to them; the sight of their father home late, with a slight stagger, and these signs fill the air with the scent of fear before any

kind of confrontation has begun. Declan is often the target, told to leave the couch and go to bed, long before any of the younger children have. The injustice of this infuriates Declan and at times he retaliates, escalating the conflict quickly. Other times, when the welfare of his siblings and mother is at stake, he leaves and the situation defuses much more quickly. While Colt stands alone, Declan has Freya and Syd to share his pain and humiliation at a father who cannot control his temper, who brings terror into their home. Freya is mystified at how he does not seem to love “the only things he has”, his children, and Syd is disgusted but not surprised at his cowardice. The way these children see the world around them, the way they feel about their family and the homes they have, that are supposed to offer them sanctuary and love, are instead tainted by their fathers.

Blame and Responsibility

“Yet in their silence and goodness they must hear the sounds that come from the Kiley house on the very worst nights – and they keep their doors closed to that. She wonders how anybody could do it.” (p 66)

The sense of abandonment by the community they belong to is palpable for Freya. She knows her neighbours know about the hostility that emanates from the Kiley house, and yet they do nothing. They hide in their houses and turn up their televisions and wait

for the commotion to stop. Tabby's awareness is the only example we actually see of this, but we know from Freya that is how things are. This story is a common one. It is not particular to this suburb in the decade this novel is set, it is human nature to withdraw and defend one's self. Not always, but often enough. When Freya challenges her father in a way that escalates the confrontation to something they have never before experienced, she must find help and she flees to the most trusted adult she knows. It is not Rex that initially comes to the Kiley house to intervene, it is Colt. Fearless and brave he doesn't think twice before he runs out of the back door and into the menacing scene that awaits. He is used to taking responsibility; he lives in a house where his mother shirks her sense of duty to her children by denying the evil that inhabits their house. But it is Rex that saves the Kiley's this time; it is Rex that reflects Joe's temper and rage back to him in a way that makes him back down. But not until his own son has betrayed him. Rather than admit defeat, Joe takes on Rex, challenging him as the hero. His accusations are correct, but Declan has no choice but to deny. With whom does his loyalty lay? – anyone but his father.

Fear

“Syd is aware he isn't breathing, that he had more air under-water than he had now, in his bed, in his room. He listens, and the house has stopped breathing.” (p 117)

Fear is a way of life for these children, especially the Kiley children. They live in the moment and the moments their father isn't around, are pleasant. Sometimes when Joe is around and has not quite had the usual fill, he performs the greatest magic trick and becomes the hero they all worship for one night at least. But for the rest of the time, his staggered footsteps bring a thinning of the air and held breaths. His unpredictability and the inevitable thrown plate that will follow has the little girls hiding in their rooms hysterical. Fear protects them. For the boys, fear becomes the test, the measure of where they stand. How far they will walk into the storm water drain, how many punches they will take at the hands of Garrick Greene, how fast they will ride a bike or a skateboard: these are all tests. Avery Price seems to pass them all easily, fear is so familiar to him it fuels him. And Colt, whose life is so permeated by fear, thrives on it, pushing past what others are afraid of with little hesitation. And for Freya, it is overcoming her fear that causes the most trouble.

Revenge and Justice

Golden Boys deals with a time that is rife with confrontation. It is not that far from the world many young people live in today, but the freedom that these young, mostly primary school age children have, is quite different from the life many growing up in the suburbs might have today. They are left to sort things out for themselves; they are also left to cope with the frightening reality of their

home life. This makes them resilient, loyal and courageous, and also breeds a keen sense of justice. There are a number of instances in the text where the boys sort out their differences with a punch. The beating Garrick gives Colt at the end of the text is quite different from this, yet the result is still the same. When Declan offers to take the punch meant for Avery, Garrick balks at the idea, but with the justification that “a punch is a punch”, the boys resolve it. Do they behave like this because of the physical punishment that exists in their houses, or is it the way they make sense of being wronged? Justice seems to be served and everyone remains friends. The stark contrast to this is the wounds inflicted on the powerless; Elizabeth Kiley with her brood of children hiding behind her legs and Freya Kiley, just a girl. Tabby retreats from the menace lurking at the Kiley house, even Rex hesitates, but Colt who knows more about how this works than his parents, immediately runs to her aid. The physical violence is obvious and seems to be easier to hide from than the much more sinister threat Rex Jenson poses. His victims are also children, and his own children suffer desperately for his crimes as the victims themselves. The revenge Garrick seeks follows the model they are all familiar with, he takes his own pound of flesh and the sense at the end of the text is that both boys can move on, justice has been done. Freya’s revenge is bitter and shallow. Her affront to her father results in something much more devastating than she could imagine. It shatters her world, allows the monster to creep in. This is a room in the castle she wishes she had never found, but it seems it might be one she cannot escape.

QUOTES

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
1	There's always some small cruelty, some unpleasant little hoop to be crawled through		
2	She'll ignore Colt for the rest of his life, if the choice is between her husband and her son.		
2	There is nothing the brothers don't receive.		
8	I guessed black...Charcoal is black.		
7	Their father piles his sons with objects worth envying, so he will be the father of envied sons.		
9	Freya Kiley has started to see things she hasn't seen before.		The world shifts into focus as children embark on adulthood.
10	A God who was always harsh and rarely fair, who would hurl even an infant to death.		Faith

GOLDEN BOYS

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
18	Dentists are rich. They make lots of money. So why are they here?		
19	To defend her position Freya will call upon the example of her father, which is something she would only do in an emergency and actually has never done before. And it will feel like a betrayal, using him against her mother. It will be a betrayal. The heart is wicked.		
20	Avery is a wild child, the kind of boy-without-boundaries that other children enjoy having as a friend, because there is nothing he will not do.		
25	Garrick, however, is a neighbourhood boy, he comes with the territory and he's impossible to avoid: being his friend is smarter than not being his friend.		
27	A punch is a punch.		Masculinity and justice
30	But inside his head he tends the chest of grievances, in which there's plenty of room.		

TEACHER'S NOTES

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
31	Her siblings all fear her, even Declan: that's as it should be, as it needs to be.	Freya	
34	Mostly she worries about money and her family's lack of it.		
35	It's taken a long time for Freya to realise her parents hate one another.		
36	All she knows for certain is that in the wedding photographs her mother and father seem happy, but that's not how they seem anymore.		
37	But why, she wonders, must babies be born into a home that can't afford them, and has no space for them? Why come to a place where they're not needed? Why keep coming to a family that is so unhappy?		
48	To Syd's mind Colt has the option of saying yes or saying no, but he looks as if the choice is more difficult.		

GOLDEN BOYS

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
50	He wishes his brother had been born a girl, a little lady content to be at her mother's side. It's too hard on Bastian to be a boy, there's no place for boys like him.		Masculinity
53	Colt sees it all, suddenly, for what it is. His father spends money not merely on making his sons envied, but on making them – and the word seems to tip the floor – <i>enticing</i> . His father buys bait.	Colt about Rex	
56	Wednesday is pay day and at the print works the men are paid in cash: it's a great temptation		
57	The watcher wouldn't feel the thinning of the air.		
61	She wishes they could be glad he's here – it's what he would like, it's what any child would choose – but it has never been that way...		

TEACHER'S NOTES

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
64	Say nothing, do nothing, behave as if you are unharmed and this is normal, this thudding heart, the acidic air, this evening bitterly torn.		
66	Yet in their silence and goodness they must hear the sounds that come from the Kiley house on the very worst nights – and they keep their doors closed to that. She wonders how anybody could do it.		
69	The crawling unease that her father brings home has been replaced by a heady sense of possibility.		
71	How drear it must be, she thinks, to be a lady, if conversation must always revolve around whether or not everyone is happy.		
76	You bastard, Colt thinks. You <i>liar</i> .		
78	Colt sees. She doesn't want to be cowardly or ashamed. 'Sometimes he drinks too much.'		

GOLDEN BOYS

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
79	'Sometimes fathers are jealous of their sons,' Rex says, and without question it is the most astonishing thing Colt has ever heard him say.		
80	'Yes,' says Rex. 'But for some men, love is difficult.'		
81	For Colt it is laughable, contemptible, enraging; but for Freya, he sees, it is as if she has pulled on a weed, and the whole world has come up in her hand.		
89	He stares at a boy he in no way resembles, and although loyal to the bone to Declan, he knows he has found the boy he'd like to be.		
96	It's incredible to Freya that anyone could be unaware of these people who are so effortlessly taking up so much space in her life.		
100	Cruel Colt, fake Tabby, mad Bastian: she feels sorry for Rex.	Freya's perception of the Jenson's	Teenage crush

TEACHER'S NOTES

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
106	You wanted – what, bit of power over people when they're weak?		
109	Spectacular, impossible, their own private circus: the children cheer like savages.		
113	It drags Colt back to the old house, the knock on the door which came without warning one evening, the faces in the hallway like concrete masks over faces he knew.		
119	Dorrie is weeping into the hair of a doll, and Marigold, white-faced, has fingers in her mouth.		
120	Syd sees what makes his sister so incandescent: the clothes which their mother spent the afternoon ironing have been flung to the floor and trampled by boots they have left their imprints in gravy.		
129	Anyway, the only important thing to know is that you are not to blame.	Rex to Freya	Sense of responsibility for the violence at home

GOLDEN BOYS

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
130	Sometimes people get married for reasons other than love.		
132	All his life he's had the greatest respect for her, his infinitely smarter sister, as well as a healthy dose of caution. And he's not so much angry at her as impressed that she could so casually break something he believed was ironclad.		
142	It cannot be easy, and he wonders how she finds the courage to do it - to unknow what she knows, and to do it for her children. To let them take the weight of the blame.		Blame and Responsibility
145	he runs the towel over the boy's throat and shoulders and ribcage, all of it done so efficiently it's like watching a man who loathes what he's doing but can never stop doing it or thinking about doing it...		
164	Syd is already weary, at ten, of the constant deprivation that is the lack of money.		

TEACHER'S NOTES

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
166	They were saying he rubs their shoulders, that sort of thing. Declan told Syd not to go to their house all by himself.		
168	Chickenshit: he thinks: <i>you chickenshit.</i>		
170	The world seems to abandon them to their plight at such times, but it shouldn't – It has no right to.		Neglected by the world around them.
170/1	'It's all right,' she says: but what is all right about a woman and a clutch of petrified children standing in an unlit lounge room watching a man deflate the tyres of their car so they won't use the vehicle to escape him – what is all right about that?		
175	The things they don't want are all they have.		
176	'Remember you said they might have got married for babies? Well, they did. I was the baby.'		

GOLDEN BOYS

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
178	‘There is no monster. There’s no such thing. There’s no such thing as the way things are supposed to be. And you are not responsible for how other people live their lives – you know that, don’t you?’		
188	But no one cares about any of that, do they? No one says he should have his hands stuffed down his throat.		
189	‘It’s not the same,’ Declan agrees, ‘but it’s just – life, isn’t it? So just live with it. Just stay out of his way –’		Justice
194	‘It’s not our fault –’		
202	But as night closes the world in, fear is harder to evade.		
202	Tabby will stand by her husband even though he’s someone against whom it’s perilous to lean, who will drag her down with him when he falls.		

TEACHER'S NOTES

PAGE	QUOTE	CHARACTER	CONTEXT/ THEME
214	And this man she's never seen before looms in front of her before she can raise her hands, a man who so clearly despises her that it sucks the air from her lungs and the strength from her legs.		
216	She's unbolted a castle door and found not only a monster, but that she's a monster herself.		
223	And Freya sees it as if fluorescently lit, how he has them in his clutches now, that whatever he wants, they must give him.		
233	'It's all right, Garrick. You should do it.'		Justice Blame and Responsibility
233	'I don't want to,' he says. 'I like you, Colt. But you knew. You knew, and you didn't tell us. You let him do it.'		
238	Tomorrow if the weather is fine, he will run, swim, ride.		

SYMBOLISM AND LANGUAGE

The castle

At twelve years old, Freya Kiley is starting to learn things about the world in which she lives without seeking any new information. It is as though the truth is revealing itself before her eyes. This coming-of-age or transformation is symbolised through the imagery of a castle.

“It is only as you get older that you realise the castle is vast and has countless false floors and hidden doors and underground tunnels, and that the castle is haunted and that the castle scares even itself.” (p 5)

This motif is returned to frequently throughout the narrative and the ugly truth about her world becomes more apparent. At first it is her faith that is shaken. The truth behind the saints and the notion of heaven is flawed. And as her world unravels, doors to new rooms in the castle are flung open and she is thrust into new and strange places.

- What are some of the realisations Freya makes throughout this novel?
- Can you identify with the castle in any way?
- What is the danger of finding herself in the centre of the castle in a white room?
- How does the symbol of the golden-eyed monster connect with the castle?

Swimming

For Syd, the cool, calm water brings escape. He can dive under and be oblivious to the world that swirls around above him. The unpredictability of a violent father is washed away with the cold silence around him. The constant repetition of swimming strokes brings a calm to him that home cannot. It is addictive to Syd. And it is out of his reach. Once Declan speaks of the forbidden, and cautions Syd against going to the Jenson's on his own, his freedom is once again limited. The pool becomes a distant beacon of solitude, and one that is no longer his to use as he pleases. The torment is enormous for Syd, who idolises his brother, but desperately needs the comfort that pool can offer. Eventually it too is out of his reach.

- How does the pool sooth some of the damage in Syd's life?
- What do his brother and sister do to escape the turmoil of their home?
- Find the quotes that are used to describe what it is like swimming in the pool for Syd?
- What taints it? What is particularly tragic about this?

The BMX

The flashy bike, the latest model, the envy of all of the other neighbourhood children. It is described as bait by Colt, for that is exactly its purpose; to attract the local boys to the house. When his father returns home with another elaborate gift, instead of being excited as his naïve younger brother is, Colt sees the bike as tainted. The cruel game his father plays at his sons' expense leaves a familiar

bitter taste with Colt. The bike is black, and this is proven later to himself, at the final showdown with Garrick when he chooses the same colour Colt had guessed. When it is stolen Colt worries, not out of genuine concern for the state of the bike, but for the repercussions a missing bike will bring. And it is not simply the wrath of his father, but everything else he has known before. The bike is his responsibility; he knows this as well as he knows that Garrick didn't find it. The physical punishment is vicious and extreme. He weathers every punch as another escape from the inevitable embarrassment that will overcome his family, again. The bike is the symbol of blame and responsibility; a son paying for the sins of his father. The beating that ensues is "the first of a life's worth of strange deals he will make." It is the only way he can be sure that his life will go on.

- Find as many adjectives as you can for the BMX.
- Write a Haiku poem explaining the significance of this bike.
- Find a quote that describes what the BMX means to each of the boys. Include Colt, Bastian, Syd, Garrick, Avery and Declan.
- What is particularly cruel about the game his father plays?

The storm-water drain

The filthy dangerous pipe at the end of town, out of reach of their parents' eyes and ears is their refuge. It represents adolescence; it tests their fear, their alliances, and their willingness to risk. As they stand on the outside looking in on all the danger that lurks deep inside, these boys are very aware they are teetering on the brink of becoming more than what they are. Some stand alone, some as brothers, some as the outcast of the town. Each one knows their place and accepts what has to be done. For Colt it is a new test, one that he accepts as the only possible way to make sense of this new place to live. And one that he passes without even realising it. This new boy is fearless in a way that leaves the Kiley boys breathless, and Garrick smarting from an unexpected infatuation.

- Draw the storm-water drain with all of the neighbourhood children who go there. Label it with key adjectives from the text.
- Why is it their place of refuge? What does it reveal about this place? What does it reveal about these children and the families they come from?
- Explain how the violence that occurs here seems to equal justice, or the world making sense of what has happened. The children seem to right the wrongs at the storm-water drain. Discuss.

SIMILE AND METAPHOR

Allocate students a symbol to closely analyse. They read the description provided and try to find their own examples of figurative language in the text that explores the symbol. Add these quotes to the following list. Create a bingo sheet and place a selection of these examples of imagery, simile, metaphor and figurative language on individual strips in an envelope. Students have to match the quote to a square on the bingo card and when they complete the whole card, they yell BINGO!

Bingo Tokens (Each one, plus others they collect on strips)

“The four of them crowd around it like sheep at the manger, Bastian’s hands fluttering to his mouth.” (p 6)

“But what he sees is the hook that was buried in his father’s game, the treacherous seaweed beneath the waves...” (p 6)

“She’s caught in a blockage that has congealed in the hope of seeing the priest as if everyone hasn’t just seen him minutes earlier...” (p 12)

“In truth such friendliness is disconcerting; it’s like a gust of too-strong wind.” (p 14)

“Coltrane and Bastian, who stand beside their mother as placid as giraffes.” (p 15)

TEACHER'S NOTES

“Already atheism sits inside her as comfortably as an egg in a nest.” (p 19)

“These small things combining to make an arena more vicious, to the bare foot, than a bull-ant’s nest.” (p 50)

“But Freya’s face is darkening, a small snarl against the world.” (p 79)

“The filling of the swimming pool attracts them like flies.” (p 82)

“Now and then flames jump through the grill to lick the meat.” (p 101)

“His towel is on the path, wet and bundled like a drowned cat.” (p 108)

“One stick has been ravaged, its wrapper shredded away, the gum protruding like the diseased shinbone of a zombie.” (p 137)

GOLDEN BOYS

BINGO CARDS

(like the tokens, a random selection can be provided)

FREYA	SIMILE	PERSONIFICATION	FEAR
SYD	REX	THE BMX	THE POOL
BLAME	THE CASTLE	IMAGERY	DECLAN
COLT	METAPHOR	STORM- WATER DRAIN	THE MONSTER

ASSESSMENT

CREATIVE RESPONSES

There are many creative writing options that have been referred to within this unit of work. Any of these could be taken and developed into an Assessment Task. Some of these are included are.

1. Design a community service advertisement that instructs people what they should do if they suspect violence is happening in a household. Include appropriate visuals and graphics. Create an advertising campaign that aims to address the prevalence of domestic violence in our society. Consider the medium, slogan, image you would use to portray your idea.
2. Write a short story Freya writes at school describing the castle she refers to and the monster that is lurking there, waiting for her.
3. Find a silence in the text and write the scene that is missing. It may be between characters that are not spoken for and it could involve a conversation or meeting. It may be their reflection on a situation. E.g. Tabby and Elizabeth cross paths at the local shops. Detail the conversation between the two women. It may be after Rex intervenes at the Kiley house.

4. 'Before Before' or 'After After' writing. Choose a moment in the novel that relates specifically to one character. Write about a significant time in their life that happens a long time ago e.g. Before before, or that happens a long time after the text ends, e.g. After after. Avery might be an interesting character to explore with this writing piece given how little we know about him.
5. As a grown man, Colt writes a song about his past. It might focus on the relationship with his father, with his father, or that hot summer growing up in the suburbs.

ANALYTICAL RESPONSES

1. To the children of this text, Rex Jenson is both a hero and a villain. Discuss.
2. "Rescue has never come when they've needed it."
Golden Boys raises significant questions about the community's response to domestic violence. Who are the victims and who is to blame for all of the heartache in this text?
3. The female characters in this text have as much responsibility for the fear and loathing in the lives of the children as the men. Do what extent do you agree?
4. Avery Price has no reason to be hopeful and yet he is. Discuss.
5. Children should never be held responsible for the sins of their fathers, and yet, so often they are. Discuss with reference to *Golden Boys*.

TEACHER'S NOTES

6. Garrick Greene is the only character in the novel who effectively achieves justice. Discuss.
7. “*And you are not responsible for how other people live their lives – you know that, don't you?*” Children have no choice but to forgive their parents. To what extent is this true in relation to *Golden Boys*?

EXPERTS CHART

CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION
Joe & Elizabeth	
Freya, Declan, Syd	
Marigold, Dorrie, Peter	
Rex & Tabby Jenson	
Colt & Bastian	
Avery and Garrick	

RELATIONSHIP

QUOTES

QUESTIONS

