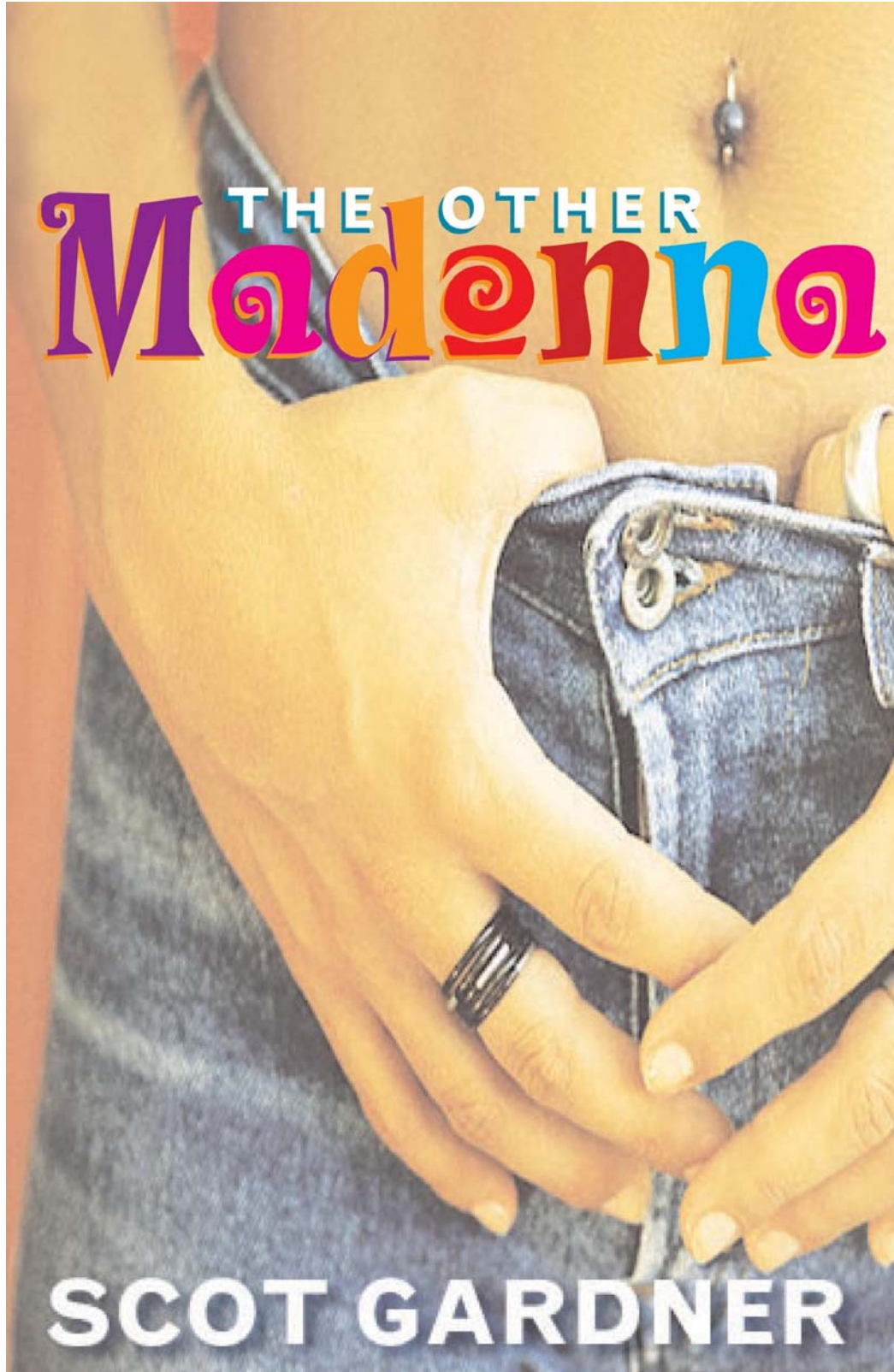




# THE OTHER MADONNA





# SCOT GARDNER

## The Other Madonna Teachers' Notes

Written by Scot Gardner

There are several major themes in *The Other Madonna*:

- 1. Body Modification** – piercing, tattoos
- 2. Family Dynamics & Family Violence** – non-nuclear families, domestic violence, physical discipline
- 3. Making Choices and Changes in Your Outside World** – taking control of your life and reflecting it in the environment where you live
- 4. Sex, Lust and Love** – healthy and unhealthy sex, sexual violence, love and passion
- 5. Talking About Hard Times** – personal story-telling, putting difficult things into words

For each of the themes, there are some questions **From the Book**, a **Snippet** of my thoughts and some **What Do You Think?** ideas for discussion.

The **What Do You Think?** exercises are designed to engage young people in an individual and creative way. They provide opportunities for students to tell stories from their own lives and develop their personal voice through writing and discussions. A couple of suggestions are: set some ground rules prior to discussions (respect others' stories, use 'I' statements, positive feedback) and get actively involved in discussions (teacher tells their own stories as part of the process)

**Ten Fast Minutes** is a creative writing technique. For exactly ten minutes, disregard language, grammar, spelling, character, plot and structure and tell a story. The telling of the story is paramount. Students should be coached to keep their hand moving the whole ten minutes. The results may be 'stream of consciousness' or have more or less structure. Some people might like to read theirs aloud. Some might be refined further.

**Show, Don't Tell** is a fiction writer's axiom. It's the crux of professional writing. Instead of writing, 'Bob was angry' and feeding the reader all the information, say 'Bob's face changed colour, from red to purple' still conveying the image but drawing the reader into the story. Some of the exercises use this technique to expand young people's grasp of creative writing.

The **For the Courageous** questions are curly ones. Teachers will know their groups well enough to decide if opening discussions on these issues will be courageous or stupid. I like to err on the side of madness in the classroom, but I wouldn't ask you to.



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## Theme One

### Body Modification - piercing, tattoos

- ★ Madonna has her tongue pierced (pp 1–3)
- ★ Evie has her navel pierced (p 1)
- ★ Colin has his tongue pierced (p 1)
- ★ Madonna gets a tattoo (p 81)
- ★ The guy in the stairwell has home-made tattoos (p 177)

### From the book

1. The book opens with Madonna having her tongue pierced. Why is there some concern about how Madonna's dad (Tricky) will react to the barbell in her mouth?
2. What does Madonna's tattoo mean and what is its significance to the story?
3. What are the bloke in the stairwell's tattoos like? What do they say about his character?

### Snip

Body modification has become an important form of self expression for young people (and the not-so-young!). In every school I visit I see young people with eyebrow rings, pierced noses and bodies modified to stamp their individuality in their skin. Some of the schools have big struggles with that, having young people cover up their piercings with Band-aids or use 'invisible' studs. Not just schools. At Coles in Morwell, the staff with piercings (other than the most common ear-lobe jobs) have to cover up or find work elsewhere. It was a big issue when my daughter Belle asked to get her nose pierced. My wife and I had fears that people would judge her. She was determined and we eventually took her to get it done. Some of the staff at her school have asked her to cover up, some have told her it looks nice. I think it looks nice on her. I have a few tattoos.

### What do you think?

- ★ In the late 1800s women were frowned upon if they showed their ankles, and in the 1920s showing ankle became cool. In the 1950s long hair on men was frowned upon, yet in the 1960s it became cool. In the 1980s, piercing was a cultural tradition not widely celebrated by the west. Where do we go from here? Describe a character from the year 2030 and outline the things they do to show their individuality.
- ★ Would you ever get a tattoo? Why/why not?



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## Theme Two

### **Family Dynamics & Family Violence** - non-nuclear families, domestic violence, physical discipline

- ★ Evie and her dad fight in the kitchen (pp 15–16)
- ★ Bruna slaps Lucia in the face when Luce is sticking up for Madonna (p 125)
- ★ Madonna is uncomfortable about Rosie and her dad having a relationship (p 74, p 170)
- ★ Madonna loses her job and her 'family' when Bruna flips out (pp 124–125)

#### **From the book**

1. Where is Madonna's mum? Does her absence mean that the O'Dwyers are no longer a family?
2. Why does Madonna work for the DiFrescos, even though she could earn more if she was working with Colin and Evie at Sapphires?
3. Describe Red's family.
4. What do Colin and Jiff's families have in common?

#### **Snip**

My mum and dad had three sons. When we pissed them off enough they would smack us. We all still love them. Smacking was an important part of parenting waaaay back then. Mum and Dad still love each other, live together and spend far too much of their lives dancing to country music. I'm a dad and a step-dad and a brother and a son, a nephew and a grandson and an uncle. I have friends that I love like family and family that I struggle to be friendly with. My wife and I have decided not to smack our kids. When they piss us off we bury them up to their necks in the sand pit, smear their faces with vegemite and set the puppies on them! Family is an amazing place.

#### **What do you think?**

- ★ What is a family?
- ★ Do you think you'll ever get married? Why/why not?

#### **For the courageous**

- ★ Will you smack your kids?



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## Theme Three

### **Making Choices and Changes in Your Outside World**

– taking control of your life and reflecting it in the environment where you live

- ★ Tricky cleans up the flat after the fight with Evie (p 17)
- ★ Tricky makes an effort with dinner, decides to change his life and gets a job with Rosie (pp 54–57)
- ★ Rosie and Tricky paint the flat bright colours (pp 74–76)
- ★ Tricky smashes a hole between the flats (pp 169–171)
- ★ Madonna is nervous about all the change going on in her life (p 173)

#### **From the book**

1. What does Madonna dislike about her home? (p 7)
2. How does Tricky modify his home to reflect his relationship with Rosie?
3. How is the music played in Sapphires (Bianca's restaurant) different to the music played in Pepe's Pizzeria? (p 176)
4. What does Bianca's house say about her? (pp 21–22)

#### **Snip**

I live in the bush with my family. I love where I live. I get the lion's share of the housework because I work from home and sometimes I'm pretty slack about it. Sometimes it gets depressing living in a messy house and the only way to fix it is to clean. By the end of it, I feel better and the housework is done for another year!!

#### **What do you think?**

- ★ Are your family neat or untidy? Why do you think this is?
- ★ When you leave home, what things will you take with you that are too important to leave behind?

#### **Ten fast minutes**

- ★ Imagine you are a car. What sort of car would you be? What is your duco like? What sort of sound system do you have? What do people think when they see you pass by?
- ★ Pick a pop star or famous person. Imagine and describe one room in their house. Think about all the things they would have on the walls, what they can see from the windows, the colours and smells in the room. Examples might be Britney Spears' bathroom or John Howard's garage.





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## Theme Four

**Sex, Lust and Love** – healthy and unhealthy sex, sexual violence, love and passion

- ★ Madonna loves Colin but doesn't want to kiss him (p 5)
- ★ Maddie realises she has the hots for Jiff (p 62, p 70)
- ★ Paolo hits on Madonna (pp 106–108)
- ★ Jiff has second thoughts about having sex with Madonna (p 153)
- ★ Jiff tells Madonna that he loves her (p 210)

### From the book

1. What did Señor Molinari from the Bull Pit do to Maddie?
2. Why does Evie think it's unlikely that she and Jerome would get married?
3. How old was Madonna when she first had sex?
4. Why is Madonna afraid of Dartanian?
5. Why does Madonna feel anger for the guy in the bar? (p 163)

### Snip

I've been in and out of love a few times in my life. Had my heart broken and done a bit of my own breaking. I think you can be in love with lots of people and chose one as your partner. That's monogamy. I believe in monogamy. Sexual violence isn't much about sex, more about power. It's normally men who feel powerless who end up being sexually violent. It's a complex and ugly side of the human condition that, as a society, we're only just finding the courage to look at.

### What do you think?

- ★ Do you think self-defence classes for women should be compulsory? Why/why not?
- ★ Is it possible for a woman to be the perpetrator in an act of sexual violence?
- ★ Is it possible to be in love with someone from the opposite sex and not feel sexual pressure in the relationship?
- ★ What are you passionate about?

### Ten fast minutes/Show don't tell

- ★ See the world from the eyes of someone who is in love. Write about anything EXCEPT the object of that person's desire. For example, write about the way someone who is in love goes about getting ready for work, does the shopping or takes the dog for a walk.



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## Theme Five

**Talking About Hard Times** – personal story-telling, putting difficult things into words

- ★ Madonna feels as though Tricky wouldn't understand her hassles (pp 31–33)
- ★ Madonna and Tricky have a heart-to-heart about Madonna's mum (pp 58–59 pp 146–148)
- ★ Evie and Madonna talk about life (pp 82–89)
- ★ Madonna tells Jiff about her sex life (pp 154–156)
- ★ Tricky and Rosie talk about the weather (pp 17–18)

### From the book

1. Why doesn't Tricky want to talk about his deceased wife?
2. Why would Jiff try to stop Madonna from telling her story? (p 154)
3. What role does Dartanian play in Madonna's story?
4. Who sees a vision of Maddie becoming *THE* Madonna?

### Snip

I spent the best part of my working life talking to people about their hassles and I've dumped my own loads of trauma and tears on friends, family and therapists. I like telling stories and listening to the stories of others. Sometimes the hardest bits to talk about are the ones we most need to wrap words around. Sometimes the crazy things that happen in our lives need to be talked about until they make sense. Sometimes they never make sense, but then talking them through can still make you feel lighter.

### What do you think?

- ★ If you were marooned on a desert island, which of your friends/family would you want there with you? Why? And if you were rescued from the island, who would be the first person you'd want to call and tell your story to? Why?
- ★ Some things should never be talked about. Do you agree/disagree? What sorts of things should be kept to yourself?

### Ten fast minutes

- ★ I remember ... (write a true story from your life)



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## Some answers for the 'From The Book' questions

### Body Modification

1. Tricky had reacted badly when Evie had her navel pierced.
2. It means 'freedom'. For Madonna it symbolises being free from the things that have happened in her past.
3. They look home-made. They might say that he has lived life quite tough, low socio-economic status.

### Family Dynamics & Family Violence

1. Madonna's mum is dead. The O'Dwyers are still living as a family, though the girls are becoming more independent.
2. Madonna has a sense of belonging with the DiFescos. She feels like part of their family.
3. Red lives with his grandmother (the old hag), his mother is dead and his father didn't want anything to do with him. He has an uncle Karl.
4. Both Colin and Jiff come from single-parent families. They have been brought up by their mums.

### Making Choices and Changes in Your Outside World

1. It stinks like shit and piss, and is nothing like the café culture she lives with her friends.
2. Initially Rosie and Tricky paint the walls with vibrant colour, the same as Rosie's flat. Then Tricky knocks a hole between the two flats so they can move in together.
3. Sapphires is a smooth classical-CD sort of venue (fine dining) and Pepe's is Dean Martin on a crackly tape (family restaurant).
4. Bianca's house is neat and beautiful. She appears wealthy and everything is in order in her life.

### Sex, Lust and Love

1. He groped her.
2. Evie believes she's in love with Bianca and Jerome is gay and has a partner.
3. Twelve.
4. Dartanian tried to rape her and stalked her afterwards. Madonna may also be afraid of how violent Dartanian makes her feel.
5. Madonna feels like every man in the world is a monster and they're all trying to hit on her. She feels like there's no such thing as normal conversation with guys, that they only want sex.

### Talking About Hard Times

1. Tricky's wife overdosed in his bed. He still feels the wound.
2. Jiff may genuinely believe that Madonna's past would hold nothing that would influence the way he feels about her but he may also be frightened of what she might say.
3. Dartanian was the first and worst in a line of unhealthy relationships that have tainted Madonna's view of men and love
4. Angelina, Bruna DiFresco's strange sister.

