



Make a Hard Fist

by Tina Shaw

About the author:

Tina Shaw has worked as an editor, freelance journalist, and creative writing tutor (AUT, Correspondence School, Auckland University) and with the NZ Society of Authors as Programme Manager. Shaw is the author of 20 published novels for adults and teenagers, most recently *The Children's Pond* which was shortlisted for the Ngaio Marsh Award in 2016. She has been awarded both the Berlin Writer's Residency and the Buddle Finlay Fellowship. She currently lives in Taupo, New Zealand.

Synopsis of Novel:

Make a Hard Fist centres on the life of sixteen-year-old Lizzie Quinn, a likeable and sassy West Auckland schoolgirl. Lizzie leads a busy life; she has good mates, attracts a little boy attention and is a very good 200 and 400 metre runner. She is also saving up to buy her uncle's VW Beetle by working after school at the local library. But when she begins to receive creepy handwritten letters we know that an outsider has her in his radar, and from then on the novel has a filmic quality with disturbing things just out of camera range. When she is seriously assaulted by a shadowy male while taking a shortcut through a local bush reserve it is still a shock though, and we empathise with Lizzie as she and her distraught family attempt to deal with her trauma.

With the help of a friendly English teacher, Mr Whitter, Lizzie sets up a girls' self-defence club tutored by Junior, a Samoan youth with a violent and troubled past. Despite very different upbringings Lizzie and Junior eventually become an item and this sub-plot provides depth and interest to the main driving plot of the novel, as does another sub-plot where Lizzie has an intense running rivalry with Tamsin, 'a private school bitch'.

The creepy letters still keep coming and the police think there is a definite link to her assault and to the earlier assault on another teenage girl in the area, who very sadly dies as result of her injuries. When Lizzie is brazenly attacked while alone in her own home by this same assailant, she uses several of Junior's self-defence techniques to save her life and ensure her mentally ill assailant is captured. Although she suffers more injuries we know she will be able to emotionally recover this time. The novel concludes happily with Lizzie and her girlfriends going on a road trip in her 'new' VW Beetle.

Themes - Issues

Male on female violence and the long road to recovery from assaults, family loyalty and support, the difficulties / pitfalls but also the joys of teenage



romance, the importance of friendships through hardship, resilience of spirit, seeing the real person behind the facades we put up, mental illness, attempting to break the violence cycle.

Writing style

The novel is written in the past tense and uses third person (limited) narration – however the frequent dialogue and frequency of Lizzie’s interior monologue definitely give the novel a first person narrative feel. The writing is descriptive without being over-written. The accessibility of the writing and the relevant subject matter makes it an engaging and fairly quick read, even for reluctant readers.

Year level suitability and application

The novel will work very well with year 10 and 11 groups, although the adult themes will also be relevant to older students. The questions from the 2017 NCEA level 1 Written Text external exam work very well with this novel, particularly questions 5, 6 and 7. As also stated below the novel has direct links to the junior and senior PE/Health syllabus.

Curriculum links

Very direct links to the P.E. / Health syllabus

Physical / mental health and wellbeing, personal identity / self-worth, safety and risk management, sensitivity and respect, relationships with other people, social attitudes and beliefs, sexuality education, interpersonal skills.

Learning opportunities

Before reading: Setting the scene

Reading the cover for visual/verbal clues:

- Students work in pairs to study the verbal and visual clues given by front and back cover of the book.
- They make a set of predictions on plot, character and setting based on those clues alone. After reading the novel they can go back and check their predictions.
- While doing this, students can also make a list of statement that identify how they are being ‘positioned’ as readers by use of colour, contrast, images, layout, font style.

Prior knowledge discussion:

(This needs to be handled with great sensitivity and individualising the discussion may not be suitable in some cases)

- Discuss the prevalence of assault / sexual assault on teens in our own communities.
- Discuss societal attitudes that may contribute to sexual violence.

During reading: Understanding the content – Answers to these may be written and/or oral

Chapter one:

1. Who did Lizzie initially think may have sent her the letter?
2. Give two reasons why Lizzie was pleased to have finally beaten Tamsin.
3. What ominous comment does Miranda make towards the end of the chapter?

Chapter two:

According to Lizzie what are the pros and cons of her library job?

Chapter three:

1. Why do you think Lizzie does not tell her father all about the letters?
2. List five main events during her assault.

Chapter four:

1. Comment on the suitability of the police interview room and the medical examination room.
2. What differences are there in the way her parents react?
3. What are your initial impressions of Rose Wallis?
4. What might be an explanation for Lizzie’s sudden awareness of trivial detail, like how her family eat?

Chapter five:

1. Describe Lizzie’s feelings as she walks into the school for the first time since the assault.
2. What are your feelings about the text message she receives?
3. How is Tamsin’s reaction to hearing of the assault different from most other people’s?

4. Give two possible reasons why coach Jessop gets the girls to train together.

Chapter six:

1. What does Lizzie like about Mr Whitter?
2. What type of self-defence skills do you think Lizzie wants to learn?
3. 'she didn't need to hide behind sarcasm anymore'. Why do some people do this?

Chapter seven:

1. What are three techniques that Junior teaches in the first lesson?
2. What is Lizzie's new fear when the next letter arrives?

Chapter eight:

1. What does Lizzie find attractive about Junior?
2. Why does Lizzie not want to go to the other girl's funeral?

Chapter nine:

1. Would Junior's past matter to you?
2. Why do you think Junior's technique for dealing with a behind grab of special relevance to Carey?

Chapter ten:

Junior seemed to handle the party aggro well ... but what may still be of concern for Lizzie?

Chapter eleven:

1. Describe Junior's family and his house.
2. Give one major difference between Lizzie's and Junior's family structures

Chapter twelve:

Do you think Lizzie is right to lose respect and hope for Junior after the fight in the skatepark?

Chapter thirteen:

List five of Junior's defence tactics that Lizzie put to good use during the second attack.

Chapter fourteen:

1. In what ways is the girls' song better than them sending cards to Lizzie?
2. What is the possible significance of Carey seeming to have lost a bit of weight?

Epilogue:

Comment on the effectiveness of comparing Lizzie's future to a silvery road.

Post reading: Taking it further

Theme analysis:

Activity one: Group work activity

Select two of the themes / issues listed earlier in these notes and get students to write what the author may be commenting on and how he may be positioning them think about these issues. When considering the 'how' aspect students will need to closely consider character presentation. A group spokesperson reports findings to the class.

Activity two: Individual work – NCEA level 1 Written text essay questions.

Attempt one of these questions from the 2017 level 1 Written Text external exam

- Describe at least one challenge faced by a character in the written text. Explain how this challenge helped you understand the character.
- Describe at least one idea that changed your perspective or point of view in the written text. Explain how this idea changed your perspective.
- Describe a key moment in the written text that surprised or shocked you. Explain how this moment was important to the text as a whole.
- Describe a character that you disliked or admired in the written text. Explain how your feeling towards this character helped you understand the text as a whole.

Role play activities: (these need to be handled with sensitivity and be closely monitored by the teacher)

- In groups select a short scene or episode from the novel. Present it to the class using a combination of existing dialogue and your own added dialogue.
- Monologue – adopt the role of one of the characters and speaking in character explain your relationship with another character.
- Monologue - Speaking as Lizzie one year in the future, reflect on events of a year ago.

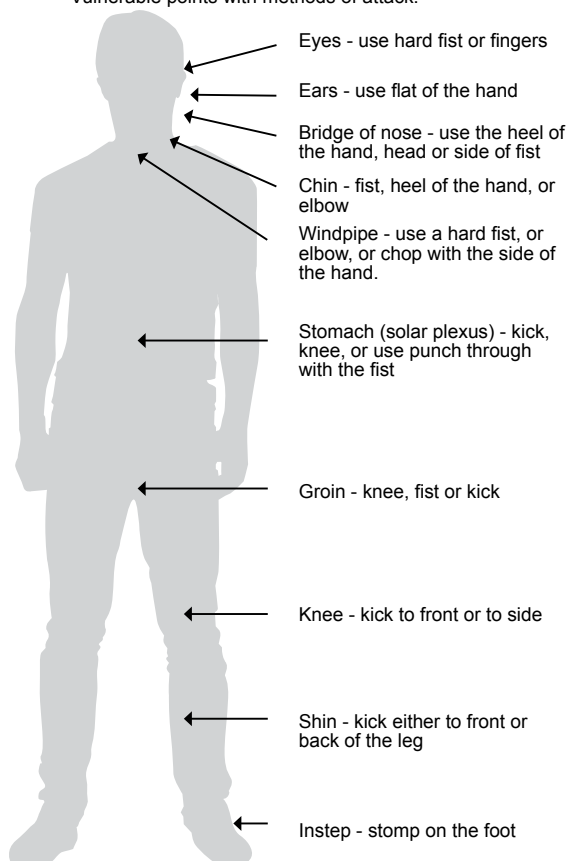
Beyond the text activities:

- Research recent examples of sexual harassment / violence in the entertainment industry.
- Write a 'guide' for teens outlining how to end a relationship in a healthy way.
- Design a poster or make a short film promoting healthy, non-violent relationships.

by Denis Wright

Self defence

Vulnerable points with methods of attack.



Seeking Support

If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of a disturbing or traumatic incident, one or more of the following services may be able to give you, or direct you to, support:

1. 0800Kidsline - 0800543754
2. Youthline - 0800 37 66 33
3. Rape Crisis - 0800 88 33 00
4. 0800What's Up - 0800 942 8787
5. See your school councillor or family doctor
6. 0800 REFUGE
7. HELP www.rpe.org.nz
to find a support centre near you

You deserve to be heard, to be believed, and to be supported.