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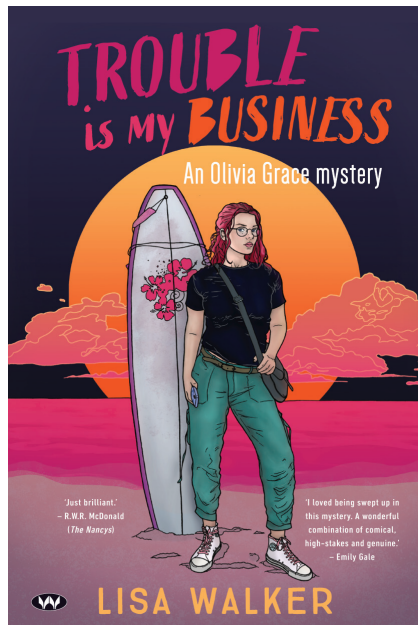
TEACHERS' NOTES

Trouble is My Business

An Olivia Grace Mystery

By Lisa Walker

Notes prepared by Lisa Walker © 2021



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1. Introduction to *Trouble is my Business: An Olivia Grace Mystery*

Olivia Grace, recently retired teen PI, has her priorities sorted. Pass first-year law, look after her little sister, and persuade her parents to come back from a Nepali monastery to resume ... well, **parenting**. But after Olivia's friend Abbey goes missing in Byron Bay, she can't sit back and study Torts. It's time to go undercover as hippy-chick Nansea, in hippy-chic Byron Bay: hub of influencers and international tourism, and home of yoga, surfing and wellness culture, against a breathtaking backdrop, a short drive from Olivia's Gold Coast home.

Olivia's looking for answers, with the help of her stash of disguises, the PI skills her irresistible ex-boss Rosco taught her ... and a nose for trouble. Her suspects include a hard-core surfer who often argued with Abbey in the surf, a charismatic cult leader and an acrobatic botany student. And then there's Rosco, officially assigned to the case, and proving impossible to avoid.

Lisa Walker's second Olivia Grace novel is another rip-roaring excursion into madcap sunshine noir, with nods to Nancy Drew and Sherlock Holmes, and a flavour of Veronica Mars meets Elmore Leonard.

Praise for The Girl with the Gold Bikini (first Olivia Grace mystery in the series)

'A fun new spin on Nancy Drew and 'girl detectives'... Engaging, action-packed, fast-paced.' — **Books+Publishing**

'An action-packed joyride... A ripper read ultimately about backing yourself.' — **The Big Issue**

'A multifaceted, fresh and entertaining teen detective tale.' — **The Adelaide Advertiser**

'An absolutely stunning book.' — **AusYA Bloggers**

'Olivia is strong, compelling, witty, irreverent, determined, intelligent and gutsy. Originality and a fresh perspective are provided through the setting, the whacky characters and comedic aspects ... unique, catchy, intriguing and appealing.' — **Connie Spanos, editor and reviewer, Kids' Book Review**

'The Girl with the Gold Bikini is a great book for the High School English classroom at any level. While students will enjoy it as a comedic mystery, it also raises a number of issues including gender equity and animal rights. The novel lends itself to a wide range of classroom activities and discussions.' — **Simon Eddy, High School English teacher**

2. About the author

Lisa writes novels for adults and young adults. She has also written an ABC Radio National play and been published in *The Age*, *Griffith Review*, *The Big Issue* and the *Review of Australian Fiction*. Her recent novels include a young adult coming-of-age story, *Paris Syndrome* (HarperCollins, 2018), and a climate change comedy, *Melt* (Lacuna, 2018). She has previously worked in environmental communication and as a wilderness guide. Lisa lives, surfs, and writes on the north coast of New South Wales and has a PhD in creative writing. *Trouble is My Business* is her seventh novel and is a sequel to *The Girl with the Gold Bikini*.

Visit Lisa Walker at www.lisawalker.com.au



Photo by Tim Eddy

3. Inspiration behind the novel

Trouble is My Business is the second book in my Olivia Grace teen detective series, following on from *The Girl with the Gold Bikini*. It's a fast-paced, humorous narrative with an unconventional, relatable protagonist.

The story draws on my own experience growing up as a teenager on the Gold Coast and Byron Bay. Byron Bay is an alternative culture and surfing mecca, which is known as the new Hollywood because so many international movie stars live and work here. The town is an eclectic mix of glamour and grunge, which makes a fun and vibrant setting for the novel.

Olivia is a curvy girl in a land of bikini beach bodies. I struggled to fit in with this image as a teenager as I'm not really a bikini person, and neither is Olivia. She's a quick-quipping body-positive screwball heroine in the style of Veronica Mars, with a sprinkle of Nancy Drew thrown in. The story explores themes of feminism, body positivity, and following your dreams.

4. Style

Trouble is My Business can be read as a version of 'Sunshine Noir', a genre which is the antithesis of cold, dark 'Nordic Noir'. Sunshine Noir is typified by TV series like *Miami Vice* and *Veronica Mars*, and the Florida-based novels of Carl Hiaasen. The world of sunshine noir is fun and colourful on the surface, but rotten underneath. Although the sea sparkles and the sun shines, dark deeds are afoot.

Trouble is My Business has a comedic tone, but also explores a range of deeper issues. It is written from Olivia's point of view, allowing the reader to become close to the character. The use of present tense allows the action to unfold in the moment, creating a sense of immediacy.

5. Discussion questions and activities while you are reading the book

a. After Chapter One

Revealing character

I discover my characters through the process of writing them. The more I write my character, the more they seem like a real person. This is essential to make my reader believe in them.

Read the following excerpt from the novel:

‘Two days later, I turn my blue Honda Jazz with the go-fast stripes south towards Byron Bay. I hadn’t wanted the stripes, but second-hand car buyers can’t be choosers.

If my car reflected my personality, I’d be a secretary who wishes she was a racing car driver. Which I’m not. I’m a law student with unfulfilled aspirations to be the Nancy Drew of the Gold Coast.

‘Try finding a car that says that for less than \$5,000,’ I mutter to the guy in the red mid-life-crisis sports car beside me. He looks straight through me as he zooms past. I pull down the mirror to check I’m not invisible. No, still there, but I’ve had better days.’

- What does this excerpt tell us about Olivia?
- Character can be revealed through physical description, action, inner thoughts, reactions, and dialogue. Which of these techniques are used in this excerpt?

b. After Chapter Two

Suspense

No matter what type of story you’re telling, suspense is a valuable tool for keeping a reader’s attention and interest. An important tool for creating suspense is raising a **Major Dramatic Question** that the reader wants answered. This question will be at the forefront of the reader’s mind throughout the whole story.

- What is the **Major Dramatic Question** in *Trouble is My Business*?
- Other techniques for creating suspense include both internal and external **conflict**, **pacing**, **atmosphere**, and **high stakes**. Which of these techniques are used in Chapter Two?

c. After Chapter Eight

Story Structure

In the **Hero's Journey** and other novel-writing structures, the hero must make a decision to move from their **ordinary world** to a **special world** in order to begin their quest. In a typical three-act novel, this is also called the **Act Two Turning Point**. The beginning of Act Two signals that a new way of life has begun.

- What is Olivia's ordinary world?
- What is her special world?
- How does she come to a decision to leave her ordinary world?
- How does she prepare for entry to the special world?

d. After Chapter Twenty-three

Setting

Any work of fiction is a fantasy. You create people who don't exist and put them in situations they were never in, make them say things they never said. But no matter how bizarre your story is, it should feel real to the reader. To create fiction that feels like truth you need to infuse your story not just with visual detail, but also smell, sound, taste, and touch.

Read the following excerpts from the book:

'I pull into the driveway of the Watsons' holiday shack. It's been ages since I've been here, but it's still familiar. A tangled bush dripping with red flowers pokes through a picket fence. As I get out of the car, the hum of a tractor from the paddock next door carries towards me on the breeze. A colourful hammock hangs on the verandah. I'm in no hurry to go inside, so I slip into it and swing, enjoying the sun on my face as I gaze towards the sliver of sea.'

'The rain eases as I turn off the bitumen onto the potholed dirt road leading to the national park. I don't know exactly where the Amalians' land is, so my cunning plan is to drive around until I find them. Rainforest crowds the road on either side, creating a dark green tunnel. Fat raindrops bounce onto my windscreen as my car brushes against the branches. A wallaby hops into the undergrowth as the car splashes through the puddles. I wind down my window and absorb the smell of wet earth.'

- How are details and senses used in these excerpts to make the story feel real?
- Describe the view outside your window without using visual description. Instead describe how you feel about it and use other senses such as hearing, smell, and touch.

e. After Chapter Twenty-eight

Using and breaking stereotypes

What image comes to mind when you think of a private investigator or detective? A man in a trilby hat with his collar turned up? A car in the snow with a camera aimed out of the window? Sherlock Holmes in his deerstalker hat? Or maybe Nancy Drew, complete with magnifying glass?

- What aspects of Olivia Grace fit with a stereotypical image of a PI or detective?
- What aspects do not?

Supporting Characters

Some of the supporting characters are listed below:

- Cactus
- Rosco
- Citra
- Abbey
- Adam

Read the following descriptions and match them up with the characters named above.

- 'Character** is wearing red board shorts and a black bikini top. Poised on the nose of the board, her toes curl over its rim and her body arches backwards as she rides the lip of the wave. I know a tricky move when I see one.'
- 'I spin around. **Character** looms behind me. His hair is still wet from the surf and faded zinc covers his nose. Sand cakes his bare feet and saltwater drips from his board shorts onto the wooden floor. A T-shirt hangs over one shoulder, leaving his muscled chest on display.'
- 'I recognise **Character** from the website, but she is more impressive in the flesh. Her black hair is drawn back from her face, and an ankle-length orange sarong clings to her body. A tattoo of the cult's symbol decorates one toned bicep. She is stunning, but a little frightening, like a prowling leopard.'
- 'A **Character** wearing a grey T-shirt and grey pants stands in the middle of the circle of spectators. A trilby hat perches on his head. Compared to the crowd around him, his look verges on normcore.'
- 'It's weird seeing **Character** at uni. He seems larger than life against this ordered environment. It's like finding Han Solo behind the counter at the bank.'

- Draw a 'family tree' that illustrates the relationships between these characters and Olivia.
- Sketch the characters, using the descriptions given in the book and the ones above, then draw lines to show their relationship to Olivia and to each other. Use a colour scheme such as red for 'don't like' and green for 'like'.

f. After Chapter Thirty-one

Write a diary

If you're feeling stuck when you're developing a character, it can be good to get them to write a letter, or a diary. People often tend to be very open and honest in writing.

- Re-read Olivia's diary entries in Chapter Thirty-one. What do these entries reveal about Olivia and her state of mind?
- Write a diary entry from the point of view of one of the other characters in the book. Try to reveal something new about them that isn't in the book.

g. After Chapter Thirty-six

Writing a newspaper article

Write a newspaper article about the Naiad miracle tree being found in the canyon. Consider the five W's – who, what, where, when, why. Include a title, by-line, subheading, image, image caption and pull quotes. Use an objective factual tone, statistics, and quotes from an expert (you can make these up).



4. Questions to consider after finishing the book

a. Character

Protagonists in a novel must have an objective: they want something, and they won't stop until they get it. Sometimes though, they don't get what they want. Instead, they get what they need.

- What does Olivia want at the start of the book?
- Does she get what she wants, or does she get something different?
- Go back and re-read the first chapter. How has Olivia changed over the course of the novel?

b. Theme

A novel's theme, or themes, help to tie it together in a way that is satisfying to a reader. Some themes often explored in novels are:

1. Good vs. evil
2. Love
3. Redemption
4. Courage and perseverance
5. Coming of age
6. Revenge
7. Finding your purpose

- Which of these themes apply to **Trouble is My Business**?
- How are they depicted in the novel?

5. Key curriculum links

Trouble is My Business is best studied in secondary years (grades 9 to 12) and can be used to teach all three strands of the Australian English curriculum (Language, Literature and Literacy). It is particularly relevant to investigating how social, moral and ethical positions are represented in texts and also explores interpersonal relationships.

6. Related exts

Veronica Mars, television series, 2004–2007

Nancy Drew, book series 1930–present and movies 2007 and 2019

The Girl with the Gold Bikini, Lisa Walker, 2020

Sherlock Holmes, book series by Conan Doyle, 1887–1927

Carl Hiaasen's Florida-based crime novels, 1986–2020

Miami Vice, television series, 1984–1989