



GIRAMONDO PUBLISHING

THE F TEAM – TEACHER NOTES

Debut YA fiction by a young writer from Punchbowl in Western Sydney, *The F Team* follows a group of high-school boys as they try to save their notorious school from being closed down, by confronting their differences on and off the football field.

Synopsis:

Meet Tariq Nader, leader of ‘The Wolf Pack’ at Punchbowl High. He has been asked by the new principal to join a football competition with his mates in order to rehabilitate the public image of their school. But there’s a catch – half of the team is made up of boys from Cronulla, also known as enemy territory – and Tariq must compete with their strongest player for the position of captain.

At school Tariq thinks he has life figured out until he falls for a new girl called Jamila, who challenges everything he knows. At home, his outspoken ways have brought him into conflict with his family. With complications on all fronts, he has to learn to control his anger, and find what it takes to be a leader.

About the author:

Rawah Arja is a member of the Western Sydney women writers’ collective Finishing School. Her writing has featured in *Arab, Australian, Other* (Picador, 2019), SBS Voices and at the Sydney Writer’s Festival. She is a WestWords Varuna Emerging Writers’ Fellow, and teaches creative writing at schools and after-school workshops.

Themes:

The main themes of the novel are **male anger** and its **consequences**, the way anger might be connected, mistakenly, with **identity** and **loyalty**, and how it must come to terms with the complex demands of **love** and **friendship**, and the **responsibilities of leadership**.

Writing style:

Arja was inspired to write for the reluctant reader in her community, and for boys who are equally reluctant to read, and so the novel is written in a conversational style with a focus on human interaction and dialogue. She writes in ‘the free indirect style’ so the reader reads the story as if it were in the present tense, even though it is in the past, because it is coming through the main character’s consciousness.



Rawah Arja

The F Team

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Study questions:

1. The main character's name, Tariq, means 'Path' or 'Way' and is of Arabic origin. What is the symbolism behind the author's choice of name and what do you think are some of the challenges facing Tariq and young men more generally, particularly from minorities or people of colour, today?
2. How does Tariq develop as a character over the course of the novel? Identify specific points in the book that signal growth or change, then present these on a timeline.
3. The setting of the story takes place in Punchbowl, a suburb in South-West Sydney. It is a suburb that has a strong character and is often described by Tariq and his friends as a place they are proud of, though they are aware of the negative stereotypes that are applied to it, whether that be crime, or violence, or gang affiliations. Discuss the concept of home in terms of belonging and how it can affect one's identity.
4. Teamwork can be described as when a group of people work together cohesively, towards a common goal, creating a positive atmosphere, and supporting each other. Discuss the issues and problems faced by the F Team as a whole and the hurdles its members have to overcome. How did they do this? What type of support network did they need to ensure their common goal was achieved?
5. Role models can have a major influence on young adults and help shape their lives. What are some of the positive impacts of the new leadership introduced at Punchbowl? Write about a time you needed guidance in your life and how or where you found it.
6. Friendships and relationships between the members of the F Team are often tested by difficult situations, questions of loyalty, prejudice or family circumstances. Describe the relationship between Tariq and Aaron and how this affects Huss. What are some of the insecurities faced by all three characters and how are these confronted in the story?
7. Every good story usually needs an interesting antagonist – the bad guy. What are some of the characteristics you think make for an effective antagonist?
8. What are some of the consequences of the rhetoric used by the boys on the football teams and of the decisions they make on and off the field?
9. Male anger is prevalent throughout the story and it manifests in many forms. Some characters suppress their anger, some act it out in the form of violence and hateful speech, and some choose to push or deny their anger altogether. Discuss some of these ways the characters deal with anger and how it affects their choices.
10. The family plays a big role in *The F Team*, Tariq's family in particular, but also the school community considered as a family. Despite the tensions, the family scenes are often the funniest in the novel. Why should comedy play such a large part in the depiction of family life? Do you think of your own family and relatives as comic figures? Why should this be so?
11. Though it deals with important social issues, *The F Team* is also a love story. How do these two aspects of the novel – romance on the one hand, anger and prejudice and responsibility on the other – relate to each other?



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Author's note

Imagine living in a world where mirrors didn't exist. You never saw yourself and you never knew what you looked like. That was my experience throughout high school as well as university – not only was a Muslim woman rare to find in print, people like me were demonised and our stories hijacked. I hated reading and found it really difficult to find a connection to the characters, the places – they did nothing for my world, the world of a Muslim.

I became a teacher, not because I wanted to but because my dad said that a woman should be independent in her life and never be in a position where she needed to rely on a man, let alone anyone else. A degree was his answer. Yes, he was very progressive. But also, he had seven children and not one of them lived out his lifelong dream of attending university, so I thought I'd take one for the team.

But during my ten years in the teaching profession, I realised that the dislike for literature in my community was still prevalent. I noticed it was mostly boys who didn't read, and so I spent my lunchtimes in libraries trying to find books that would spark the love for reading and books, the way *Looking for Alibrandi* by Melina Marchetta or *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdel-Fattah did for me.

It was hard. I observed in different boys' high schools for weeks to get a better understanding of why reading to them seemed like a school chore. 'We're either the terrorists or we're the bad guy with a big beard,' one boy said to me. He was talking about the news, but still, this idea was prevalent amongst most of the boys I talked to.

The answer seemed simple. If I wrote a book where I ignited their senses – if they could visualise the places, could feel with and connect to the diverse characters, and imagine plotlines without explosions – then maybe they'd not only read my book, but would be inspired to read the many wonderful Australian books that they'd missed out on.

In short, I want to create a story that any child of a minority would feel proud of, and know they matter. They matter to me; they matter to their community and school; and most importantly, they would see themselves as worthy of being in print. They would be inspired to take ownership of their narrative, rather than sit idly by while the world tells their stories.

Rawah Arja