

## Yellow Mini: Teacher's Manual

### Discussion Questions: Whole Novel

1. How do the characters in *Yellow Mini* struggle to find their own identities, separate from the expectations of their parents? Is this a common struggle for all teenagers? What situations make this struggle harder or easier? What can teenagers do to assert themselves without disrespecting their parents? How can parents assert their wishes without disrespecting their children?
2. Various friendships in the novel grow stronger and others break apart. What situations lead to these scenarios? Is conflict an inevitable part of friendship? Why do some friendships survive adversity while others fail? What are the qualities that lead to the best friendships? The worst?
3. The characters in the novel struggle to find inner strength in order to overcome their fears and insecurities. In the process, they grow up. What are some of these fears and what steps do the characters take to face them? Why is this a crucial step in the coming of age process?
4. Mr. Dawe defies the authority of his school board in order to give his students the education he believes they need and deserve. In what circumstances might it be acceptable to defy authority? How is individual conscience sometimes in conflict with societal expectations?
5. The characters in the novel often have a public face and a private face, a side they show to the world and one they keep to themselves. Where do we see this in the novel? What causes people to hide their true nature in public? What helps the characters become more authentic?

## Working with Character

**Annabelle:** Annabelle is the main character of the book. Her poems open and close the novel and she is the “glue” between various characters. What are her greatest fears? How does she want her own life to be different from her mother’s? How has her mother’s experience as a teen mom shaped her life? How have her own political views affected her personal relationships? How does she grow over the course of the novel?

**Stacey:** How does Stacey look for love and approval outside the home and why does she do this? How does she sacrifice her own role in the Talent Show for Mark? What made Stacey drop Annabelle and Mary and did she benefit from doing this? What is the main thing Stacey wants in life and does she get it by the end of the novel?

**Mary:** What role does music play in Mary’s life and how does she see this music differently from her parents? How does the music both separate and connect her to other characters in the book? Why is Mary reluctant to audition for the Talent Show? Does being in the show change her? What do you make of her connection with Mark at the end?

**Mark:** Mark is the owner of the title car. Why is this car so important to him and his sense of who he is? How does the way he acquired the car affect this? How does the car factor in to his relationship with Stacey, and then later with Mary? Why is it so important for Mark to find the land in the country and then to bury his father’s taxi key on it? How does Mark change during the novel?

**Christopher:** What are Christopher’s insecurities and how does he overcome these in the novel? How does he have to balance his own beliefs with his desire to connect with Annabelle? How does his interest in astronomy affect his personality and his decisions? How does Christopher change over the course of the novel?

**Mr. Dawe:** What are Mr. Dawe's beliefs about the role of education? How is he instrumental in helping Annabelle find direction in her life? Why does Annabelle's mother distrust him at first? How are her values different from his? Is he right to encourage students to travel to New York even when their parents are uneasy with it?

**The Parents:** What fears and concerns do each of the parents have regarding their children? Are these normal or justified? In what ways do they hold their children back, or help them to grow? How does each parent learn to see his or her child differently over the course of the novel?

	Main conflict or problem that the character faces	Main steps or actions taken to deal with the conflicts/problems	Resolution, outcome, or change
Annabelle			
Christopher			
Stacey			
Mark			
Mary			

## Symbolism

Many of the characters in the novel have objects that they are associated with and that have symbolic importance.

Using the symbolism chart below, go through the novel and find references to the symbols listed in the first column. Jot down the page numbers in the first box.

Now, go back and reread all the passages where the objects are used. What impression do they create? What ideas do they suggest? What do they tell us about the characters? Jot down your ideas in the second box.

In the final box, write a one-word definition of what each symbol represents. You might come up with more than one definition for each symbol.

**Writing Activity:** Choose one of the characters and write an analytical paragraph on symbolism. Start your paragraph with a topic sentence that includes the name of the character and the symbol, plus your main point on the meaning of the symbol. Your topic sentences may look like this:

In *Yellow Mini*, the Birkenstocks that Mr. Dawe wears represent X.

Now, develop your paragraph with support from the text, including three quotations that show the symbol. Analyze each quotation separately, relating it back to the main idea in your topic sentence. End the paragraph with a wrap-up sentence that reaffirms your main point.

Topic Sentence:

Three Supporting Quotations:

1.

2.

3.

Wrap-up Sentence:

## Symbolism Chart

Character & Symbol	Page numbers of referenced symbol	Impressions created / ideas	What the symbols represent
Annabelle & political flyers/ posters			
Stacey & makeup			
Mary and music / piano			
Mark & key, mountains, car			
Christopher & stars / planets			
Mr. Dawe & Birkenstocks			
Annabelle's mom & briefcase			

### Setting

The novel does not have a specific setting; however, many locations are described in the novel and do play an important role in developing the characters and themes.

Below is a list of locations used in the book. Beside each one, write down the name of the character most associated with it. Look up a few references to the location in the novel and jot down the page numbers. Look at the passages again and think about how the setting contributes to our understanding of the character. Does the character's attitude about the setting remain the same over the course of the novel, or does it change? Does something very important happen at the setting? Does the setting represent a trait or desire? How would the character's experience be different in a different setting?

**Writing Activity:** Write an argumentative paragraph defending one of the following viewpoints: Make sure you use the text to support your position.

1. This setting (choose one) is not essential to our understanding or appreciation of the character.
2. The novel would have had more meaning if, instead of using this location (choose one), the author had used the following: (suggest new location).
3. If the author had not used (choose one) as a setting for this character, X, the whole meaning of the novel would have been different.



## Setting Chart

Location	Character(s)	Pages referenced to	Meaning or significance
The third floor lounge			
The auditorium & its stage			
The mountains			
The mall			
The cast party house			
The dark basement			
The Greek deli			
New York City			
The Hayden Planetarium			

### Similes and Metaphors

A simile is a comparison between two things that uses the words “like” or “as”. A metaphor is a comparison, often of two unrelated things. Both create meaning by associating objects and raising an image or a connotation in the reader’s mind.

For example, when Annabelle states that the kids in the third floor lounge flaunt their popularity by pulling “it out/of tight tops like a/magician’s scarf” (3),

she might be saying that they are enjoying showing off, that they see it as a performance or a show, one that is meant to trick other people or impress them.

Working with the simile and metaphor chart below, find five of your favourite similes or metaphors in the book. Write the simile/metaphor down in the first box, with the page number.

In the second box, write an interpretation of it. Finally, in the last box, rewrite the similar in straightforward, non-figurative language.

Compare your chart with your classmates'. Did you find different similes/metaphors? Do you agree with their interpretation of them?

Read your simile/metaphors out loud to one another and then read your non-figurative rewrite. Which do you like best? What does writing in figurative language add to a text?

## Similes and Metaphors

Simile or metaphor & page number	Meaning it creates	Rewrite it without the figurative language
Popularity, pull it out of tight tops like a magician's scarf (3)	The popular kids are enjoying showing off, they see it as a performance, one that is meant to trick other people or impress them	When the popular kids know someone is looking at them they show off on purpose, just to impress them.

**Tone and Voice:** Each of the characters in the novel speaks with a very distinct voice, one that captures a tone that is appropriate to the character. That tone could be sad, happy, angry, sarcastic, scared, etc.

Look carefully at a few poems for each character and discuss, or write about, the voice. What tone does it convey? Is the tone of that character consistent throughout the book or does it change? What contributes to the tone: think about diction, line length, even rhythm.

**Plot:** Plot is what happens in the book. In this novel, each character has his or her own story arc. This arc sometimes involves other characters, but it is still unique to that character. Trace the story arc of each of the five teen characters. What are the key events or the rising action? Where is the climax, or high point, for each story? Where is the resolution?

Conflict is also an important element of plot. Without conflict, there is no story. Each character has his or her own conflict as well. What is the main conflict for each? Where is it introduced in the novel? How is it resolved?

**Style:** The novel is written in free verse style. Each character's poems have their own style. For example, Christopher's poems tend to be long and narrow, while Mark's are dense and almost prosaic. Choose five poems for each character and discuss or write about how the particular style of their poems suits their character. To experiment with style, rewrite one of each character's poems in a different style. In a sense you are changing the form of the poem. How does this alter the characterization?

**Theme:** Discuss the major themes of growth, identity, discovery and friendship. For each theme, make a list of poems that best exhibit this theme in the book.

## Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Annabelle afraid to walk past the third floor lounge of her school?
2. Why did Stacey stop hanging around with Annabelle and Mary?
3. How did Mark obtain his yellow Mini and why doesn't his mother approve?
4. Why does Christopher join the social action group that Mr. Dawe runs?
5. What are Annabelle's mother's concerns about the social action group?
6. In what ways did Mark and his father clash?
7. Where do Mark and Stacey go in the car and how does Stacey feel about it?
8. What happened to Stacey's sister?
9. What is Mark looking for in the mountains and what does he plan to do there?
10. How does Christopher feel about the work he has to do as part of the Social Action group?
11. What is the story of Mark's father's life back in Lebanon?
12. How does Mary feel about being pressured to play the piano?
13. What keeps drawing Mark up into the mountains?
14. What is Stacey's role in the Talent Show and how does it change?
15. In what ways does Annabelle have mixed feelings about being seen with Christopher at first?
16. What is Mary's reaction to making it into the Talent Show?
17. How does Christopher's father react to his son's changing identity?
18. Why is Mr. Dawe in trouble with the school and how do various characters react?
19. Why is Annabelle's mother worried about her daughter falling in love?
20. How do Stacey's feelings about driving around with Mark change and why?
21. What does Mark bring up to the spot where his father wanted to buy land and what does he plan to do with it?
22. What is Stacey's father afraid of and why?
23. How are Christopher and Annabelle in conflict over the trip to New York?
24. How do Mark's feelings for Stacey change and why?
25. How does Mary perform at the Talent Show?
26. Does Annabelle's mother change her mind about the work her daughter is doing in the Social Action Group? Explain.

27. How does watching her daughter perform affect Mary's mother?
28. Why did Stacey's parents attend the Talent Show and how did it affect them?
29. Why doesn't Mary stay at the cast party?
30. How does Mark surprise Mary?
31. How do Annabelle and Stacey reconnect, in a way?
32. How is Mark surprised by Mary?
33. How is Stacey surprised by her father?
34. What memory allows Annabelle's mother to let her go to New York?
35. How does Mark want his home life with his mother to change?

### **Essay Topics**

1. Write about the factors that help three of the main characters grow and change over the course of the novel. Make sure you show how the characters transform.
2. Write about the conflict between three of the characters and their parents. What is the source of the conflict and how is it resolved?
3. Write about the importance of friendship or connection in the novel. Focus on at least three relationships.

### **Journal Entries**

1. How are your own wishes and desires for your life and future different from your parents' wishes and desires about your life and future? What kind of conflicts do the differences create? Or, conversely, how does it feel to have your parents support?
2. Have you ever lost a friend because he or she suddenly dropped you? Why did this happen and how did it make you feel? How did you deal with the abandonment?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to do something that really frightened you, but that other people were pushing you to do? What happened? Did you overcome your fears?
4. Have you ever been in a situation where your own beliefs and values were different from a close friend's? How did this affect the relationship? What happened?

## Creative Writing Projects

1. Take a series of poems from the novel and rewrite the poems in prose form, adding words as needed. You can even add description, stream of consciousness, and dialogue, all the elements of traditional prose. Read the original poems out loud, then read your prose versions. How are they different?
2. Write a letter from Annabelle's mother to Annabelle that she slips in her luggage to take to New York. What would it say? How would it convey and even try to justify her fears for Annabelle? What advice would she give her? Would the tone be encouraging, sad, or something else?
3. Write a letter from Mark to his deceased father that he takes up into the mountains to bury beside the key. What would he say about what he has done, about his relationships, about his new friendship with Mary?
4. You are a parent of one of the Social Action Group members and you have seen your child handing out flyers in the mall. Write to Mr. Dawe and let him know what you think of this practice, either positive or negative.
5. Rewrite the ending of the book, from the time Mark pulls up to the party and sees Mary. How might it all have turned out differently? Try to do it in verse.
6. Write an actual conversation between Annabelle and the waitress at the Greek deli, where we get to know the waitress as a person. You can write it out as a skit and then act it out.
7. Write a conversation between Stacey and her estranged sister that takes place the night Stacey's dad hugs her on the landing. What would they say to each other?
8. Mark and Christopher never speak directly to each other in the novel. If they did meet the day after the Talent Show, say in a park or somewhere else, what kind of conversation would they have?



## **Research/Oral Presentation Topics**

1. One of Annabelle's mom's biggest fears for her daughter is pregnancy. Research the topic of teen pregnancy in your country or in another part of the world.
2. One of Mark's mom's biggest fears for her son is the way he drives his car. Research the topic of teens and driving.
3. Research Chopin, Mary's favourite pianist, or research teen pianists who have become well-known in the classical music world.
4. Stacey has a talent for doing make-up. Research the various jobs that a make-up artist could have. Focus on some interesting and unusual ones.
5. Christopher is fascinated by the origins of the universe. Research the various scientific theories that exist.
6. Annabelle's passion is raising awareness about child labour and abusive labour practices around the world. Research some of the best known cases and what is being done to change them.

## Working with Poetry

*Yellow Mini* is written entirely in free verse, a poetic form that doesn't follow any set pattern in terms of rhythm or number of lines or stanzas, or rhyme scheme. Take any poem from the book you like and try rewriting it in one of these poetic forms:

1. **Haiku:** A Japanese form of poetry with seventeen syllables, in three lines (5 / 7 / 5). Juxtaposition is used to contrast two images and to capture a mood. Your task would be to capture the mood of one of the poems in the novel, paring it down to just seventeen syllables.
2. **Villanelle:** The villanelle is a poetic form with a prescribed pattern of two-rhyme sounds. It is nineteen lines long, consisting of five three-line stanzas (tercets) and one concluding four-line stanza (quatrain). The first and third lines of the first stanza are special: they rhyme with each other; each of them is used alternately as the last line of the following stanzas; and they conclude the poem as a rhyming couplet. For a fun villanelle example ("The Villanelle Sandwich") visit: <http://www.catandgirl.com/view>.
3. **Sonnet:** The English (or Shakespearian) sonnet is 14 lines long, falling into 3 quatrains and one final couplet. The rhyme scheme is abab/cdcd/efef/gg. The entire sonnet is on the same theme, with each quatrain exploring another aspect of that theme, and the final couplet offering a concluding concept. Here you would be taking a concept and topic from the original poem and rewriting it as a sonnet.
4. **Acrostic Poem:** The first letter of each line of an acrostic poem spells out the title and topic of the poem. Write an acrostic poem for any of the characters in the book, using their names as the basis for the poem. Try to capture the essence of the character in this poem.