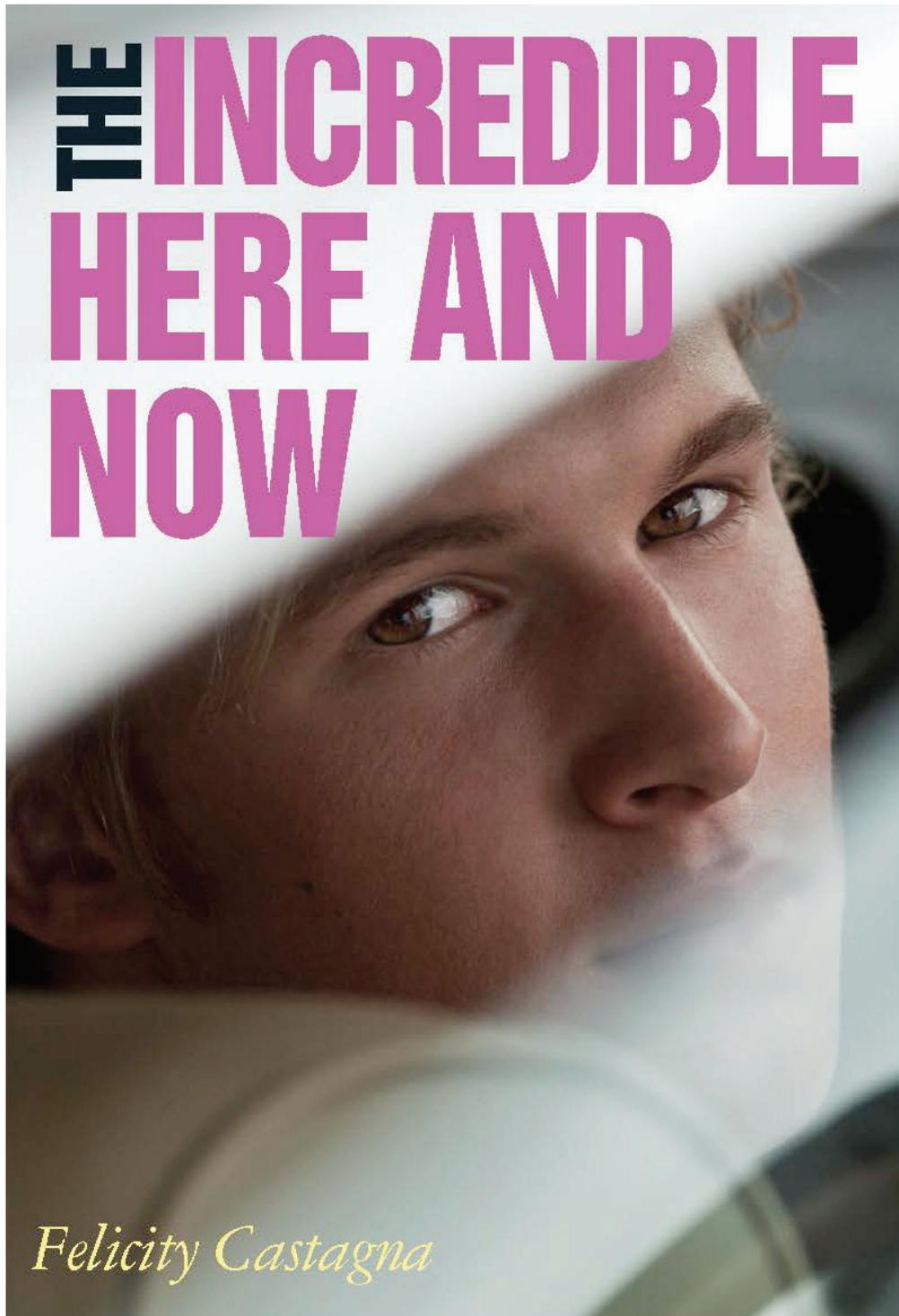


Reading Notes

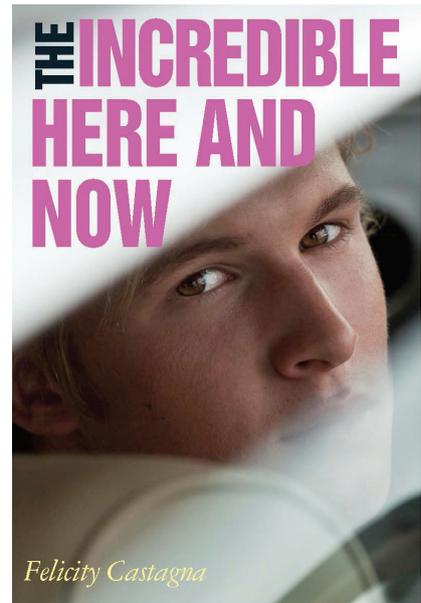


Reading Notes

Felicity Castagna, *The Incredible Here and Now*

About the Book

Something terrible happens the summer Michael turns fifteen. But *The Incredible Here and Now* is not about tragedy. It is about his place, the West, where ‘those who don’t know any better drive through the neighbourhood and lock their car doors’. Michael knows it intimately and lets the reader in: to the unsettled life of his family, the friends who gather in the McDonald’s car park at night, the one girl who will acknowledge he’s alive, the classmates who drool at the Coke factory on their way to school, and the white Pontiac Trans Am that lights up his life like an omen. It is here that he finds an escape from his mother’s growing silence and the absence of his brother Dom, who could charm the whole world with his energy and daring. Michael’s stories are about love and joy and wonder, felt in the company of friends, and the place he lives in.



About the Author

Felicity Castagna spent her youth living and travelling around Asia and North America before moving to Parramatta, where she has worked as a teacher, arts worker and editor for the past ten years. Her collection of short stories *Small Indiscretions* (Transit Lounge, 2011) was highly praised. She has won the Josephine Ulrick Literature Award and the Qantas Spirit of Youth Award.



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Reading Notes

Felicity Castagna, *The Incredible Here and Now*

Felicity Castagna on writing *The Incredible Here and Now*

In writing *The Incredible Here and Now* I really wanted to create something different in Australian Young Adult Fiction. A lot of contemporary Young Adult fiction is about fantasy and magic in made up worlds. I wanted to write about the magic and fantasy that exists in the ordinary, everyday places in the very real communities that young people live in. The text is primarily set in Parramatta and also Auburn, Granville, Harris Park and Merrylands. I was interested in writing about the small intimate spaces of these communities that you walk past every day but you don't think about very much: the McDonald's Parking lot at night, the corner store, the Coke Factory. These are the spaces where young people's lives happen. It is also where the 'West' becomes larger than one location, it becomes a place where stories are told about ordinary places that gain a legendary status through this story telling.

My experience of young people is that they are great storytellers whether they know it or not and you can't live in this community without seeing that. I wrote *The Incredible Here and Now* in a series of vignettes that can be read individually or in chronological order to tell a cohesive narrative. In writing the book, I have come to see the vignette form as a vehicle for forming a picture of a whole community because it mimics the way we understand places in a series of seemingly disparate voices and images that, when combined, form a whole picture. Having workshoped *The Incredible Here and Now* with several groups of young people I have found they like this form because it is easy for them to grasp a text that is complex and literary when it is presented in tight, short, images. It's this focus on storytelling and place that I hope marks the texts' difference.

I really admire Young Adult writers like Sonya Hartnett, Marcus Zusak and Sandra Cisneros because they take risks with the accepted form and structure of Young Adult novels and they don't patronise their audiences by giving them what they think they want – Instead, they make the audience want what they've got to give them. They write risky texts that cross boundaries between Young Adult and Adult fiction, literary and popular fiction and I hope I've done this too with *The Incredible Here and Now*.



Reading Group Notes

Felicity Castagna, *The Incredible Here and Now*

Discussion Questions

1. Do you know someone who is able to charm their way through life the way that Dom does? How do you feel about the way they're treated?
2. What is the defining characteristic of Michael's friendship with Shadi? Why do you think they're such good friends?
3. Over the course of the book, Michael feels as though he has to start taking care of his mother. Have you ever felt that you were in a situation where the parent/child roles were reversed?
4. Why do you think that Michael is able to talk to his aunt in a way that he could never talk to his parents?
5. Do you think it was right that Mo's parents forbade her from seeing Michael? Do you think she did the right thing in obeying them?
6. Have you lost a close family member? What impact did it have on your family and your relationships?
7. What effect do you think it has on the story that it's told from the perspective of someone living in the western suburbs (of Sydney)?
8. How is this suburban setting depicted in the novel? Is it different to the way you imagined it to be from press reports and other representations in the media?
9. How did you find reading a book told through individual scenes or vignettes? What effect did the brevity of the sections have on your experience of the story?
9. What do you imagine Michael's future will be like?