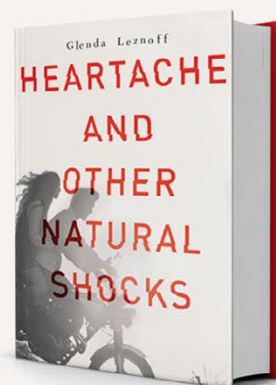


AS WE WALK BY, HE FLICKS HIS HAIR OUT OF HIS EYES AND LOOKS AT ME. HIS FACE CHANGES EVERYTHING ABOUT HIM. HIS BODY IS LOOSE AND LAZY, BUT HIS EXPRESSION HAS AN UNSETTLING INTENSITY. . . . THOSE EYES ARE UNNATURAL: PALE GRAY-BLUE, COLD LIKE A WINTER MOON RINGED IN BLACK. WOLF EYES. EYES THAT KNOW THEIR OWN POWER. OUR EYES MEET. NEITHER OF US SMILES.

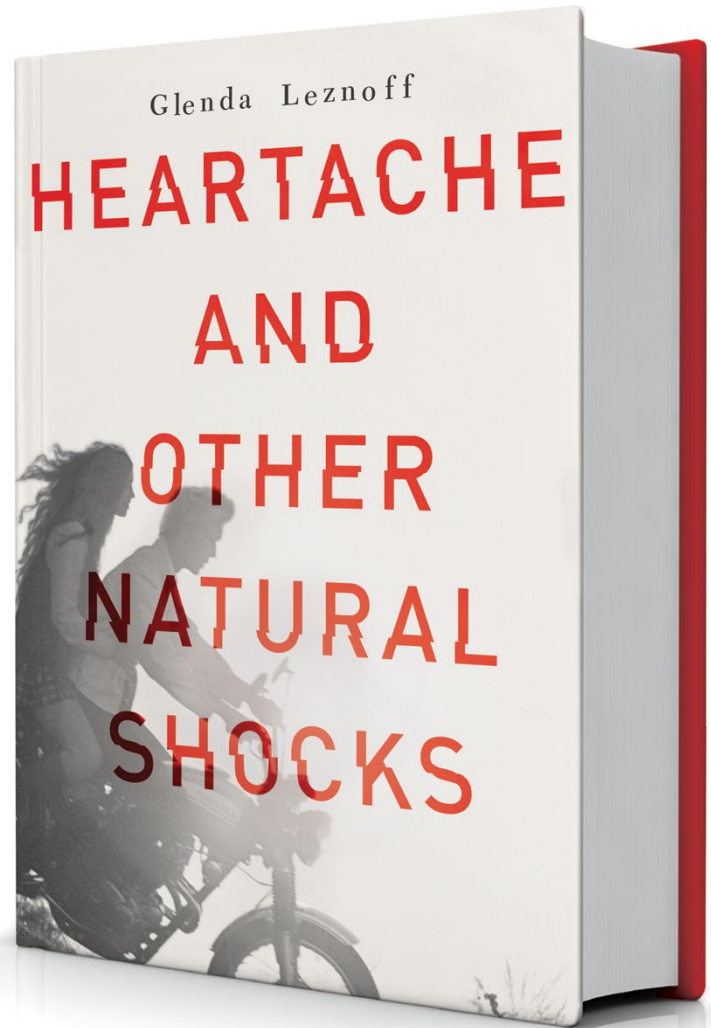


ABOUT THE BOOK

When fifteen-year-old Julia Epstein and her Anglophone family flee Montreal in October of 1970, she struggles to adjust to a new life in the suburban wasteland of North York, Toronto. Next door lives Carla Cabrielli, who works her “assets” and knows how to get what she wants. Julia and Carla are set on a collision course, not only for the same role in the school production of Hamlet, but also for the leading man: sword-wielding bad boy Ian Slater. *Heartache and Other Natural Shocks* explores teen rivalry, and when events take a dangerous turn, both Julia and Carla become vulnerable to deception and betrayal.

Full of unexpected twists, Glenda Leznoff’s unique novel can be used in the classroom in a number of ways, including

- Exploring concepts and themes such as family, acceptance, feminism, courage, adolescence, friendship and respect
- As a starting point for meaningful discussions about bullying and/or common universal issues surrounding adolescent dating and sex
- As a thought-provoking and engaging independent and/or group reading experience



Links to Common Core State Standards have been noted where applicable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo credit: Sylvie Fefer

GLENDA LEZNOFF is a writer, college professor and artist. She launched her career as a playwright before writing for film, television and animation. Leznoff became involved with magazine and non-fiction projects, and continues to write fiction and children’s literature. She is currently an instructor in the Creative Writing Department at Douglas College. As a visual artist, her paintings have been shown in galleries and collections across North America. Glenda lives in Vancouver, where she gardens, dances and cooks sumptuous meals for friends and family.

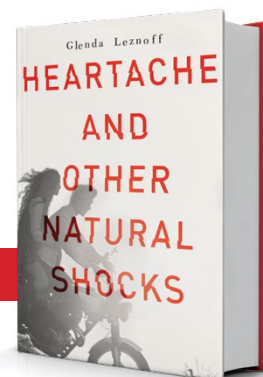
BEFORE YOU READ

- Consider the title of the novel, *Heartache and Other Natural Shocks*. What is your impression of the title?
- Do you know of any important events in French Canadian history in the early 1970’s?
- What is your idea of a “normal family?”
- What do you know about the Shakespearian play Hamlet? If you haven’t already read it, find and read a brief synopsis of the play’s main characters and plot.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1](#)

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DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What do we learn about Jules in the first chapter?
- How does the author alert the reader to the time period in which the novel takes place without actually stating it at the beginning of the novel?
- How has communication changed between the time period in which the novel takes place and now?
- After meeting Carla for the first time, Jules states, “You either like people right from the start, or you don’t.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Can you think of a time that this statement has been proven true or false in your personal experiences?
- In what way(s) does Jules empathize with her former housekeeper Alice?
- The author reveals key characteristics of Carla’s personality by showing rather than telling. What do Carla’s answers to the Cosmo quiz reveal about her personality?
- What are some examples of overt bullying in the novel? Which character was bullied the most? Explain your thinking.
- Brainstorm a list of underlying themes (universal ideas that are found throughout the novel). If you had to select one theme as being the most relevant to the novel, which one would it be? Why? What message do you think the author is trying to convey?
- There are some powerful violent incidents in the novel. What role do these incidents play in the development of the plot?
- How has your understanding of the title changed?

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1](#)

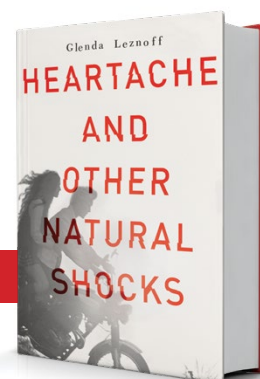
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[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1](#)



SETTING

- The novel is set in 1970's Toronto. There are many marked differences in culture and society between then and now. Locate examples of how the author effectively sets the scene of this distinctive time period by referencing music, art, technology, movies, politics, clothing, cars, money and cultural norms that were present at this time in history.
- Why do you think the author chose to set the novel in the 1970's? What would need to change about the novel's plot if it were to take place in the present day? What major event in 1970's Montreal played a key role in the plot's development?
- Research the Front de liberation du Québec and the separatist movement in 1970's Montreal.
- How has Canadian society's acceptance of smoking cigarettes evolved and/or changed since the 1970's? What prompted this change in thinking?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3

CHARACTER

- If you had to compare the characters in Heartache to the characters in Hamlet, who most resembles whom?
- What is the significance of Jules taking on the role of Hamlet at the last minute?
- Write a character comparison of Jules and Carla. What effect does alternating each chapter between Jules and Carla's voices have on the telling of the story?
- Jules's character develops with each new experience over the course of the novel. Write a description of Jules at the beginning of the novel and then at the end of the novel. Find three defining experiences that contributed to her character's evolution.
- Who do you consider to be the hero or heroine of the story? Consider the pivotal role this character played in major plot developments. If you could choose one defining event in the novel that changed the course of the narrative (outside of the duel scene in the school production), what would it be?
- What is the significance of Geoff and Jules's relationship in the novel?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1

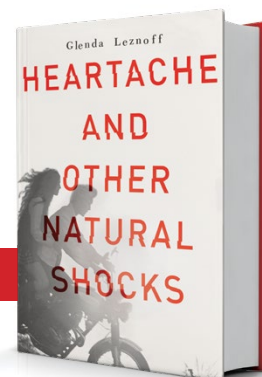
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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2



FEMINISM

- What is “feminism?” Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? Why or why not?
- What are some of the cliché images of feminism mentioned in the novel? How would you describe Carla’s attitude towards feminism? Why do you think this is the case?
- Discuss and/or write about how Carla’s attitude towards Jules is an example of anti-feminist behavior. Reference specific examples from the novel to support your thinking.
- Carla comes across as being a highly confident young woman. How might insecurity be a driving factor behind her behavior and actions?
- Carla references Germaine Greer when talking to her friends about feminism. Research Germaine Greer’s personal history and what was seen as her groundbreaking and controversial views at the time.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1](#)

HAMLET

“Imagine that your father has been murdered by your uncle, your mother is behaving like a whore, your girlfriend is being used as a pawn against you, the people you thought were your friends have betrayed you, and the society you live in is seething with corruption. Watch Hamlet wrestle with this, and then discover how, even in the most desperate of times, a man can act with dignity and courage. “

- Reflect on Mr. Gabor’s statement, drawing parallels where applicable to the character and plot of Heartache.

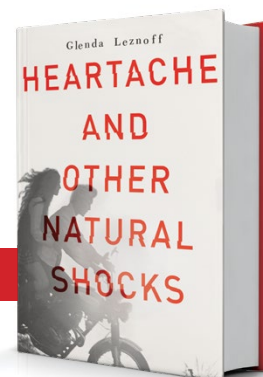
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[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9](#)

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FAMILY

- Jules, Carla, Ian and Geoff all face challenges in their family life. Compare and contrast these characters' family lives.
- After visiting what we learn is his father's home, Geoff asks Jules, "Don't you ever wonder what it feels like to be normal?" What do you think he means by this question? Revisit the pre-reading discussion of your views of a "normal family." Do any of the families in the novel fit your description?
- Write an opinion piece addressing the following question: Is there such a thing as a normal family? Support your argument by referencing the novel and your personal experiences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1](#)

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

READING: LITERATURE

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1](#)

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2](#)

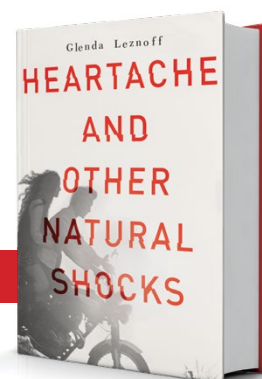
Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#)

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5](#)

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.



READING: LITERATURE (continued)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

WRITING

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9

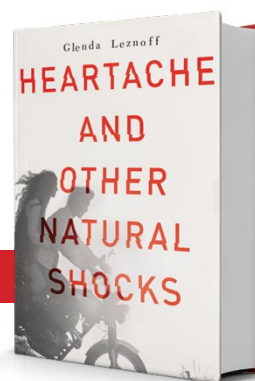
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.



SPEAKING AND LISTENING

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Praise for *Heartache and Other Natural Shocks*:

“Told from Jules’s and Carla’s alternating viewpoints, this insightful, compassionate, and darkly humorous novel explores the agonies and ecstasies of being a teen in 1970s Canada.... VERDICT: Well-developed characters experiencing parental problems, jealousy, betrayal, lust, and friendship will captivate older teens.”—*School Library Journal*

“Told from both girls’ viewpoints in alternating chapters, this novel explores the concept of love—for both the teens and their parents—and what truly creates a home. Historical fiction fans in particular will enjoy the story’s backdrop, where clippings files in the public library, record albums, and references to Canadian politics firmly set it in the 1970s. Well-developed characters, with Jules’ friend Geoff stealing the show, and the ending elevate this novel from the ordinary.”—*Booklist*

“Glenda Leznoff sets her sexy, honest story about a love triangle between three teens against the backdrop of the early 1970s and the FLQ crisis.... Much drama ensues, but Leznoff does a great job keeping the action and dialogue realistic, both for the characters’ ages and the time period.”—*Quill & Quire*

“She said, she said, with a dose of Shakespearean intrigue ... a refreshing break from contemporary teen fiction.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Wishing Judy Blume had written a novel set in 1970 during the peak of the FLQ crisis? This is it.... The Blume comparison is apt because of the deliciously juicy realism; the simultaneous upheaval of both the country and two teen girls’ hormones is addictive and surprising. Leznoff gets teen girls – their conversations, their insecurities and their deep yearning for self-worth.”

—*The Globe and Mail*

