REALITY

Ray Glickman
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Year level: Upper high school +
Cross-curriculum: Media

ABOUT THE BOOK

Six people have been chosen at random. Without their knowledge, Kathy, Mario, Garry, Hannah, Robert and Julia are about to participate in the ultimate game of manipulation. A stranger brings them together, but can this ruthless puppeteer really be held responsible for the choices each makes? In the end, who is to blame for their actions: for their deceit, infidelity and crime? At the heart of this thought-provoking novel lie questions of fate and self-determination.
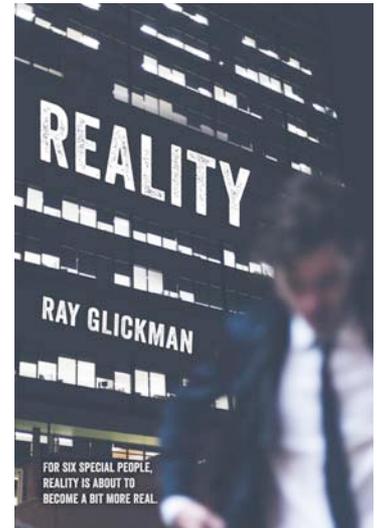
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ray Glickman holds masters degrees in Business, Applied Social Studies, and Psychology and Philosophy. He was the CEO of the City of Fremantle for nine years and president of the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce for three. Ray has a background in psychology and social work as well as leadership and management. He has been a lifelong student of what makes people tick as individuals and in groups. Ray has spoken at numerous conferences around Australia for many years on a variety of subjects. *Reality* is his first novel.

STUDY NOTES

Before reading

Predicting
1. Explore the blurb and brainstorm possible connotations of the title.
2. Create a prediction chart detailing what narrative developments students expect. (It is often interesting to keep this chart to look over at the end – amusing false predictions inevitably arise!)

Considering the context of the novel
3. Discuss the historical context of this text (Perth/Australia in the twenty-first century).
   a. Discuss the popularity of social media – have students create a list of pros/cons.
   b. Discuss the popularity of reality television.
      i. Have the class discuss important controversial issues raised by this form of entertainment.
      ii. You may wish to view an episode of *Big Brother* together as a group prior to conducting the discussion.
4. Brainstorm other forms of entertainment (novels, books, games) that interrogate or critique the 'reality' genre.
5. Create a class definition for the term 'metamodernism'.
6. Discuss the ways in which this novel might be seen to fit within this movement.

During reading

7. Have students make notes on the following:
   a. The characterisation of the narrator, the six 'chosen' individuals, and any minor characters they feel are significant (e.g. Mark).
   b. The portrayal of setting (Perth) and various locales within this region pertinent to each character (e.g. Robert's bar, Hannah's house).
   c. Plot structure, chronological structure, different points of view – do we ever receive the points of view of the six subjects directly?
   d. Narrative mode: narrator as framer of the narrative; narrator's reliability; issues of bias.

    e. Literary devices/structural techniques – how would students define the author's voice and style? To what extent, in students' opinion, does the author intend this book to be taken seriously?

    f. Dialogue – have students compile a list of important quotes for each character, noting how they may change/grow over the course of the novel.

    g. Symbolism – recurring motifs and metaphors; the significance of these.

After reading

Have students discuss the following in pairs or small groups, then elect one group member to summarise their findings to the class. Alternatively, conduct a whole class discussion.

8. For much of this text, you are in the position of knowing more than the characters about the Reality Experiment. However, the narrator is generally in the position of knowing more than you. He foreshadows/reveals clues as he sees fit. How does this dynamic enhance or detract from your reading experience? Do you feel like the narrator is 'playing' with you too? Would you characterise the reader's role in this experience as passive or dynamic?

9. Is the narrator reliable? Why/why not? How does the author achieve this effect?

10. *Since when is it a crime to select people out of the telephone book and put them in touch with each other? I asked. Did I force anyone to do anything against their will?* (p. 368)
Are the narrator's actions immoral, amoral or neither?

11. Why do you think the author has not given his narrator a name?

12. What is it about watching *Big Brother* that inspires the narrator to do what he does? What does he learn from the Sharon School of Management?

13. Why has the story been divided into sections? What are the meanings of the section titles?

14. Compare the size of each section (e.g. *Reality Engaged* vs. *Reality Spurned*). How does this affect the pacing and tension of the novel?

15. In the interview at the back of these teaching notes, author Ray Glickman makes the following statement:
Although reality TV is a modern phenomenon, the central themes of the chaos of fate, the quest for significance, and the abrogation of personal responsibility are timeless.
Discuss with reference to texts that deal with these themes.

16. Reread Hannah's statement in Transcript 8 (p. 215), Garry's statement in Transcript 11 (p. 218) and Julia's statement in Transcript 12 (p. 219). Consider their words and then answer the following questions:

    a. To what extent are people responsible for their own actions, even if they are not in control of the circumstances in which they find themselves?

    b. Which of the characters' lives is least affected by the narrator's intervention?

    c. Which is changed most dramatically? Is this change the 'fault' of the narrator or the character?

    d. To what extent can it be said that the narrator has 'ruined' the lives of his chosen six?

17. What is the narrator's rationale for allowing the six subjects to speak for themselves in the section *Reality Reviewed*? Does his rationale differ from the author's? Does the narrator's choice change the way in which we

    a. view the narrator?

    b. consider issues of fate and self-determination?

18. In the testimonies, Julia states:
What I'm trying to say is that fate needs conductors to make the contacts to influence people's lives. I guess our friend was one of these fate conductors. And so, he was as much fulfilling his own destiny as influencing ours. (p. 208)
Do you think the narrator would agree with this statement?

19. In his final speech to his chosen ones at the gala, the narrator claims: *Fate is the hand that gets dealt to you. By contrast, reality is the hand I create.* (p. 364)
What do you consider to be the key difference between fate and reality?

20. Explore the importance of satire in this novel – find three examples.

21. Explore aspects of consumerism, materialism and 'product placement'. Why do you think *Reality* is full of brand names?

22. Consider the representation of gender in this novel. Does the novel reinforce gender stereotypes? Does it challenge gender stereotypes? Discuss.

23. What is the difference between archetypes and stereotypes? Is it possible to define the chosen six, and the narrator, as either of these?

24. Do you think it is possible that an experiment like the one in the novel could actually be conducted in society? Why/why not?

Comprehension activities

Comprehension questions can be adapted from the discussion points above – have students write paragraph answers supporting their claims with at least one quote from the text.

Essay questions

The following questions can be adapted for in-class assessment or used for a take-home research essay.

25. 'An individual must always take responsibility for his or her own actions.'
   Evaluate the validity of this claim with reference to *Reality* by Ray Glickman.
26. How is the theme of self-determination portrayed in Ray Glickman's *Reality*?
27. Discuss the representation of one or more of the following in Ray Glickman's *Reality* – gender, class or race.
28. Compare and contrast Ray Glickman's novel *Reality* with the television show that helped to inspire it, *Big Brother*.
29. How is Australian culture/identity portrayed in Ray Glickman's *Reality*?
30. Evaluate the claim that 'the narrator within Ray Glickman's *Reality* is selfish and immoral.'
31. 'All narrators are unreliable; they cannot escape personal bias when framing narrative structure.'
   Critically analyse this claim with reference to the narrator in Ray Glickman's *Reality*.
32. Investigate the statement that 'Ray Glickman's *Reality* is primarily a novel about deceit.'
33. Fate can be defined as 'the ultimate agency that predetermines the course of events.' Discuss the representation of fate versus the self-made person in Ray Glickman's *Reality.*
34. Consider the representation of masculinity and femininity in Ray Glickman's *Reality.*

Oral presentation topics

35. Create a three-minute presentation discussing the representation of one of the following themes in the novel: deceit, friendship, manipulation, innocence.
36. Create a three-minute presentation discussing the representation of one of the following in the novel: gender, race, class.
37. Create a three-minute presentation outlining how issues of morality are explored in Ray Glickman's *Reality.*
38. Create a three-minute presentation comparing how the idea of fate versus the self-made person is debated in Ray Glickman's *Reality.*

Debate topics

39. Construct an argument for/against conducting the Reality Experiment – is it immoral?
40. Construct an argument for/against the following claim – 'We are all puppets of fate.'
41. Construct an argument for/against the following claim – 'The Reality Experiment could not have been conducted in the twentieth century. It relies upon modern technologies such as the internet and social media.'

Creative writing activities

42. Write a diary entry from the point of view of one of the 'chosen' individuals that describes their feelings towards the narrator after they discover they have been deceived.
43. Write a letter of praise/criticism for the Reality Experiment to an imaginary local newspaper that ran an article on the 'scandal'.
44. Construct a narrative or free-verse poem on what reality, fate or the modern condition means to you.
45. Write the first chapter in the life of your favourite character following the end of the novel. What will happen to them after the unique experience of the Reality Experiment?
46. Design your own Reality Experiment.
47. Design your own reality TV show.

Television and film analysis

48. Investigate how cinematic codes and conventions are employed in a popular reality television show of your choice. How are these techniques used to 'construct' reality? What effects and distortions do such programs create? Consider the way footage is edited, the way scenes are juxtaposed against one another, the effects of lighting and music, and the emphasis and deliberate downplay of certain characters/events. What is the role of the audience in receiving these constructions – as passive observer or as participant in the process?

49. At the end of the novel the narrator informs us that his experiment will be made into a feature film. Adapt a section or scene from the novel into script form. Act it out in groups for your class.

General skills to revise in creating texts (through study of Ray Glickman's *Reality*)
- Model appropriate planning and drafting strategies, including underlining and highlighting key words in an essay question, and analysing the 'directive words' that instruct you how to answer the question (e.g. evaluate, compare and contrast, critically discuss etc.).
- Provide an essay-planning template. Revise how to structure an effective proposition.
- Use the novel as stimulus for teaching a number of points of spelling and grammar to improve students' ability to effectively proofread their own work.

General skills to revise in interpreting, analysing, evaluating texts (through study of Ray Glickman's *Reality*)
- Set small reading activities to encourage students to practise a variety of reading strategies. For example: skimming through a page to find a relevant quote.
- Set comprehension tasks requiring the students to justify their response with appropriate evidence from the novel or their wider reading and viewing.
- Set compare-and-contrast activities to encourage students to make connections between the novel and their wider reading and viewing.

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

What was your motivation for writing Reality *and where did the idea come from?*

It was essentially a personal challenge. I thought I could write fiction, I had a clever story in mind and so I challenged myself to put up or shut up.

This particular story springs from my interest in how people tick and how society changes with interventions such as new technology. *Reality* explores the pervasive influence of fate, concepts of 'human significance' and dimensions of personal responsibility.

Reality TV brings these themes nicely into focus. In their quest for 'fifteen minutes of fame', participants entrust themselves to the fate offered by faceless TV networks. This is a great backdrop against which to explore concepts of personal responsibility.

How do you yourself feel about working within bureaucracy?

Although this word has taken on a pejorative meaning, there is nothing inherently bad about bureaucracy. It is just a process for getting complicated things done in large institutions. Max Weber's view was that bureaucracy was the ideal way to organise human activity.

In my various paid and unpaid roles, I have encountered great people with wonderful values and extraordinary capabilities working in the so-called bureaucracy.

Having said this, it is clear that governments and large corporations have become increasingly driven by process rather than outcomes. Politicians, aided and abetted by the public and the media, have progressively driven the bureaucracy to value risk management over everything else.

Hence it is fertile ground for satire. It is delicious (one of my favourite words too!) to observe the bureaucrats tie themselves in knots over political correctness and doggedly follow due process blind to its often perverse consequences.

Are the narrator and the other characters real people you have worked with or encountered in other parts of your life?

The narrator is strongly based on someone I was connected to via my work/board directorships. I was both shocked by, and in awe of, this person's capacity to manipulate.

All of the other characters are either tightly or loosely based on people I know. In a way, they are archetypes representative of people like them. Most of the quirky events that happen to them and the phrases they come up with are real.

Who (if any) is your favourite character in the Master Plan?

I love Mario because he is such a larrikin. He is also very real to me, having been based on someone I was quite close to once. I also greatly admire Hannah. I currently lead an organisation that works with the aged and she is the epitome of the experience and wisdom that reside in so many older people that so often go unrecognised.

Which 'intervention' did you enjoy creating the most and why?

I tried to make sure that all of the chosen interventions were not only credible but also had an element of wicked fun. At some level all of them involve someone getting their comeuppance. However, weaving the web of intrigue between Lisa, Julia and Robert and their families appealed to me most. In the end, how can anyone resist poking fun at the privileged and the worried well?

Do you agree (to paraphrase the narrator) that this story is a product of its time? Could it have been written in an earlier era?

Although reality TV is a modern phenomenon, the central themes of the 'chaos' of fate, the quest for significance, and the abrogation of personal responsibility are timeless.

It is true, however, that the internet is a most useful tool for those in the manipulation business. It is said that information is power. This power can be used for good or evil, and this is a point explored in the book. In the modern world, it is much easier to find things out about people and engage with them.

What do you think lies behind our desire to probe people's private lives?

Human beings are essentially curious animals. That drive to search for new understandings and new opportunities has underpinned mankind's success, if you can call it that.

At the same time, people are highly competitive. As I said before, they strive for significance, which is a relative term. People want to know about other people's lives because it helps them gauge their own success.

In the modern world, mass communications and social media have revolutionised nosiness and encouraged prurience. The mass media have fuelled interest in the lives of the rich and famous and operated with breathtaking double standards by spawning the paparazzi and condemning them all at once.

In the end, most of us do lead little lives so we search for opportunities to make ourselves feel better because the lives of others are even less significant.

Do you yourself watch reality TV?

I love music so I do watch most of the reality music shows. Like many people, I have a morbid fascination with *Big Brother* and the moronic dating shows but I can't bring myself to watch them.