



GROUNDING BY SHEENA WILKINSON

About the book

Declan loves Seaneen but horses are his passion. He'll do anything to work in a top showjumping yard so when he's offered his dream job in Germany he's thrilled.

Belfast holds nothing but dark memories of his past.

But suddenly, Declan finds himself tied to home in ways he could never have imagined; leaving Seaneen presents its own problems as their relationship progresses; the troubled teenager Cian reminds him of his own turbulent past and when he rescues a traumatized horse from an abandoned barn, Declan knows he has to help her. He knows he has to stay.

Grounded is a compelling story of love and duty, despair and joy by the author of *Taking Flight* and *Too Many Ponies*.

About the author

Sheena Wilkinson is a secondary school English teacher from County Down who has won many awards for her short fiction and has an MA (distinction) in Creative Writing as well as a PhD in the crossover between adult and children's fiction. Her first novel *Taking Flight* (2010) won the CBI Honour Award for Fiction as well as the Children's Choice Award. It won a White Raven Award from the International Youth Library and a place on the IBBY Honour List. *Grounded* (2012) also won the CBI Children's Choice Award as well as the overall Book of the Year. Her latest novel *Too Many Ponies* has just been published by Little Island and she has just been appointed Writer in Residence for 2013/14 at the Church of Ireland College of Education in Rathmines.

BEFORE YOU READ...

Things to Think About:

- *Grounded* is a sequel to *Taking Flight* but it can also function as a stand-alone novel. Is it important for the reader to know Declan's backstory? Why do you think this?
- What does the title *Grounded* make you think of? What does the word mean to you?
- The novel is set in present-day Belfast. What are your expectations of a Belfast novel? Is there anything that you associate specifically with the city?



AFTER/DURING READING

- *Grounded* is written in the first person. Is this significant? Is Declan a reliable narrator? How does the author handle this first person narrative? Does she make Declan's voice authentic and believable?
- If the book was written in the third person would it lose any of its power?
- Having read the novel, What does the title mean to you? Is it an appropriate one?
- What do you think of Seaneen? Is she given enough of a voice in the novel? Take a key scene between Declan and Seaneen and see if it is possible to rewrite it from her point of view. What changes do you have to make? What do you learn about Seaneen as a result?
- *Grounded* is full of contrasts e.g. between different locations, social classes, families, relationships, etc. How many contrasts can you find? How are they dealt with?
- Novels usually chart developments and changes in the main characters. How does Declan mature as the narrative progresses? Does his outlook on life change?
- If Wilkinson were to write a follow-up to *Grounded* how do you think Declan and Seaneen would be coping with life and a new baby? What challenges do you think they'd be facing?
- Is *Grounded* a specifically 'Belfast' book or could it have been set anywhere? Explain your answer.
- Can *Grounded* really be classed as a "Belfast" novel if it does not address the subject of the Troubles?

Quick Review

1. Give a summary of the novel in no more than ten sentences.
2. Complete the following statements.
 - When I was reading *Grounded* I was reminded of...
 - The one thing I really like about the novel is...
 - A question I'd like to have answered is...
 - I wonder why ...
 - I'm not sure about...
 - What I learned from reading *Grounded* is...

Issues for Discussion

The book raises a number of issues that are relevant to teenagers today. These topics can be discussed very broadly (see list below) through English, Drama or SPHE, or in more detail.



- Identity and self confidence: How does Declan define himself? How do the other characters in the novel define him? How does he deal with threats to his sense of self?
- Friendships and relationships: How does Declan handle the friendships in his life? Does he handle the crossover between his working relationship with Cam and their personal friendship? Is his relationship with Seaneen a healthy and equal one?
- Family dynamics: How do families function in the text? What levels of dysfunction do they experience? How do they communicate with each other? Is the absence of father figures significant?
- Motherhood: The novel explores the idea of motherhood by presenting the reader with some very diverse female characters; Theresa, Stacey, Mairead, Collette and also Seaneen. How does Wilkinson use their various experiences to investigate the difficulties of parenthood?
- Alcohol and drug abuse: Addiction is one of the novel's major themes and Wilkinson uses Theresa's experience as a recovering alcoholic and Cian's drug dependency to explore the complexities of the issue.
- Class: Declan is painfully aware of the social differences between himself and characters such as Cam and Lara. How does he deal with this? What are the stereotypes he encounters?
- Teenage pregnancy: How do Seaneen and Declan cope with the idea of the baby? Does it bring them closer together or does it come between them?
- Suicide and Mental Health: Cian's situation is both compelling and tragic; what support does he receive in the novel? What could have been done differently that might have affected his actions?



EXPLORATIONS

Here are some themes and topics for individual and/or group work:

Identifying issues

1. What are the key issues for Declan?
2. How do they compare with your own concerns?
3. How do the book's characters handle difficult situations? What you might have done in their place? Debate different outcomes.
4. What do you think happens next for Declan and Seaneen?
5. Having read the novel, how do you think might Declan answer these 'big' questions?
 - a) Who am I?
 - b) Who can I trust?
 - c) Where do I belong?
 - d) Who loves me?
 - e) Where can I feel safe?
 - f) Who will I turn in when I'm in trouble?
 - g) How brave am I?
 - h) What will I do with my life?
6. Select three key moments in the novel:
 - Give each one a title and describe what happens in three or four sentences. Why do you feel they are important?
 - What do we learn about Declan or any of the other major characters by looking closely at these moments?
 - Describe your reaction as a reader to each moment.

From Novel to Stage

Would *Grounded* work as a play? How would the narrative be affected? What would you change?

- Choose an important scene from the novel and rework it for a stage production. Is the dialogue between the characters strong enough to sustain the audience's interest?
- What stage directions would you give your actors?