



Piano Lessons

Anna Goldsworthy

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**'A terrific depiction of the powerful bonds between student and teacher,
musician and composer'** Books+Publishing

TEACHING NOTES BY LAURA GORDON

Praise for *Piano Lessons*

“Marvellous. Enlightenment and joy on every page”—
Helen Garner

“I loved this book. Anna Goldsworthy’s memoir left me awed, inspired and humbled.”—Alice Pung

“This is a lovely, warm book – a terrific depiction of the powerful bonds between student and teacher, musician and composer, and, at its core, between two very talented women.”—*Bookseller+Publisher*

“Goldsworthy delivers an expertly spun narrative, told with wry, self-effacing charm, elegant economy and the genuine love of a student for her teacher.”—*The Australian*

“This impressive debut will surely mark Anna Goldsworthy’s arrival as an Australian writer to be reckoned with.”—*The Age*

“Full of insight and a tender awareness of her adolescent foibles.”—*The Advertiser*

“A joy to read”—*The Adelaide Review*

“A brilliant memoir ... Goldsworthy is a fine writer.”—*The Big Issue*

To view footage of Anna Goldsworthy and Mrs Sivan speaking about *Piano Lessons* and download free teaching resources visit www.blackincbooks.com/teachers

Piano Lessons

By Anna Goldsworthy

“We are not teaching piano playing,’ she said. Her English was new and I was not sure if I had heard her correctly. ‘We are teaching philosophy and life and music digested. Music is yours. Instrument is *you are.*” – Anna Goldsworthy (*Piano Lessons*, p3)

Summary

This is the memoir of Anna Goldsworthy, the daughter of the renowned novelist Peter Goldsworthy who wrote *Maestro*. Sharing her experience of learning the piano from the enigmatic Mrs Sivan, who inspired her father’s novel, Anna tells audiences what it was like to experience the magic of a unique and gifted teacher. Set in Adelaide, Anna grows up in a very supportive and loving family whom instill in her a love of music that fills her life. At the age of nine, after she has received an A for her first grade examinations and her jazz teacher recommends she needs someone more experienced to take her on and tutor her, Anna meets her new teacher. Mrs Sivan “is from Russia”, and is on “the Liszt list. Liszt taught the teacher of her teacher’s teacher” (p2). This impressive accolade is something that appeals to the young Anna as “it sat well with the grand narrative (she) had for (her) life” (p2). Eleonora Sivan is an accomplished and highly regarded teacher and is introduced to Anna through her Grandfather. Anna is accepted as her student out of pity as “any child who labored through a Mozart sonata, so ill-equipped, deserved to be taught” (p5). It is the beginning of a life-long relationship that teaches Anna so much more than exceptional piano technique and fosters her intense love of music. It becomes the defining relationship in her life and Mrs Sivan continues to challenge, support, mentor and love Anna through her music journey.

The novel is divided into three parts and completed with a Coda set many years after her final lesson. Each chapter is titled with the name of a composer. These correspond with the piece of music Anna is learning at each section of the novel, More importantly though, each composer is known so intimately by Mrs Sivan that it is the lesson about life or philosophy or attitude or love that is passed on with such passion and intensity that become the foundation for Anna’s musical skill. This novel is about learning, and not just about music, or about how music can enrich your life and fulfill you, but also about how that life should be lived in order to achieve that success and happiness that Anna is desperately seeking. It follows the many extraordinary successes that Anna achieves both musically and academically. She is fiercely intelligent and seems to win so many competitions and awards through her schoolwork with very little effort. While she spends hours perfecting her piano playing, her remaining time is spent studying. There is little room left for friends or socializing and even less for boyfriends. Anna is not bothered by any of this. She spends time with Sophia, happily sacrifices any chance at popularity to experience success musically, and has a close relationship with her parents and grandparents. While she experiences moments of failure, this is a story of a very gifted high achiever, who ultimately achieves her childhood dream, to be a concert pianist.

- [Play students the Mozart Sonata that Anna plays in her audition for Mrs Sivan. Ask students to close their eyes and just listen. Then as it finishes invite them to write anything down that comes to mind. Share these observations. Then play students The Chopin B-flat Minor Sonata that Anna plays for her recital at Elder Hall in the Coda. Repeat the listening and observation task.](#)

- Put all of the names of the composers in a hat and ask each student to draw one out. (A number of them are repeated, so students might need to work in groups depending on class size.) They need to research the life and music of the composer. Then identify the lesson Mrs Sivan attributes to them. As each group presents their findings, ask them to bring a piece of music by that composer for students to listen to. Students exposure to classical music will vary and while will need to download the music, others may be able to play it for the class.

Characters

Anna Goldsworthy

Her memoir begins at the age of nine when her jazz piano teacher passes her over to someone who can continue to help her reach the success it is already obvious she is capable of. Anna's grandfather takes her to meet Mrs Sivan and this charismatic, Russian teacher agrees to take her on as a student. Anna's first impression of this woman who will become her lifelong mentor is hard for her to recall as she ponders how to describe her. "In (her) mind, she is less a character than a force" (p3). Even at this young age, Anna is desperate to impress, to answer correctly, to understand all of these complicated lessons her teacher is passing on to her. Sometimes she is successful, but when the result is not perfect, she struggles enormously with this less than perfect result. It is a feature of her character that drives much her ambition, that enables her to practice for hours on the piano, to keep learning and improving, but it is also something that haunts her. Many years later as she nears the end of her schooling, she is faced with "a number of other goals (she) had to achieve" (p140). Anna exerted enormous pressure on herself and felt the expectations of her teachers weigh her down immensely. She believe she had to get the top English mark in the state, "dux of the school, achieve perfect scores in double mathematics, guide the school debating team to victory in the finals" (p140), as well as win all of her music commitments. After listing all of these demands she states; "none was negotiable. Achievement had become my way of knowing myself: I no longer even experienced it as a pleasure, only as the relief of non-failure" (141). Unsurprisingly, Anna achieves each one of these goals, gloating at her speech night and making fun of her principal as her "dux-hood glowed around (her) like a protective force-field". Through all of this extraordinary achievement and success, and despite the advice from her teachers and friends, she continues to pursue her dream of being a concert pianist. The only problem in all of this is that her teacher has declared that this is exactly what she will never be. As she cries desperately at this exclamation, she reflects, "it is not that I necessarily wanted to be a concert pianist; it was just that I wanted to be *able* to be one, if I chose" (p47). It is the removal of possibility that she is so upset about, and it is this claim that drives her to make the impossible become a reality. Her teenage angst is not made of the usual stuff. She is not too worried about boys, or her friends, or the restrictions of her parents. She has learnt about 'unbeauty' through acne and growing so tall, but she is happily unpopular as she considers herself an artist, and spends so much of her time with the piano that she has little time for these other things anyway.

The novel follows her success at highschool, to being accepted into the Conservatorium to study with like-minded students. Anna begins to take on her own students and it is through passing on the precious legacy that Mrs Sivan has imparted to her, that the magic of her teaching really strikes Anna. It is impossible for her to recreate the exceptional lessons, both musical and otherwise, as she realizes that the gift Mrs Sivan has is truly unique. Anna travels to America to learn and receives a scholarship to study alongside Mrs Sivan's prized student, Kate Stevens. Eventually she returns and creates

the Seraphim Trio with Helen and Leah and after some minor setbacks, they achieve great success. Surviving two serious car accidents, overseas travel, horrifying auditions, overcoming obsessive-compulsive disorder and finding someone whom she loves and has made a life with takes us to the Coda. Anna has frantically left Melbourne, where she is planning to travel overseas with the trio, to respond to the urgent message that her darling Mrs Sivan is very ill. Wracked with grief and torn between her commitment to her fellow musicians, Anna asks for a sign to leave Mrs Sivan's bedside and travel to Italy to play. As she feels the slightest squeeze of her hand she does just that. The novel finishes with Anna leading a life she loves, teaching, playing, surrounded by music and performing for all of the important people in her life, in exactly the setting she chose. And while Eleonora isn't in the audience, she is still in Anna's life, guiding her and teaching as she always has. And the growth in Anna is evident as she loves the stage, not for what it does for her, but for what she can offer her audience.

- Divide the class into four groups and assign each group a section of the text. They need to create a detailed character profile of Anna at this stage of her life. Each group need to complete the chart for their section and once they have become the 'expert' on their part, rearrange the groups to have one person from each section in a group to help complete the chart. These are some suggested headings for consideration.

Section	Family	Friends	Music	Self	Achievements
Part I					
Part II					
Part III					
Coda					

- As a class, choose four symbols that represent Anna at different stages of the text. Draw these symbols on A4 sheets and put them on each wall of the classroom. Each student finds one quote from the novel to write on a sticky note. They need to all be different, so perhaps allocate the popular quotes first and then ask the rest to find their own. Stick the quotes on the board. Students then collect a quote, write their name on it and stick it under one of the symbols on the wall. They have to justify why they put it there. Once completed, students move around the room to copy the lists.
- Read page 14. How do you feel about Anna at this stage of the novel? At what point does this feeling change?
- 'Anna defines herself more by her failures than her successes.' Do you agree with this statement?
- Select one event from the novel. Write a piece describing how Anna perceives herself at this moment. Then write a mirror version of this, where another character writes about the same moment from their perspective.
- "Of course I love this girl, so intelligent. Really, I never knew such a child. But so reserved. Wants to give right reading: correct and right. Does not understand emotional freedom and artistic representation." (p47) Is this a fair assessment of Anna. In what ways is Mrs Sivan right about Anna?

Eleonora Sivan

Eleonora is the star of this novel. Her voice is authentically created through Anna's perspective as she adopts her broken English and extravagant descriptions to recreate the magic and often confusion their lessons together. When we first meet Mrs Sivan, it is in the presence of Anna's grandfather and mother and nine-year-old Anna as she desperately tries to impress this new piano teacher.

"How to describe her? In my mind she is less a character than a force. Music is coiled inside her under a pressure that demands expression, and from the moment she opened the door she did not stop talking. She must have been in her forties, but was not much taller than my nine-year-old self and had the peachy, springy skin of an infant. I met her powerful gaze and blushed and dropped my eyes." (p3)

Mrs Sivan, as she comes to be known until Anna becomes an adult and is instructed to call her Eleonora, is from the Leningrad Conservatorium of Music in Russia. She now lives in Australia with her husband and her son, who barely get a mention, and she teaches at one of the schools in Adelaide, as well as offers private tuition to students. She is a woman of passion, intellect and great skill. Her knowledge of the great composers encompasses not only their music, but also their lives and philosophy. These are the lessons that have the lasting impact on Anna. Each pocket of wisdom appears just as something in the confused child, overzealous teenager or aspiring young women needs it. Mrs Sivan always remains her teacher, never her confidante. Part of this is possibly due to the fact that Anna's father is present at every piano lesson, and part of it is that Anna had little to confide; the piano was her absolute focus. Mrs Sivan offers advice, limits her praise, is critical of competitions, and refuses to make empty promises. And of all of the explanations, recommendations and suggested improvements, it is one sentence that has a lasting impact on Anna, her claim that "Anna will never be concert pianist" (p46). As Anna grapples with the technical advice, the meaning of the music, the beauty of performance as a way of giving to others, this is the most influential statement Mrs Sivan ever makes, and it is as debilitating as it is motivating. In the Coda, as Anna returns to Adelaide to play at Elder Hall, she knows that even though Eleonora isn't physically in the audience, she is still the most important audience Anna has.

- What are your first impressions of Mrs Sivan? Does she remind you of anyone? What is your favourite phrase that she uses?
- There is no doubt that Eleonora Sivan deserves her reputation as an outstanding piano teacher. Select five examples from the text that are testament to this.
- Imagine Eleonora is describing Anna to her new student Kate. Write this conversation.
- What makes Eleonora declare that Anna will never be a concert pianist? Is this a fair call to make?
- Do you think she enjoys having Peter Goldsworthy present in all of the lessons? Imagine she is telling her husband that she has discovered he is writing a book with her as the inspiration. What would she say about this?
- The newspaper article incident on page 163 – 166 is one of the great lessons she teaches Anna. How did you feel about Mrs Sivan when you first read the caption from the photograph? How did you feel about Anna?

Peter Goldsworthy

“To be praised by my father in print astonished and delighted me; it was the highlight of my thirteenth year”. (P80)

Anna and her father are very close. She reads his manuscripts and speeches and edits them for him. He attends every one of her music lessons, albeit as research for the novel that eventually is a hugely successful piece of literature. He is creative and artistic, very well educated as a doctor in his field and highly respected by many who know him. He is also very honest with Anna, not fuelling her ego unnecessarily and answering her quite honestly when she is seeking praise inappropriately. He has high expectations of his spectacular daughter, but not in a way that seems to put any more pressure on her than Anna puts on herself. He keeps her grounded. After experiencing some kind of anxiety induced hallucinations and imagining voices during her second audition for the ABC Young Performer Award, Anna finds herself wallowing in self-pity. After bringing home her favourite dinner and a movie which she barely responds to, Peter firmly instructs her to “stop being self-indulgent” (p186). While her immediate reaction doesn’t heed the advice, eventually it is a lesson she is happy to embrace. Peter does a marvelous job of embarrassing her by inviting a well renowned pianist out for tea and lets Anna flounder through conversation in a way she never really has had to before. He is the doting father, checking on her results, taking her to buy a beautiful piano and affectionately calling her ‘Pie’. He is her biggest fan. There are not many moments of disagreement or humiliation that Anna chooses to share in the memoir. But the few she does are significant. At his speech for the launch of a new collection of short stories, he ignores Anna plea to leave out a line that she finds humiliating. He delivers the line anyway, claiming it is “only a joke” and “no one will take it seriously”. But at the launch where there is a smattering of laughter about how acne makes adolescent children distasteful to their parents, it is Anna’s acne riddled cheeks that burn with embarrassment. There is no doubt that throughout the entire novel, and obviously her life, Anna adores her father. She seeks his advice, support, help and presence. She delights in his success, even being told by her teenage best friend Sophia that “we all have Dad’s, we just don’t all talk about them all the time”. He is one of her greatest friends, and that’s what teenage girls do, talk about their friends. It says a lot about both of them that her father plays this role in her life.

- Peter decides to write Anna a letter on the eve of her performance at Elder Hall. Write this letter.
- Do you think it was ethical that he wrote a story, using the lessons as his inspiration without telling Eleonora until the very end? At what point should he have asked her permission? Given that the final draft was quite different, did he ever have to?
- Anna’s Mum raises a concern that a friend has over whether Anna was missing out on her childhood with the emphasis on the piano. How would he respond if his brother, or one of his friends had suggested that to him?
- Why does he invite Douglas Owen out for tea? What is the intention of this meeting?
- Of all of Anna’s achievements, which one do you think he would be most proud of?

Sophia

Sophia is Anna’s window into a world she is never quite belongs to. She gives her many of the social cues that Anna is totally oblivious too. She warns Anna against seeming too

intelligent in case she comes across as a “dork, or dweeb, or geek” and in turn sacrificing any chance of popularity she may have had. Sophia is supportive and understanding, but her attention is elsewhere. She has many friends, other interests and of course is busy being a teenage girl. Sophia warns her not to tell anyone of the scholarship to Pembroke, or to stop talking so much about her Dad. She questions some of the strange things she does, not in a nasty way, just as a means of understanding someone who has their mind on other things. Sophia remains Anna’s lifeline to normality. Even as Sophia gets a new best friend and “they spent their lunch hours reciting the lyrics of Bon Jovi, (Anna) sat by in silence, calculating how much practice time remained before bed” (p111). Their friendship shifts over the years and Anna reveals a little jealousy toward Sophia and her svelte body and “film-star teeth” (p112). As Anna’s mother worries about the fact that Sophia has started going out with boyfriends and Anna hasn’t, her daughters response is to silently exclaim; “who needed such trifles? I had the piano as my lover” (p113). But they remain friends over the years as Sophia attends many performances. Her absence is noted in the Coda, as Anna lists the important people in her life who are out in the audience once more. Sophia is absent from this list, but then this is many years later and it is no doubt that their lives took very different paths.

- Choose one of the events that Sophia and Anna share and write this event from Sophia’s perspective.
- How would Sophia describe Anna to her friends at Pembroke?
- Do you think there would be any jealousy between these girls?
- Imagine Sophia and Anna run into each other at this final recital. What would this conversation sound like.

Kate Stevens

“By the time Kate reached the conclusion, she was a goddess, delivering each octave like a thunderbolt.” (P60)

In many ways, Kate offers more of a friendship to Anna than Sophia does. Anna absolutely idolizes Kate Stevens, mostly because of the way she plays the piano, but also for her energy and enthusiasm. Mrs Sivan is also a big fan of Kate’s and enjoys teaching her for these same reasons. As Anna watches Kate perform, and turn into this goddess, a world opens up for Anna that she hadn’t really known before, one where music and popularity were connected. Kate is older than Anna and takes her under her wing in many ways. Rather than being egotistical or arrogant or competitive, Kate nurtures Anna in way she really needs. They find themselves studying at the same music school overseas and when someone remarks that Anna reminds them of Kate, it is one of the greatest compliments Anna receives.

- Find the first description of Kate in the text. What are the key adjectives Anna uses? Why is Kate so appealing to Anna?
- Why do you think Anna is so flattered when someone tells her she reminds them of Kate?
- What are the musical lessons that Kate could teach Anna?
- Fill in the rest of Kate’s character. What is her family like? How does she go at school? Where does her love of music come from?

Themes

The gift of an exceptional teacher

One of the great treasures of this novel is the relationship between Anna and her lifelong mentor and teacher, Mrs Sivan. As a nine-year-old girl, Anna meets Mrs Sivan and is immediately in awe of her. She desperately wants to understand all of these lessons and answer her frequent questions correctly, but in many cases, it is years and years before she can. Many of the lessons apply to the piano, but in the absence of many friends, most of the lessons Anna learns about life, come from this time with Mrs Sivan as well. Humility, gratitude, the danger of ego and the importance of honesty are among these teachings. Anna always knows and appreciates all of the expertise of this wonderful lady, but it is not until she tries to teach students herself that the magic of her teaching is fully appreciated. As the intricacies of the technical aspects of piano playing become difficult to teach, so too do the motivations and philosophies of these great composers. The insight Mrs Sivan has repeated to her over the years is something she understands, and yet the contradictions that seemed to somehow make sense in Eleonora's teaching, remain contradictions to the confused students of Anna. No matter how proficient Anna becomes, she can always learn in the company of someone on "the Liszt list". And so can her accomplished peers, Helen and Leah who remark that, "there's something very special about that lady". Eleonora becomes someone whom she cannot live without, "her Y-axis". As her health takes a turn for the worst, Anna abandons the rest of the trio she is about to travel overseas with, to race home and be with her beloved mentor. And as she finally realizes her childhood dream, it is the one audience member who is not there that she misses the most.

- After many years of working together, Anna finally finds the perfect gift to say thank you to Mrs Sivan. What is this gift? Write the accompanying letter.
- Think of a time when someone has taught you something remarkable. Write the lesson you learned and what was so significant about this.
- Find the five moments in the text that are the most significant teaching moments. Summarise this into a sentence for each and accompany each with a symbol or a photograph. Order them into the most significant to least significant.

Success and failure

At the end of her high school, Anna lists all of the goals she has set for herself to achieve, or others have set for her. She describes the pressure of this as; "achievement had become my way of knowing myself: I no longer ever experienced it as a pleasure, only as the relief of non-failure" (141). Anna's self perception had become totally dependent on whether or not she achieved all of the expectations, awards, achievements that had been set for her. She viewed default setting as failure and everything less than perfect was defined by this standard. It meant for significant disappointment as perfect is extremely difficult to maintain constantly. These high expectations meant that Anna often achieved the success she dreamed of. She practiced the piano intensely, listened carefully to the advice of her mentor and teacher and entered competitions despite Mrs Sivan's warning that "music is not sport". Often overwhelmed by the reality of performing in an unknown space and faced with impressive and highly talented competitors, Anna was frequently out of her depth. With mixed results, Anna continued to put herself out there, entering competitions and seeking scholarships to continue to improve her music. The opposite seemed to be the case for her academic performance. With school, music

lessons and practice, there can't have been much time left for study, and yet Anna seemed to achieve accolade after accolade, often beating not only her private school counterparts, but also the rest of the students in the state. This area seems to come much more naturally to her, yet she rejects all of the possibilities this success offers in search of her dream, to be a concert pianist.

- Make a list of quotes from the text of Anna describing her successes and failures. Divide them into those which are positive and those which are negative. How does Anna perceive herself according to this list of achievements?
- Ask students to stand on the line in the room according to what they think about the following statements. They must justify themselves for their position. (One side of the room is totally agree, the other totally disagree.)
 - Anna never learns Mrs Sivan's lesson that the greatest pleasure of music sharing your music with others.
 - Anna learns far more from her failures than her successes.
 - Anna's life is so privileged that she could never really understand failure.

The art of music

There is considerable time spent on the technicality of playing the piano. To readers who have played, this will sustain their interest in the magic of this instrument. But it is not essential to have played piano, be able to read music or even know who these famous composers are to appreciate the art of music. The description of the way these pieces of music sound to someone who lives and breathes music brings it alive for any reader. Mrs Sivan intricately explains the nuances of the different styles, coloured with vivid descriptions of the men who wrote them. The emotion the different pieces of music evoke for different characters also reveals the truly artistic nature of music. Her grandfather is warmed and reminded by the familiarity of the pieces he hears, and later learns to play. Her friend Kate is admired for the genuine enthusiasm she brings to her playing and the way she can bring music to those who might otherwise be disinterested. For Anna's father, the experience of learning and playing creates a stunning story and characters that take on a life of their own. Mrs Sivan asks Anna to tell the story of the music, and it takes her a little while to really understand what she means by this. But once she does, this art form becomes even more beautiful than it had before.

- Play the students a piece of music. Invite them to write or draw anything that comes to mind. Ask each student to write a sentence or an image on a sticky note and post it in the room somewhere. Each student selects one of these and uses it as the start of a piece of writing.
- Music and art is often interwoven. Think of the album covers and now film clips that are works of art in their own right. Ask students to find a film clip that means something to them and ask them to show the class part of it and share why it is so significant to them.

Quotes

PART I

"He pronounced my name with an extravagant French accent that spoke of her mystery, her glamour." (P1)

"I liked the sound of that. If I learned piano from Mrs Sivan, then I too would be on the Liszt list. It sat well with the grand narrative I had in my mind for my life." (P2)

“The melodrama of it delighted me; a tear of the most exquisite self-pity formed in my eye and then rushed down my cheek.” (P14)

“It is never enough to tell a student something once: teaching is constant repetition , constant correction.” (P20)

“We don’t go into competitions for to win: music is not a sport.” (P25)

“I recognized the rift between Mrs Sivan’s teaching and the imperfect world in which I would try to enact it.” (P34)

“I was not sure that I wanted to be chosen by the piano. I loved music and I enjoyed playing it, and I appreciated the way it brought me attention within the family. But I was not yet certain that I wanted to be claimed by it, for life.” (P44)

‘Of course Anna will never be concert pianist.’ (P46)

“Was there a chance that I might be a square? Or worse: a dork, a dweeb or even a geek?” (P49)

“It was great that we were going to Pembroke, but in some ways it would be better if my parents were paying my school fees, just like everybody else.” (P57)

PART II.

“Ignorance is bliss’, I said. ‘Knowledge is power!’ he retorted.” (P66)

“Of course, you are very fortunate girl. First of all , to have such family, so involved in everything you touch, and such aim of learning in your surroundings.” (P68)

“I was learning about unbeautiful. Puberty had not only vandalized my face with acne, but seemed to have disassembled my body and put it back together all wrong.” (P85)

“I think you’re actually the most boring person I’ve ever met’, he said. I gaped back at him; I had no rebuttal.” (P87)

“But here I had been singled out by failure, branded personally with a C, and forever.” (P95)

“Most important, that you enjoy being onstage. That you love sharing your music.” (P97)

“Anyway hadn’t I already sacrificed enough for my dream? Hadn’t I sacrificed my popularity? “ (P99)

“I snorted to myself, contemptuously. *Boyfriends*. Who needed such trifles? I had the piano as my lover.” (P113)

“I won’, I said, experimentally. I had always wondered how these words might feel in my mouth. They were less substantial than I had hoped.” (P115)

“Mrs Sivan was also my lifeline; at times, the degree of my dependency on her troubled me.” (P119)

PART III.

“There was something extravagant about these results: something over the top. Had I gone too far this time?” (P161)

“Music itself can’t change the whole world, but definitely can change us, one person at a time.” (P162)

“By the time we arrived at her house, I was overcome by shame, matched only by fear of what was about to happen.” (P165)

“At the conservatorium, we studied the lives of the great composers, but in my piano lessons, she took me into their inner lives, reading their music as autobiography, until they became more real than many of the people in my life.” (P170)

“Was this the way I would serve Mrs Sivan’s legacy? Scrambling her message, from one telling to the next, as in a game of childhood whispers?” (P176)

“There’s something very special about that lady.” (P203)

“I realized my life had been building up to this moment, this grand Hollywood ending.” (P224)

CODA

“My grief is more selfish than that. It is not only about her legacy. It is that she is my great friend as well as my teacher, and I am not ready for her to be missing from my life.” (P233)

Assessment

1. Essays

- ‘Anna learns more about life and her place in it from Mrs Sivan than she does from her parents.’ Do you agree?
- “Lizzie thinks we’re pushing Anna’, said my mother, “That she’s missing out on a childhood.” To what extent is this true?
- Mrs Sivan tells Anna that it is “most important, that you enjoy being onstage. That you love sharing your music.” Does Anna learn this lesson?
- ‘In life, we learn far more from our failures than we do from our successes.’ Is this the case for Anna? What is the greatest lesson she learns?

2. Creative Responses

❖ ***Lessons from Mrs Sivan***

Students are to create a collection of the many lessons that Mrs Sivan teaches Anna. Select ten of the lessons from the novel and the composer that the lesson

is connected to. This collection can be designed as a book that might feature on a Mother's Day list or something similar. Each lesson is given a title, an explanation and a photo or image to accompany it. A brief story is told about the lesson being taught, either drawn from the novel or from student's own experience. It could also feature some contemporary song lyrics that would fit each lesson.

❖ ***Speech to the State's High Achievers***

Imagine Anna Goldsworthy has been invited to address a function that the South Australian Premier has invited students to. It may be just before they begin Year 12, or it may be on the release of all of their results at the conclusion of their final year of school. You can create a theme she is speaking to, or it may be on Anna's own experience and her advice for their future endeavors.

❖ ***First draft of Maestro***

Anna's father took copious notes during her lessons with Mrs Sivan and these formed the inspiration for his initial draft of what eventually becomes published as a very different story in *Maestro*. Write a section of this first draft, either a description of Mrs Sivan, an observation of one of the early lessons, or of the impact this teacher and mentor was having on her student through music or philosophy.

❖ ***A letter to a younger self***

Anna has been invited to contribute to an anthology where women write a letter to their sixteen-year-old self. Write this letter. What advice would she give? What would she tell her to do more of and less of? Who should she treat differently?

About Laura Gordon

Laura Gordon is an experienced secondary English teacher. She currently teaches years 7–12 at St Joseph's College, Geelong, where she has taught for the past 10 years. She shares her passion for books and reading by creating engaging curriculum and learning activities for the classroom.



ANNA GOLDSWORTHY is the author of *Piano Lessons*, *Welcome to Your New Life* and the Quarterly Essay *Unfinished Business: Sex, Freedom and Misogyny*. Her writing has appeared in the *Monthly*, the *Age*, the *Australian*, the *Adelaide Review* and *The Best Australian Essays*. She is also a concert pianist, with several recordings to her name.

Anna Goldsworthy is a classical pianist and writer. Anna's father Peter Goldsworthy was inspired to write his book, *Maestro*, by Anna's experiences learning piano. *Piano Lessons* is Anna's story of her musical journey and is the perfect companion text to *Maestro*.

In this remarkable memoir, Anna Goldsworthy recalls her first steps towards a life in music, from childhood piano lessons with a local jazz muso to international success as a concert pianist. As she discovers passion and ambition, and confronts doubt and disappointment, she learns about much more than tone and technique. This is a story of the getting of wisdom, tender and bittersweet.

With wit and affection, Goldsworthy captures the hopes and uncertainties of youth, the fear and exhilaration of performing, and the complex bonds between teacher and student. An unforgettable cast of characters joins her: her family; her friends and rivals; and her teacher, Mrs Sivan, who inspires and challenges her in equal measure, and who transforms what seems an impossible dream into something real and sustaining.

Recommended for middle and upper secondary

Subjects: Memoir, Non-Fiction, Music

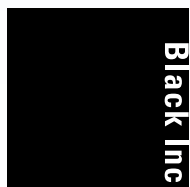
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