

Miles Franklin Literary Award 2009  
Longlist

***Addition***

**Toni Jordan**

Text Publishing Melbourne Australia

Reading Group Notes

**Praise for *Addition***

'Jordan...relishes Grace's mordant wit and feisty take on the world. This novel is energised by Grace's grumpy, funny, obsessive, fearful and insightful voice. Her strangeness is beautifully crafted...A winning love story, a sorbet for tired souls.' *Age*

'Snappy, sassy, superior chick-lit with a twist...Jordan portrays Grace's quirks with poignancy, pathos and, most importantly, humour.' *Canberra Times*

'*Addition* is a Trojan horse of a novel. It has a cutesy cover, a kooky love story and a "hot" wisecracking blonde heroine...But the heroine, Grace Vandenburg, is no ditsy Bridget Jones everywoman...*Addition* raises questions about our values and our society, couched in disarmingly easy-to-read prose...The core message of this kind of book is about being loved on your own terms, by someone who appreciates the "real you". What *Addition* does is to broaden the definition of what your own terms (and the "real you") can include.' *Australian Book Review*

**A reader's introduction to *Addition***

'I kneel down so that I am almost eye level with him. He has both my breasts in his hands now. Please God don't let him take off my sweat shirt. He'll see they're not even, that my breasts are not even. The left one hangs down lower than the right. 5 millimetres. My collar bones aren't even either. They don't align. One sticks out further than the other. No reason – not a legacy of a childhood accident. No genetic deformity passed from mother to daughter like a bone china set. Misaligned, that's all. Surely when he sees that he'll stop. He'll give up.

He doesn't give up.'

Grace Vandenburg counts everything. Without numbers the world would be too big, too changeable. She would be overwhelmed. Seamus Joseph O'Reilly is a development that she did not predict. He makes love to her and does not notice that her breasts are uneven. He wants her to be happy.

*Addition* follows Grace as she discovers what it means to be happy. Should she abandon counting altogether and live a 'normal' life? What is she willing to give up in order to be 'normal'? What is 'normal' anyway?

The novel explores the idea that fulfilling societal expectations is no guarantee of happiness. Better to love people for who they are and allow them to love you for the same reason. The relationship between Grace and Seamus is beautiful at the end of the novel because they have both compromised. Surely in this sense their journey towards each other is universal?

Toni Jordan explores with wit, humour and insight, the problems not only associated with being an obsessive counter, but the problems associated with being human. How do we enter into relationships and still keep our individuality? How do we live with grief, guilt, love and need? How do we forgive ourselves when life does not follow the reassuring rhythms but dips into chaos?

### Questions for Discussion

1. 'Counting, adding, measuring, timing. It's what makes us human.' *Addition* explores the things that humans share as much as it explores the things that divide them. What similarities are there between the characters in the novel? What things make us human?
2. At the beginning of the novel Grace is perhaps the most judgmental of all the characters. Discuss the ways in which she becomes more accepting of the people in her life. Grace dreams of being saved. In tiny ways the other characters do save her, but to a large degree, Grace saves herself. Do you agree?
3. What questions does *Addition* raise about 'normal' behaviour? What questions does it raise about therapy and medication?
4. The safety in life lies in order. The beauty lies in what can't be predicted. Actually, the truth lies somewhere in between. Is this your reading of the novel?
5. There's a beat to the language in *Addition*. How does the rhythm mirror both Grace's need to predict life and her inability to do this in any way?
6. 'I had measured the dimensions of my world, and I knew them, and now nothing would ever change them.' In some ways, Grace's dimensions at the end of the novel move back to where they were at the beginning. Or have they shifted beyond measure?
7. Grace might be different to other people in many respects, but her love story is universal. Discuss this idea.
8. How critical is Grace's specific condition to the themes of the novel? What important aspects about human nature does Grace's counting allow the author to explore?