

YOU KNOW YOU LOVE IT... BUT WHY?

Gossip Girl is the hottest teen drama around. Kim Edwards explains why.

To the non-teen-drama fan, *Gossip Girl* is just another *Beverly Hills 90210* or *The O.C.* But its fans know the difference. What sets *Gossip Girl* apart from the long line of teen dramas that came before is its ability to stay in touch with what's popular this very second. And the drama is so fast-paced – with the first season featuring countless hook-ups, break-ups and scandals – you wonder where it can go from here.

Gossip Girl is based on a popular book series by Cecily von Ziegesar, and was developed for television by Josh Schwartz, creator of *The O.C.* Like *The O.C.* (which is based in California), *GG* portrays the lifestyles of Manhattan's rich and famous (and gorgeous) teens and their equally gorgeous yet troubled parents. The characters aren't just rich, they're filthy rich – as in driven-to-school-in-limos and attended-to-by-servants rich. Viewers love storylines featuring the impossibly wealthy, and *Gossip Girl*'s characters are, for the most part, exactly that.

What distinguishes *GG* from its predecessors is the way it connects

with today's tech-savvy generation and comes up with original ways to use today's technology to advance its plot. Text messages, blogs, video camera pics, videos: they're all used as evidence by school officials and other characters looking to get each other in trouble.

And the way viewers watch the show demonstrates that those new forms of technology are here to stay. Ratings for *Gossip Girl* weren't stellar at first (only about 2.5 million an episode), but *GG* frequently topped iTunes' most-downloaded TV show chart. Hundreds of thousands also downloading it for free from The CW's website, that is until the network discontinued the practice in order to force viewers to watch it the traditional way, on TV. (It seems advertisers complained that they were not able to reach the audience without traditional commercials.) [As of late July, streaming episodes of *GG* were once again available on the CW website, at least to American viewers. – Ed]

And don't forget the clothes. *GG*'s fashions evoke a trend-setting New York lifestyle. These kids don't shop at chain stores at the mall, they wear the latest designer duds: surprisingly preppy combinations of blazers, polo shirts and argyle sweaters. Teens apparently stride into New York boutiques with photos of items worn on the show. They can also follow links on *GG*'s website to purchase the clothing they see.

Gossip Girl's young, beautiful cast has also garnered considerable media attention. They have appeared on daytime and late-night TV and graced numerous magazine covers, most notably the controversial *New York* cover which featured the teen cast in bed in white underwear.

And if the on-screen drama isn't enough, the cast are living interesting lives off-screen, too. Chace Crawford's romance with singer Carrie Underwood – and bitter breakup by text message – was in the tabloids earlier this year. Penn Bagdley and Blake Lively, who play on-screen couple (at least until recently) Dan and Serena, are

dating in real life. Meanwhile, Leighton Meester casually dated Sebastian Stan, who plays rich granola-type Carter Baizen. As well, there are rumours that Blake Lively and Leighton Meester don't get along in real life, leaving cast mates to choose sides in their feud.

With such a fast-paced debut where can the show go in season two? The season one finale showed the cast pairing up with new partners (Nate with Serena, Blair and Chuck with new randoms) and moving on to other pursuits (Rufus is on tour, Dan and Vanessa are hanging out as friends).

What I'm wondering is will we ever find out who the *Gossip Girl* is? The anonymous teen blogger-narrator, voiced by Kristen Bell (TV's *Veronica Mars*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*), seems to have the inside scoop on just about everyone.

Guess we'll have to keep watching to find out.



Season 2 of *Gossip Girl* debuts September 1 on CTV.
Season 1 debuts on DVD August 19.