

Sunny is an 11 year old girl that is going through the pre-adolescent phase. The reader is first introduced to Sunny as a young girl that is upset about her mother's boyfriend's children taking over an activity that was solely her job. Being an only child of divorced parents, Sunny has been used to the undivided attention of in both households. Sunny's world turns upside down when she is forced to struggle with the fact she is getting a new family – being “blended” against her will with her mother's new boyfriend with his kids moving in, and her Dad and his new wife having a baby. To make it worse, Claudia, who is Sunny's sole best friend, starts acting strangely and has taken a liking to Sunny's sworn enemy. She has no one to turn to except her estranged Grandma, whom Sunny has promised her mother that she will not contact.

How Sunny manages to sort her life out and find out what is important to her makes for an amusing and satisfying read which will delight young readers. The book looks at the themes of family, broken and new relationships, secrets, white lies or deception, and death, which can be looked at and can be a subject for discussion in the classroom. Though the story is seen through the eyes of Sunny and how she copes with her struggles, the author has also illustrated how the characters of Claudia and Buster deal with the different themes in the book. Because the reader can only see through the eyes of Sunny, we sympathise with her, though there are other stories that we don't see (of Buster and Claudia). This could be used in the classroom – looking at the story of an alternate character within the book. Towards the end of the book all worlds collide and the reader learns more about the sub-stories that have been going on with each character. Unlike many stories of blended families full of angst, this is a wonderful, warm tale. Sunny's black and white photos, which illustrate the book, enhance the enjoyment of the story. The book also highlights the different scenes of Melbourne and mentions aspects of the young Australian culture which is another topic that could be looked at in the classroom. Overall – an excellent book.

Michelle Ward, casual teacher, NSW

It has been a long time since such a light hearted, joyful and at the same time touching novel has been on the market. It is a story that involves every aspect of the life of a modern pre-adolescent: from myth busting sayings that it is so hot that one can fry eggs on the footpath to making money out of one's shed; from step-siblings' invading one's space to family ghosts in the closet; from caring for animals to boys; from drugs to hypocritical parents. The whole gamma of an eleven-twelve year old's “normal” life is thrown into the wringer, sprinkled with an exquisite usage of language and original images (“the sky had changed its mind from blue to charcoal in a huge sweeping Etcha-Sketch way”) and hung to dry in the breeze of refreshing observations that make the humour flap off the page like an inviting banner for a party. For the book *is* a party, a celebration of life with its joys and its pains, its hopes and disappointments, its discoveries and hurts, its promises and love.

It is a book girls will like more than boys, mainly because it deals with issues that interest the girls more than the boys of that age. I would love to see a counter story written from a boy's perspective – maybe Buster's. With the world *he* lives in, this could be a novel that showed some of the darker sides of life that Sunny is obviously not aware of, nor wants to believe in.

Meanwhile it could be a class exercise to write Buster's perspective on some of the events that happen in the novel.

Hopefully Sunny's adventures won't stop there, and the author has enough in store to delight us, not only with a counter story, but with a sequel as well.

Gilbert Van Kerckhoven, Noosa Pengari Steiner School, QLD

This novel sensitively, subtly and often humorously deals with many of the problems and issues that confront adolescents of today, as experienced and told by Sunny (Sunday), the central character of *Sunny Side Up*.

Separation, new relationships, the peer group pressure of friendships changing direction, growing up, secrecy, jealousy, re-establishing yourself within extended families, long lost grandparents,

bullying and entrepreneurial teenagers are some of the many themes and issues which confront Sunny and the stability of life as she knew it.

It is with great humour that she relates her experiences, often becoming side tracked... 'that's something you'd better get used to because I'm the sort of person whose mind accidentally runs off on tangents'. Sunny also imparts various words of wisdom from 'The Theys of Transylvania', dictating throughout the book what worldly advice 'They' advise about various aspects and problems in her life.

I really enjoyed reading 'Sunny Side Up'. It was both funny and touched my heart strings, all at the same time. I can imagine it would appeal to 12-13 year old girls. While it addresses many of the emotions of an adolescent girl, it is told with such humour and honesty it is sure to make an impact on its readers.

An excellent task would be to look at all the issues presented through the eyes of the various characters involved. It would certainly raise interesting discussions and allow students to identify and evaluate the strength of different perspectives and points of view.

Highly recommended reading... I would look forward to a sequel... alternatively ask the students to write about what happens next in the lives of the various characters.

Sue Johnston, Holy Spirit School, North Ringwood, VIC

Sunny is a girl trying to survive a Melbourne heatwave, run a pizza business with her friend and make sense of her changing world. These changes include becoming part of a new blended family, the impending birth of a new half-sister, her best friend's sudden interest in the most annoying boy in school and an estranged grandmother who has, after many years, initiated contact.

This book is written in the first person and the author has successfully managed to get right inside the head of an adolescent and produce an excellent, humorous read. In fact, I almost felt as if I was inside Sunny's head myself. The narrative includes a lot of Sunny's thoughts and emotions, and she often goes off on tangents. Sunny even has tangent police in her brain to help her overcome this problem.

Sunny has some big things to contend with and some maturing to do, but occasionally the 'kid' in Sunny shows with her hilarious antics such as frying an egg on the hot pavement, and drowning or breaking her mother's cigarettes in an attempt to help her stop her secret smoking.

This book will appeal to girls aged nine to thirteen and once started, is hard to put down.

Claire Cheeseman, Summerland Primary School, New Zealand

Sunday is a young girl who thinks she has the perfect life as an only child living with her mum and greyhound Willow. She visits her father and stepmother who are about to give her a baby sister.

Sunny spends her spare time with her best friend Claud going to the beach and running their Friday night pizza delivery service 'Pizza-a-go-girl'.

Her life is turned upside down when everything seems to go wrong. Her mum informs her that her space will be invaded by a new stepfather and two step siblings. She contacts her long lost grandmother, without her mothers consent and takes a trip away with her. Keeping secrets from her mother is something Sunny has never done before.

This book lends itself to a wide range of discussion topics for upper primary school classes.

Trying to be an entrepreneur, Family relationships, best friends, keeping secrets and finding out what really matters in life are just a few possibilities.

It is easy to read and entertaining.

Kathy Hotz, Naragba State School, QLD

Sunny (Sunday) Hathaway's peaceful life, enjoying the "total bliss of being an only child", of quality parents who are divorced "in a friendly way", is set to change – a change which "one-on-one" type person Sunny isn't eager to embrace, as sharing does not come easily to this inventive eleven year old. Jangry (jealous and angry) feelings surface to test both her new "blended" family

relationships and her long-standing friendship with Claudia. Such feelings, previously foreign to Sunny, the intelligent, cheery, open and enthusiastic, inquisitive girl with the vivid imagination, threaten to weigh her down in this lovely story of growing up, with elements of mystery and adventure thrown in.

The twenty year long estrangement between Sunny's mother and Granny Carmelene adds these extra dimensions, as Sunny, hankering to have someone just for herself, develops a close, but secret, relationship with her grandmother. She discovers both the truth of her mother's past and something of the truths of life, as both women speak to her about betrayal, pain, guilt and forgiveness, the very important "facts of life" which Sunny must grasp. "Life is precious...we all live with our pain...you have to find a way to flow your life around the obstacles or through them". Indeed, Sunny will map out her life accordingly and we, too, can learn from Granny Carmelene's wisdom.

Ali Durham's bright and cheerful cover art, capturing the significant elements of Sunny's life in Melbourne, will attract readers, and the title is particularly apt, as Sunday does finally learn to "keep her sunny side up". Marion Roberts presents an original and easy-to-read story, refreshingly light-hearted though based around the challenges of family relationships, friendship, change, acceptance, lies and secrets, "building bridges" and moving on. Written with honesty, warmth and humour, readers will be drawn to Sunny, this endearing, creative young girl with her unique charm.

Sunny Side Up is suitable for readers aged 10-13, for use as a teacher read-aloud in upper primary classrooms, with its humour and important themes for discussion, and for individual Year 7/8 borrowing from the high school library. Ever bright and joyful, and somewhat of a philosopher herself, the positive, hopeful resolution makes us want to read more of Sunny - this passionate, comic, "list making, on-time" kind of person - the book lending itself to a sequel as Sunny accepts new routines and the big transition in her life.

Alison Cassell, QLD

From the moment I started reading *Sunny Side Up* I knew it was going to be a precious story. It is written looking through the eyes of an 11 year old girl, Sunny whose quiet, perfect life is suddenly turned up-side-down. At first, she is faced with coping with a new step-dad and 2 precooked siblings and things continue to escalate. Her best friend Claudia has always been there to share her thoughts and secrets, but Claudia starts acting strangely and starts hanging around with their sworn enemy, Buster.

Sunny struggles to cope with broken and new relationships along the way and secretly rekindles a relationship with her maternal grandmother against her mother's wishes.

This is a story with lots of humour as Sunny's thoughts and emotions are portrayed as she faces the many challenges of secrets, lies, peer pressure, jealousy and different relationship issues. It is an excellent story and I found it hard to put down. It will appeal to pre-adolescent and adolescent girls aged 10 -14 years old, and even the most reluctant reader will enjoy this book. It addresses the many issues facing teens today which they can identify with, and realise that they are not the only ones dealing with big changes.

Sunny Side Up would be an excellent tool in the classroom, used to discuss all the issues faced by the different characters in the story, especially Claudia and Buster.

The reader of the book sees things through the eyes of Sunny, but it would challenge students to see things from Buster or Claudia's point of view.

This is an excellent read and I commend Marion Roberts on her excellent abilities to successfully portray the 'goings-on' in a young girls head with humour and honesty.

Shelly Draga, Auckland, New Zealand