

***The 10PM Question* by Kate de Goldi**

The 10PM Question is the story of Frankie and his family as Frankie attempts to survive Year 8. This is made more difficult by the fact that Frankie worries about many things, especially the events and circumstances in his own family that nobody speaks about. When a new girl, Sydney, arrives at school and inserts herself into his life with her outspokenness and her ability to deal with her life's problems, Frankie begins to face his own problems more directly. With some help from his friends and teachers, and his family, Frankie tries to deal with the anxieties and questions of his own life.

This book hooks in readers with the detail of the story. Frankie, despite being overwhelmed by anxiety at times, is a funny and thoughtful protagonist. His family situation is realistic, and the mystery of why it isn't quite functional keeps you engaged and interested. There is a lot of humour in the text which lightens the otherwise sombre subjects and the characters are well formed and credible.

I could picture this text forming part of a Year Nine, Ten or Eleven program. The whole text could be the basis for looking at family relationships and issues of adolescence, family and belonging. It could also be used just in sections for study, such as comparing and contrasting the descriptions of the different family situations, looking at the ways the different characters meet and come to accept each other, or looking at the different ways the characters cope with the difficult situations that arise.

This is a relatively complex but readable text, which brings up interesting ideas.

Anne Sim, Dromana Secondary College, VIC

It's 10pm and Frankie has some questions to ask in *The 10PM Question*.

This hauntingly lovely book, with its carefully unfolding story, is about twelve year old, Frankie Parsons. He's a constant worrier. He worries that he might have worms, that the smoke detector won't work because the batteries are dead, that the house will go to rack and ruin if he dares to go on school camp. His family: Louie, Gordana and George don't understand. Only Mum does. Then Sydney comes along and everything is thrown into confusion. Because she has questions too. And some of those are about Mum.

This is a beautifully written book which tackles anxiety in a way I hadn't seen in a YA book before. The characters are diverse and interesting, and the story stays with you long after you finish reading it. One of the things I enjoyed the most was the way the author, and her main character, plays with language. Frankie even has his own secret language with his friend, Gigs. I can see it working well in Upper Primary, as students examine themes such as growing up, anxieties, friendship, different languages or even child as a carer. I feel that it would work particularly well with students in the Upper Primary years who are identified as gifted, who (from my experience) would sympathise with Frankie's worries, while enjoying the often subtle humour of the book.

Melina Dahms, Bray Park State School, QLD

Here is a new novel for adolescents by the famed New Zealand author who has been made the N.Z. Arts Foundation Laureate. Both Agnes Nieuwenhuizen and Ursula Dubosarsky highly praise this coming-of-age story of Frankie Parsons and so do I.

The central character is a 12-year-old boy with a rodent's voice of worry nibbling away in his head. The worries of Frankie's family and of his own life control his thought patterns so that often he is totally dominated by this constant negativity. When a new student, a girl called Sydney, enters his social circle at school she helps him deal effectively with his past issues and look forward to the future with a more positive and realistic viewpoint.

De Goldi's style will always grab the reader with its honest depiction of family issues and conflicts, plus the funny overtones which lighten the serious issues presented. I feel both

adolescent boys and girls will enjoy and benefit from a reading of this novel and all school library collections should have a copy or two on the fiction shelves.

English classes from years 7-9 could use class sets for a class novel, and it would make a suitable own text for HSC Belonging. Here's a sensitive and well-written novel which is a great addition to adolescent fiction reading selection.

Susan Hill, McCarthy Catholic College, NSW

In this book we are introduced to Frankie and his unusual extended family. Frankie is a worrier and constantly sees the potential for danger in even the most mundane situations.

Frankie shares a unique and private language with his best friend Gigs. This friendship is put to the test with the arrival of the refreshing Sydney, a girl who is unlike any other Frankie has met. Sydney's cricket prowess gains Gig's reluctant respect and Frankie no longer has to choose between his friends.

Sydney's questions push Frankie to confront some of his fears and anxieties and in turn, Frankie helps Sydney cope with a difficult family situation.

The adults in Frankie's life are quirky and his home life is interesting and often chaotic. The novel examines Frankie's relationship with his family and in particular, his mum. Although her presence can calm his fears – she is the source of his greatest anxiety. Ma is agoraphobic and Frankie is terrified that it could also be his future.

The 10PM Question is a novel that could be a springboard for many class discussions including the nature of friendship, belonging, anxiety, mental illness, stereotypes and relationships. Kate de Goldi thoughtfully deals with sensitive issues in *The 10PM Question*. The novel is an excellent addition to any reading collection for students from Stage 3 onwards.

Lyn Pritchard, Hunter Valley Grammar School, NSW

The 10PM Question by Kate De Goldi is suitable for upper to middle years.

At first I was a little skeptical as to whether this story would actually appeal to a 12 year old boy. The main character Frankie Parsons is a 12 year old boy who is plagued by questions and worries. Is the smoke alarm working, do I have cancer, have I remembered everything for school? He is completely obsessed with controlling his little world and worries about everything, and I doubted whether boys would actually relate to this. His home-life responsibilities seemed to me, to be an unknown for any boy of that age. However, after just a few pages, I had fallen in love with the quirky little boy and could not wait to find out what he would do next. From his made up "Chilin" language to his wacky family, odd friends, unchangeable routine and his colorful school teacher, the whole story was captivating. Frankie's new friend Sydney is unlike any person he knows and he comes to depend on her and her never ending questions and queries. In the end, the book is completely heartbreaking and even though the ending is relatively happy, I was sad to have to let go of this adorable boy. In the classroom, it could open up great discussions on growing up, grief and acceptance of differences. I highly recommend it to all!

Carolyn Hicks, VIC

As I read through this story, one word echoed in my head: 'Delicious'. From her introduction of Frankie Parsons with his many worries and his highly ordered and predictable routine to the vivid character descriptions of Gordana, the Aunties and Sydney, Kate de Goldi expertly crafts a truly moving, thought provoking and delicious story. She effortlessly draws the reader into the world of Frankie, a young boy who is riddled with fears and carries the self-imposed weight of family responsibility on his young shoulders. Frankie's Mum has not ventured outside of the house for many years and one of Frankie's many fears is that he will end up the same as her. Enter Sydney, a truly unique and well travelled girl with an insatiable appetite for asking questions who brings a completely new dimension to Frankie's world.

Kate skilfully explores both the sensitive and difficult aspects of nuclear families, extended families and the relationships between friends, describing in fabulous detail the eccentricities that make up the wonderful characters of her story. From 'Chilun' to the 'Second Lieutenant Fox' army of mercenaries to 'Honey Johnson Moments', she constantly takes the reader on voyages of rich literary delight.

The 10 PM Question is a beautifully written novel and I would highly recommend it to anyone from high school age onwards.

Leo Wanders, Mountain District Christian School, VIC

The 10PM Question is a lovely book, written sensitively by author Kate De Goldi. The main character is 12 year old Frankie Parsons. Frankie takes on the responsibility of worrying about his family and, it seems, about everything else. His main concern is for his mother, who never goes out. Frankie doesn't want to ask what is wrong, mainly because he's not quite sure he wants to know.

He makes a new friend, Sydney, who before long turns his world upside down. Sydney is everything Frankie isn't and she becomes quite a positive and much needed influence for him. The novel covers adolescent anxieties and pressures very well, including the intelligent Frankie's overactive and overanalysing mind.

There is no quick fix solution for his Ma's agoraphobia nor Frankie's own anxieties. I like the honesty of that. This could quite easily be a real life situation.

This novel would suit high school students and would promote good discussion about friendship, mental illness, grief and understanding and accepting others.

The 10PM Question is a complex, well written novel.

Julie Huntley, Noosa Library, Qld

I greatly enjoyed this well written book which tackles the themes of early teenage angst and relationships, depression and adult agoraphobia. Its appeal lies largely in the believability and likeability of the characters, many of whom can be described as mildly eccentric in the English way. It was not immediately obvious that the book was set in New Zealand, but the cultural tone is refreshingly different to Australia.

Although thirteen year old Frankie is squeamish and neurotic, his concerns undoubtedly reflect many normal teenage worries and the author's skill in sharing what is going on in his head creates empathy and care for him. Frankie has a lot to worry about with his mum being agoraphobic for the last nine years, and he feeling unnecessarily responsible for her in the way that sensitive children do. Plus a new girl suddenly appears in his life and threatens not only his relationship with his good mate Gigs, but also his carefully created stability and order. The book is set over some four months with each chapter set about two weeks later than the last one. Despite its serious theme there is humour and vivid detail aplenty.

Frankie's caring family are individual but normal characters and his three maiden aunts are unforgettable in their insatiable zest for life. You wish you had aunts like this. The teacher, Mr A, is a character we no longer see in schools, more's the pity. In Sydney, the new girl, Kate De Goldi creates a remarkably confident, non-conformist and likeable young lady who succeeds in spite of a very unstable background. She and Frankie have life lessons for each other but this isn't a "message" book. I liked the way De Goldi creates characters who are original, creative, different, likeable and accepted. We need more like them in these increasingly conformist times. So what if the family calls dad "Uncle George," his mum never steps outside the door and Frankie doesn't get to Camp? They all still have a lot going for them!

I felt the title and cover design of a bird did not do justice to the book, given how teenagers are so visually driven, and how real the people in it are. More discerning readers in all secondary years will enjoy this book. Its "old-fashioned" tone is like a breath of fresh air.

Kevyna Gardner, Balaklava High School, SA