



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower secondary (ages 12-14)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Health and Physical Education.
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking; Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding; Intercultural Understanding.
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Sustainability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Analysing how language and writing evoke mood, tone, tension and characterisation
- To discuss what makes a story extraordinary
- Encouraging creative and imaginative writing
- To discuss resilience, perseverance and the power of human connection
- To discuss social and economic inequity, and the effects of addiction and dementia

THEMES

- Family
- Friendship
- Loss & Grief
- Dementia
- Addiction

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

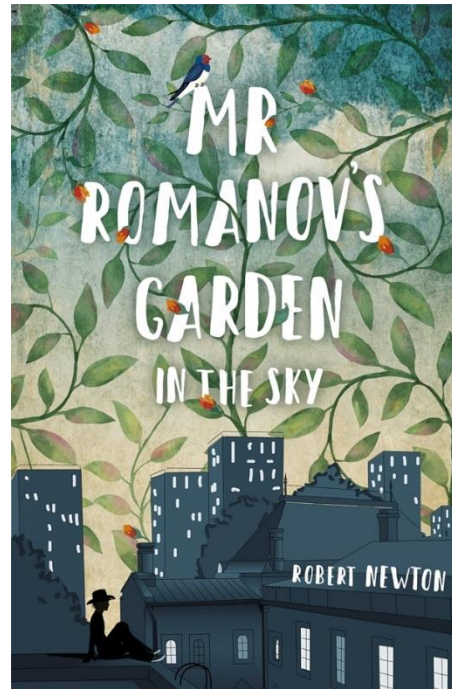
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Mr Romanov's Garden in the Sky

Robert Newton

PLOT SUMMARY

Living in the commission, Lexie is left to fend for herself. Her mother is mostly absent, out searching for something to help her forget the tragic death of Lexie's dad.

But then, after witnessing the aftermath of a shocking incident, Lexie finds solace in the most unlikely of places – in a troubled old man called the Creeper. A chance, life-saving encounter on the commission's roof seeds a friendship between the two and when they enlist the help of Lexie's friend Davey, the three set off on an epic journey; one that will change their lives and the lives of those around them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Newton works as a firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in Melbourne. His first novel, *My Name is Will Thompson*, was published in 2001. Since then he has written seven other novels for young people, including *Runner*, *The Black Dog Gang* (shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards), *When We Were Two* (winner of a Prime Minister's Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction) and *Mr Romanov's Garden in the Sky*.

He lives on the Mornington Peninsula with his wife and three daughters.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Rob Newton says:

I have my three daughters to thank for this book. They'd been at me for a while to write a story about a girl and now seemed like the right time to do it. I wasn't sure where to start at first, but two weeks of poking and prodding triggered something from my past; an incident that went on to trouble me for a long time after it happened.

The incident occurred about twenty-two years ago while I was working as a firefighter at Eastern Hill Fire Station in Melbourne. I remember many things from my work but this incident, a drug overdose in the housing commission in Fitzroy, seemed to trouble me more than anything else I'd seen.

I remember the housing commission tower and an elevator grinding up to the tenth floor. I remember the elevator doors opening and I remember seeing a woman convulsing on the landing outside her apartment. But most of all, in the madness and urgency, I remember the little girl in the pink pyjamas, sitting on the ground, holding her mother's hand.

I'm not sure why this incident came to trouble me more than the others but in the days and months after, I began to wonder what became of that little girl.

To this day, I never did find out what happened so I suppose I wrote this story for me. I wrote it to put an end to the wondering but mostly I wrote it for that little girl that day.

Sometimes confronting, *Mr Romanov's Garden in the Sky* is a story full of hope and possibilities.

It lets our young people know that although life may not be easy, all it takes is one moment, one person, to make a difference. Sometimes there is magic where you least expect it.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Look at the cover design – what do you think the front cover might reveal about the story? What kind of emotion is it evoking?
2. Examine the importance of the back cover blurb in captivating the reader. Do you feel it has been successful in peaking your interest? Why? Why not? How important are review quotes in influencing you to read this book?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Writing Style

Questions

1. What is the novel's writing style? Consider how and when information is revealed, particularly through the use of direct speech, including that of Lexie's imaginary friend, Miranda, and through 13-year-old Lexie's thoughts and observations. How effectively does this contribute to the novel's storytelling?
2. How does the first-person point-of-view affect what is revealed to the reader? How might the story have been different if a third-person narration had been used?
3. How might the story be different if it had been written from another character's point-of-view?
4. How were you affected by the events in Chapter 1? Do you feel it was too strong a beginning to the story, or did it spurr you on to find out more about this sad character?
5. What do you feel was the role of the Prologue and Epilogue in this story. Do you feel the Prologue helped you to invest in the character of Lexie, especially considering the shocking events in Chapter 1? What would have been the effect of starting the story at Chapter 1?
6. What did you think of the ending of Chapter 12? Was it the best ending for this particular story? Do you think Lexie should have stepped on the sand? Why?/Why not?
7. Did you feel the Epilogue was necessary to satisfy the reader's curiosity? Why?/Why not?



8. How does the book's title relate to its content, beyond the obvious physical garden that they build?

pp212-214? Write a short description of a scene focusing on the use of colours to convey feelings.

Activities

1. Choose an incident in the story and write it from a different character's perspective, such as Mr Romanov, Davey or even the imaginary character of Miranda.
2. Write a different version of the ending on pp212-213 and the Epilogue in which Lexie does walk on the sand.

Setting

Mr Romanov's Garden in the Sky is initially set in a high-rise Housing Commission estate in Fitzroy, Melbourne, built in the 1960s and early 1970s. Then, on the road trip from Melbourne to Surfers Paradise, the setting outside changes constantly until Lexie finally reaches Surfers Paradise in Queensland.

Questions

1. How does the initial setting of a housing commission estate affect the tone of the story? What affect does it have on the characters? (see the paragraph at the base of p9, and descriptions on pp13-17 & p71)
2. What role does the Surfers Paradise postcard and the snow dome play in the story? (see Postcard references on pp11, p81, pp83-84, p169, p208; Snow dome references on pp21-22, pp39-40 & p82-84, 169)
3. What do you think is the purpose of the reference on p17 to the 9/11 Twin Towers tragedy?

Activities

1. Read this information on the high-rise housing estate in Melbourne on which the setting is based:
<https://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/infosheets/the-melbourne-story/high-rise-housing-in-melbourne-atherton-gardens-estate-fitzroy/>
How does this setting effect the tone of the story and the actions of the character? How does it compare to Lexie's dream of Surfers Paradise?
2. Look at Lexie's descriptions of the commission on pp10-11, particularly in relation to colours. How does that differ to her descriptions of Surfers Paradise on p11, p71-72 and p89,

Characterisation

Characters in the book include Lexie, Mr Romanov, Davey, Miranda, Ramesh (the shopkeeper), Gordo & Nate (commission bullies), Brenda (a worker from Human Services) and Cath Clements (police woman).

Questions

1. Who do you see as the major characters in the story? Why?
2. Which minor characters also had pivotal roles the story? Why? What roles did they play?
3. What does the Prologue reveal about Lexie? How does this continue to tie into the development of here character?
4. Compare the description of the Creeper on p5 with what we find out about him on pp25-33 and then on pp47-53. What affect does it have on you as a reader once he is called by his real name?
5. How does Lexie's appearance and how people react to it affect her self-esteem? (see pp120-123, 175-175, 178-180, 208).
6. What role does Miranda play in Lexie's development? (see pp11-13, 42, 72, 89, 127-128 &186.) How does Lexie's reaction to her change throughout the story. Why?
7. What effect does helping with Mr Romanov's garden have on Lexie and Davey. What effect does their involvement in the garden have on Mr Romanov?
8. How do Lexie, Davey and Mr Romanov change as a result of their journey together?
9. Read the last line on p214. Why does Lexie think that Mr Romanov has saved her rather than the other way around? How? Is that the magic the author talks about on p2 of this resource?

Activities

1. Gather together a number of photos of unknown people and have a short written biography of each. Give each student a photo and ask them to write a description of the kind of person they think they are, based on their appearance. Now give them the short biography that matches the photo and compare that with their own description. Were they very different?



THEMES

Family

In this novel, there are a number of different types of families who interact in different ways – Lexie and her mother, Davey with his brother and mother, Mr Romanov and his remembered wife and child, Ramesh and his fiery relationship with his wife Shanti, and even the Nguyen's working together in their commission flat.

Questions

1. What is the overall message in this book about family? Give some examples of why you think that.
2. What are the important things that define family versus friendship?

Friendship

Lexie's friendships with Davey and Mr Ramanov (and even with Ramesh) are pivotal to this story.

Questions

1. How does the road trip help to develop those friendships?
2. What do you see as the most important characteristics of a good friend in this story?

Loss and Grief

Many of the characters in the story are suffering loss of some kind, and the grief that comes with that loss.

Questions

1. What are the losses that Lexie, Davey and Mr Romanov are dealing with in their lives? What are the ways that each of them have tried to deal with their grief over that loss? Are they different?
2. How does the building of the garden and the road journey help Lexie, Davey and Mr Romanov deal with their loss and grief?

Dementia

Part way through their road journey, Mr Romanov admits that he is suffering from dementia.

Questions

1. Do you know what dementia is? If not, look up a summary of the condition. What are some of the signs of dementia that Mr Romanov shows in the story?

Addiction

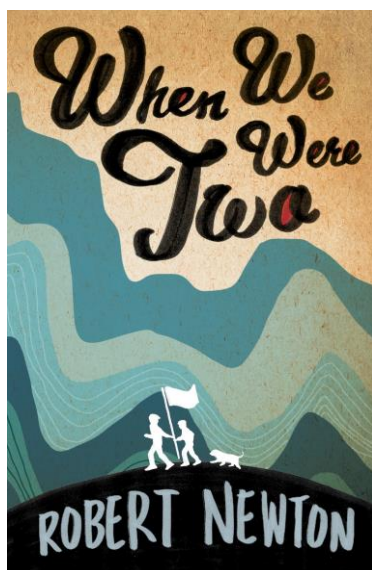
Lexie's mother suffers from a drug addiction, which means they have very little money left for necessities and it leaves 13-year-old Lexie often having to fend for herself.

Questions

1. How has her mother's addiction affected Lexie's character? (see pp67-69 and pp70-71)
2. Why do you think Lexie reacts the way she does to her mother's overdose? (see pp159-161 and pp186-187.)



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

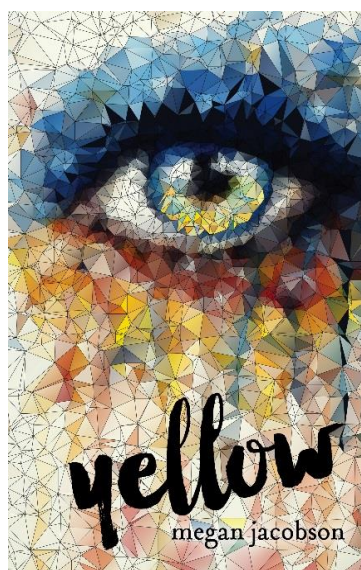


When We Were Two
by Robert Newton

Dan had to go, he felt he had no choice. But leaving home was never going to be easy.

Dan and his brother Eddie take off for the coast, in search of their lost mother, in search of a better life ... But it's a long road they face and Dan must use all his wits to get them there in one piece.

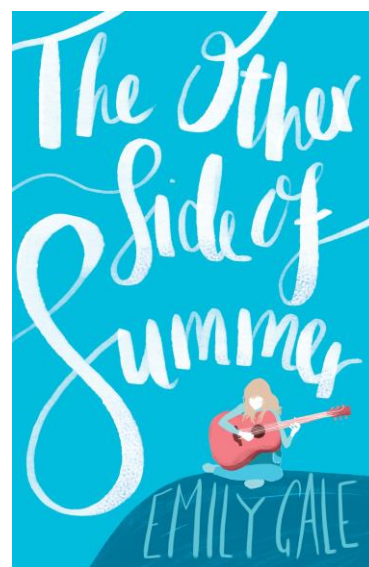
When they are taken under the wing of a group of would-be soldiers marching over the mountains to join up for the Great War, Dan and Eddie's journey becomes something quite unexpected. The experiences they share will shape their future beyond recognition.



Yellow
by Megan Jacobson

If fourteen-year-old Kirra is having a mid-life crisis now, then it doesn't bode well for her life expectancy. Her so-called friends bully her, whatever semblance of a mother she had has been drowned at the bottom of a gin bottle ever since her dad left them for another woman, and a teenage ghost is speaking to her through a broken phone booth.

Kirra and the ghost make a pact. She'll prove who murdered him almost twenty years ago if he makes her popular, gets her parents back together, and promises not to haunt her. But things aren't so simple, and Kirra realises that people can be haunted in more ways than one.



The Other Side of Summer
by Emily Gale

Summer is trying to recover from a tragedy, but it seems impossible when her family is falling apart around her. Having an extraordinary best friend like Mal helps a little, but Summer's secret source of happiness is a link to the past: one very special guitar.

Now her dad's plan to save them is turning Summer's life upside down again. The next thing she knows, they've moved to the other side of the world.

In Australia, Summer makes an unlikely friend, who seems to be magically connected to her guitar. Is this for real? Has a mysterious boy been sent to help Summer? Or could it be the other way around?



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Mr Romanov's Garden in the Sky	Robert Newton	9780143309307	6+	\$17.99		
When We Were Two	Robert Newton	9780143566830	5+	\$17.99		
The Other Side of Summer	Emily Gale	9780143780113	5+	\$16.99		
A Fortunate Life	Albert Facey	9780670076895	5+	\$19.99		
The Power of One	Bryce Courtney	97806700775	5+	\$19.99		
Yellow	Megan Jacobson	9780143573333	8+	\$19.99		
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