Unit written by Dr Pam Mcintyre and Dr Susan La Marca

Something in the World called Love
by Sue Saliba

Year 9 and 10

Background

Esma has moved into 22 Starling Street, a share house, to begin her university study but also to search for a clearer sense of her own identity, and a place where she can feel connected. Esma is searching for acceptance – she wants a home, a place of belonging. The relationships she forms in the house are central to how she sees herself, how she interacts with others, and the subsequent decisions she makes. All of this contributes to Esma's growing sense of who she might be.

This is a book about growing into yourself – learning to like who you are. Young women, in particular, will identify with Esma's search. She is a hesitant, shy and unsure young woman on the cusp of something important. This story is about her journey and what she learns about some of life's big emotions – love, trust, commitment and belonging as she moves towards an understanding of what her life might be.

Saliba has chosen to present her story in an unusual style, with no capitalisation and a non traditional use of the text on the page. Her work has a poetic sensibility that heightens its emotional impact.

Objectives

Saliba's experimental style and evocative language lend themselves to a focus on how words convey meaning. The focus and assessment are supported by the following framework statements:

> *At Level 6, students read, view, analyse, critique, reflect on and discuss contemporary and classical imaginative texts that explore personal, social, cultural and political issues of significance to their own lives…. They explain how texts are shaped by the time, place and cultural setting in which they are created.*
>
> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain Level 6* p. 25.

> *Literary texts engage students in a large part because of what they might learn about the human condition and, in conjunction with this, what they might learn about how language has been used to create particular emotional, intellectual, or philosophical effects.*
>
> National Curriculum Board (2008-09) 'Informed Appreciation of Literature' *National English Curriculum Framing Paper,* Paper for Consultation p 11.

Focus

Rite of Passage

Living in this flat provides Esma with many opportunities for personal growth and her confidence and awareness of her own path in life develops.

Emily Meldrum *Viewpoint: on books for young adults*, 16 (4) 2008, p. 52.

- At the beginning of the novel when Esma has moved into the share house in Carlton, the author says *'and esma was grateful right then because she knew she'd come to the right place, a place to learn and become…since she was in need of becoming, and determined too, eighteen years of living had not yet made her wise or full or unscared, or beautiful of all things she was meant to be beautiful of…'* (pp. 5-6).
- By the end of the narrative, Esma is a different person: *'and she knew something else: that, at last, it didn't really matter what kara said…22 starling street was the journey she'd needed to take to awaken that love inside her, to realise it, to let it grow strong'* (p.184).
- Identify the important events in Esma's life that move her to a more certain sense of herself. Consider that the author has divided the book in terms of the seasons and how they might operate metaphorically for Esma's transformation.
- Also important is the notion of love, which is in the title and the final line of the book: *'released into freedom by love'* (p. 186). Identify all the different expressions of love in the book and how they function in Esma's journey to confidence.

Innovative Writing Styles

The story is not a straightforward narrative in the usual sense…perhaps it is simply a story reflecting the random nature of life.

Emily Meldrum *Viewpoint: on books for young adults* 16 (4) p. 52.

- Writers choose particular writing styles to create character, tone and meaning, such as Meg Rosoff's 'skaz' style in *How I Live Now.* The punchy use of verse in novels such as Steven Herrick's *Cold Skin* and Catherine Bateson's *His Name in Fire*, and Margaret Wild's phonetic text in *Woolvs in the Sitee* stretch the boundaries of expression. Poetry also challenges the way we read and use text, playing with punctuation and capitalisation to enhance meaning. The work of E. E. Cummings is a well-known example.
- Students could experiment with innovative styles of communicating meaning. The adventurous could attempt poetry or narrative in an SMS text language, or they could explore the impact of varied punctuation, capitalisation or the layout of text on the page. The use of music or art could be incorporated. This experimentation could be a personal response to the major themes of love or self realisation in the novel.

Assessment

… students read and view imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that explore ideas and information related to challenging themes and

issues. They identify the themes and issues explored in these texts, and provide supporting evidence to justify their interpretations. They produce personal responses, for example, interpretive pieces and character profiles.

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain Level 5* p. 23.

- As a response to this VELS statement, students choose one of the subsidiary characters from the novel – Kara, Simon, Chloe, Jonathon or Samantha, and recreate a scene from one of their lives in dialogue, description or verse – experiment with style. We only meet these characters through Esma; her views colour our perception of them. Consider your chosen character's life beyond Esma's view of them.

Related Reading

- Bateson, Catherine *His Name in Fire*
- Earls, Nick *Monica Bloom*
- Earls, Nick *48 Shades of Brown*
- Hartnett, Sonya *The Ghost's Child*
- Herrick, Steven *Cold Skin*
- Hyland, M. J. *How the Light Gets In*
- McCarthy, Maureen *Queen Kat, Carmel and St Jude get a Life*
- Rosoff, Meg *How I Live Now*
- Rosoff, Meg *Just in Case*
- Valentine, Jenny *Finding Violet Park*
- Wild, Margaret & Spudvilas, Anne *Woolvs in the Sitee*