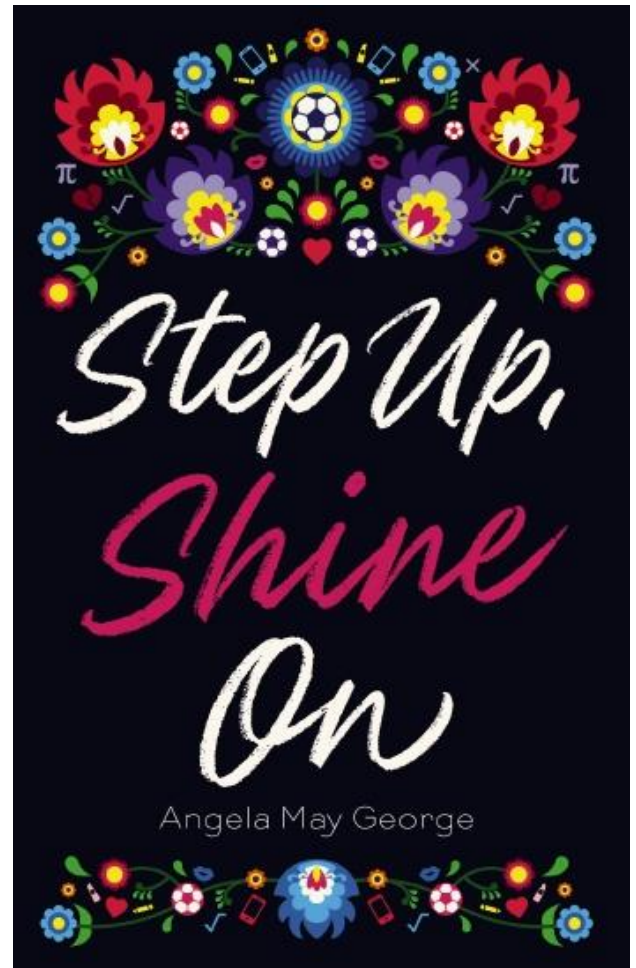


Step Up, Shine On

Author

Angela May George



Synopsis

Kat's main aim in life is to slide by unnoticed. She makes sure not to do too well on any tests at school, refuses to try out for the rep soccer team, and tries to stay out of sight when her family does yard work together every week. But some things you can't hide from, and some things you shouldn't, and hiding your abilities and gifts can make life harder rather than easier. For all that she loves the Polish food her parents cook, Kat really wishes that they would abandon most of the rest of their Polish ways. She hates the way her parents insist on constant cleaning, how overprotective they are, the clothes that they wear, and most of all she hates going to Polish School every Monday, where she is incessantly bullied by the teacher's daughter. She also hates how her brother, Franek, seems to manage to constantly please everyone. No one except Kat seems to be able to see that he is always putting on a false front just to gain approval. From sibling rivalry to soccer, from bullying to boyfriends, *Step up Shine on* is the story of how Kat navigates the difficulties of friendship, family, and high-school in modern-day Australia, and how she learns not only what is really important in life, but that at the end of the day the power to choose who she will be is in her own hands.

About the Author

Angela May George is a children's author. She has published the stunningly powerful picture book *Out* (2016), which was nominated for a CBCA Children's Book of the Year 2018, and *How I Didn't Straighten my Hair...and other Life Lessons* (2018). *Step Up, Shine On* is her third book with Scholastic.

Themes

Key themes include: Friendship; bullying; cyber-bullying; immigration; cultural conflict; heritage language learning; high-school; self-honesty; self-worth; personal integrity; and choices

Writing Style

Written throughout in the first-person from the point of view of teenaged Kat, the story is chronologically straightforward, and the language used is representative of 21st century Australian high-schoolers. The narrative is heavily interaction driven, and Kat's relationships with the other characters are the core of the plot progression, set against a background of unexceptional urban normality. How Kat responds to events, and how her family, friends, and schoolmates react in return, is presented as a realistically believable tale that touches on many of the issues and experiences common to young people growing up in a modern electronically-interconnected society.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class look closely at the cover and title, and discuss what you can learn about the story. Some things you might include in your discussion could be:
 - What can we see happening in the cover artwork?
 - What do you think the genre of this story might be and why?
 - What does it mean when we say *Step up*, or *Shine on*? What could it mean when these two phrases are combined in a title and why?
 - Who do you think the protagonist might be?
 - What type of events might happen in this story?
- 2) After reading the first chapter, as a class discuss what you have learnt about the main character and her family from the opening scene. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
 - Where is this book set?
 - When does the action in this scene take place?
 - Who is the main character?
 - Who are the members of the main character's family?
 - What do we now know about the personalities of the main character's family and the relationships between them?
 - How has the author set the scene for the reader - what literary techniques have been used in these opening pages?
- 3) Why is Kat embarrassed by her family in opening scene - what precisely are they doing that she finds embarrassing and why?
- 4) What are some of the different ways that people can react to being embarrassed? Why? How do you react to embarrassment?
- 5) *Livinia is one of the only people in this world who understands how hard it is to be me.* (p 8) - how important is it to feel understood by the people in our lives?
- 6) Who is Kat's best friend and why? What makes a friendship rewarding and comfortable?

- 7) How and why does Kat's perception of friendship change over the course of the story? Consider who she considers to be her best friend at different points in the story, what she considers to be their positive characteristics, and what makes them her friend.
- 8) Why did Kat's parents emigrate from Poland to Australia? In pairs, research the history of Poland in the 20th Century, and create a list of reasons why people might have wanted to leave. Organise your list chronologically - there will be different reasons for wanting to leave in the 1920s than in the 40s or in the 80s.
- 9) Both of Kat's parents are pharmacists. Are there any careers, professions, or talents which run in your family? Write a brief piece discussing the similarities and/or differences between the skills and abilities various members of your family or household have.
- 10) Kat feels multiple social pressures on her from classmates, teachers, family, and friends. Frequently the social expectations of the different groups conflict with each other. What are at least two examples of conflicting expectations, and how does Kat handle the situation for each one and why?
- 11) What do you think is the biggest mistake that Kat makes in trying to navigate her life?
- 12) What do you think is the luckiest mistake Kat makes?
- 13) Can a bad decision end up with a good outcome for someone? Share an example of this from the text.
- 14) Franek makes pierogi as part of his apology to his parents. Look up a recipe for pierogi online, and try making some yourself. What are the different fillings you can use, which one did you choose, and why?
- 15) On page 69 Kat says of Dan and Bay *It suddenly felt so awkward—like I was the prey and they were competing predators*. In pairs or small groups, discuss this simile. What do you understand of the situation from this description? Write a description of this scene from the point of view of either Dan or Bay. Be sure to include what you think they were thinking and feeling at the time, as well as a description of events.
- 16) How well do you feel that the waiting room metaphor Kat uses on page 74 describes the experience of childhood and adolescence? How, in your opinion, does the use of this metaphor add to or detract from the experience of childhood and the teenage years? Think about how society views teenagers, and whether you can think of other productive metaphors to describe the experience.
- 17) What is the symbolism of Kat redecorating her room? Does this reflect a change in her attitude to life in general and how she lives it? Find evidence from the text to support your answer.
- 18) Is hiding her abilities and skills a good decision on Kat's part? Why/why not? What abilities does Kat try to conceal or downplay, and why? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.
- 19) What is the difference between arguing/disagreeing and bullying? Where is the line and how can you tell? At what point did the Triad cross the line with Kat and her friends?
- 20) What is the worst possible thing you can do in a Polish family? (pg 126) Why was Franek's behaviour considered so horrific?

- 21) How does it feel to be bullied? How would you feel if a close friend or sibling laughed about you being bullied?
- 22) At camp, the group of girls who have been picking on Kat and her friends steal Alysha's makeup bag, and use the contents to make themselves up in a style similar to Alysha's habitual look. As a class discuss this incident. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
- Why is this behaviour clearly bullying?
 - If Alysha's bag had not been stolen, and the girls had used their own makeup would this have been just as bad? Why/why not?
 - What is the difference between mockery and imitation? How can we tell?
 - Is imitation always bullying, or can it be complimentary? What are some examples of both?
 - How did Alysha feel when she saw what the girls had done, and why?
 - Why might someone choose to dress or wear makeup that makes them very distinctive?
 - Do you think that everyone in the group who mocked Alysha did so for the same reasons? Why/why not? What are some of the reasons that someone might act in this way?
- 23) Kat says that *to be accepted and liked for who you are is the best feeling ever*. (p130) Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why/why not?
- 24) Why is trust important within families and between friends? Write a one page piece sharing your personal opinion of the importance of trust within personal relationships.
- 25) Ch 29 highlights the consequences of choices within Kat's, and Franek's, life. What choices will you make in your life? Write a private letter to yourself sharing the choices you will make for yourself and for your future.