

Saving Francesca
Review
By
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Saving Francesca is Marchetta's latest teen novel, following her first bestselling, multi-award-winning novel, *Looking for Alibrandi*. The book sold more than half-a-million copies and was released as a motion picture. The motion picture won an AFI award and collected \$8 million at the box office. 11 years on the anticipated, *Saving Francesca* is released.

Saving Francesca follows the life of a shy 16 year old girl Francesca Spinelli. She begins year 11 at St Sebastian's an all boys school that just recently is accepting girls. The St Sebastian boys find the girls intimidating and label any girl who has an opinion a lesbian. Francesca is unhappy with school and for the most part wishes the semester would wash away.

Her friends are few, Tara Finkle the Fanatic, Thomas Mackee the slob, Justine Kalinsky the loser and Siobhan Sullivan the slut. Away from school Francesca's mother, Mia, suffers from a nervous breakdown and Francesca and her brother Luca become separated. With the support of her friends and relatives she surprisingly brings the family together.

The story is in set in Sydney's CBD where Marchetta lives and teaches. Marchetta writes again about a young Italian student like Jossie Alibrandi in *Looking for Alibrandi* and now Francesca Spinelli in *Saving Francesca*. Marchetta captures the culture of the Italian-Australian students brilliantly. The Sydney background, Bar Italia, the Chess Garden, the Catholic Church, the Markets, the Sydney residents and houses all give detailed representations of Sydney and the Italian culture within.

Marchetta writes instinctively, her experiences as a teacher and when she was a student. Writing as a 16 or 17 year old school girl is interesting considering she left school when she was 15. However most of her experiences are from observation, friends and her two sisters. Her writing is accurate and believable. She started writing *Looking for Alibrandi* when she was 21 and has never looked back.

The story is written through Francesca's point of view. Characterisations are vivid and three-dimensional. Humour is subtle throughout the book and the dialogue is imaginative and witty. This point of view allows us to understand about the author's intentions, experiences and views that influence us as a reader.

Saving Francesca targets young readers and may provide a good set text for schools. It is an invaluable excerpt of young Australian literature for young readers and authors. Catholic-teenage culture is articulated with a strong sense of experience and understanding.

Marchetta's use of characters isn't far from excellent. Francesca's hostile and humorous interplay between such characters as William Trombal and Tara Finkle is a stand-out and makes for a refreshing break from her saddened and dry relationship with Mia.

The William Trombal character is the most complex character from the school and comes across with many faces, a rival, an enemy, a friend, a mentor etc. Being of opposite personality to Francesca it establishes clear character traits between the two

and sets up tension and suspense. The basketball game early in the novel is an example of this.

Francesca is a typical introvert that is both cautious and observant of her environment. She isn't much of the self-conscious type and considering she is shy it seems unusual. Internal monologue is used sparingly and gives only glimpses of how she feels. Her brother Luca tends to be a mirror and they both share similar feelings. The brother and sister relationship is a good way of exploring thoughts and emotions of one another; even the smallest reactions can be felt and understood.

An example of this is when Luca told Francesca that Mia had a nervous breakdown.

Nonno Salvo and Nonna Anna, Mia's replacements come across as typically traditional and a foundation for Mia's recovery. The background characters are used cleverly, enhancing situations and personalities. Francesca has little motivation which denotes the pace of the story. The pace of the story is slow at the beginning though tends to speed up towards the end when Francesca becomes more outgoing.

Throughout the novel, Marchetta uses references that relate to year 11 and 12 students. These references for example include English, Macbeth and History, Trotsky. Her fascinations with film are also heavily referenced, from the Godfather to Harry Potter, showing just how diverse our culture and language is. This is not only a discussion of popular topics and themes but demonstrates how we perceive the world and others.

What defines who we are? Marchetta defines this by attachment.

Mia's university degree is an example that defines the person she is, alternatively her husband is defined as being apart of Mia. Both Jossie and Francesca try to find themselves and a sense of who they are.

Francesca finally waves to the elderly couple across the street, Mia takes her first step out of bed all of which conclude that she not only saved herself but others too. The ending was emotional and predictable. Her boyfriend Will is unexpected and felt constructed for the purposes of closure. For this reason the character was introduced way too late and it is hard to understand why Francesca fancies him. I.E he seems no different to the rest of the Sebastian boys.

The book finishes where it begins, a popular technique used by many authors at some time or another. This technique is used to create an uplifting feeling and sense of resolve. "*And for the first time all year I went to school with hope in my heart*".

The story is written in a style that adheres to young readers and allows no room for suggesting otherwise. Only a single instance of profanity was used. Her style of writing is also suited to her audience that make characters and plot easy to follow.

Overall the story will capture the hearts and minds of teenagers and will be popular with both sexes. If you fell in love with Jossie's character in *looking for Alibrandi*, then Francesca in *Saving Francesca* would be your next. Marchetta's latest book is *Road to Jellicoe* and will be published sometime this year in 2006.

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