

## Teachers' Notes

Written by Judith Ridge

From the bestselling and award-winning author of  
*LOOKING FOR ALIBRANDI*

# Saving Francesca

Melina Marchetta

I miss the Stella girls telling me what I am. That I'm sweet and placid and accommodating and loyal and non-threatening and good to have around. And Mia. I want her to say, "Frankie, you're silly, you're lazy, you're talented, you're passionate, you're restrained, you're blossoming, you're contrary."

I want to be an adjective again.

But I'm a noun.

A nothing. A nobody. A no one.

(p44)

For years now, Francesca has relied on other people to tell her who she is. Back in Year 7 her friends at St Stella's saved her from being the 'wrong' kind of girl – a show-off, a loud girl, the kind who people tap on the shoulder to point out what she's doing wrong. Her mum Mia never lets Francesca forget who she, Mia, thinks her daughter is – or should be. But now, in term two of Year 11, Francesca finds herself without anyone to reflect her identity back to her. Her friends from Stella's – which only goes to Year 10 – have gone on to Pious Senior College while Francesca is stuck at St Sebastian's, an all-boys' school that is taking girls for the first time. But worse than this is that Mia, Francesca's bossy, over-bearing, controlling but deeply beloved mother, suddenly can't get out of bed in the morning. She's had a breakdown, is suffering a serious depression, and it looks as if Francesca's family – and her fragile sense of self – may not survive her mother's illness.

Saving Francesca takes place of the two middle terms of the year – the winter of Mia's illness. It explores Francesca's sometimes turbulent journey to finding her true self, as she builds some extraordinary and quite unexpected friendships along the way. Memory, humour and popular culture are all important devices Marchetta uses to create meaning. Thematically, identity, friendship and family are the novel's focus, with Mia's depression being the narrative force behind Francesca's journey.

A full cast of well-drawn secondary characters support and sometimes hinder Francesca on her way – the difficult, demanding and now almost totally debilitated Mia, Francesca's beloved little brother Luca, her father Rob, to whom she displays an enormous amount of antagonism as she blames him for her mother's illness. There is Francesca's extended Italian family, her posse of girlfriends from St Stella's – who she is beginning to see in a new light – and the new girlfriends she is tentatively, almost reluctantly bonding with at St Sebastian's. There's the boys of St Sebastian's – the 'last bastions of poor patriarchal taste' and the teachers – some good, some bad. And there's Will Trombal, who Francesca falls in love with – despite her better instincts.

Saving Francesca is a richly rewarding novel, the work of a mature, assured writer. It is well worth spending time re-reading the novel and exploring how Marchetta has interwoven theme, character, language and narrative techniques and devices to construct a complex series of layers of effect and meaning. It may also be savoured simply as a deeply moving and satisfying story of a young woman's journey to self-hood.

The categories set out below to assist you explore the rich world of Saving Francesca are somewhat arbitrarily organised. The themes, characters and narrative techniques of the novel are closely interwoven, and these notes should be read as a way of identifying various elements, which should then be re-contextualised within the novel as a whole. These notes are not a recommendation to treat these identified areas of interest as distinct and stand-alone from one another.

### MODE OF TELLING

- Saving Francesca is narrated in the first person present tense by Francesca herself. What is the effect on the reader of having a single focaliser telling her own story?
- Why has the author chosen the present tense? What effect does this technique have on the reader and how does it help shape meaning?
- Francesca is at some points an unreliable narrator, although this is not an attempt to deliberately mislead the reader. Rather, it is a reflection of Francesca's personality and emotional journey. Her memories shift and her perceptions of other people and herself range from extremely shrewd to wildly inaccurate. Ask your students to consider Francesca's reliability as a narrator and to identify evidence that Francesca doesn't always get the full picture of her own story. How does this reflect on Francesca as a character and the emotional journey she undertakes through the course of the novel?
- The author has used flashbacks to explore events that happened in the past that are relevant to Francesca's current circumstances. However, the flashbacks are not discrete scenes separate from the main narrative; rather, these flashbacks are in fact Francesca's memories of past events and conversations with members of her family, especially Mia, and her friends from St Stella's. How do these flashback memories reflect on the key themes and events of Francesca's present day circumstances?

### IDENTITY

Identity is a common theme of literature written for young adults, and it is a key theme of Saving Francesca. It becomes clear through the course of the novel just how much Francesca has come to rely on other people to give her her identity. She doesn't even have her own taste in music, but listens to the music her St Stella friends or her mother plays (p152).

The theme of identity is also closely tied into the novels' exploration of friendship and loyalty.

The centrality of the question of identity to Francesca's story is established in chapter 1. First there is Francesca's mother's morning pep songs 'designed to motivate me into being just like her.' Francesca then recalls being 'rescued' in Year 7 by her St Stella friends, '...and I

relished being saved because it meant that people stopped tapping me on the shoulder to point out what I was doing wrong'. Note the irony in this statement as we quickly realise that this is precisely the function her St Stella friends take on in her life.

The chapter concludes with Francesca commenting about herself, in context of her mother's depression: 'But today the Mia we all know disappears and she becomes someone with nothing to say. Someone a bit like me.' Francesca's loss of any sense of herself without her friends or mother to mirror her is reinforced on page 52: 'My mother won't get out of bed and it's not that I don't know who she is any more. It's that I don't know who I am.'

Consider the language the author uses to describe Francesca's lack of sense of self:

- Francesca questions, 'Will anyone notice if I'm gone?' (p26)
- 'I'm frightened to look at myself in the mirror because maybe nothing's there.' (p43) Invisibility recurs again and again as both one of Francesca's great fears and as her actual perception of herself.
- Francesca rings Justine and gives her full name Francesca Spinelli, on the assumption that Justine may have forgotten her despite the amount of time they've been spending together. (p142)
- Francesca's fear of invisibility is given some credence when no one remembers her 17th birthday – 'I was born seventeen years ago. Do you think people have noticed that I'm around?' (p205)
- What other language does Francesca use to describe herself? How does she compare herself to others? See page 51 for one example.

Part of Francesca's confusion comes from the fact that she has been getting seriously mixed messages about who she is from her friends, teachers and family: 'I was either talking too much in Year 7, or not talking enough in Year 8. I was either too smart for my own good, or not working to my potential. One year they'd tell me that I needed to be put in my place, the next year I'd be told to find a place of my own, rather than letting the girls find it for me.' (pp27-28)

Compare Francesca's willingness to accede to her St Stella friend's repression of her personality, energy and 'loudness' to her resentment of Mia constantly reminding Francesca of 'the little girl who sang "Dancing Queen" at the Year Six Graduation night.' (p4) At the same time she is single-handedly resisting the fact that '(Mia) thinks she knows who I am because she thinks who I am is who she tells me', (p13) she is more than willing to allow the St Stella friends to quash her individuality. A key example here is them talking Francesca out of auditioning for the St Stella's production of *Les Miserables* because she'd be letting the group down (Francesca recalls this incident in chapter 26).

It is only once Francesca is separated from the influences of her St Stella friends and of her mother that she is able to find her own identity – and to find out who is more right about who she really is. Shortly after Mia takes to her bed, Francesca is given detention. In the first instance it's not her fault, but she quickly displays a knack for getting in trouble, and finds herself repeatedly in detention over the course of two terms – 'I've turned into a delinquent', she observes on page 23.

It also becomes evident that Francesca is not entirely unaware of the negative influence her St Stella friends have had on her, and as time goes on becomes more and more critical of her St

Stella friends. Look closely at the scenes where Francesca meets them on the bus, at parties, etc, or recalls incidents from St Stella's days. Some examples may be found on the following pages: pp28-30, chapter 26, p213. Consider this in terms of Francesca's reliability or otherwise as a narrator.

It is also critical to compare Francesca's 'received version' of who she is to what her new friends at St Sebastian's think of her.

Look at the following passages to further consider the question of identity:

- (p59) Francesca says 'I've perfected the art of shyness'. What does this passage reveal about Francesca's own choices to deny her true nature? What has motivated her to repress her own energy and creativity, or to actively allow others to do it for her?
- (p72) Which *Pride and Prejudice* character does Francesca identify with?
- (p113) During drama class, Thomas invites Francesca to dance with him. Read and discuss the passage where she thinks about what her St Stella friends would think of her if she does dance, and what her decision says about how she's changing away from the Stella friends' influence.
- (pp113–14) Francesca has a sudden, vivid memory of her friendship in Year 7 with Siobhan 'and for one split second I can't remember being friends with anyone else.'
- (p144) Francesca says, regarding being with Will, '...for a moment, I kind of like who I am.' What is it about her relationship with Will that allows this? Why doesn't she feel this way with her female friends?
- (p189) Francesca decides she wants to be an actor. Consider this in context of Francesca's silence and invisibility, and her not auditioning for *Les Miserables* (chapter 26). What does this ambition to act tell us about who Francesca really is, and how far she has come on her journey?
- (p195) Siobhan calls Francesca a show off like it's a good thing – a critical comment, given the reason Francesca broke her friendship with Siobhan in Year 7 was precisely because someone told Francesca that she and Siobhan were show offs.
- (p196) Francesca pays tribute to the new and re-established friendships she has made at St Sebastian's friendships: 'I think I'm a bit in love with these girls. They make me feel giddy. Like I haven't a care in the world. Like I'm fearless. Like I used to be.' Consider how the question of identity is inextricably linked with the novel's exploration of the nature of true friendship.
- (p238) Francesca says 'I think it's about time I saved myself'. Discuss the title of the novel in terms of its thematic concerns regarding identity. What else might the title refer to? (see DEPRESSION and Francesca's fears for her own mental health).

## FRIENDSHIP

Powerful friendships and shifting alliances are a common adolescent experience. *Saving Francesca* explores the nature of true friendship, largely by the comparison of Francesca's St Stella's friends with the new friends she makes at St Sebastian's. It also explores the unexpected benefits of getting to know people beyond the superficial label given to them. At St Sebastian's, Francesca finds true friendship with three ex-Stella girls 'I have barely exchanged a word with over the last four years', including Siobhan, the best friend she dropped in Year 7, as well as Tara, the highly political feminist and social justice agitator, and Justine, the quietly confident musician. Francesca also finds, to her astonishment, that she forms

some powerful friendships with some of the St Sebastian boys she has initially dismissed as merely crude and unsocialised (p10).

Francesca's growing romance with Will Trombal is another version of a friendship that simultaneously challenges and supports Francesca. Consider how the author acknowledges the importance of romantic attraction and bonding in her teenage characters, but doesn't concede the fairy tale 'happy ending' as the end point of their respective personal journeys. (A point of comparison may be made here with Josie and Jacob in Marchetta's first novel *Looking for Alibrandi*.) This relationship should also be viewed in context of Marchetta's feminist sensibilities, as explored through the difficulties her characters face, both male and female, as St Sebastian's accepts female students for the first time.

It is, however, her female friendships that nurture and support Francesca (note also the important role Ms Quinn plays in supporting Francesca through her most difficult days at school), and she pays tribute to this on a couple of occasions, most notably on page 202 where she describes the qualities of these friends that are held in the 'ammo pack that's kept right next to my soul' – spirit, hope and passion.

- (pp 3-4) Look at Francesca's initial comments on Justine, Tara and Siobhan. She is initially reluctant to forge close friendships with these girls, and hides the fact that she's hanging around with them from her old St Stella friends. Why?
- Compare her initial attitudes to these girls to her later praise of them. How does this shift in understanding and attitude shape our perceptions of the changes Francesca undergoes through the course of the novel? What does it tell us about the nature of friendship?
- (p98) It's becoming evident that Francesca, Justine, Tara and Siobhan have been thrown together at St Sebastian's, but are forging a much stronger friendship than the superficial ones Francesca left behind at Stella's. See also (pp121–122)
- (p103) Francesca is beginning to identify with her new friends – 'I haven't felt like anyone else since Year 7...' which, of course, was when she 'felt like' Siobhan.
- (p139) Francesca remains insecure about her new friendships, despite the bonding they did at the party in chapter 19. Is this insecurity a true reflection of the tenuous nature of the friendships, or of Francesca's own shaky sense of self? (This insecurity is also demonstrated by the phone call to Justine on page 143 where she gives her friend her full name.)
- (p196) Francesca pays tribute to her new friendships: 'I think I'm a bit in love with these girls. They make me feel giddy. Like I haven't a care in the world. Like I'm fearless. Like I used to be.' Note how passages like this make overt the link between the novel's preoccupation with Identity and Friendship.
- (p217) Francesca experiences real emotion, including anger, from her real friends. Compare this to the faux emotion of her 'drama queen' St Stella friends. What does this convey about the nature of true friendship?

## FAMILY

Thematically, family is as important as friendship in *Saving Francesca*, and Francesca has as much to learn about her family and her place in it as she does about the nature of friendship. Francesca has always viewed her mother as the strongest member of her family: '...no one in my family has ever pretended that my mother doesn't make all the decisions.' (p2) So when Mia has a breakdown and takes to her bed with serious depression, it feels to Francesca as if her whole family is falling apart – which becomes literally true when she and her young brother are sent off to stay with two different sets of grandparents for a short time.

The emotions Francesca has about her mother's illness are complicated by the difficult relationship she and Mia have had over the years. Francesca resents being told that she is 'just like Mia', but by the end of the novel is happy to learn that she and her mother both look like Sophia Loren (p228) and says 'When I grow up I'm going to be my mother.' (p231) Francesca wavers between anxiety, compassion and anger towards her mother and her illness.

Francesca also increasingly blames her father for Mia's illness; look at their arguments on page 156, and pages 184–86, the antagonism towards Rob she expresses on page 204 and their final explosive argument after Francesca learns about Mia's miscarriage – note that the only time Francesca swears is when she tells her father to fuck off (p221).

- Have your students look at the differences between the Spinelli family before Mia's breakdown (from a series of Francesca's 'memory flashbacks') and after. Make a close study of the language and metaphors the author uses to highlight the massive changes this family has undergone.
- Discuss the responsibilities Rob hands over to Francesca after her mother's breakdown. How do students feel about Rob making Francesca contact Mia's work and colleagues about her illness, for example. What does this tell us about Rob, and about Rob's attitudes to his daughter?
- Is Francesca really angry with her father? What is her fear and anger really about? What does she eventually come to realise about Rob's place in the Spinelli family? (p 226)
- pp 219 Read and discuss the last paragraph, immediately after Francesca has learned about Mia's miscarriage. This entire paragraph is one long sentence. Discuss how this creates meaning and emotion at this critical point in Francesca's story.

## DEPRESSION

Mia's depression is a critical element of *Saving Francesca*. It drives much of the action and emotion without becoming a 'movie of the week' issue – clinical information about the illness is kept to a minimum. Rather, the novel explores the emotional impact Mia's illness has on Francesca, especially in terms of her own fears that she may also have 'this ugly thing... sleeping inside of me.' (p121)

NB: It is very likely that students may have themselves, or had family members or friends experience anything from mild, circumstantial depression to serious clinical depression. It may be worth making an introductory statement to the effect that depression is a common, yet serious problem that needs to be discussed with respect for the possible feelings of fellow students.

Francesca displays her own symptoms of depression at various times throughout the novel. She also expresses fears about having depression like her mother. How are these symptoms and fears expressed? Look at the metaphors the author employs to describe depression. What language have other people used to describe depression? Churchill called it 'the black dog', F Scott Fitzgerald wrote about 'the dark night of the soul,' Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar* explores depression through language rich with metaphor and imagery. Other interesting quotes about depression can be found at:

<http://quotes.prolix.nu/Sadness/>

- (p116) Look at different attitudes to depression from various characters. How do Mia's colleagues respond when Francesca tries to explain Mia's condition? Is this dismissal of depression a common reaction? Compare this to how Francesca's friends – her Stella friends and her Sebastian friends – respond.
- (p122) Francesca and Mia swap roles as Francesca talks and Mia listens – and eats. This is a small turning point in Mia's illness – how does it reflect on what Francesca has learned as a result of her mother's depression?

## MEMORY

Memory features strongly in *Saving Francesca*. It acts as a metaphor for depression and identity, and conveys a great deal of information about Francesca. Francesca's memories are frequently fragmentary and unreliable, but when she remembers something fully, it is always a moment of powerful revelation. Some examples to explore follow:

- (p149) Francesca's memories of Mia wanting to leave work come back in fragments. What other examples of Francesca's memories of her past as fragmentary and unreliable can you find? What is the significance of Francesca's memories being so unreliable? What does this tell us about her reliability as a narrator of her own life?
- (p179) Discuss the opening paragraph 'Memory is a funny thing.' This is the chapter in which Francesca remembers the Les Misérables incident from St Stella's. How is memory re-framing Francesca's sense of the past and of herself?
- (pp213–4) Francesca's memories are shifting from the Stella girl's framing of who she is to her own sense of self: 'Why do they have to always remember the pathetic stuff? Why can't they ever remember something positive being said about me?'
- (p222–4) 'The Woy Woy sign in the past was a good memory and I want to remember it but I can't...' Why can't she? What is the significance of this memory (and her repression of it) when it does fully come back to Francesca? Why does she remember this now? What does it tell us about Francesca and Mia, and what influence will this memory have on 'saving Francesca'?

## FEMINISM 101 – GIRLS AT ST SEBASTIAN'S!

It is difficult to ignore the feminist and social justice sub-text of *Saving Francesca*. Male-female relationships, especially within institutions such as school (St Sebastian's, who is accepting girls into the school for the first time) and marriage (Mia and Rob, Francesca's cousin Angelica) are fully explored. Within marriage and family, this question is given added complexity by the role expectations placed upon these men and women by their Italian heritage. This is presented as more of an issue for the older characters than for the teenagers – both Mia and Angelica are presented as unconventional Italian women within their various relationships. Yet it is perhaps no accident that Francesca becomes involved with Will, who is also Italian, rather than Jimmy or Thomas, both of whom are initially presented to the reader as possible romantic 'alternatives' for Francesca – although this ultimately emerges as a sort of narrative 'red herring'. Tom and Jimmy's importance to the novel's exploration of the notion of friendship should not be underestimated, however.

The reluctant acceptance of female students by the St Sebastian school community works as a metaphor for Francesca's general sense of isolation and invisibility:

'It's like this. Girls just don't belong at St Sebastian's. We belong in schools that were built

especially for us, or in co-ed schools. St Sebastian's pretends it's co-ed by giving us our own toilet.' (p2)

There is no place for girls at St Sebastian's in their sporting or artistic life, and Francesca's early run-ins with Will (over the Latin inscription of the school's coat of arms and Will's confusion of Trotsky and Tolstoy) acts as a metaphor for the inevitable intellectual rivalry between the boys and girls. This is explored further when Thomas shows a reluctance to align himself with the highly political Tara during a class debate on asylum seekers, despite his obvious sympathy for her social justice ideals.

Eventually, the boys and girls of St Sebastian's find a commonality of experience, often expressed through popular culture references, that opens them to a better understanding of each other and to true friendships – and even romance.

Perhaps the most important feminist statement of the novel is made when Francesca's says to Will – 'I think it's about time I saved myself'. (p238) It is not her boyfriend, her parents or her friends who will save her – it is Francesca alone who can and will. Yet the male-female divide remains: on the very next page, as Francesca weeps when she sees Mia has come to collect her from school for the first time in months, a passing St Sebastian's boy comments, 'I don't understand girls... They have to get emotional about everything.'

- Discuss Tara's 'boots and all' approach to forcing St Sebastian's to better accommodate female students, which culminates in the bloody basketball match in chapter 5 (pp39–40).
- Look at the language the author uses to describe the basketball match – how does the game act as a metaphor for boy-girl relationships at this time at St Sebastian's?
- Look at Will's advice to Francesca that the girls' 'keep it low key' on pages 17 and 87. How does Francesca react to this advice on these two different occasions?
- Have the students find examples of the language the boys and girls use when talking to and about each before they get to know each other. What sort of stereotypical attitudes that each gender has for the other does the language indicate? How does this change as they get to know each other – does it change?
- (pp61–65) Francesca 'accidentally' gets to know Jimmy, largely through a conversation about movies. Is this the turning point in girl-boy friendships at St Sebastian's? What other incidents happen that allow relationships to 'thaw'. Note Francesca says on page 68 'Oh God, don't let me like these guys' and Justine's comment after helping Thomas with musical tabulation; 'This doesn't mean we have to be his friend, does it?' (p75).
- (pp107–8) Discuss the conversation between Francesca and Will about the graffiti about Siobhan. Francesca implies there's a double standard operating in Will's request that she warn Siobhan about the graffiti.
- (p147) In a conversation about the forthcoming production of Macbeth, Tara says the play is 'an exposé of how strong-minded women either end up going insane or getting clobbered'. What other examples of this can be found in *Saving Francesca* and any other novels, films, plays etc the students can think of. Then, have them come up with other examples of stories where strong-minded women don't end up going insane or getting clobbered. Avoid the use of butcher's paper (p20).
- (p35 and p239) Compare the passages on these pages where Francesca thinks about the school community of St Sebastian's. How has the school changed in the two terms the novel covers? How has Francesca changed?

## POPULAR CULTURE

Popular culture – references to television shows, movies and especially contemporary music – is so integral to the story and characters of *Saving Francesca* that it is integrated into the physical design of the book – the first page of each chapter has the names of various alternate contemporary bands and musicians in greyscale behind the text.

Many YA novels make reference to pop culture in a way that serves no particular meaning – a character may have a poster of a particular band on a wall, for example, with no other references made. Such books tend to date quickly. However, the pop culture references in *Saving Francesca* contribute directly to the creation of meaning.

Consider the various ways popular culture is used in the novel:

Pop culture as frame of reference of character's feelings and to illuminate points in their lives:

- Mia's usual morning song reflected her mood – now the absence of this daily ritual reflects strongly on how Mia's depression has affected the Spinelli's family life.
- Francesca's unhappiness at being sent to live with her grandparents is emphasised by their boring television habits (game shows and the news) and the fact that she has to go to bed before 10.30 and so misses *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. (*Buffy* itself frequently references pop culture, and it figures as an important program in Francesca and her friend's lives – a neat case of inter-textuality for those familiar with the program, as many of the book's readers will be.)
- When Francesca finds out that Will, the boy she is falling for, has a girlfriend, her new female friends argue over whether or not they've have an Alanis (Morrisette) or a *Pride and Prejudice* night (the recent BBC version with Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehman) to cheer her up. They decide on both (p102–3)
- Francesca finds The Whitlams album *Eternal Nightcap* and remembers happy family times which now feel long past due to her mother's illness. (p110)

Pop culture bonds people:

- Francesca bonds with her new friends by dancing to ABBA's 'Dancing Queen' at a party (p134 – note the connection to the reference that Mia 'misses' the Francesca who danced to 'Dancing Queen' in Year 6, p 4), at the Alanis and *Pride and Prejudice* night (pp 102–3) and over a Keanu Reeves movie. At the school camp they bond debating the finer points of *Buffy*, comparing favourite romantic moments in films and dancing hip-hop (pp194–196)
- Thomas' interest in punk music leads him to a friendship with Justine and Francesca.
- Will uses Francesca's favourite romantic quote from *The Last of the Mohicans* (the film) to indicate his feelings for her (p237).

The limitations of popular culture are also revealed:

- The happy sitcom family where 'Things get solved in thirty minutes' brings little comfort to Francesca as she contemplated the enormity of the impact her mother's depression is having on the family and on Francesca herself (pp156–7).

## HUMOUR

The function of humour in the novel is subtle but important. Of particular importance is how Francesca's use of humour reveals aspects of her personality that she either doesn't recognise or denies about herself (which is it – non-recognition or active denial?). Humour often emerges in Francesca's banter with boys like Thomas and Jimmy, and in the quiet rebellions she displays towards the bully-teacher Mr Brolin.

- Find examples of Francesca's use of humour. Under what circumstances does she make jokes? Look at the subtlety and intelligence of her humour. How do these examples shape our understanding about the real Francesca, as opposed to the Francesca she presents herself to be?

## NAMES

Think about the names of characters, some of which can be read as carrying a symbolic level of meaning.

- Francesca's name lends itself to variations from different groups of people in her life (Frankie, Francis, Francesca) reflecting her shifting identity.
- Will – who frequently gets into a battle of wills with Francesca.
- Mia reminds us of the word 'Me' and the centrality of identity to the novel.
- Rob – what has been robbed from him, from his family?
- Luca – Francesca named him from a favourite song (pop culture).
- Justine – justice.

## RELATED READING

'Anna and Francesca' by Melina Marchetta in *Family: A Collection of Short Stories*, edited by Agnes Nieuwenhuizen, Mammoth Books 1994

'Uniforms' by Melina Marchetta in *Nothing Interesting About Cross Street: A Collection of Girls' Voices*, edited by Beth Yahp, Angus and Robertson 1996

These short stories contain early versions of the character Francesca, and afford an interesting opportunity to look at how the author has developed the character from these 'fragments', as she calls them in the acknowledgments page of *Saving Francesca*. Which aspects of Francesca's personality and story has Marchetta retained and which has she discarded in the novel?

Literally hundreds of YA novels deal with questions of identity and self-actualisation. Some recent and significant Australian examples include:

*Wilful Blue* by Sonya Hartnett

*Borrowed Light* by Anna Fienberg

*Killing Aurora* by Helen Barnes

*Queen Cat, Carmel and St Jude Get a Life* by Maureen McCarthy

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