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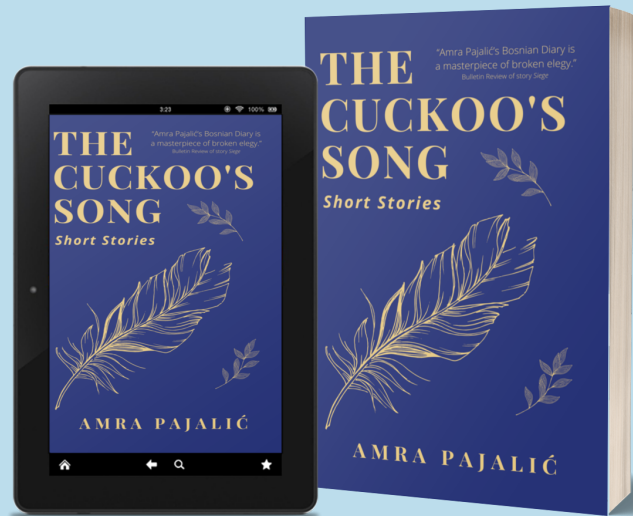
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Recommended for Secondary



Resource kit contains:

- Praise
- Synopsis
- Author statement
- Author information
- Short story summaries
- Reading, research, analysis and writing activities
- Short story themes



Praise

Siege 'a powerful and moving story of family dissolution and the suffering, deprivation and terror of war.' Australian Book Review

In Nervous Breakdown 'rebellion is fuelled by the cultural disconnect between themselves and their migrant parents.' Sydney Morning Herald

Synopsis

Award-winning author Amra Pajalić showcases her gritty, poignant and sometimes bruising voice in this eclectic short story book of previously published and prize-winning stories. Featuring powerful and moving stories of family dissolution, deprivation of war, tenderness of family and the heart-rending experiences of mental illness. Thriller stories with a twist of vindictiveness and retribution, and love stories that make the heart sing, this collection will delight and entertain.

Author statement

My short story collections deal with themes that represent who I am. As I was parented by a mother who was a Bipolar sufferer I find myself coming back to themes that deal with mental health, especially within the context of Non-English Speaking communities as this places particular pressure on a sufferer and family due to stigma and lack of awareness.

Author information

Amra Pajalić is an award-winning author, an editor and teacher who draws on her Bosnian cultural heritage to write own voices stories for young people, who like her, are searching to mediate their identity and take pride in their diverse culture.

Amra Pajalić won the 2009 Melbourne Prize for Literature's Civic Choice Award for her debut novel *The Good Daughter*. The anthology she co-edited, *Growing up Muslim in Australia* (Allen and Unwin, 2014, 2019), was shortlisted for the 2015 Children's Book Council of the year awards and her memoir *Things Nobody Knows But Me* (Transit Lounge, 2019) was shortlisted for the 2020 National Biography Award. Amra Pajalić is available to deliver author talks and writing workshops in person or online.

Short Story Summaries

1. The Cuckoo's Song

Francesca is ten when a gypsy fortune-teller told her the day and the hour of her death and she has been waiting since.

2. Siege

Bahra writes a war diary detailing her life while under siege in Sarajevo during the Balkan War of 1992-1995.

Short Story Summaries-continued

3. Flirty Eyes

Talia's half sister May comes to live with her one summer and her family is never the same.

4. In Treatment

Azra is admitted into a mental health hospital after hearing voices. Is she mentally ill or is there something more sinister at play?

5. Fragments

Seka and her brother forage for books in a bombed-out school in Srebrenica during the Balkan war.

6. Nervous Breakdowns

Alma's mother suffers from nervous breakdowns and goes to hospital regularly, leaving her searching for role models.

7. The Choice

Jasmina goes to a party with her sister, however the night ends on a ruinous note.

8. Suicide Watch

Sabiha is in counselling sessions with her high school counsellor after her work experience gone wrong.

9. Teddy

Marie receives an unforeseen birthday present from her friend Lillian that changes the course of their friendship forever.

10. The Heart of the Matter

Amra deals with her body image issues stemming from a heart operation scar by getting a nose job.

11. Friends Forever

Two lifelong friends share a room at a nursing home, as well as a secret or two.

12. School of Hardknocks

Amina is a new high school student after migrating from Bosnia and struggles to acclimate to the Aussie way of life.

13. Woman on Fire

When Elma's mother moves in with her new boyfriend Elma discovers a new life as a wayward child.

1. The Cuckoo's Song



Romance



Family



War



Multiculturalism

- What was the great deed that Francesca performed and what did the gypsy fortune-teller give her in return?
- What is the author foreshadowing as Francesca watches her sister drive away in the car? How do we think this is connected to the fortune-teller?
- The next fragment shifts to when Francesca is 16 years old. What do we learn about her life?
- When Francesca returns home from meeting Marco, there is a visitor waiting for her. What does it signify that the soldier is in a Black Shirt?
- What did the gypsy fortune-teller predict about Francesca's life? How has it come true?
- What does it mean that baby Cosima is three months old? What does Francesca fear happened?
- When Francesca receives Cosima's last letter, what do we learn happened to her?
- Why does Francesca make the decision to marry Lorenzo?
- How do the gypsy's words give Francesca hope in her seventeenth year?
- How were divorced women treated in Francesca's village?
- What was the last fortune that that gypsy had told Francesca? How does the story end?



Research

Roma people
Black Shirts
Partisans



Analyse

How is the cuckoo clock used as a literary device to transition between past and present?



Write

Write about a character who receives a prediction from a fortune-teller.

Author statement

This story is inspired by my husband's grandmother whose first love went to war and was presumed dead. She was forced into marriage and divorced her husband when he went to war. Five years after her first love left, he returned. He had been a prisoner of war the whole time. They were married for fifty years until death parted them.

2. Siege



Romance



Family



War

- What is the mood the author is creating with the description of the basement?
- What is the effect of food shortages on citizens living in the city and why?
- How is the family coping with boredom while under siege?
- How is Nermin changing during his service as a soldier?
- Why is the author comparing and contrasting the events at the stadium in 1984 and what is happening there now?
- Why was the journey by Bahra and her sister into the city so long?
- What is life like for the family when there is peace?
- What do we learn about Bahra and Darko's relationship from her conversation with her father?
- What do you think happened to Darko?
- What happens to Bahra at the end of the story?



Research

Research the story of Sarajevo's Romeo and Juliet and compare the differences and similarities between the two stories.



Analyse

Why do you think the author chose the structure of a war diary?



Write

Write your own Romeo and Juliet story, a tale of forbidden romance.

Author statement

This story was inspired by Sarajevo's Romeo and Juliet, Admira Ismić and Boško Brkić, who were a couple that were natives of Bosnia and Herzegovina living in the city of Sarajevo. She was a Bosniak, and he a Bosnian Serb. They were killed by sniper fire on 19 May 1993, while trying to cross the Vrbanja bridge to the Serb-controlled territory of Grbavica.

3. Flirty Eyes



Sexuality



Family



Coming of age

- What is the author foreshadowing in the first paragraph?

3. Flirty Eyes-continued

- What do we learn about Talia's sister May and how she measures her self esteem?
- What does Talia think about her sister May from the way she describes her?
- What does it mean that Talia and May are half sisters?
- Do you think May knows the difference between sex and love?
- How does May feel about Talia's relationship with her father and why?
- How did Talia and May's relationship change as Talia grew into adolescence?
- What is May's relationship like with her mother and her stepmother?
- How does May change after she has sex and how does Talia deal with it?
- What is May's reaction when Talia kisses the MC Hammer Look-alike?
- What choice does May make in the end?
- Who do you think Talia calls from the payphone?
- What happens to the sister's relationship?



MC Hammer

Research

Flirty Eyes is written from the point of view of an adult looking back on their youth. How does this impact the way that the story is told?



Analyse



Write

Write about a character who discovers they have a half-sibling.

Author statement

My mother had a daughter from her first marriage that was raised by her father and stepmother. My sister visited us on school holidays and when I was a young child, she was on the periphery of my life due to our age difference. It was only when I became a teenager that I appreciated having a sister and we had the opportunity to develop a relationship.

4. In treatment



Women



Mental Illness



Multiculturalism

- When the doctor turns on the television Azra is surprised to see Vietnam War protests. What does this tell us about the setting of the story?

4. In treatment-continued

- How does Azra's limited English impact on her sessions with her psychiatrist?
- What was Azra's childhood like?
- Why did the adults think Azra came to see Mirsad when he arrived from Australia?
- How did Azra's survival mechanism of making herself 'small and invisible' contribute to her getting married?
- When Vivian calls Azra a 'dago' an insulting and contemptuous insult that was used against migrants, what does this tell us about how migrants were treated by some Australians?
- What do we learn about the lives of women during this time through the stories of Vivian, Thoula and Cheryl and their hospital admissions?
- What do we learn about Azra through the déjà vu she experiences she steps out of the hospital?
- What does Azra dream about when she falls asleep?
- Why does Azra not remember her dream after electric convulsive therapy?



Research

Vietnam War
Migrant experiences in Australia in the 1970s
Women's rights in the 1970s
Electric convulsive therapy



Analyse

How does the author build suspense about the reason Azra is in the asylum?



Write

Write a story set in an asylum from the perspective of a patient or someone working there.

Author statement

This story was inspired by my mother's experience of suffering post-natal psychosis after she gave birth to her first daughter in Australia and then being subjected to electric convulsive therapy, or what we now call, electric shock therapy. There have been studies that show there is long and short term impact on memory and this gave me the idea for a suspense story in which a young woman saw a crime, but could not remember due to treatment.

5. Fragments



War



Family



Coming of age

- Why does Seka's mother scream when she runs out the front door?
- How has the town of Srebrenica changed in the three months since the war began?
- What is the difference between how the refugees who have arrived because of the war dress and the how original inhabitants dress?
- How do the Srebrenicans communicate with the outside world? Why do you think this is?
- What do we learn about how Emir is reacting to the war from the story he tells Seka about the playground?
- What building did the mosquito aeroplane target with its bomb? What does Seka believe and what does Emir believe?
- Why does Seka risk everything to go into the shelled school?
- Who is Zora and how does Seka feel about her?
- What do you think happens to Seka and Emir?
- What is the symbolism of her seeing the bone fragment?



Research

Balkan War
Srebrenica siege



Analyse

The structure of the story and the five parts of the plot. Why does the author leave an open-ended ending?



Write

Write a story set during a war in which two friends find themselves on opposite sides.

Author statement

This is an extract from my novel *Time Kneels Between Mountains*, set in the small mountain town of Srebrenica. Srebrenica was besieged by the enemy during the Balkan War from 1992-1995. Declared a safe haven by the UN the residents of Srebrenica endured three harsh years of deprivations and starvation as they were drip-fed medical and food supplies. The siege tragically ended on the 11 July 1995 when the enemy invaded and transported women and children to the free territory, and massacred 8,372 men and boys who were buried in mass graves.

6. Nervous Breakdowns



Family



Coming of age



Mental Illness



Friendship

- What was life like for Alma while living with her grandparents in Bosnia and what is life like now?
- What is the contrast between the environment in Bosanska Gradiška and St Albans?
- Why does Alma think that it might be better living with her mother than with her grandparents?
- What does Alma's interaction with her mother about her first period reveal about their relationship?
- What is the conflict in the family about the television and how does this come to a head?
- What happens at the nightclub when Zehra takes Alma out with her?
- Do you think Zehra is a good role model?
- What does Alma reveal about growing up in the western suburbs?
- Why is Alma seeing Miss Beattie?
- Why does Alma's mother cover for her when the Principal calls?
- What does Alma learn about her mother's illness from Miss Beattie?
- How and why does Alma's relationship change with Zehra?



Bipolar

Research



Analyse

Analyse examples of descriptive language the author used.



Write

Write about a time when you learnt a new truth about someone you knew, either a family member, a friend, or an acquaintance; and how this impacted your life and worldview.

Author statement

When my mother was first diagnosed with her mental illness she was not well versed in English and she called the name of her illness, nervous breakdown. It was only when I found out the name of my mother's illness from my high school counsellor that we as a

Author statement-continued

family were able to understand my mother's medical condition and receive the support she needed. This is a story shared by many migrants who come from cultures where mental illness is stigmatised and misunderstood.

7. The Choice



Women



Family



Coming of age

- Why does Edin's father not approve of his social life?
- Why did Senada and Jasmina blackmail their brother into taking them to the party?
- What is life like in post-WWII in Yugoslavia?
- What did Jasmina expect the party to be like and what did she actually find?
- What are Nermin's family circumstances like compared to Senada and her family?
- What happens when Senada and Jasmina drink rakija?
- What proposition does Karim offer to Jasmina?
- Who does Jasmina choose and why?



Research

WWII

Yugoslavia

Women's lives in 1950s



Analyse

The structure of the story and the five parts of the plot. Why does the author leave an open-ended ending?



Write

Write about a female character in the 1950s and what her life would have been like depending on where she lived.

Author statement

My grandmother told me stories about what it was like for women of her generation to be young in post-WWII in Yugoslavia. The way that men and women had very different expectations of virtue and how this influenced a woman's life. This is a story inspired by her marriage to my grandfather.

8. Suicide Watch



Family



Coming of age



Mental Illness



Multiculturalism

- How does Sabiha feel about her counselling sessions and why?
- How has the Balkan War affected Sabiha's life?

8. Suicide Watch-continued

- Where does Sabiha complete her work experience? What does she expect it to be like and what does she actually end up doing?
- What is Sabiha's 'ethnic baggage' and how does it make its reappearance?
- Why does Sabiha love the train trip and what does it signify to her?
- When Vivian and Sabiha have lunch they have a tense moment over the use of the word 'ethnic.' What is Sabiha's view and what is Vivian's? Who do you agree with and why?
- Why did Sabiha's work experience reflection lead to her counselling sessions?
- Why do you think the school wanted Sabiha to undergo counselling?



Balkan War of 1992-1995

Research



Analyse



Write

The dialogue is written as a script with character labels. Why do you think the author chose to use this stylistic feature?

Launch your character into a work experience situation that is exciting and unusual. What happens?

Author statement

In year 10 when I was undertaking work experience I did the most exciting thing I could imagine, working at a private investigation firm. I imagined enthralling cases of missing persons and following suspect spouses, instead I was stuck in an office mailing debtor letters. This story is inspired by some of my experiences.

9. Teddy



Friendship



Sexuality



Romance



Lesbian

- What type of friend does Lillian call Marie?
- What happens when Marie sees Lillian in the teddy?
- What wrong conclusion has Marie reached from Lillian kissing her the weekend before?
- What does Marie's dream that night reveal about her changing feelings and how does she deal with these?

9. Teddy-continued

- Why is Lillian desperate to have Michael pick her?
- Why didn't Marie want to tell her friends Vanessa and Trudy about who bought her the teddy?
- Why is Lillian conflicted about leaving the formal with Michael?
- Who does Lillian call from the formal and why?
- What does Lillian realise about her feelings for Marie?



LGBTQI history

Research



Analyse



Write

The structure of the story and the five parts of the plot. Why does the author leave an open-ended ending?

Write about a LGBTQI character in a historical period and what their life would have been like.

Author statement

One in four young people will discover that they are same sex attracted. Many of these young people are conflicted about their developing feelings for the same sex due to societal attitudes that hetero-normative relationships are the only path. This story is written for them.

10. The Heart of the Matter



Family



Coming of age



Friendship

- Why is Amra going to see a doctor?
- How did Selma's nose job transform her?
- How did her stepfather's teasing affect Amra?
- Before the surgery what else does she want to change?
- How does Amra react when she sees herself in the mirror at the hospital?
- Why does Amra put her clothes for donation?
- What does she read in the magazine at the doctor's surgery when she goes for a check up a year later?
- What does her taking her clothes back from donation signify?



Rhinoplasty
Reconstructive surgery

Research

10. The Heart of the Matter-continued



Analyse

The use of fictional techniques of descriptive writing, dialogue, similes and metaphors used in this memoir piece



Write

Write about a time in your life when you wanted to change something about yourself.

Author statement

This is a chapter that didn't make it in my memoir about my experience getting a nose job when I was seventeen. I was naive about the reality of rhinoplasty surgery and the brutal effect it has on the body to have bones broken and reshaped. I also thought that I would be magically transformed after the surgery into a new me, only to realise that I still had to battle the same body image issues that I had before.

11. Friends Forever



Friendship



Romance

- Why does Shirley scare off the nurse?
- What mood is the author creating as Gertrude gets ready for the morning?
- What was Shirley and Gertrude's friendship like when they first met at Dr Metcalfe's surgery?
- How did June Davis transform their friendship?
- Who was Mary Smith and what happened to her?
- What happened to Shirley and Gertrude after they stopped working at the doctor's office?
- Who comes to visit Shirley and what does Gertrude do with their gift?
- Who did townspeople assume killed Stephen after the ball?
- What happened to Gertrude and Shirley after Stephen's death?
- What happened when they were reunited decades later when Gertrude was 40?
- Why did Shirley decide to remain in town to give Gertrude a surrogate son?
- What did Gertrude's husband Troy confess after they were married for forty-five years?
- How did Gertrude get her revenge against Shirley?
- How does the title relate to the story?



Research

Alzheimers
Desperate and Dateless Balls

11. Friends Forever-continued



Analyse

The transitional sentences the author uses to shift between present and past tense.



Write

Write about two friends trapped somewhere.

Author statement

One of my favourite movies is *The Notebook*, based on a novel by Nicholas Sparks. In *The Notebook* an elderly man uses a notebook to try and remind his much-loved wife of their love story and have her return to the present with him. I loved this idea so much and from this spark came the inspiration about two friends, trapped together in a nursing home, and the backstory to their friendship.

12. School of Hardknocks



Multiculturalism



Coming of age



Friendship

- What is a dacking and what does this reveal about the school that Amina is attending?
- What school did Amina want to attend and why was she enrolled in The Tech?
- What does Amina's ignorance about periods and tampons reveal about her life in Bosnia?
- Why does Amina agree to go out with Jeremy?
- What was Amina's first kiss like?
- What does the interaction between Amina and Katherine reveal about each girl?
- What does the prank that is played on Amina at Kayla's sleepover reveal about the friendship between the three girls?
- What happens at the pool between them?
- How does their friendship resolve and why?



Research

Bosnian migration to Australia
Yugoslavia



Analyse

The structure of the story and the five parts of the plot.



Write

Write a story about three friends and one of them being peer pressured into doing something.

13. Woman on Fire



Friendship



Family



Coming of age



Mental Illness

- Why is Elma sent to the park and what happens when she returns?
- How does Elma's relationship between Muamer and her mother change when they move in together?
- How does Elma's life change when her mother is admitted into hospital?
- What happens when Elma sleeps over at Lucy's house?
- How does Elma feel when she receives a Cabbage Patch Doll? Why does she feel like this?
- Compare and contrast Lucy and Elma's home life.
- What prompts Elma's mother to get discharged from hospital?
- What happens when Muamer takes Elma and her mother camping?
- How do Elma and her mother escape Muamer?
- What does the last image symbolise about the relationship between Elma and her mother?



Research



Analyse



Write

Bipolar

Cabbage Patch dolls

The use of fictional techniques of descriptive writing, dialogue, similes and metaphors used in this memoir piece

Write about a family camping trip that goes wrong

Author statement

When I first started writing my memoir, *Things Nobody Knows But Me*, I had to trick myself into writing by working on stand-alone pieces that I wrote as if they were fiction. This was one of the pieces that became a chapter in my memoir.

Short Story Themes



Friendship

Nervous Breakdowns
The Heart of the Matter
Teddy
School of Hardknocks
Friends Forever
Woman on Fire



Romance

The Cuckoo's Song
Siege
Teddy
Friends Forever



War

The Cuckoo's Song
Siege
Fragments



Family

The Cuckoo's Song
Siege
Flirty Eyes
Fragments
Nervous Breakdowns
The Choice
Suicide Watch
The Heart of the Matter
Woman on Fire



Sexuality

Flirty Eyes
Teddy



Mental Illness

In Treatment
Nervous Breakdowns
Suicide Watch
Woman on Fire



Lesbian

Teddy



Multiculturalism

The Cuckoo's Song
Suicide Watch
In Treatment
School of Hardknocks



Coming of age

Flirty Eyes
Nervous Breakdowns
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Woman on Fire



Women

The Choice
In Treatment