Title: Big Brother Little Sister

Author: Witi Ihimaera

Text Type: Short Story

Date completed reading: 6/5/14

Date:6/5/14

This short story is about two young children who are brother and sister, Hema the brother and Janey the sister. They are part of a family where their parents are going through a rough relationship which is subsequently ended. The mother soon gets a new boyfriend who goes by the name of Uncle Pera. She is always trying to please him and is constantly on edge as she doesn't want her actions to result in him leaving her. The mother puts Uncle Pera before her children and soon Hema and Janey run away hoping to distance themselves from their horrible home life and start afresh with members of their extended family.

When I read this text, I felt disgusted because of the way the mother showed such a lack of interest and concern towards her children’s lives.  She was only worried about trying to please her new partner and in the process, neglecting her kids making it impossible for them to understand if she still loved them or not. She began to change and not take her children into consideration at all. For example one time Hema’s emotions got the best of him and he let it all out. He yelled at uncle Pera “why don't you go out yourself, why don’t you go and don't come back”. Hema’s mum then told Hema to get out. She hadn't understood the situation and had not taken into account her sons point of view. It was as the mum was blinded by Uncle Pera, she had neglected being a mother altogether. She later says to Hema, “don't interfere, son, you only get hurt.” This further illustrates how she is blinded by wanting to be in a relationship with someone and forgetting about her children and how her new way of life is affecting them. This great example of how in society today, parents’ actions are having severe influences on their children’s lives and impacting their mental state.

An interesting idea that this text made me think about was how violence tears families apart. The author seemed to be suggesting that violence is confusing for everyone involved and is caused by disagreement and dominant personalities. It makes co-operation very difficult and has a domino effect, breaking various relationships, even those of the members of the family who aren't directly involved. We see this in the text when the mother starts to become less and less involved in her children’s lives after her bout of violence with her initial partner. Her whole demeanour changes and her children become unable to please or co-operate with her. When Uncle Pera is around, she tries to give the children almost unreadable signals of when they need to leave. Their relationship becomes more like a dog/owner relationship where she is trying to teach her children new signals as when to go. This shows us that because of the violence the mother has been involved in, she has become a different person with a list of priorities that don't include being a mother to her children. She has become self-centred and has then started to neglect her children, who are struggling to comprehend what they need to do to get things back to normal.

This idea of relationship change is also relevant to my world as an extended family member went through depression a couple of years ago. This was one of the most difficult times of my life, seeing such a mentally strong person become so exposed and vulnerable changed my whole family dynamics. As we are all so close, it was as if we were going through depression as a family, feeling the effects of what our family member was experiencing. This phase was an important part in all of our lives as our relationships with one another changed. It had become hard for us to have times of laughter and happiness. It was almost as if for a period of time, we were a group of individuals fighting our own mental challenges to regroup as one. I do believe though that this rollercoaster ride has made us all much stronger and closer as a family and has readied us for more difficult challenges we will face later in life. In society today it is so important to build a strong bond between all of your family members, so that when times like this do occur it is easier to understand the difficulties each individual is going through allowing free flowing support for one another.

Another interesting idea that this text made me think about was how family violence helps to bring siblings together. The author seemed to be suggesting that the closest relationships are ones that have experienced the worst and have had to come together as one to overcome the hardship. We see this in the text when Hema and Janey run away together to try and escape their rough home environment. They see themselves in identical situations so unite and their relationship becomes so caring and intimate unlike it would have been in the past. Now that their parents are no longer seen as important figures in their lives they have adopted each other and have become stronger people with one another. This shows us that being involved in the worst situations really makes you appreciate what you have and the people that care about you, it makes you treasure them and hold onto the special moments you spend together. I think that this is quite interesting as it shows how some people who have had life real easy take their family for granted and dont realise how important their relationships are until they are ended. This idea is also relevant to me and my world because I feel like I have a really close relationship with my younger sister. I have come to realise how important the time I spend with her is as soon it will be time for me to go off on my journey wherever it may be, to university, the polytechnic etc. I really appreciate the time we spend together and even though I'm not always the strongest person mentally she is always there for me when I'm in need and offers never ending support. I think that in society today technology is becoming the replacement for spending quality time with our siblings and we need to spend our childhood/teenage years outside making the most of the time we will be able to spend together. For families experiencing violence the outdoors offers a distraction and a way to build on our relationships with one another.

Overall this text has been a real eye opener for me, it has made me realise that not everyone has it easy. It's easy to say that you a physically strong person but its a whole different story when you're talking about being mentally strong. The author has done a great job of making the reader feel sorry for the main protagonists and make the reader think about what it would feel like to be in their shoes. This short story would be a great read for year 12 students as it gets the reader thinking about what the author is trying to teach/say to society. Year 12 students would also find it interesting how these two children of such a young age were so independent and took it upon themselves to find a solution to their exposure to violence and its after effects. They may also think about their relationships with their siblings and how they could improve them. Furthermore this text would be great for a year 12 book club as it displays many key themes around violence which can be easily contrasted between society from the past to present.

Zac Borrie