

These notes are for:

- Secondary
- Years 9-11
- 14+

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Media Studies
- PD/Health/PE
- Science

Example of:

- Novel
- Young adult fiction
- Text-types - social networking sites, SMSes, blog posts

Themes:

- Sibling rivalry
- Relationships
- Cyber-bullying
- Diversity and difference
- Homophobia
- Adolescence
- Strength of character/courage

Values addressed:

- Understanding, tolerance & inclusion
- Respect
- Integrity
- Responsibility

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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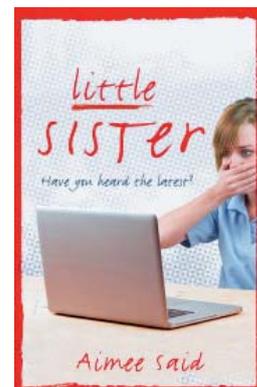
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Little Sister

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Aimee Said
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Synopsis

There are just thirty-eight days until Al's smart, pretty, popular sister, Larrie, finishes Year Twelve. Thirty-eight days until everyone at Whitlam High stops seeing Al as Larrie's little sister and starts appreciating her for who she really is. But when rumours about Larrie start spreading, Al discovers that having a sister everybody is talking about can be worse than having a sister everybody adores.

Little Sister is an entertaining and thought-provoking novel which affirms the importance of loyalty and integrity. Besides offering a sharply observed dissection of contemporary adolescence, the book raises many valuable issues relating to family, relationships and identity. Themes of bullying and alienation are explored in the context of a typical Australian high school, giving students the opportunity to reflect upon their own attitudes and values and providing avenues for meaningful discussions about diversity and acceptance.

Author Information

Aimee Said grew up in Sydney and now lives in Melbourne. When she's not writing fiction, she works as a freelance web writer and content strategist.

Aimee's previous novel, *Finding Freia Lockhart*, was published by Walker Books in 2010. She also blogs at www.aimeesaid.blogspot.com.

How to use these notes

These notes provide a variety of discussion questions and activities that can be used with the novel *Little Sister*. These activities are suited to a range of ages, ability levels and learning styles. Please select accordingly.

Discussion Question & Activities

1. Sibling rivalry is one of the main themes of *Little Sister*. How has Allison's relationship with Larrie altered from when they were younger? How does it change over the course of the novel? Draw a diagram or graph depicting these changes. What are some of the factors that contribute to them?
2. Imagine that at the end of her final year, Allison were asked to deliver a graduation speech to the school. Write this speech then deliver it to the class. Make sure you consider what lessons Allison has learnt at school and the message she would like to impart to the other students.
3. Compose an essay in response to the following question: "*Allison is essentially a self-absorbed teenager, wholly concerned with her own reputation and insensitive to the needs of those around her.*" To what extent do you agree? Use quotes and evidence from the book to justify your arguments.
4. Compose a diary entry in the character of Larrie after the photograph of her and Beth is posted on the internet. Focus particularly on her emotional response and her thoughts about how to respond.
5. Evaluate anti-bullying policies at your school. Write a report addressing the following questions:
 - What behaviours are defined as bullying?
 - What strategies are in place for preventing bullying?
 - What actions occur if bullying takes place?
 - What role do the following groups/people play in addressing bullying at your school: the principal, teachers, the school counsellor, students, parents, others?
 - In your opinion, is your school more concerned with punishing students who bully or educating students so that bullying doesn't occur? Explain your answer.
 - Overall, how effectively do you feel your school deals with this issue? Provide evidence for your response.After writing your report, compose a formal letter to either the principal or your Student Representative Council member suggesting strategies for reducing bullying at your school.
6. Create an advertisement or marketing tool to raise awareness of homophobia. This could be a television commercial, poster, website banner or any other text-type you feel would be effective for this purpose. Present your work to the class, explaining the persuasive techniques you have used to convey your message.
7. Allison's New Media Studies class discusses the role of the press in chapter 6: "It's been said that the media is a hungry beast: it devours everything and is never satisfied. But is the media to blame or is it merely trying to satiate a ravenous audience?" (39). Debate this question as a class then write an editorial arguing your point of view.
8. Whitlam High hosts a school blog called "Whit's Wit". Create a blog for your English class with all students contributing a featured post on a topical issue.
9. For Biology, Allison writes a report comparing Larrie and herself in terms of heritable traits and behavioural traits. What are some of the characteristics she examines? What conclusions does she reach? Write a report on your own family looking at ways in which you are similar and different to other family members. You may like to also include a chart of recessive and dominant characteristics.
10. Research the "Nature vs Nurture" debate on the internet. From your reading of *Little Sister*, which do you think Aimee Said believes has the greater impact on identity: genetics or upbringing? What do you think?

Aimee Said on *Little Sister*

I set out to write a humorous YA novel about the unfairness of being a younger sibling (something with which I am familiar!), from the point of view of a 16-year-old protagonist whose older sister outshines her both at school and at home.

Initially, my focus was on sibling rivalry and sibling genetics and the way we react when told that we are or are not alike. In the course of my research, I came across a study conducted by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University called "Writing Themselves In Again: the 2nd national report on the sexuality, health and well-being of same sex attracted young Australians" (most recent report available at http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/assets/downloads/wti3_web_sml.pdf). It was this research that got me thinking about homophobia and bullying in schools.

Although *Little Sister* is not based in any way on my personal experience, it was definitely informed by attending the same high school as my older sister for two years, and by her coming out a couple of years after she'd left school, when I was 15. I don't remember it being a big deal for my family at the time, but it wasn't hard for me to imagine how things might have played out differently, especially in an era when social media plays such a ubiquitous role in the rapid spread of information.