

Black Inc. Book Club Notes

Book description

In 1944 Emily Dean is dispatched from Melbourne to stay with her father's relatives in rural Victoria. At the family property of Mount Prospect, Grandmother is determined to keep up standards despite the war, while Emily's young aunt – the beautiful, fearless Lydia – refuses to befriend her. Feeling lonely and isolated, Emily can't wait to go home.

But things start to improve when she encounters Claudio, the Italian prisoner of war employed as a farm labourer. And become more interesting still when her uncle William returns home wounded. He's rude, traumatised and mostly drunk, yet a passion for literature soon draws them together.

A delightfully wry novel about desire, deceit and self-discovery.

Praise

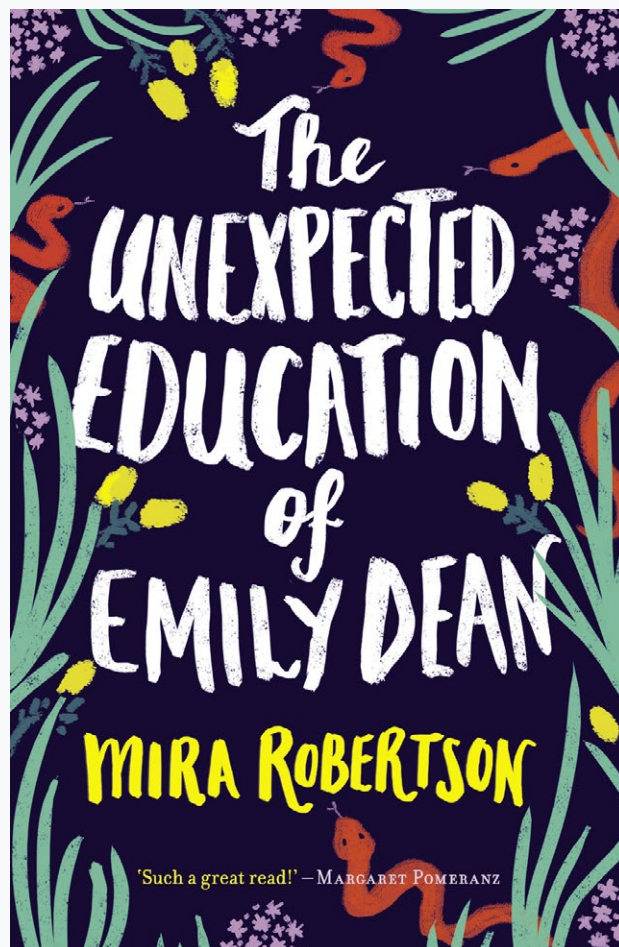
'Funny and poignant and wise, it's a tale of self-discovery and emotional intricacy, full of brilliantly written, complex women.' —CAMERON WOODHEAD, *The Age*

'A resonant and engaging story - illuminating and subtly compelling' —ROSALIE HAM

'A rich evocation of an era and a beautiful insight into the process of emerging from childhood into womanhood. Such a great read!' —MARGARET POMERANZ

About the author

Mira Robertson is an award-winning screenwriter who has also published short fiction. Her feature film credits include the multi award winning films *Only the Brave* and *Head On*, co-written with director Ana Kokkinos. *The Unexpected Education of Emily Dean* is her first novel. She lives in Melbourne.



TITLE: The Unexpected Education of Emily Dean

AUTHOR: Mira Robertson

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SUBJECT: Modern/Contemporary Fiction

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Questions for discussion

1. Discuss the change in Emily from the time she arrives at the farm, to the time she leaves. What did she discover about herself and others during her stay? What were the important lessons?
2. The book is set in 1944. How do you think this affects the way some of the themes are dealt with? (Identity, sexuality, race, class, etc.) If the story was set in present times, how would it differ?
3. How are the issues of masculinity and femininity dealt with in the book? Which characters are most defined by traditional roles, and which less so?
4. What assumptions are made by various characters about Claudio and what he's capable of?
5. Emily's discovery of the book *Fanny Hill* is a turning point in her sexual education. How did you learn about sex? How has the teen experience of learning about sexuality changed over the years?
6. Issues of class are touched on throughout the book. Discuss these and how they affect the characters involved.
7. When Emily accompanies Lydia to collect the rabbits she is horrified by the task, but Lydia is coolly detached. Discuss the two women's personalities: how they differ, and the possible reasons for this.
8. Why do you think Lydia was so dismissive of Emily for much of the book?
9. Was the revelation about Lydia's sexuality at the end surprising to you? Why/why not?
10. Why do you think Emily writes the letters to Dorothy? How do these influence her actions later in the book?
11. In what ways did the author capture a sense of 'place'? Did you find yourself easily picturing the landscape and setting?
12. Mira Robertson is also a screenwriter and co-wrote the award-winning films *Head On* and *Only the Brave*. If the book were a film, who would you cast in the main roles and why?
13. The issue of mental illness is present in the book via Emily's mother, and also, one could argue, William. Discuss the ways in which the various characters, including William himself, deal with this, and the ways in which attitudes have changed.
14. Reflect on the importance of reading and a love of literature for, in particular, Emily and William. Consider the ways that literature enriches lives, provides solace, broadens perspectives and generates empathy in this novel.