

Saving Celeste by Timothée de Fombelle, published by Walker Books, and translated stately with impressive skill by Sarah Ardizzone is a hopeful insight to contemporary world issues, disguised as a “slice of life” and “coming of age” story, appealing children to deeper issues, and deepening their understanding of the world.



Published November 2021, this political allegory follows the fictional plot of a girl called Celeste, who only enters the speaker’s school for one day before leaving. As the speaker continues disclosing envelopes of mystery, letters of profound understanding are discovered and words of understanding overcome him, as he realises the truth behind Celeste, and her now sickly state.

In a world where people idealise materialism, buying and engage in retail, where the world is structured like a commercial building and the physical landmarks of Earth are in a diminishing state, we are exposed to a dystopian setting, similar to one in novel, “1984” by George Orwell, where a totalitarian government - “Big Brother” - dominates and watches society like a hawk, its talons of control pinching into the body of a subservient society. However, “Big Brother” is instead mirrored by Industry, and the only resolution is escape.

Personally, I thought the plot felt slightly rushed and out of place at times, possibly due to the shortness of the book, however, I did like how dynamic this book was as at first glance, I wasn’t expecting a political allegory, epithets and symbolism to change the book entirely, giving it an aspect of maturity. The criticism of contemporary society in the book is also directly relevant to critical theory, as the protagonist challenges the power of The Industry, which is the main social structure. The author makes it clear that he believes social issues are caused more by power structures and cultural assumptions rather than the actions of individuals.

I would rate this book a 4 as I loved the allegory and depth, but I wished it was longer so some of the scenes didn’t feel as rushed and the actual plot could have more added to it, considering it’s very simplistic currently; that could obviously be a stylistic choice but it clashes with my personal preference.

Considering the vocabulary and content of the book is fairly easy to understand and the length isn't too long, I'd recommend that ages 9+ enjoy this beautiful amalgamation of words by Timothée de Fombelle. Read, enjoy and prosper!