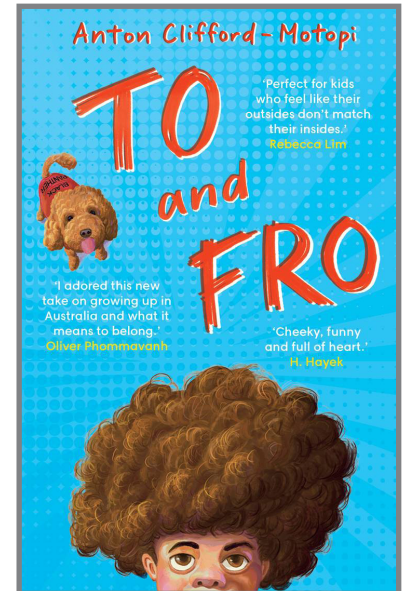


To and Fro

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary

SYNOPSIS

Sam thinks he's a weird-looking white kid with an afro. He lives with his white mum (annoying but not smelly) and brown dog Trevor (smelly but not annoying). He's never met his father. He just knows that his father is black.

But a surprise visit has Sam questioning who he really is. Is he a white kid with a black dad? Or a black kid with white skin? Or half-black and half-white?

Not only does Sam want to know these answers, he has to know them to finish his annoying homework and perform in the school concert. But how can he make his outside match his insides if he doesn't know who he is?

A delightfully funny story about family and identity, and what it means to be truly Sam.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anton Clifford-Motopi enjoys writing stories that make children laugh. His stories explore themes of self-identity, family relationships and friendship, drawing from his experiences of being mixed race, growing up in a large adoptive family and raising four children. Anton first became interested in writing for children while teaching Health & Physical Education and English at a high school in Mount Isa, but it would be many years before he put pencil to paper. That day arrived when he was shopping for a book to buy his daughter for her birthday. Browsing through children's books, he decided it was time he followed his heart. Over the next decade, Anton wrote three children's books while completing postgraduate studies in public health, working as a university lecturer and raising four children—phew! Alas, none of these books were published, but they developed Anton's love for storytelling and were important steps to him becoming a published children's author. At the moment, Anton's other job is a health researcher at a university. The job involves a lot of thinking, reading and writing, but his passion is writing funny and thought-provoking stories for children. *To and Fro* is his debut novel.

Find out more about Anton at www.antoncliffordmotopi.com.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- While you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, a cover can tell us a lot about a book. Look closely at the cover of *To and Fro* and see if you can guess what kind of story you are about to read. What helped you guess your answer? Was

- it the illustration of the boy and the dog, the cover's fonts and colours, the title itself, the quotes from other authors?
- How might the word 'Fro' in the title refer to a physical attribute of the boy on the cover?

AFTER READING

Chapter One

- What a character says, thinks or does tells a reader about the sort of person they are. Read Chapter One and complete the following sentences to describe Sam, Mum, Lachlan and Aidan. Remember, use adjectives in the first part of the sentence to describe each character and then describe what that character said, thought or did in the chapter that led you to use that adjective.
 - Sam showed he iswhen he.....
 - Mum showed she iswhen she.....
 - Lachlan Bott showed he iswhen he
 - Aidan showed he is when he.....

Chapter Two

- Read the below poem from *To and Fro*

*Sam . . . is my name . . . and I am a kid . . . with an
Afro . . . who lives with . . . his dog Trevor . . . and
Mother . . . who had me . . . with another.*

What makes Sam's work an acrostic poem? Do you think he has put a lot of thought into his poem? Why/why not?

- Can you do better? Try writing an acrostic poem using your first name that tells the reader a lot about who you are.

Chapters Three–Twenty-Three

- Nanna tells Sam that 'foreigners' are people who 'take Australian jobs and live off welfare' in Chapter Three (p 31) and that 'The problem we have is African refugees bringing crime into Australia' in Chapter Eleven (p 109). If racism is when people are treated unfairly because of their skin colour or cultural background, would you describe Nanna's comments about 'foreigners' and African refugees as racist? Why/why not? Can you find other examples of racist comments in *To and Fro*?
- Nanna is a good person who loves her grandson, but accepts things she's read and seen on TV without question. Can you think of areas in everyday life where people might learn racist attitudes?
- 'Minstrels were white actors who painted their faces black and sang and danced. Your grandad and I used to watch The Black and White Minstrel Show on television in the seventies.' Nanna nodded thoughtfully. 'Well, yes . . . I guess they were. Although I never saw it like that before.' (p 237). Why do you think Nanna's attitudes changed over the course of the story? What role did Sam and his dad play in making her change? How might you help a friend or family member change their attitude?

Themes

Microaggressions

- Nanna's comments are obviously racist, but other characters in the story say and do things that more subtly express prejudiced attitudes to marginalised groups. Often this type of prejudice is unconscious, meaning the people don't even realise what they are saying and doing is offensive. We describe this form of prejudice as microaggressions, and while the word 'micro' suggests they are small, they have an enormously negative impact on the recipient. Why do you think Charlee felt uncomfortable when Mr Peacock insisted she 'show off' her Aboriginal background in her Culture and Identity assignment (p 23)?
- Why might her parents feel uncomfortable when they are singled out by him at the open classroom day (p 151)?
- How must Sam's dad feel that he is the only person to have his bag and body screened for explosives at the airport (p 144)?
- Can you find other examples of microaggressions in *To and Fro*?

Blackface

- Research the term 'blackface' and answer the following questions:
 - What is blackface?

- • When and where did it begin?
- How does it portray black people?
- Sam has no idea why his use of Ultra Dark tanning lotion offends his mother and, later, Charlee, so much.
 - Explain in your own words, why you think Sam's mum and Charlee got so upset.
 - Does Sam's ignorance about the significance of blackface make his actions okay?
 - What do you think Mr Peacock should have done when Sam entered the classroom in blackface?
- 'Remember, Sam, you are black because of where you come from and what you feel inside. Not just because of what you look like.' (p 263). How does Sam's performance at the end of the story show that he has come to understand and agree with his dad's opinion?

Humour

- Did you find *To and Fro* a humorous book to read? What, in particular, did you find funny in the story? Can you find examples of things people said or did that made you laugh? How might using humour help when writing a story that features topics as serious as racism and microaggressions?

ACTIVITY

- Follow in the footsteps of Sam and his classmates and create a visual art piece to represent who you are.
 - Draw a family migration map to show where you come from.
 - Write a poem to express how you feel about who you are and where you come from.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
CAROLYN WALSH