

An eye-opener

Jostein Gaarder's classic philosophical fiction ***Sophie's World*** makes the most difficult subject one of the easiest

AUTHORED by Jostein Gaarder and published in 1991, *Sophie's World* was originally written in Norwegian. The story takes place in Norway. Sophie Amundsen is a 14-year-old girl who lives with her mother and her pets: a cat, a goldfish, two tortoises and two **budgerigars**. Her father is away as he is the captain of an oil tanker.

As the story opens, Sophie is **unsettled**. She has checked her mailbox only to discover two **anonymous** messages: "Who are you?" and "Where does the world come from?" She also finds a postcard with the name and an address of "Hilde Møller Knag, c/o Sophie Amundsen" written on it. She does not know the addressee. Later, she gets a pack of papers which seem to be related to a philosophy course.

With these unknown **dispatches** and mysterious materials, Sophie becomes a student of the unseen philosopher Alberto Knox. As the story unfolds, it is revealed that the package received by Sophie was actually sent by Alberto. Yet, the postcard is not from him. It is from another person named Albert Knag, a United Nations peacekeeper.

Sophie learns about the Pre-Socratic Greeks, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir from Alberto. Apart from philosophical theories and writers, Alberto also teaches her about **civilisation**, religion and history, including Hellenism, Christianity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and much more.

While absorbing the **essence** of various philosophical thoughts, Sophie sees her life in a different light because of the peacekeeper. With the help of Alberto, she uses her philosophical knowledge to fight back. According to Alberto, Sophie is better able to control and understand her world through philosophy.

The novel is written in a dialogic style. Most sections and chapters consist of conversations between Sophie and her mother and Alberto. Metaphorical and analogical techniques are used to make philosophy easy to understand.

Gaarder is a good writer who depicts philosophical arguments in a simple and easy-to-understand way. He also uses philosophy to skilfully drive the storyline forward. The ending is quite surprising; it casts doubts on the main characters' natures. ☺

About the book

• Author: Jostein Gaarder • Genre: Philosophical fiction • Publishing year: 1991

