

# Sunday Sundowners

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You would think that a perfect windless summer's day and a picnic at the far end of Longbeach amongst the rocks would be an amusing lighthearted gathering . . . and for the most part you would be right. Over finger snacks we debate such deep existential mysteries as how flies and bugs locate food so quickly and unerringly; looking across the bay at Hangberg and Hout Bay, we ponder why Cape Town would prefer bricks and mortar on Chappies rather than e-tags on vehicles; and sipping our fruit juices we explore the algebraic formulae to calculate how soon the world would abandon 'moving forward' for some other equally meaningless buzz phrase. We Sundowners do not

hesitate to bravely go where no one else shows any interest in going before – or after – or in between.

Yet there's something about the rhythm of the ocean that induces thoughtfulness. Did you read Karen Schimke's *Cape Times* column *Chapter and Verse* of 30 March? Its title is *The exhilaration and sweet relief of facing life's horrors vicariously*. If you missed it or no longer have that issue, I have a copy I can fax you. There's nothing new or startling, but she highlights two concepts relevant to the current national campaign of 'creating a culture of reading'. Schimke observes that not everything we read is enjoyable and 'there [can] be some other reward that is not related to . . . pleasure', that 'we read some books . . . because [they] activate our worst fears . . . it is a force in us as strong as the desire for pleasure.' She refers, for example, to the late Maurice Sendak's **Where the wild things are** (Harper & Row, 1963) (also see page 7). I discovered it in the early 80s, some 20 years after its creation. I must have been around 35 and quite unaware of the controversies and hostile reception of its publication. I loved it. Max is my kind of boy, and the kids at my story times agreed – well, most of them did. Don't you hate that the ones who start to cry are always the ones whose mothers are hovering anxiously? Schimke reminds us that books give the reader a safe environment to explore extreme concepts and emotions.

Perched on our rocks, we try to define 'a culture of reading', each of us adding a facet, and the only thing clear is that our definitions define ourselves and what books mean to us individually. For one, it is an escape from the mundane, for another it is lifelong learning; someone offers 'a feeling of comfort and inspiration', and a fourth says firmly, 'Biographies and travel books only – I prefer real stuff.'

## WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE



STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK

We all agree that you cannot convert a non-reader into a passionate bibliophile by telling him: 'Read! It's good for you!' That puts reading on a par with castor oil. So what is it that Enid



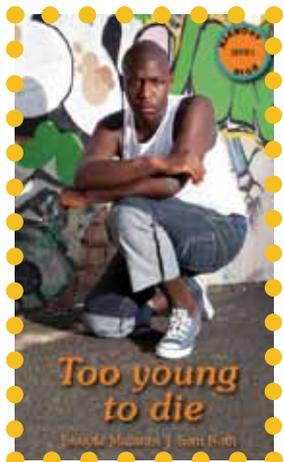
Blyton, JK Rowling and Stephenie Meyer have in common? If we could extract that common 'appeal factor', the whole world would have its collective nose buried in books tomorrow. If the publisher's PR blurb is to be believed, the next flavour of the month since *Twilight* is already upon us in the form of Suzanne Collins' **The hunger games** (Scholastic, 2010).

Three books and a film are making entertainment history with sales figures, and the marketing hype is intense. It's also causing a little confusion since there are no vampires. The connection lies solely in the overwhelming teen demand.



**The hunger games** trilogy does, however; have enough blood and violence to excite fans and critics alike, a better ploy to get us all talking, and hopefully, reading. The stories cover two scary scenarios: a fearsome post-apocalyptic world and the extremes of reality TV shows.

We who read and talk about what we read have no doubt about the pleasure and rewards of living vicariously through someone else's imagination and words. What we find difficult is laying the right trail of breadcrumbs to lure others to these delights. One who has found a way is Mignon Hardie of FunDza Literary Trust and publisher of the *Harmony High* series. They have combined 'paper' publishing with an online space where readers can help shape the content of books still to be published.



**Broken promises**, **Sugar daddy**, **Jealous in Jozi** and **Too young to die** by Ros Haden (Cover2Cover, 2011) are the very popular first titles. She reports 'that readers

are telling us that they never knew there was a book about them and their lives. The knowledge that your own life is important ... and that you can recognise yourself through the pages' has

strong appeal. (Interview with Justin Nurse, LeadSA, *Cape Argus*, 2 February 2012.)

We walk (cautiously) to the Kakapo wreck and back to justify the intake of more calories with our ice cream and fruit salad. Savouring the sweet cool flavours, Jenny confesses almost apologetically, 'That bit about not all reading being a pleasure? I decided since it is Dickens' Bicentenary this year; I should read something of his, do my duty, you know?' Raised quizzical eyebrows encourage her to continue. 'Did you know his work was originally published in serial form? **Bleak House** (Penguin Books, 1996) which is over 900 pages long, was published in twenty monthly installments from 1852 to 1853. Each installment had to be a certain number of pages, so I've decided to read only one or two chapters per afternoon and to read something else in the evenings. It's quite amazing but I am really enjoying reading it this way – makes it more manageable and less daunting. I shall also be able to finish it more quickly than the Victorians did.'

Hmm? Dickens, two chapters daily? Maybe there's something to be said for castor oil!

