

# Bronze and Sunflower

Sunflower has moved to the countryside in China with her father. As her father works all day, Sunflower feels lonely. She watches the river and the people across it who live in a village called Damaidi. She meets a boy called Bronze from Damaidi and the two become friends. When a tragic event brings Sunflower into Bronze’s home, the two children must work together to survive the hardships of village life.

## Author

Cao Wenxuan was born in a village called Longgang, in 1954. He is one of the most read and translated children’s authors in China. *Bronze and Sunflower* has won various awards and Cao Wenxuan has written many books for children. In China, surnames are written first, so Cao is the author’s surname. Helen Wang translated *Bronze and Sunflower* from Chinese into English. She has been translating books for a long time and has written and edited many books.

## Historical context

*Bronze and Sunflower* is set in the late 1960s and early 1970s in rural China. The Cultural Revolution was happening, which was when a Chinese political leader called Mao Zedong wanted to promote communism (a system where the community, rather than individuals, owns property). Professional people who were used to working in offices were sent to labour camps in rural China called Cadre Schools. By the mid-1970s, the Cultural Revolution was over, and many people returned to cities.



## Characters

### Bronze

Bronze has been unable to speak since a fire when he was five. He doesn’t attend school and finds it hard to interact with other children. He spends a lot of time alone, with his family or with their buffalo until he meets Sunflower.

### Sunflower

Sunflower is a sweet, gentle child who is very lonely at the start of the book. When Bronze’s family take her in, she feels like one of them. Sunflower loves learning and is keen to share what she has learned with Bronze.

### Nainai

Nainai is Bronze’s grandmother and immediately treats Sunflower like her grandchild. She is selfless and does whatever she can to earn money for the family, even though she is elderly and her health is fading.

### Gayu

Gayu is a boy in the village who sometimes makes things difficult for Sunflower and Bronze. He accuses Bronze of a crime he has not committed and teases Sunflower. By the end of the book, his attitude towards them changes.

## Themes

- community
- family
- perseverance
- effects of poverty
- loneliness
- power of education

## Settings

### Damaidi

Damaidi is a small village in China where Bronze lives with his family. The village has a strong sense of community, but it is not always easy to live there. The people are reliant on crops for their survival, and they work very hard to buy the things they need.



### Bronze’s family home

Bronze and his family welcome Sunflower into their home and treat her like Bronze’s sister. The family are poor, but their home is full of love. Although they find it difficult to afford food and other necessities, they make sacrifices so that Sunflower can go to school.



### The river

Sunflower is drawn to the river from the beginning of the book. It is described as a beautiful, peaceful place: ‘*She watched it flow, she followed the ripples and waves... watched the midday sun paint it gold and setting sun stain it red.*’ The river is also a significant place because it is where Sunflower first meets Bronze.



## Story timeline

These are some of the key chapters in the novel. When you read the chapters, use the questions as starting points for discussion. This book has long, unnumbered chapters that are split into sections.

### ***A Little Wooden Boat***

Sunflower spends a lot of time alone while her father is working until she meets Bronze. How are both children presented?

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### ***Plaited Reed Shoes***

Bronze's family take Sunflower into their home. She fits in very well, but they realise they can't afford to send both children to school. Do you think they make the right decision? Why do you think that?

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### ***Golden Thatch***

A natural disaster strikes Damaidi and the family's home. How do they respond to the tragedy?

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### ***A Plague of Locusts***

Another hardship affects the village when a locust swarm destroys the crops. What are the consequences?

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### ***The Big Haystack***

City people arrive and want to take Sunflower back with them. What do you think of the ending of the book?

## Language

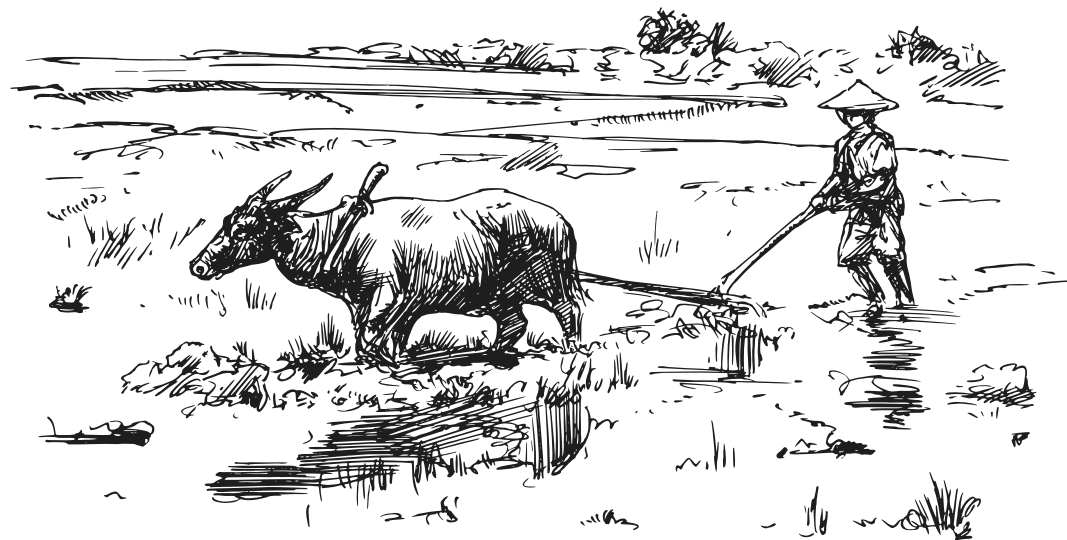
*Bronze and Sunflower* is written using a lyrical, descriptive style that evokes settings and characters in detail. It also uses figurative language effectively, such as similes. For example, the author uses a vivid simile to describe the devastation after a plague of locusts destroy a field: *'The locusts passed over like a barber's knife, razing everything to the ground.'*

## Historical novel

*Bronze and Sunflower* is an example of historical fiction. It is set during a real time period, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, but many of the events and characters did not exist. The novel captures the relationship between village and city people at that time, as well as how difficult it was to live in the countryside and make a living.

## Symbolism

At the beginning of the book, the reader learns that Sunflower's father used to make sunflowers from bronze: the two main characters that give their names to the book. Bronze is often used for sculptures because it can be sculpted in detail and withstand outdoor conditions. Bronze and Sunflower endure many hardships in the book, and their relationship offers strength and support to both characters.



## Literary terms

### **figurative language**

Figurative language is a word or phrase that has an imaginative meaning rather than a literal meaning. It is intended to describe something precisely to readers or evoke their senses. Similes and metaphors are examples of figurative language.

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### **historical novel**

Historical fiction stories take place at a real time in the past, but the events might not have really happened.

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### **lyrical**

A book is lyrical if it expresses emotions using beautiful, imaginative descriptions. For example, this vivid description describes the effect of the sun on Sunflower's father: *'As the golden sun filled the sky, casting its brightness far and wide, he felt intoxicated, invigorated, liberated.'*

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### **simile**

A simile compares one thing to another, often using like or as. For example, *'A gentle breeze blew past her, like softly flowing water.'*

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### **symbolism**

Symbolism is using a character, action, animal or object to represent qualities or ideas.

