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ENGL 112B
5 October 2020

Book Talk

Young Adult Novel:

What Kind of Girl by Alyssa Sheinmel

Information on Author:

Alyssa Sheinmel grew up in Stanford, CA and now resides in New York. After attending Barnard College, she worked in a literary agency as well as a marketing team for a publishing company.

(There is no personal information available that is relevant to the writing of this novel.)

For more information visit Sheinmel's website:

<https://alyssasheinmel.com/bio/>

Summary:

North Bay junior, Maya, comes to school with a bruised eye. She goes to the principal to inform her that her boyfriend, Mike, is the one who inflicted the damage onto her. Due to his popularity and his stance as the “golden boy” of North Bay, other students begin to question the legitimacy of Maya's accusation. They start asking questions such as: Why did she go straight to the principal instead of legal authorities? Why did she wait so long since the beginning of Mike's ongoing abuse three months ago? Was it really the most coveted student in North Bay that hurt

her? With the help of her best friend, Junie (who is also dealing with issues of her own), Maya rallies other students for Mike's expulsion while others refuse to believe that the most popular boy in school abuses women.

Stand Out Quotes:

“It's hard not to want to defend him. He's one of my best friends. I've known him since we were little kids. The whole school knows how sweet he is. It's hard to believe he would ever do what he's accused of doing. And if he did, maybe he didn't mean it. Maybe it was an accident. Or maybe it was justified, somehow” (Sheinmel 5).

This quote is Maya's thoughts going into confessing the abuse she experienced from Mike. She acknowledges that not many people will believe what has happened to her because of how likable he and charming he is. Even going as far as to say that if he did do it, it must have either been an accident or justified in some way (abuse is never justified in any way).

“I brought the razor blade back to my room. I'd seen characters on TV do this, read about it in books. Even though I was home alone, I shut the door. I pulled down my pants and made a tiny cut on my inner thigh. And I felt better. It was a relief, like all that energy finally had a way to escape. My heart stopped racing, my hands stilled. I had one thing—the pain—to focus on, and suddenly it was easy to focus on that, and only that” (Sheinmel 110).

Maya is not the only one who is facing problems; her best friend Junie suffers from crippling anxiety and causes her to develop the habit of cutting herself via a razor blade. She describes the action of cutting herself as a way to relieve her of her anxiety, though only for a short time. The pain she produces from cutting herself is used as an escape from all the

overwhelming thoughts she experiences, a temporary distraction of sorts that only leads to an ongoing habit.

“‘A parent’s most important job is making sure her child knows she’s loved,’ Mom continues. ‘After that, it’s keeping her child safe. And I didn’t do either of those things’” (Sheinmel 329).

The theme of parenting plays a major role in the novel. Both Maya and Junie have issues within their own families, the former having divorced parents and the latter having expectations placed on her that she does not want to fulfill. Maya’s parents constantly argue and decide to distance themselves country-wide, causing Maya to question whether or not it has any influence on why she faces physical and mental abuse from Mike. And Junie’s parents never bother to ask her why she begins to cut herself or the root of her anxiety; they make her attend a psychiatrist by herself rather than together as a family.

Presenting *What Kind of Girl* to a Class:

Due to the mature topics present in Sheinmel’s novel, I believe that it should be taught primarily to juniors and seniors in high school. *What Kind of Girl* brings about a variety of topics and issues that hold a lot of value for students in high school such as: physical and mental abuse, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, sexual consent, parenting, and so on. A class discussion I would implement is allowing my students to identify the problems that Maya and Junie are both facing, and talk about why they made their decisions(open-ended).

I believe that this novel belongs in the category of Books about Real-Life Experiences due to its plot revolving around facing violence, mental health issues, and family issues. I recommend that students read Sheinmel’s *What Kind of Girl* to gain an understanding of what

possibly goes on in the mind of their fellow peers, who could be going through hardships that are similar to the protagonists'. Educating students about everyday experiences and issues such as these will prove to be beneficial and eye opening for them in the long run.

When it comes to the text complexity of *What Kind of Girl* by Alyssa Scheinmel, it is given a Dale-Chall final score of 5.9 (using a randomly selected passage of 500 words). With the Flesch Reading formula, it is given a score of 87. To simplify these scores into more understandable terms, the novel is identified as easy to read, with the level of reading being fit for grades 5-7. These primarily take into consideration the length of sentences as well as the diction used by the author. Although the textual complexity is appropriate for younger readers (as young as grade 5), it is much more appropriate for high school students to read such a novel, due to its graphic images of cutting, deep rooted descriptions of depression, and drug use.