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The Perks of Being a Wallflower, the Otherside of High School

In a young adult’s life there are expectations that are set: having a plethora of friends, excelling in academics, maintaining a healthy family relationship, and setting up the future for themselves. These expectations are often not met and combated with failures of their social spheres: being a loner, failing in classes, fighting with parents, and not knowing who they are or where they are going. In the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* written by Stephen Chbosky, Charlie a young adult is left feeling lonely after his bestfriend commits suicide and begins to ponder on how he will manage through high school alone. Charlie is able to connect with two particular seniors Patrick and Sam. Charlie begins having a love interest towards her which begins to trigger other issues. The novel focuses on teens trying to maintain composure while dealing with the complixities of drugs, alcohol, rape, and mental illness.

Stephen Chbosky was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on January, 25th 1970 and released *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* on February, 1st 1999. Stephen Chobsky’s website is <https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Stephen-Chbosky/1843916>. An interesting quality about Chobsky is that since he was born in Pittsburgh the perspective of the story was fairly accurate as he decided to include qualities of his city such as watching *The Rocky Horror Show*.

In the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower,* a young adult named Charlie struggles with his freshman year in high school as he is dealing with a mental illness causing him to be alone. Charlie is able to build a friendship with two particular seniors Patirck and Sam. Through their friendship they begin to go through events such as homecoming, prom, Christmas, and their graduation. The novel deals with problems such as drugs, alcohol, rape, and mental illness. Charlie is confronted with these issues through his friends, family, and academics. There is also a focus on family dynamics through Charlie's relationship with his parents and siblings. LGBTQ+ topics are included as Charlie befriends Patrick. Ultimately the novel has multiple layers of topics that are portrayed through the young adults.

Three quotes that represent the novel deal with various issues within the narrative.

“Charlie, we accept the love we think we deserve”(24). Bill mentions this quote to Charlie after discovering that his sister was hit by her boyfriend. The quote represents how as a young adult there are moments where we accept what we think we deserve. In terms of the novel it can be seen with Charlie’s sister staying in an abusive relationship, Sam with Craig and dealing with his cheating and unattentive ways, and Patrick and Brad hiding their relationship. The scene is inspirational as the teacher believes that people deserve more than what they believe. Sam states to Charlie at the graduation party, “You can’t just sit there and put everybody’s lives ahead of yours and think that counts as love. You just can’t. You have to do things”(200). The repetitive use of you is powerful as it is intended for Charlie but breaks the fourth wall as though reminding the reader to focus on their lives. The quote is powerful as it focuses on taking care of one’s self and pursuing one’s dreams even if it includes selfishness. It also states that in order to obtain those desires actions must be made you cannot just await for them to occur. As winter approaches Charlie begins to fall into a depression. Charlie states, “...I can already feel myself going into a bad place I used to go...But now i’m trying not to think about it too much because that makes it worse”(74). Charlie is not able to confront the issues that he is feeling due to his mental illness and issues with Rape and losing his friend. It is represented that one who experiences trauma struggles with understanding their emotions and rather tries to ignore them.

I would use the novel in conjunction with *The Catcher in the Rye*. Both novels have the themes of discovering identity and being lost at the commencement of their stories. In addition the narration is similar as they are both told first person and told from the setting of a school. It would be appropriate for this novel to be taught towards freshman and sophomore students as the content is mature but could build up relatable discussions. Some ideas to teach this novel would be to have a screening of the film and discuss the parallels to the film and which characters they felt the most connected to. I would also build a venn diagram to discuss the similarities and differences of characters between Charlie and Holden. Teens should read this book as it has common and not so common experiences that they could relate to and process high school issues. They should also read it as it creates a sense of inspiration as the characters are able to reach a happy ending. The book fits in the category of books that deal with identity, discrimnation, and struggles with decisions as most of these scenarios are in the novel but it does overlap with other categories.

The text complexity of this work is not complicated at all. The structure of the story is not difficult to understand as the story progresses from beginning, middle, and end with a couple scenes that are from prior to the beginning of the narrative. The language clarity of the novel is simple, most of the vocabulary is of grade school; it is only the content that is cautionary. The knowledge demand is not high either; some elements may not be known to the reader but can be discovered through simple research. The level of higher meaning is at the end of the higher level as the story provides insight to various complicated scenarios but inspires the reader to apply their new skills to their own lives. The scores received were 5.7 and 6.5 showing that it is not difficult to read.

Works Cited

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