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Dr. Warner

ENGL 112B

Book Talk Handout: *The Sun is Also a Star*

Author information:

Nicola Yoon grew up in Jamaica and Brooklyn, according to her short biography on her website. This is significant because one of the two main characters in *The Sun is Also a Star*, Natasha, was born in Jamaica and lived there until the age of eight when she was brought to New York to live with her parents.

Yoon also seems to draw from her own experiences and loves to write her books. For example, she lists her hopeless romantic tendencies, love of Karaoke (though she describes herself as an awful singer), and love of Korean food on her website, as well. These are all reflected in *The Sun is Also a Star* via the characters of Daniel, a Korean American hopeless romantic who declares his favorite type of food Korean food, and Natasha, who accurately self-describes herself as a terrible singer as she picks a song to sing in a Karaoke bar.

Both of Yoon’s books, *The Sun is Also a Star* and *Everything, Everything,* are now major motion pictures, and she is a New York Times bestselling author.

Summary:

*The Sun is Also a Star* is a story about identity, love, and inevitability, all simultaneously. Daniel, a Korean-American poet and hopeless romantic, prepares for an interview that will help him achieve the life his parents came to the US so he could have. Natasha, a Jamaican-born science lover who illegally immigrated to the US when she was 8, has less than a day to stop her family’s deportation after their immigration status was discovered due to her father’s recent DUI. Call it the strings of fate or casual coincidence, but something has brought the two together. Can love keep them together?

Quotes:

1. “And now a man who has probably spent no more than a week in Jamaica is telling me that everything will be *irie*...Again I say it to quietly to be heard, and again he hears me.” (21-23)
   1. This quote is significant because it sets up the conflict and background of Natasha’s deportation. She gives background on her specific situation, with not knowing her family well and not having the accent, but also on the status of Jamaica as a whole, with the non-touristic parts of the country dealing with poverty and high murder rates. There is an emotional argument made in how she asks Mr. Barnes if they left the resort at all, and how different she describes Jamaica is outside of the walls of a resort. We also learn about her experience as an illegal immigrant in her mother’s attempt to get her a “good” fake social security number.
2. “‘How come you call yourself Korean,’ she asks after a few more sips… ‘It wasn’t pretty.’ She mock-shivers at the memory.” (157-158)
   1. A significant part of this book is it’s discussion of identity, and this quote is a great example of this. Daniel speaks about being considered too Korean by Americans, and not Korean enough by his family. This middle place of being both too much and not enough is a common feeling shared by many immigrant and first generation families in the US. While Daniel and Natasha’s backgrounds are very different, this thread of being “othered” connects them, and this quote shows how they each share their identities. Daniel has been labeled as Korean, and Korean alone, so much that he calls himself just this, and not Korean American. To Americans, he has settled into just being different, an outsider. Natasha critiques, this, though, as she calls herself Jamaican American, and considers how she’s grown up in America to be part of her identity. This quote is important because students who are immigrants and/or first generation can read it as a mirror to see themselves reflected in, to use Rudine Sims Bishop’s semi-famous metaphor, and students who are second generation+ American born can identify this as a window or sliding glass door, seeing a different world and identity than they may have portrayed in front of them.
3. “Learn how to use chopsticks...This country can’t have everything.” (160-161)
   1. This final quote I chose for a few reasons. First, it is in the brief chapter style that most of the book is in, with only two pages being dedicated to this “chapter” and in the perspective of “the waitress” (160). It shows one of the strengths of this book in how it takes a small, potentially insignificant character and gives us a backstory, a reason for her behavior. This constant process of doing so throughout the text helps to build empathy for each character, no matter how small they may be. As a YA book, this is in some ways a guide for the young adults it is aimed at, in the same way that all books are teachers of some lesson. This way of making every person important no matter their brief interaction with the main characters can be a template of empathy for all people outside of the book, no matter how brief one interacts with them.

My second reason for choosing this quote is the cultural stereotype of not wanting to date outside one’s race. This is a major stereotype when portraying people of Asain descent: TV shows like Netflix’s “Indian Matchmaking,” depicting Indian people going through a matchmaker to try and find love, and Freeform’s “Kim’s Convinience,” about a Korean family who live in Canada and run a convenience store, use stereotypes and cultural phenomena like this as plot points. Just because it is a stereotype, though, doesn’t mean it isn’t based in true outdated ideals in some cultures. This quote gives context to this. Not only does it show this outdated ideal in action, an potential example of what Daniel’s family may feel if he were to bring home Natasha, but it gives the reason of parents struggling to relate to the person who is a different race due to the cultural differences they have.

Finally, I chose this quote because of it’s last lines. In a way, I think the line “This country can’t have everything” (161) summarizes a lot of the book. One of the major themes of the book is, of course, immigration: both coming to and leaving countries. This line signifies a lot of heartbreak: there is loss of one’s home and community in leaving, there is hurt at being othered upon arrival, there is a struggle to maintain an identity that is not welcomes with open arms in the new country. What this line says but does not say is that this country *takes* from it’s people, and there is a small revolution in not letting one more part of one’s past be given away.

Writer’s Style and *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*

This book was chosen as one of Entertainment Weekly’s 10 best YA books of the decade, LA Times’ 10 most important books of 2016, and the New York Times’ notable children’s books of 2016 lists. In an interview with Writer’s Digest, Yoon said that she writes by hand in a notebook with a very basic outline in mind, typing up her writing every few days onto her computer. Though she doesn’t say so in her interview, writing like this allows authors to edit as they type into their computer, or at least to engage with what they’ve written once more before they continue writing or go into the editing process. She also noted that, to her, characters are the most important part of writing a book. This is reflected well in her writing, where the whole text is incredibly character-driven, and each character is clear with clear intentions behind their actions. She has a talent for making the characters and their actions feel very real, so the reader may step into the character’s mind as they read about his or her actions.

As for the types of book it is through the characteristics listed in *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, I would put *The Sun is Also a Star* into two of them. I first consider it to be a book welcome in the “Books about Real-Life Experiences” chapter, as the threat of deportation for Natasha and her family is a real-life experience. It is also representative of this category because of how Natasha and Daniel’s relationships with their families are shown. Both characters have some difficulties in their interaction with their family especially due to their duality of being both American *and* Jamaican (for Natasha) or Korean (for Daniel), which places it both within this category but also within the category of “Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions.” Identity plays a huge roll in the text, especially in how the two characters interact with each other. In one of the quotes listed above, on page 158, Daniel narrates, “I love how simple this is for her. I love that her solution to everything is to tell the truth. I struggle with my identity and she tells me just to say what’s true” (Yoon). This is a great example of how the two help one another to express their identity.

Text Complexity

* Lexile
  + Age range: 12-18
  + Score: 650L
* Atos
  + Score: 4.7
* Dale-Chall Readability Score
  + Final Score: 6.1
  + Grade levels: 7-8
  + Note: The quote I used was “My mom says it’s time...are leaning unopened against the wall” (3-4).

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