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ENGL 112B

Dr. Warner

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Book Talk

**“Eleanor and Park”**

By Rainbow Rowell

 



**Source:** http://time.com/3714753/rainbow-rowell-interview/

**Author’s Webpage:** <https://www.rainbowrowell.com/>

**Author Biography**

Rainbow Rowell is an American author who’s literary works center on fictional young adult and adult genre. She currently resides in Nebraska with her husband and two sons. From 1995-2012, Rowell worked for the Omaha World – Herald as a columnist and ad copywriter. Rowell’s motivation behind writing “Eleanor and Park” was to illustrate love through realism. She wanted to appeal to emotions and demonstrate its intensity, especially to an audience who are young and never been in love or if they’re older and let them to reminiscence if they’ve been in love, by incorporating literary elements that contrast what is typically show in romantic comedies that have happy endings. Rowell’s other works include “Attachments”, “Fangirls”, “Landline”, “Carry On”, and currently working on “Wayward Son”. She also worked on comics including the “Runaways” series and “Pumpkin Heads”.

**Summary**

Eleanor Douglas is the new girl in Omaha. She has curly red hair and an eccentric style that attracts attention. Park Sheridan is a half Irish, half Korean boy who's lived in Omaha all his life and knows taekwondo.

The two teenagers lead contrasting lives, both at school and at home. Eleanor is an outcast at school where the other girls would bully her by pulling revolting pranks while at home, she has to endure her step-father's abuse and mistreatment of her family. Park has a happier upbringing where he has a comfortable social life and a loving family but still has his own set of problems to deal with. He faces an identity crisis due to being half Korean, making him feel more excluded from everyone else at school, and thinks he doesn't fully live up to his army veteran father's standards.

Eleanor and Park’s interactions start off on a rocky note but their similar taste in music and love of comics slowly brings them closer, forming a blossoming relationship that gradually turns into something more than friendship.



<https://www.rainbowrowell.com/eleanor-park>

**Text Complexity**

1. **Lexile Level:** HL580L, Ages: 14-18+

Based on Common Core Bands, the book’s text complexity would at a 2nd or 3rd grade level because of the narrative style. It is comprised of simple vocabulary and colloquialism. However, the recommended age group falls between 14-18+ is because of the vulgar language within the narration and explicit content.

1. **ATOS:** 3.8, Upper Grades: 9-12

Based on the Common Care ban, ATOS recognizes that the book’s text complexity falls between 2nd-3rd grade level. The reasoning behind the score is the same as the Lexile because “Eleanor and Park” is a simplistic novel, solely in terms of the vocabulary.

1. **Dale-Chall:** Final Score is 6.3, Grades 7th-8th

The Dale-Chall formula shows that students as young as 7th-8th grade are able to read “Eleanor and Park”. It is a fairly minimal theme that doesn’t have overly complex vocabulary. However, the content is meant for an older audience who should at least be in high school due to mature delivery, connotative vocabulary, and a more complex narrative structure.

**Adolescents in the Search for Meaning**

**Chapter 3: Young Adult Authors Describe Their Commitment to Adolescents**

Rowell’s motivation behind “Eleanor and Park” is to expose her young audience to the reality of love and overall life for people their age. She believes many love stories are intense and emotional but they feel inauthentic because the happiness they’re showing is sending a message about love that doesn’t exist. Through “Eleanor and Park”, Rowell hopes to portray a love that still holds the same intensity as romance stories with happy endings but at the same time also has a realistic point of view.

https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/55711-q-a-with-rainbow-rowell.html

**Chapter 4: Books About Real-Life Experiences**

*Making Life Choices, Facing Violence or Abuse, and Living Through Family and Relationship Issues*

Eleanor’s stepfather, Richie, is the source of abuse within her family. He makes her life completely miserable by constantly berating her, invading her privacy, and stalking her. Furthermore, Richie also physically abuses her mother. His existence is the reason Eleanor faces some of the biggest hardships in her life, including having to make the choice of leaving Omaha behind for safety in Minnesota with her relatives. This choice impacts her relationship with Park because by escaping Richie’s wrath, she inevitably has to leave his side.

**Chapter 6: Books About Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions**

Themes of identity and discrimination is illustrated through Park’s characterization and point of view. As a biracial person, he faces the inner conflict of how he should deal with being half-Korean. Although he was born and raised in Omaha, his appearance has other people assume otherwise. He looks more Asian and because of that physical trait, he feels like a foreigner. Furthermore, this causes his friends to unintentionally mistreat him. At the beginning of the story, his friends also assume he’s good at Kungfu and taekwondo because he’s Asian. At the beginning of the story his friends make ignorant, racially-fueled remarks such as assuming his Korean mother is Chinese and that he should be at good Kungfu and taekwondo because he’s Asian.

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http://www.amitiecode.eu/news-events/memes-against-racism

**Quotes**

**“*If you don’t want people to look at you,* Park had thought at the time, *don’t wear fishing lures in your hair.* Her jewelry box must look like a junk drawer. Not that everything she wore was stupid….**

**She had a pair of Vans he liked, with strawberries on them. And she had a green sharkskin blazer that Park would wear himself if he thought he could get away with it” (31).**

Park is mentally criticizing Eleanor, thinking about how she’s crazy for disliking attention yet dresses herself to unintentionally attract it. To him, nothing about her makes sense yet he’s constantly thinking about her. Although his thoughts come off as complaining, Park is actually revealing his true nature through his contemplation on trying Eleanor’s blazer. This quote illustrates Park’s gradual and subconscious attraction to Eleanor which is important because his characterization centers on being apathetic towards those around him, including his friends and father. Furthermore, it exposes a part of himself that challenges masculinity and that he is willing to try clothes that a girl is wearing.

**“Until this moment, she’d kept Park in a place in her head that she thought Richie couldn’t get to. Completely separate from this house and everything that happened here (It was a pretty awesome place. Like the only part of her head fit for praying.)**

**But now Richie was in there, just pissing all over everything. Making everything she felt feel as rank and rotten as him” (67).**

Richie is the main antagonist of the story that plays a role in ruining Eleanor’s life. As her stepfather, he not only has power over herself but also her whole family. This results in him having control in nearly all aspects of her life. This quote exemplifies Richie’s control over Eleanor’s life to a point where her only safe space, at first, was her mind. Eleanor just needs one place in her life where his toxicity can’t reach her and allow her to feel at ease. However, Richie has not only become aware of Eleanor’s feelings for Park but he immediately intrudes her safe space and abuses it once got the chance.

**“‘I mean, you don’t seem like you’re from there….’**

**‘Because I’m Korean?’**

**‘You’re Korean?’**

**‘Half.’**

**‘I guess I don’t really know what that means.’**

**‘Me neither,’ he said” (103).**

Eleanor assumes he isn’t from Omaha because of his appearance, showing one instance of what his experience as a half-Korean person is like. Park has his own inner conflict about his identity, especially as a biracial boy. Being half Irish and half Korean draws a divided line between what he looks like and what he knows about his culture. Although he was born and raised in Omaha for his whole life, his appearance makes the people around him think he’s an outsider despite not knowing almost anything about Korea. His feelings of being an outsider is further emphasized by the behavior of those around him, like Eleanor and his friends. In a town where there is little diversity, not a lot of teenagers are exposed to other cultures like Korean culture. This lack of awareness can lead them to making their own mindless assumptions and remarks about Park, further amplifying his inner conflict with his identity.

**Teaching Resources**

1. Before reading the novel, have students write down what they think (a first) teenage love is like. It could either be from their own ideas, television, movies, or other young adult books. After finishing “Eleanor and Park”, have students write down how teenage love is portrayed in the book then compare and contrast it with what they wrote prior to reading the story.
2. The story’s narrative is divided between Eleanor’s and Parks point of view. Based their narrative style and language, write a diary entry as one of the characters in response to one of the chapters. Some chapters leave a cliffhanger and this activity allows students to not only be creative but also expand on Eleanor and Park’s thoughts.
3. Eleanor and Park’s relationship started on the basis of comics and music. Students can create a photo and article collage from 1980’s publications to highlight notable hits mentioned by Park and Eleanor. They can also focus on any lyrics from the bands to see if they might have any relevance to Park and Eleanor’s relationship.
4. Do a brown bag for either one of the main characters or the whole book. Students can put in objects in the bag that represent a characteristic or important theme, such as eyeliner for Park because it represents his challenge against masculinity or a cassette to symbolize Eleanor and Park’s relationship.
5. After finishing the book, have students theorize what Eleanor’s last three words to Park and support their claim through any evidence found in the book.

**Rationale**

“Eleanor and Park” is a great young adult novel that centers on many topics with some being more sensitive and difficult to dabble on. This novel should be taught in high school classrooms because it portrays many important and sensitive topics in a mildly explicit manner that students can empathize with. The dialogue between the characters are crude, containing cuss words and euphemisms. Although it’s vulgar, the language Rowell adopts will have students be more interested and immersed with the reading. A few topics this book covers are first love, domestic abuse, bullying, and racism.

I want to expose students to the reality of a contemporary first love where it won’t always be something they’ll see in a romantic comedy and has a “happily-ever-after” ending. The book has a heavy tone based on separation, angst, and drama where the results aren’t going to be positive. However, I want to show students that “tragic” endings don’t signal the end of everything. Rowell’s goal for this book is that 17-year-olds aren’t supposed to have happy endings and that just means this is the beginning for them which is a message I also want to pass down to students.

Domestic abuse and bullying are the touchier topics that is frequently mentioned throughout the book, especially when domestic abuse and bullying become intertwined at one point. Exposing students to the recurring domestic abuse gives them a better understanding of the problem, especially if they’ve never experienced it. With bullying, it is a common problem found within academic settings. For many students, bullying is something they might’ve experienced in their lifetime and the book can help them relate their personal experience to what Eleanor is experiencing. These sensitive topics creates a stronger appeal to emotions and help students reflect on their personal experience as they connect to the book.

Rowell includes themes of racism and cultural identity issues in this book as well, mainly through Park and his mother. As a biracial teenager of half Korean descent, it’s difficult for him to find a place where he “belongs” along with his “friends” making remarks about his Korean mother. Exposing and discussing these issues with students will not only raise awareness amongst them but do so in a setting that seems most realistic to them.

Post “Eleanor and Park” :



www.someecards.com/memes-lists-comics/memes/29-memes-you-will-relate-to-if-pretty-much-everything-makes-you-cry/



https://www.bookbub.com/blog/funny-things-that-happen-when-you-finish-a-book