*Waiting for Fitz*

By Spencer Hyde

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<https://spinemagazine.co/articles/spencer-hyde>

Spencer Hyde experienced OCD at a young age going to a children’s hospital (Johns Hopkins) for three years while in high school. Spencer Hyde said his first symptoms began when he around six years old. Spencer Hyde has earned his MFA and Ph.D. specializing in fiction. Spencer Hyde “wrote *Waiting for Fitz* while working as a Teaching Fellow in Denton, Texas” (Spencer-Hyde.com). A teaching Fellow is essentially a person who assists with or teaches in higher education.

The novel starts with the quick-witted protagonist Addie Foster, and her struggles with an on-set of OCD at the age of seventeen. Addie is still in high school, but her rituals are so rampant that they are consuming her life. The main feeling that is described by Addie is that she feels that if she does not complete the rituals her mother will die. These rituals include, but are not limited to washing hands, blinking, and counting heartbeats. Addie is admitted into a psych ward where she learns how to cope with her OCD. Addie meets Fitz a Schizophrenic patient at the psych ward that is her age. Addie forms a connection with Fitz because of his wittiness and enjoyment of wordplay. Fitz asks Addie to help him break out of the psych ward because he has something important he needs to do that is time-sensitive.

# Significant Quotes

1. “Let’s be honest: We all have issues. Let’s be even more honest: Sometimes we need help but don’t want to face it. I understand now why my mother was looking for more help, for better help, but at the time I thought she was just overreacting. I mean, don’t most teenagers have a three-hour morning ritual before they can walk out the door? Don’t most teenagers wash their hands to keep their families alive? Just kidding. A little. But that’s how it went with OCD. I guess if we get super technical, it’s not all that untrue. But I did need help, and Mom took action”

Hyde, Spencer. Waiting for Fitz (p.8).

This quote is significant because it showcases Addie’s personality, Addie’s struggle with OCD, and the impact of her OCD on her family. In the quote, we see Addie’s personality in how she jokes about her situation. Her sarcastic tone is a trait that is seen throughout the novel, and it helps her form relationships with other characters in the story. Addie’s OCD is quite severe and has an impact on her life and her mother’s life. This is important because we gain insight on the impact that mental illness has on a family

1. “Fitz looked at his list of words. I could tell he wasn’t all that interested in discussing those voices, but he was also pretty open with me, emotionally. He was incredibly hard to figure out, but those kind are the most fun, in my opinion. “Did you get ‘chartreuse’?” he asked. “Get real, guy. What do you really have?” He started listing his words off: Berry. Err. Yarn. Brawn. The list went on. I crossed off some of mine, having doubled up on a few. Then I read my list until I got to the seven-letter words I was most proud of. “‘Warbler,’” I said. “That’s a good one, eh?” I looked at Fitz and alternated my blinks because I was excited. I waited for his smile to mimic mine, for him to make some joke about warbling in the shower and maybe mock country music again. But he didn’t. He threw his pen down on the table and said, “See you later, Addie.” Then he stood and walked away. Just like that. I saw his silhouette bathe the opposing hallway wall as he faded from my view. I heard the wind push against the windows, the breeze a living thing that beat like a heart against the glass. Was he really that competitive? Did I offend him in the way I said it or something? Was he just a sore loser, or did he think of something that upset him at that exact moment? I didn’t see him for a week. Warbler. Seven-letter word. A type of perching bird”

Hyde, Spencer. Waiting for Fitz (p. 32).

In this quote, Fitz and Addie are playing Boggle a game of words. This is significant because the two characters have bonded over their use of wordplay in group meetings. As explained in the first quote sarcasm is a trait that Addie relies heavily upon in order to connect with other characters in the book. Addie and Fitz are similar in this respect because Fitz is described as witty and sarcastic in the book. This quote is also important because we learn more about Fitz’s social awareness. Fitz is not the best at sharing emotional issues with anyone, and here is an example of how he shuts down in the presence of someone who presses an emotional trigger.

1. “I spent most of that week waiting in my own mind. I kept thinking about the characters in Waiting for Godot and why they were okay with waiting, playing out absurd rituals and mocking the engine of silliness around them, rotating hats, and joking about everything instead of confronting the real reason Godot didn’t show up or asking why. The only thing they are sure of in their life is that they are waiting. That’s it. Waiting for Godot to show up. They say life will end if he doesn’t show. They talk about leaving. But they don’t move”

Hyde, Spencer. Waiting for Fitz (p. 81).

This quote is significant because it incorporates one of the major motifs. *Waiting for Godot* is referenced constantly throughout the book even the title *Waiting for Fitz* is a reference to the play. There is an argument to be made that Addie’s situation parallels the story of *Waiting for Godot.* In this quote, we have a short description of the book. Addie struggles with answering the last question to her assignment about the play. The question is “‘What are the characters waiting for, and why is it significant that it/he/she never shows up?”(page 56). This question is extremely open-ended, yet it stays with Addie throughout the book. The question is one that invokes thought about meaning in general and could be applied to the struggle of meaning that all humans face.

# Text Complexity

**Dale-Chall Formula worksheet**

Raw score 2.5385

Adjusted Score: (3.6365 + 2.5385),

Final Score: 6.2

Readability Grade Level: Grades 7-8

I used a sample from the first chapter of the book. This book is definitely geared toward an audience of middle school to early high school students. The dialogue is not too complex and the quotable moments are a bit corny. Mental illness is a topic that should be discussed around this age as well. With the rising rates of suicide, topics of mental illness are extremely valuable.

Lexile range

## 610L - 800L

I used a sample from two of the quotes I shared in this book talk. The score of 610L-800L means that the book is around the 4th to 5th-grade level. I specifically looked at scores between the 25th and 50th percentile. According to Lexile, the complexity of the book is around the late elementary school demographic. I don’t see much of an issue with teaching this book at those grade levels. While the themes tackle issues like mental health and death they are not depicted gruesomely.

# Teaching Suggestions

I would use this book if I taught at the middle school level. I wouldn’t really expect it to be a difficult book to read in terms of grammar and complexity. I would use the book more as a catalyst to have open discussions on mental health.

 Ways I would implement this in a classroom is by asking students what their experiences are with mental illness. I would open this discussion by sharing my experiences working for a non-profit that rehabilitates and provide residential housing for people with mental illnesses predominantly schizophrenia. This would allow students to form a personal connection through their own lives or at the very least through the lives of others.

 Another way I would implement the book is by discussing the wider array of mental illnesses. Talk about clinical depression, OCD, and Schizophrenia. Making the students aware of the symptoms and treatments could expand their understanding of what people are suffering through in regard to mental illness on a daily basis.

 Finally, the last suggestion would be to make a field trip to a residential care facility for the mentally ill. A field trip to one of these types of facilities could be illuminating for students that don’t understand mental illness from a first-hand experience. Or it is possible to have someone visit the class that has experienced severe mental illness.

# Why should Teens read this book?

Waiting for Fitz should be read by teens because it explores themes related to mental illness and self-discovery. These are both issues relevant to today’s youth. Depression and mental health are not taught enough in today’s classrooms, and these issues are having a real-time impact on families and communities. Throughout the book, the characters are discovering their meaning and purpose in the world. Teenage years are prime time for this type of discovery. If teenagers read this book they will be prompted to have a discussion on mental health and their own purpose in the world, and these could be valuable lessons that will be applicable in their lives.

# More from Spencer Hyde

(image from Author’s website)



**Quoted from Shadow Mountain Publishing:**

***Will I still be loved if I show people who I really am?***

**Four high school seniors. Four secrets about to be told.**

If Indie had it her way, she would never choose to river raft with three other high

school seniors, mostly strangers to each other, from her journalism class.

A loner, a jock, an outsider, an Instagram influencer. At first they can’t see anything that they have in common. As the trip unfolds, the unpredictable river forces them to rely on each other. Social masks start to fall as, one-by-one, each teen reveals a deep secret the other three don’t know.

One is harboring immense grief and unwilling to forgive after the death of a loved one. One is dealing with a new disability and an uncertain future. One is fearful of the repercussions of coming out. One is hiding behind a carefully curated “perfect” image on Instagram.

Before they get to the end of Hells Canyon, they’ll know the truth about each other and, more importantly, learn something new about themselves.

*What the Other Three Don’t Know* is a poignant and gripping YA novel about the unlikely friends who accept you for who you really are and the power of self-acceptance.