



<https://www.amazon.com/Eleanor-Park-Rainbow-Rowell/dp/1250012570>

# eleanor & park



This is a love story between Eleanor and Park. Eleanor has just transferred to a new high school. Her appearance makes her stand out from the other students: she is “big and awkward,” has curly red hair, and wears men’s clothes with unusual accessories. Park feels like an outsider as well since he is Asian-American in a school with little diversity. Unlike Eleanor, though, the other kids don’t really tease him. On top of being outsiders at school, family tensions make them uncomfortable at home as well. Eleanor has just returned after her abusive stepfather kicked her out for a year. Park struggles to express himself in a family that has certain expectations of him. This is a story of how two misfits learn to find where they belong.

## About the author: Rainbow Rowell

<http://www.rainbowrowell.com/>

Taken from her website’s about page: “Sometimes she writes about adults (*Attachments* and *Landline*). Sometimes she writes about teenagers (*Eleanor & Park*, *Fangirl* and *Carry On*). But she always writes about people who talk a lot. And people who feel like they’re screwing up. And people who fall in love.”

When Rowell graduated from University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she was a triple major in news-editorial, advertising and English. She ended up working in all three areas: 17 years as a newspaper columnist, four years as an ad copywriter, and now a novelist.

*Eleanor & Park* is her first young adult novel, and she has written two others (*Fangirl* and *Carry On*). *Fangirl* is a good follow-up to *Eleanor & Park* because it follows a young protagonist starting her first year of college. Coincidentally, she is an aspiring fiction writer.

“Today they were supposed to be discussing *Romeo and Juliet*, but nobody wanted to talk.

...  
She rolled her eyes again. She knew Mr. Stessman’s game by now. ‘Romeo and Juliet are just two rich kids who’ve always gotten every little thing they want. And now, they think they want each other.’

‘They’re in love...’ Mr. Stessman said, clutching his heart.

‘They don’t even know each other,’ she said.

‘It was love at first sight.’

‘It was “Oh my God, he’s so cute” at first sight. If Shakespeare wanted you to believe they were in love, he wouldn’t tell you in almost the very first scene that Romeo was hung up on Rosaline... It’s Shakespeare making fun of love,’ she said.

‘Then why has it survived?’

‘I don’t know, because Shakespeare is a really good writer?’

‘No!’ Mr. Stessman said. ‘Someone else, someone with a heart. Mr. Sheridan, what beats in your chest? Tell us, why has *Romeo and Juliet* survived four hundred years?’

Park hated talking in class. Eleanor frowned at him, then looked away. He felt himself blush.

‘Because...’ he said quietly, looking at his desk, ‘because people want to remember what it’s like to be young? And in love?’” (44-45)

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Their class is discussing *Romeo and Juliet*, and both the protagonists are called upon to provide their opinions. Eleanor cynically claims that Shakespeare is making fun of love. However, Park suggests that the play expresses real and universal emotions. Their interpretations of the play reveal their inner character and foreshadows their future relationship. Eleanor is used to hiding vulnerable feelings behind a deliberately prickly exterior, but Park teaches her another way to experience the world: being sincere and opening yourself to let others in is not a bad thing.

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“Ask me why I like you,’ she finally said.

...  
‘I don’t like you, Park,’ she said, sounding for a second like she actually meant it. ‘I...’—her voice nearly disappeared—‘think I live for you.’

He closed his eyes and pressed his head back into his pillow.

‘I don’t think I even breathe when we’re not together,’ she whispered. ‘Which means, when I see you on Monday morning, it’s been like sixty hours since I’ve taken a breath. That’s probably why I’m so crabby, and why I snap at you. All I do when we’re apart is think about you, and all I do when we’re together is panic. Because every second feels so important. And because I’m so out of control, I can’t help myself. I’m not even mine anymore, I’m yours, and what if you decide that you don’t want me? How *could* you want me like I want you?’” (110-111)

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This moment of open affection is a crucial turning point for Eleanor. She finds it difficult to admit her feelings to both herself and to Park. She's more used to building a wall between herself and others so that she can stay protected from the world around her. Her feelings for Park give her this newfound courage to chip away and begin breaking down those barriers.

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"He pushed his shoulder up against hers and nearly wept with relief when she laid her head against him. Weeping again today seemed wholly inevitable.

'Do you really believe that?' she asked.

'What?'

'That...we'll have other chances? That we have any chance at all?'

'Yes.'

'No matter what happens,' she said forcefully, 'I'm not coming home.'

'I know.'

She was quiet.

'No matter what happens,' Park said, 'I love you.'

She put her arms around his waist, and he hugged her shoulders.

'I just can't believe that life would give us to each other,' he said, 'and then take it back.'

'I can,' she said. 'Life's a bastard.'

He held her tighter, and pushed his face into her neck.

'But it's up to us...' he said softly. 'It's up to us not to lose this.'" (304-305)

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This is one of the last conversations Park and Eleanor have on their way to her uncle's. In typical fashion, Eleanor is guarded and cynical about their situation, and Park has to be the one to provide hopeful words. These words instill a sense of hope and belief into their bleak situation and imminent separation.

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## Why Teens Should Read This Book

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Real-Life Experiences: Making Life Choices, Facing Violence or Abuse, and Living through Family and Relationship Issues

*Eleanor & Park* deals with real-life experiences that many teens can relate to. Eleanor's stepfather Richie is physically abusive to her mother as well as emotionally abusive towards the children, especially Eleanor. He has a temper that the family has to work around and constantly appease. She also has to deal with bullying at school. Eventually, Eleanor has to pluck up the courage to run away to her uncle's and convince her family to leave Richie.

Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

Park is Asian-American in a school with little diversity. While the racism he deals with from Steve and Tina are more out of ignorance than real malice, it doesn't make it any less infuriating. Park struggles with his identity, which he has pushed aside in

order to blend in with his peers. He is torn between who he wants to be and who he has to be for the sake of those around him. His father pressures him to be more traditionally masculine, but Park does not have those qualities.

## **Text Complexity**

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### **Lexile:**

HL580L

Ages: 14 to 18+

### **ATOS:**

Interest Level (IL): Upper Grades (9-12)

Book Level (BL): 3.8

Both these tests suggest that the text itself is easy to read for younger audiences, but the content is suitable for older children. The ATOS Test included a warning for profanity and vulgar language in its summary of the book, coinciding with known incidents of attempted bannings of this book from school libraries.