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Engl 112B

Dr. Warner

Book Talk

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Eleanor and Park

By Rainbow Rowell

Author’s Website:

<http://www.rainbowrowell.com>

Author’s About Page:

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

Secondary Biography:

<http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/15-young-adult-fiction/9174-eleanor-a-park-rowell?start=1>

Biography

Rainbow Rowell is an American novelist from Omaha Nebraska. She has written a few novels for adults as well as a few YA novels. Whether they are adult or YA books, she almost always writes about a “people who talk a lot. And people who feel like they’re screwing up. And people who fall in love.” She is currently working on a screenplay for her most successful novel, Eleanor and Park. When she is not writing, she enjoys reading comic books and planning trips to Disney World with her husband and two sons.

Book Summary

The novel opens with a boy named Park states that he has lost a girl named Eleanor. It then rewinds, like a cassette tape, to the beginning of the school year. The readers are then introduced to our narrator, Park, a lanky, awkward, half-Korean boy who loves music and comic books and finds himself to be an outsider in Omaha, Nebraska. Then Eleanor enters and Park no longer feels like the furthest outsider. Eleanor is a heavy girl with unruly red hair, dressed in baggy men’s clothes. He offers her the seat next to him and a friendship starts to bloom. At first the bus rides are silent but as Eleanor begins to read Park’s comics over his shoulder, the two begin to find connections. The two share mix tapes and comic books and fall head over heals in love. When Eleanor faces some troubles at home with her abusive and alcoholic stepfather, she finds refuge at Park’s house and the two grow inseparable. As tensions at home build for Eleanor, she comes to realize her stepfather is even more of a monster than she had thought and decides her only option is to run away. Park drives her all the way out to her uncle’s house in Minnesota. They say their goodbyes and part ways. Park writes her letters and sends cards to which Eleanor never responds, until one day when she does.

Significant Quotes

“I told him you were ready to be part of this family.”

“I’m *already* part of this family. I’m like a charter member,” (20-21).

Eleanor is just returning home at the beginning of the novel after spending a year at another family member’s home to wait for Richie (her stepfather) to cool down after a fight. She was only supposed to be there a few nights, maybe a couple weeks, but she ends up staying there for roughly a year.

So many kids are dealing with issues at home at in middle school or early high school; reading about another broken family can often help students realize that they are not alone and, unfortunately, these things happen a lot. Many students live with other family members for one reason or another and this could help them relate.

“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,” (308).

Love is such a foreign concept at such a young age. Most young adult experience comes from what we experience in our families or even what we have read in literature. Eleanor and Park are reading Romeo and Juliet in their class, which creates a nice contrast between the two couples. Eleanor and Park aren’t the fake fairytale love story that Shakespeare mocks in his plays. They are real and the emotions that are felt are raw and vulnerable.

“Eleanor was right. She never looked nice. She looked like art, and art wasn't supposed to look nice; it was supposed to make you feel something,” (107).

Self-image and acceptance is critical in a young adult’s life. This age brings about so many issues with the physical appearance and it is healthy to have role models who accept themselves. Not only does Eleanor unapologetically wear men’s clothes but she flat out admits that she doesn’t fit the stereotypical ideal of “nice” or “pretty” and she is at peace with that.

Text Complexity

Lexile Level: 580L

Ages 14-18+

ATOS Book Level: 3.8

AR Points: 11

Grades 9-12

Teaching Eleanor and Park

I would teach this novel to 9th and 10th graders. It is fitting for their reading level as well as deals with issues that are commonly faced in these years. I would teach it alongside Romeo and Juliet as it has several references to it within the novel itself as well as parallels in relationships and love. The lesson could also incorporate music and lyrics as they play a large role in the novel as well which, could then in turn link to sonnets, bringing it full circle back to Shakespeare.

Eleanor and Park could be taught with several of the chapters from Adolescents in the Search for Meaning as it deals with so many issues young adults face. It could be taught through chapter five and the identity, discrimination, and difficult decisions Eleanor faces both at school with her bullies or at home with her stepfather. It could then also be taught alongside chapter seven as she is a survivor of the abuse.

Teaching Methods

Reader’s Theater: Many of the scenes in the novel are vivid and easy to imagine acting out in front of you. This exercise would allow students to reenact their favorite scenes from the novel or ones that they found to be the most important.

Open discussions and debate: Important questions and themes would be prompted for an open debate or discussion. Questions such as “Do you side with Eleanor or Park on the topic of love?”

Short stories: Have students write their own love stories (fiction or non-fiction), mimicking Rowell’s writing styles OR write a fan-fiction followup ending after Park receives Eleanor’s final postcard.