



Rayne and Delilah's Midnite Matinee

Book Talk by Julie Vazquez

✦ About the Author: Jeff Zentner ✦



Source: jeffzentnerbooks.com ✦

Zentner's other novels include *The Serpent King* and *Goodbye Days*. He has won awards such as the William C. Morris Award, the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award, the International Literacy Association Award, and the ✦ Westchester Fiction Award.

Before he was a writer, Zentner was a musician. He started as a guitarist and eventually became a songwriter. He lives in Nashville, Tennessee (on a similar note, *Rayne and Delilah's Midnite Matinee* takes place in ✦ Jackson, Tennessee).

Summary of the novel

On TV Six -- a public access cable station in Jackson, Tennessee -- best friends Delia and Josie transform into Delilah Darkwood and Rayne Ravenscroft for their show *Midnite Matinee*, which features terrible horror films. However, Josie dreams of being a TV star and is given the opportunity to become an intern at Food Network, but this would mean leaving Delia, her new friend Lawson, and *Midnite Matinee*. Meanwhile, *Midnite Matinee* is Delia's last hope to connect with her dad, who left her family when she was a child. In the end, both girls learn the struggles of growing up and the meaning of human connectedness.



Quote #1

“We stand side by side and stare up at the moon covering the sun. I feel so tiny -- a cog in this immense heavenly machinery -- the way I felt standing in the ocean with my dad. But being there with Josie, I’m okay with it. There are times when there’s solace in smallness. It puts the bigness of problems in perspective. As long as there’s someone by your side to remind you that you’re not nothing.

[...] As we stand there together in the moon’s shadow, for that brief moment, I wish I could tell time to *stop* and it would obey, as if time were the one thing that wouldn’t leave me behind” (356).



Analysis of Quote #1

This quote comes at the end of the novel when Josie and Delia spend the last few weeks of summer together before Josie goes leaves for college. This quote is from Delia's point of view and emphasizes friendship. Delia acknowledges that she feels small, but it is okay because she has Josie by her side. Their friendship is strong enough to make Delia feel the immensity of the world, but she feels like she has meaning because of her proximity to others.

✦ On the other hand, it also shows loneliness. Delia still feels like people need to be physically close to have a strong bond. She asks time to stop, but also says it will leave her behind like everything else. The quote shows Delia's fear of people abandoning her, but also an acknowledgement that life is better with close friends. Overall, it shows a need for human connectedness; Delia needs a friend that will stand with her, because she feels too small if she is standing alone. What she does not realize is that if a bond is strong enough, distance does not make a difference in its strength.

Quote #2

“Of course, Jesmyn moved and left me behind. We don’t talk nearly as much as we used to. She has a cool boyfriend now who takes up all her time, and pretty soon she’ll be going to Carnegie Mellon, where she’ll find even more cool friends to take up her time.

‘Mom,’ I say softly.

‘What, baby?’ Mom murmurs, focusing.

‘Why does everyone I love leave me behind?’ My voice quavers.” (182)



Analysis of Quote #2

Delia mentions her friend Jesmyn, but she is also talking about her dad and Josie. All three people have left or will leave Delia, but Josie mirrors Jesmyn in that Josie cancels her Thursday night routine with Delia to go hang out with Lawson, a guy she has feelings for. So, while Delia brings up Jesmyn, she is subconsciously thinking that Josie will do the same thing; Delia worries that Josie will find other people that she likes better, and eventually leave Delia.

This quote is significant because it is one of the first times Delia vocalizes her fear of being left behind. However, it is even more significant because Delia tells this to her mother, and it is important to note that Delia's dad walked out on both of them when he left. Therefore, Delia's mother can relate to Delia's fear of being abandoned. I think this moment strengthens the mother-daughter bond already present in the novel.

Quote #3

“Swear we’ll stay best friends.’

‘Until we both die.’

‘Even after that.’

‘Our gross flyblown corpses will be friends. We’ll pick maggots out of each other’s eyeholes and paint each other’s yellow nails black and laugh about how we smell like dumpsters.’

‘Deal.’

We both laugh, but it quickly dissolves into crying.

It suddenly hits me, more raw than it ever has before: everything ends. Some things last longer than others, but everything ends. Childhood feels like it takes forever when you’re in the midst of it, but one day you wake up and you’re eighteen and going to college. That basset hound puppy with the bow around his neck? You’re going to see his whole life pass. You may find someone you love and get married. And it might last a long time, but it ends one way or another. Maybe you’ll be together for fifty or sixty years, but one of you is going to get left behind. I’m glad things end, though. It forces you to love them ferociously while you still have them.

There’s nothing worth having that doesn’t die” (368).



Analysis of Quote #3

This quote from one of Josie's chapters captures every element of *Rayne and Delilah's Midnite Matinee* -- it is funny, thoughtful, and emphasizes Delia and Josie's friendship and strong bond. It represents the ending of the novel as well as the end of Josie and Delia's childhood. However, it is not the end of their friendship. While it is a bit morbid of Josie to talk about the things she loves in terms of dying, it also brings comfort. She acknowledges that it is not easy to say goodbye to people, but the fact that it is so difficult means these bonds are meaningful. Learning that everything ends is a tough lesson to learn, but the novel does a great job intertwining humor and difficult situations.

Josie's acceptance of eventually being left behind confronts Delia's fear of abandonment. Josie's point of view communicates that life is full of endings, but instead of being afraid of goodbyes, it should be seen as a reason to love people as much as possible.

Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story

Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences

Both Josie and Delia share their experience of graduating high school and their difficulties with the life changing events that occur afterwards. Additionally, the effects of depression are detailed in the novel, as well as Delia's experience with poverty and having an absent parent.

Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

The central plot of *Rayne and Delilah's Midnite Matinee* deals with the inability to make a decision. Delia struggles with deciding if she should contact her dad, and Josie struggles with deciding if she should leave Delia to go to college.

Text Complexity

Dale-Chall Readability Index

5.7 (grades **5-6**)

ATOS Book Level:

4.4 (grades **4-5**)

When looking at the quantitative complexity of the novel, the novel is placed between grades four through six. However, when examining the qualitative complexity, this score is too low. I would recommend this novel to grades **eight through nine** because some of the language used might be inappropriate for a younger audience. Additionally, despite being easy to understand, the novel deals with themes and events that would have the most meaning for a student in high school.

Rayne and Delilah's Midnite Matinee in the Classroom



Journal Entries

The formatting of the novel is almost in the form of journal entries. Students can be asked to write their own journal entries to reflect on moments with friends and family members.



Playlists

Josie and Lawson discuss music a lot. Lawson loves country music, while Josie does not. Students can be asked to create a playlist for one of the characters in the book with explanations - including textual evidence - for each song.

Prompted Writing

Various prompts may ask students to write about something they are passionate about, how they would react to a close friend moving away, or to write a letter to someone they appreciate.



Creative Writing

Students can write from the point of view of a secondary character from the novel. This teaches students how to write from first-person point-of-view and to pay attention to the characterization of secondary characters.



✦ Why Should Teens Read This Book? ✦

- *Rayne and Delilah's Midnite Matinee* is a novel that is relatable to teens because it is about two teenagers and their struggle with accepting adulthood. It contains topics such as love, depression, abandonment, bonds between family members, bonds between friends, and passions.
- ✦ The novel has a lot of humor, but also effectively communicates how confusing and heartbreaking the transition from high school to college can be. A lot of the events in the book take place when Delia and Josie are reaching an important milestone -- their high school graduation -- and many teen readers can see themselves and their worries reflected in the novel.
- The novel contains a lot of the Exeter qualities, as well as many of the traits of a good problem novel.