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Endgame by Nancy Garden

About the author…

Nancy Garden is an american novelist, most known for her work in YA fiction. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1938. She was an only child and took comfort in reading. She obtained a Bachelors of Fine Arts and Master of Arts from Columbia University School of Dramatic Arts in the early 1960s. Garden then began her career in theatre and editorial work for various publications, eventually leading her to publishing her own writings. She is most known for her novel Annie on my Mind, based on two lesbian characters falling in love. The novel faced controversy and was even banned from Kansas City school system in the early 1990s. However, it was this novel that won the author the Robert B. Downs Award for Intellectual Freedom in 2001 from the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, and the annual Margaret A. Edwards award in 2003.Nancy Garden herself identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, and lived alongside her longtime partner Sandra Scott, before passing away from a heart attack in 2014.

Plot Summary



Endgame, published in 2006, follows the life of a 14-year-old boy as he deals with bullying, physical and emotional abuse, and loneliness. Gray Wilton’s extensive history with bullying, begins to gain some hope with his new start at life. Gray and his family move to Greenford, Conneticutt. Gray begins to make friends and tells himself “it’s going to be better”. Quickly, his hope begins to fade quickly as he realizes he has become a target for bullying once more, at Greenford High School. Gray begins to lose his friends, the support of his parents, and the only things that bring him joy anymore, sending him into a dark spiral. After being hurt over and over again by the people in his life, Gray begins a plan to end the life of all those who have hurt him, and even end his own.

Significant Quotes:

* “Suddenly I heard something and I look around, still running. I saw it then. I saw a car… coming fast… rounding the corner… tires… squealing… funny license plate… DON something… the headlights caught me, caught Barker… Barker ran on the outside; I ran onto the shoulder to give him room… The car swerved and there was a thud, a sound I’ll never forget. The car vanished, laughter pouring through its open windows. Barker’s no longer beside me… I run back. My heart’s trying to get out of my chest, my throat is tight, hurting; I can’t breathe. (...) My throat ached like there was a fire in it, but I couldn’t even cry. And I just stayed there all night like I was frozen inside. (237)

I chose this quote as it is one of the events leading up to Gray’s final decision. After losing his friends, his favorite instrument, and now his pet, Gray begins to describe himself as “frozen” and being held by a “dark cloud” (may be observed in the following quotes). This is a turning point for the story, and is where the climax begins. It is also a great representation of Garden’s craft in writing, as she uses the spaces to add pauses to emphasize ideas.

* “After Barker was gone, the spiraling black cloud was right around me again, holding me inside it, suffocating me. It was always there from then on, always. Nothing worked anymore, not even music, not even when I played Third Wheel as loud as I could when no one was home. (...) Sometimes I just stared at Dad’s gun cabinet and at his new handgun on its fancy stand.” (242)

Here the “black cloud”, as previously mentioned, appears. At this point in the story, Gray’s mental illness becomes more obvious. Gray discusses how all of his joys have vanished, leaving nothing to help him feel normal or support him during this troubling time in Gray’s life. Gray begins to feel hopeless, as though there is nothing left for him, which relates to Exeter Quality #3 (Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists). The gun closet mentioned, is also a use of foreshadowing as to what will follow in the chapter.

* “My mind was sort of blank most of the time, like an empty space without any thoughts or mind pictures in it.” (242)

Here is a simple quote, that accurately respresents Gray’s mental state during this time before the shooting. He is destrout by all the negative things that have happened just in the short few months he has been living in Greenford. This also applies the Exeter Quality #3.

* “I wait for the right time in that little basement storeroom. And I review the Plan over and over again, the Plan that I’d started to make months earlier, the Plan that I wasn’t sure I’d ever do, but I’d been keeping it and working on it, just in case. This is the time, and I know I have to do it. I’m not really hiding in the storeroom now, not in the same way I did the last time I was there. I’m just waiting. The black cloud is gone and I still feel good. Bells ring and I can hear kids going back and forth to classes. Like lemmings, I remember thinking, little rodents running to their doom in the sea. I wait in the storeroom till lunchtime, and then before the bell rings, I go up the stairs and wait on the landing while the lemmings spill out of their classrooms.” (264)

In this scene, Gray is in the height of the climax. This is the first time Gray mentions his Plan to actively attempt a school shooting, and not simply just a passing thought in his head. These are the final moments before Gray attempts his shootings. Garden’s writing style shifts to a more hostile tone, different from Gray’s tone in the beginning of the book. He begins to dehumanize his classmates, a sign that he no longer has any mercy or humanity felt towards them.

Why Endgame Should be read by Teens:

Endgame tells the story of how bullying and mental illness can lead to fatal consequences when left unnoticed. It bring about the issue of mental health and bullying, while also highlighting issues such as gun violence and sexual assault. School shootings are beginning to become more and more common, and it is important to offer a space for teenagers where they can learn about the issue and decide how they would like to take action and contribute to the end of mass shootings and gun violence. This book touches on many real life events that can be delved into deeper with the use of other books such as Thirteen Reasons Why, Twisted, Speak and even, The Perks of Being a Wallflower.

Text Complexity

**Age Range:** 12 - 17 years:

The age range for this book falls between 12 to 17, as it is a fairly easy read and focuses on serious issues. However, I feel it is most appropriate for readers over the age of 17 to begin reading this, as school shootings are a serious issue in contemporary times and many younger readers may not have the capability to fully understand the matter, or may be heavily impacted by it.

**Lexile Measure:** 790L, **ATOS Book Level**: 4.8:

The book was given a lexile level of 790L, which is around the 4th-5th grade level. This was score was given because of the simple sentence structure and diction. Although it may be easy for readers in this grade level to follow along, the book also contains mature language that is not suitable for elementary school-aged children.

**Interest Level:** 9th through 12th grade:

Given the heavy content of the book, it is understandable as to why Endgame has an interest level of upper grades. The book is best suited for mature audiences, who can thoroughly understand the complexity and severity of school shootings. I think this book would be best for students above 11th to 12th grade, and should be incorporated in Preparation for Teaching programs or credential programs, to open up the conversation about gun violence in school settings.

**Exeter Qualities**:

This book goes well with Exeter Qualities #1.( Imaginative and well-structured plots going beyond simple chronologies to include time shifts and different perspectives.), #3. (Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists) and #6. (Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns.). The book relates to several real life issues that contribute to the overall theme of school shootings. The various issues work together to bring light to struggles that can lead to larger consequences when left untreated.

**Chapters in Adolescents in the Search for Meaning:**

The book goes well with Chapter 4, since it discusses real-life issues including bullying, sexual assault, physical assault, and gun violence. The same applies for Chapter 5, as it speaks to the different deaths and losses in Gray’s life throughout the book.