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Mrs. Rutan

A.P Literature and Composition

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Dear Mr. Markus Zusak,

I have recently just finished one of your most talked about books—The Book Thief—and may I say that it was one of the best books I have read throughout my two years of high school. The Book Thief is unlike any other book I have read; whether it was for English class or for reading for enjoyment. From the structure of the story to the point of view of the book, it caught my attention resulting in all nighters due to the fact I was unable to put down the book.

Throughout The Book Thief, I noticed that colors played a major role in how each event occurred and the interacting of death and human beings. As the narrator—death—puts it “So many humans. So many colors.” (Zusak, 309). To me those two sentences say a lot about your book because humans and colors where the important factors; whether it was describing a character, like Liesel, or it was describing the day death and Liesel crossed paths. As I read farther and farther in The Book Thief, I looked forward to seeing how the next setting was described and what color would be next in the journey of Liesel Meminger and death.

There are several things that I simply loved about your book—small and big. To start off with the small things I loved which include the titles of each chapter and the drawings. In the beginning I really didn’t notice the titles and how they might relate to the content in the following pages, but as I got more into the book the titles started to give me ideas of what was going to occur in the next pages to come. Although there was one name of a chapter in part six that tricked me, it was called “Fresh Air, An Old Nightmare, And What To Do With A Jewish Corpse” (Zusak, 325). Before I read the chapter I thought that everything was going to go downhill from there since Max Vandenburg was dead, but I was surprised that it was the total opposite. As a result it made me enjoy and love The Book Thief even more for not being predictable or common. Then there are the unique-looking drawings of Max Vandenburg’s stories to Liesel. I believe that it was a good idea to integrate into the book to give the reader a little break from reading a large amount of words on a page. The drawings also made the book even more interesting and unique since longer books usually do not have any illustrations except for the cover. For the first set of drawings really helped me understand the emotional state of mind that Max Vandenburg was in and helped foreshadow Liesel and his relationship later in the book. The second drawings were repeating what had been said already about Hitler and the way of like during 1939 and the years that followed, but it did help visualize in a kid version what it looked like. The last drawings of Max Vandenburg were creative and kind of looked in a way like a children’s book minimized into a few pages, but it context was thoughtful and clever. I thought the last set of drawings was foreshadowing the next time Liesel Meminger and Max Vandenburg were to meet since Liesel got Max’s attention by saying “Is it really you? the young man asked… Is it from your cheek that I took the seed?” (Zusak, 512). Those were the exact words from Max’s story—Word Shaker.

So enough of how much I liked the illustrations in the book and now on to the big things that I loved most about The Book Thief which include the way the book was written and the characters and their relationships with each other. When I began to read The Book Thief I was confused with the whole idea of death being the narrator, but after awhile it all seem to go together and I can’t see a better way of writing the story. One thing that really stuck out to me was the way the narrator told the reader, me, what was going to happen next or in the distant future. I liked it in some way. I liked that I knew a head of times and that it created suspense to how it gets to it, but it also in some way ruined what happens in the end. For example, when the narrator says that Rudy Steiner dies at the end of the book and goes in a way that he did not deserve (Zusak, 241). A huge reason why I liked The Book Thief and stayed up all night to read was because of the characters and the relationships that developed throughout the book. Liesel and Hans Hubermann’s relationship was my favorite and from the beginning I predicted it would change each character in a good way. I believe that relationship made Liesel grow as a person and turned her into someone totally different from the beginning. For example, when Liesel’s brother had passed away she was heartbroken, but it didn’t change the way she lived her life whereas when Hans Hubermann—Papa—died she was able to read, enjoy music, and promised never to drink champagne again since that summer night (Zusak, 539). I also liked the way Liesel’s relationships with male characters—Rudy, Hans, and Max—were stronger than any other due to the factor she didn’t really have any other real relationships prior to arriving on Himmel Street. I strongly believe that the way the characters were described made me connect with them and make the book so much easier to fall in love with.

I may love many things that The Book Thief displayed, but there is one major thing that I honestly did not like—the ending. The ending was a major blow to the picture I created in my head of what was occurring in the book. When the narrator had said “Rudy Steiner slept. Mama and Papa slept. Frau Holtzapfel, Frau Diller. Tommy Müller. All sleeping. All dying.” (Zusak, 498) I simply stopped reading and put down the book. I was a big shock to me and I was not sure I wanted to read more. Even thought it ended with Liesel ended with a family and happy ending, I wished that those who died got to live. I did notice that it showed readers that during that time in Germany, especially on Himmel Street, that it wasn’t safe and there was no way to know what would happen next.

So enough with that small bit of negativity and on to a few things that I saw were important and should be brought up last. First thing is Himmel Street. In the beginning Himmel Street was translated to the meaning of heaven. At first I did not think it was of importance, but as I read the end of the book it made sense to me. I believe it translates to heaven because in the end all Liesel’s loved ones die in one night and all supposedly go to heaven leaving her alone. Another thing that stood out to me is when death talked about Liesel’s book and how “The book was divided into ten parts, all of which were given the title of books or stories and described how each affected her life.” (Zusak, 528). I thought it was amazing and blew my mind that it came out and said you were reading the life story of Liesel Meminger; it was just a shock factor to the reader. The last thing is the epilogue. The epilogue really helped me see what the results of the war were. The books I read normally don’t show an aftermath of what happens to the characters; it is basically up to the reader’s imagination. Those are things I believed were special and were more points that stood out to me.

I am usually not a big fan of reading, but your book—The Book Thief—has changed my perspective on reading; whether it was due to the amazing storyline and characters or the little details of chapter titles and descriptive use of colors. Also, let’s not forget the integration of German vocabulary to help make the reader picture the setting that the book took place. I look forward to rereading your book and many more of your others.

Sincerely,

Lauren Carr