



Regarding the Fountain

Concept Analysis

Literary Text: *Regarding the Fountain: A Tale, In Letters, Of Liars and Leaks*
by Katz Klisz

Organizational Patterns

Regarding the Fountain is considered a multi-genre novel. Klise uses several different types of writing to tell the story; it is not written in the common narrative form. The different genres include:

Letters
Letterheads
Memos
Notes
Blackboards
Faxes

Newspaper Articles
Expository Essays
Telegrams
Song Lyrics (Poetry)
Interviews
Postcards

Flyers
Written Recordings
Receipts
Warrants
Police reports
Pictures

There are no chapters, and the only breaks are when the genres change—which is about every page. The entries are from all different perspectives and points of view- all dealing with people regarding the fountain. Each of these entries is a clue in the story about a leaking water fountain in the local middle school of Dry Creek. The fifth grade class uncovers a 30 year old mystery which is revealed through these various correspondences. The entire events of the novel occur during one school year.

Issues

Theme

Generosity: Throughout the entire novel there are references to water. Everyone's name is somehow related to water. For example, Sam N. sounds like salmon and Goldie Fisch sounds like gold fish. Florence Waters' name is like the flow of water. She is the source of life for this town because she teaches them how to give without expecting anything in return. The geyser symbolizes this theme and ideal of generosity. The geyser continues to give water expecting nothing in return. In addition to the names of people referencing water, many of the words Sam N. has his class talk about are all related to giving. In the end it is the act of the fifth grade students giving all their time and talents, and also Florence giving everything she has found to create the fountain that brings the town back to life. Florence Waters builds a fountain that "will serve as a monument to the spirit of giving and the art of friendship" that will last "for years to come"(131).

Honesty: The theme of honesty is present in the contrast between the antagonists and protagonists. The antagonists are always dishonest while the protagonists are always honest. It is really important for the fifth grade class to uncover the truth about their town, and in the end they are able to put all the pieces together and reveal dishonesty to the rest of the town. Klise glorifies honesty and demonstrates the importance of being honest in her representation of honesty in her characters.

Acceptance: The main issue in this novel is a leaking fountain. Flo Waters creates a new fountain for the school. The fountain is created out of all the different suggestions of the different students and people in the school. This presents the theme of community and acceptance. In order for this fountain to be complete, Flo needed everyone's idea. The end product was a little piece of everyone. That is what accepting others, and being part of a community is all about.

Setting

This story takes place in Dry Creek, Missouri, which used to be called Spring Creek. Dry Creek is a small city. The fountain that has started to leak is located in Dry Creek Middle School. The fifth grade class is located in the classroom closest to the fountain. Other places are the Swimming Pool, whose founder is Sally Mander, and the Water Company whose President is Delbert "Dee" Eel. Florence Waters travels all throughout the novel and sends postcards from places like Spain and Costa Rica.



Point of View:

Because this is a multi-genre novel, there are many different points of view. There is no specific or consistent narrator. As the readers piece all the writings and clues together, they, in a sense, become the narrators of the story.

Literary Terms

Characterization: There are a lot of different characters in the novel who all play important roles in uncovering the mystery. It is important to help students learn how to analyze the characters through their actions, what they say/write and what is said about them. For example, Sally Mander has been hiding behind a facade of a sweet lady who has a pool for ever one to go to. She always wants to give anyone who wants to talk to her about the fountain. She always brushes off the subject regarding fixing the fountain. On the surface she appears to be a nice lady, but analyzing her character reveals her true criminal nature. This characterization is important for more than just Sally. Doing a character sketch of all the characters is helpful in understanding their role in the mystery and in the novel.

Connotation: In this novel there are a lot of plays on words and different meanings of words and names. It is important to have students look closely at the names and figure out what that means in relation to the individual characters, and novel as a whole. For example, Sally Mander sounds a lot like Salamander. The connotation of a name like this lends to a negative perhaps evil character, which is exactly who Sally Mander is. There are also words that mean more than one thing in a certain situation. Often Sam N. has these words written on his blackboard. Carefully looking at these words would help students better understand the themes of the novel.

Forshadowing: Because this is a novel about a mystery, there are a lot of clues that help the reader discover the secret of the middle school fountain. Paying close attention to these detail will help guide the readers to solving the mystery. For example, in a fax to “Dee,” Sally says “ you said you took care of the ‘leak.’ Now look where we are.” This is one of the very first correspondences and it gives us an insight and a foreshadowing of the role Sally Mander and “Dee” Eel will play in the novel. This would work very well with having students predict what is going to come next in the novel.

Affective Issues related to work

Authority: Students can relate to this novel in several ways. First, it is about a group of students working together to solve a problem. The students reading this novel are also part of a school organization where they work with each other in the classroom. Like the students in this book, readers also have to work with teachers and people outside the school regarding events going on inside their school. Students know what it is like to be a part of a school where things are going on that they do not like and would like to change it.

Friendship: Students are concerned with friends and being accepted by their peers. This novel is about the relationship created by a fountain lady and a fifth grade class. The students could relate to this growing relationship as they meet people that may not be exactly like them at first, but who could end up as their friends, and even teaching them something.

Peer Pressure: In the novel there is a lot of pressure from the outside to act a certain way. The students are expected to stay in line exactly how the principal wants them to. The students band together and realize it is more important to do what is right that to do what they are pressured to do. Students will relate with the struggle between be accepted by everyone and choosing to do the right thing.



Vocabulary Issues

The vocabulary in this novel is basic. The words are explained within the text. Some of the words are actually defined on Mr. Sam N.’s Blackboard. This helps guide the students to think about the specific vocabulary in a different way. There is minimal vocabulary that would be hard for most students reading this novel to understand.

Background knowledge

There is a lot of prior knowledge that students would need in order to successfully read this novel. Students would need some background on the different genres of writing that are present throughout the novel. If students do not know how to read the different text, it will be hard for them to read and understand the story. They will not be able to pick up context clues given in the various forms. Background knowledge on each of the types of writing would help the students understand how to read the text.

Background knowledge on what life is like in a small town would also be beneficial to students reading this novel. Depending on the area students live in, they may not know what it is like to have only one middle school in the whole town, and have that be the most important thing going on. They also may not know about cultural activities such as a fair day that takes place in smaller towns.

Implications for student Diversity

Students of diversity will be able to connect with this novel because there are characters in here who are different than everyone else and who are ok with that. Florence Waters represents a type of person who is different from everyone else and helps everyone else feel good about themselves. Students of diversity may feel like they do not fit in with everyone else around them. Addressing the issue of being OK with who you are regardless of the people around you, would be an important issue to discuss not only with students of diversity, but with all students. Also the culture of this town is unique and different. They may be able to relate to what it is like being from a different place that has different customs than they are used to. Florence Waters travels all over the world to collect different items for the fountain. Students can relate to some of the items and places. This could also be used to help students of diversity talk and share with the rest of the class about their culture and what would be an item they could contribute to the fountain. This could help bring the class together and validate all students' cultures.

Gender Issues

There are strong gender roles in this novel that should be addressed. One of these is the relationship between Walter Russ, the school principal, and his secretary, Goldie Fisch. Walter Russ always wants



Goldie Fisch to write all of his correspondences for him. This could be because he is the principal and male figure and Goldie is the female figure and secretary. This is a common stereotype between male and female work roles. This issue could be addressed with the students by talking about Florence Waters. Flo Waters will only accept correspondences from Walter Russ if he has written them himself. She does not believe Goldie should be doing everything for him. The fact that Florence Waters has her own business as a woman, and Sally Mander (putting aside the fact that she is the antagonist) has her own business, would also be issues to discuss. Recognizing characters' jobs could help to diminish any of the stereotypes between males and females in the workforce.

Other than this, there seem to be no other stereotypes between genders. There are both boy and girl students who all work together to solve the mystery.

The central question or ending issue

What does it mean to truly be generous?

Generosity is a main theme of the novel. The students and the town all go through a transformation in figuring out what it means to be a generous person. Florence Waters directs them in learning what generosity is, and how it benefits not only the individual, but everyone else around them. Klise successfully reveals what she believes it means to be generous through all of the symbols and characters that grow into being generous, thoughtful, kind people.

What does it mean to accept everyone?

There are a lot of different types of people in this novel. In order to solve a problem, they all have to work together. It is only with all of their help and all of their contributions that they are successful in revealing the mystery. Klise effectively communicates this idea through the correspondences and relationships that develop throughout the novel.

What does it mean to be part of the community?

In this small community, a group of students works together through research, interviews and many other things to solve the problem of the dried up creek that has plagued the city for 30 years. They have been successful in making the community better for everyone else around them. They did not leave the problem for someone else to figure out. They took the problem and worked hard at it, collaborating with the school and community officials in order to do what they knew was right (revealing the reasons for the dried up creek). Being part of the community is more than just being complacent. It is getting involved in the issues and working out a way resolve problems in the community.

Research Issues/ Project Ideas

Research:

There is always so much going on in the school and community that students are not aware of. Students could research the issues of their school and community and find something that they would like to change, or something they think they could organize better. They would research the topic and create a plan on how execute their idea. This would involve working with the district and administration and school council to further their ideas, and perhaps even be implemented within the school or community!

Projects:

Classroom Fountain: One of the themes of the novel is community and acceptance. The community comes together to create a fountain that has part of each of the contributors in it. For a project, create a class fountain. Have the students each contribute a piece they want included. Have the choice be something that relates to them individually and have them justify their inclusion. Have them all draw their portion and then actually display the class fountain on the wall. This would help promote unity and a sense of community in your own classroom.

Individual addition: Because the novel is only in correspondences, a lot of personality comes out in the fonts and the pictures used and drawn by the individual people. Have the students use a format of writing they think describes them. Have them write to Flo stating what they would want included in the fountain. Have them pay attention to font, colors and style.

Informational/Functional texts

Local Newspaper: Students may want to know what is going on in their own community to better understand the position of the main characters of the novel. Read the local newspaper with the students. Talk about current issues going on in the community. Talk about things they could do to help.

Biographies: Students may want to look at a biography of the writer and find out why she wrote this novel and more about her life. More information can be found out about her at:

<http://kateandsarahklise.com/visitskate.asp>