

Chelsea Crescencia
Grade 10
Scripps Ranch High School
Scripps Ranch Library

Look to your right.

Do you see that person beside you? Well, of course you can see them, but can you really *see* them? Look at them for a good two minutes. Take a note of the way their mouth is curved. Is it curved upward in a smile, bent downward in a frown, or crooked in a line for natural expression? How about their eyes? Are they bright, dim, small, huge. . .? Go on, keep looking at them. Notice the way their shoulders slightly rise and fall when they breathe or watch the way their pupils scan on whatever is in front of them. Okay, now turn away because you might be freaking them out.

Think about that person for just a minute, but do not look back at them because they might be eyeing you funny. Do you know that person? Does that person frequent your location often? As you gather all this information and answer all these questions in your head, you hear your own voice, don't you? Yes, that little voice you have within you, the one who is reading this to you right now. Thousands of thoughts are passing you right now, aren't they? Now very subtly, glance at the person on your right once more. Now notice that they have thousands of thoughts passing them as well. Just as your little voice is reading this back to you, their little voice is asking, "Why the heck was that person looking at me?" This right here, this realization of everyone living their own life with their own little voices, it is called *sonder*.

Every person in the world has countless thoughts running through their minds every second of every day. Just as you are reading this and thinking, “Oh, this is boring,” the person on your right is thinking, “Oh, this person is so weird,” as an observer from afar is thinking, “They must like each other because they keep staring at each other.” Every person has experienced happiness, anger, excitement, and pain; however, it seems more people are experiencing sadness more than happiness.

Everyone has been depressed or upset at some point in their life. With today’s society, a lot more people are more depressed because they are faced with criticizing media every day. Being told how to “look,” being told how “smart” they have to be, and being told how they should dress are just a few examples of what gets people down. This constant exposure to negativity lowers people’s self worth and causes them to become depressed or unmotivated,, When people get depressed, they learn to hide it for fear of judgment or rejection. By doing this, the depression worsens and can result in self harm or suicide. The worst part is most people do not even realize this.

A book that helped me realize this is *I Am the Messenger* by Marcus Zusak. In this book Zusak portrays the ugly truth of how life can be hard and depressing by introducing ordinary characters whose lives are more complex than what they seem to be on the outside. Though the characters are written as simple people who will never amount to anything, the protagonist in the story, Ed Kennedy, performs small and simple tasks that ultimately turn their lives around. By reading this book a few years ago and seeing how small things can make a person’s life brighter, I became inspired to help save not the Earth, but the people on it.

As the years progressed, I found myself striving to make people smile. I never wanted to see my friends in constant depression so I tried to cheer them up when they were sad, or I'd lend an ear to their worries and fears. If I saw someone in discomfort or pain, I would try to help them out as best as I could. Believing that no one should ever feel less than amazing became common sense to me. Not so fast! Subtly okay. *subtly*. Just so they do not think you are being creepy again. Look at the person and actually see them. If they are frowning, offer them a smile. If you know they are hurting, help them to the best of your ability. Whose life will you brighten today?

Vilan Nguyen
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Mira Mesa Library

The Gangster We Are All Looking For by le thi diem thuy

The Gangster We Are All Looking For by le thi diem thuy is about a young girl and her family who struggle to adapt to the new American culture. They go through obstacles of their past to overcome the struggle of adapting to the new culture. Moving to America gave the narrator and her family more freedom and safety from the war happening in their homeland. Much like the narrator, my parents immigrated to America. During the Vietnam War it was very difficult to live in Vietnam so my parents moved to America. They, too, had difficulties with the change in culture and dealing with the past to truly achieve freedom. The issues of adaptation to a new culture and acceptance are shared by both the novel, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* and the time when my parents moved to America.

In both cases the narrator and my parents did not like the people in America when they first arrived. They both had difficulties understanding the behavior of people. The young girl in the novel did not make friends when she first went to school in America. She was always alone because she was the only Vietnamese girl in class. Similarly my parents did not understand the people in their school as well. Both of my parents arrived in America as teenagers and were forced to attend high school. My parents did not like the lack of respect that was given to the teacher by the students they were in class with. In Vietnam young people were expected to pay elders respect so the other students' behavior made

them feel as if they were in a barbaric place. In the novel and for my parents the early time in America made them feel lonely as if they did not belong in this new place.

At young ages my parents and the narrator did not just dislike the behavior of the people, they also disliked the items in their new home such as the clothing and food in America. The young girl in the novel was at first forced to wear American dresses by the house owner, Mrs. Russell. The narrator did not like these dresses because they looked unattractive and were very itchy. The narrator eventually adapted to the dresses, knowing that she would fit in better to the American culture and society. My parents also did not like some things in America. My mother and father did not like the food because they felt it was tasteless. Compared to Vietnamese food, American food had a very strange taste. They believed it did not have enough flavor and was sometimes too bland compared to Vietnamese food. My parents did not like it at first, but soon adjusted to the food to survive through school days and avoid starvation. The narrator and my parents did not like the items in America, but they had to adjust so they would be able to get comfortable in their new environment.

One similarity between the novel and the early time in America for my parents was the religious differences between the characters, Ba and Ma, the parents of the young girl who had a forbidden love. Ma was a Catholic schoolgirl who was very restricted from the outside world while Ba, a Buddhist gangster, was able to run around the city freely. It is believed in Vietnam that a Buddhist and a Catholic do not belong together for this type of difference can cause much argument between the two. Being rebellious young people they got married and had a child. However, as time goes by, the couple had increasingly heated

arguments by the day. The religious differences brought up arguments of their past family problems from their marriage resulting into much difference between the two and the narrator's issue of being in the middle of the arguments.

Likewise my parents also had a forbidden love. Knowing about the forbidden love and the problems that are possible to come about, my father decided to convert to Catholicism to stay with my mother and avoid any future dispute. My father wanted to keep peace between him and my mother's family by converting to Catholicism. It was a very difficult process for my father to become a Catholic, but he did. My father is still learning to adjust, and my father and mother's arguments are not as aggressive as those of the narrator's parents. Sometimes adaptation takes drastic changes such as involving one's faith.

The characters in *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* and my parents had perseverance and finally found happiness, success, and freedom in America, but it took a lot of adjustment. Through loneliness in class and American dresses, the narrator was soon able to adjust to the culture change and accept the different traditions. My parents also adjusted to the differences of nationalities and were able to survive and grow into happy lives with their families trying to keep the Vietnamese culture alive. Le thi diem thuy reveals to readers that to be happy, one must adapt and accept changes just as my parents did.

Bailey Pinto
Grade 10
Patrick Henry High School
San Carlos Library

Written word in a hard bound shell awaiting your curious young mind to go grasp it in your fingertips. A piece of knowledge, a sign of hope and forgiveness. A sense of friendship and suspense, some even say a piece of art. All of this, gone forever. But in that fraction of a second you were able to save one, one and only one. What would you grab? What would you want it to be about? I know what I would do. I would frantically take hold of *Soul Surfer*. I would grab this book because it demonstrates never giving up, hard work and determination, friendship, and most of all how friends and family can impact your life in so many ways.

Soul Surfer is about an outgoing teenage girl who has loved to surf her whole life. She loved feeling the warm ocean on her skin every time she paddled out. Surfing usually cheered her up and made her happy which was one of the reasons why she would get up at the crack of dawn every morning to do what she loved. She and her best friends called each other mermaids because they were in the water almost all day and night. On October 31, 2003 on the island of Kauai she went out surfing with her friends not knowing that this particular day her life would be changed forever. She suddenly felt a tug on her arm and realized that she was just attacked by a shark. They rushed her to the hospital where she had her arm amputated by a local doctor and family friend. What she did not know was that was the day that everything would change. She had to relearn how to do all the daily things in life and what she loved most, surfing.

I would save the book *Soul Surfer* because it inspires you to never give up on what you love. The main character, Bethany Hamilton, never gave up when the shark attacked her. That's why she lived. She never gave up when she was rushed to the hospital. If she had given up, she could have died right then and there. Another time when she never gave up was when she was learning how to surf after the shark attack. Bethany had to regain her balance on the board so that she could enter in surf competitions like she did before the accident. But to enter in surf competitions she had to train really hard, in fact, two times as hard as any other surfer because she had one less arm.

Soul Surfer is an outstanding book because. It teaches you that you can do anything with hard work and determination. When this young teen was relearning how to shred the waves, she had to do hard exercises with her dad who was also a surfer. She had to learn how to do pushups with one arm, pull ups with one arm, and had to relearn how to balance, all with one arm. These challenging tasks helped her become a better surfer. After that she was able to surf even better than before. Bethany's family and friends were very supportive throughout the whole process of recovery and all the other times in her life.

The book, *Soul Surfer*, demonstrated friendship. When Bethany was recovering, her best friend Alana came to see her. Although she was in too much shock to go to the hospital right after this happened, she eventually made it there. She wanted to go and try to brighten the spirits of her surfing buddy. Alana's going to the hospital to see her motivated Bethany to go out and surf when she was fully recovered. With her lifelong best friend by her side the whole time, she knew she would be back out in the water in no time. Without her best

friend by her side the whole time, she may not have been back in the water so quickly.

Without the support of Bethany's family and friends, she would not be where she is today. 'Today she is a professional surfer which was her lifelong dream. Her friends and family were very supportive when she was relearning to surf. When she finally caught her first wave with one arm, they were all there to support her. They were so proud of her and how hard she was trying.

Overall *Soul Surfer* demonstrates the power of family and friendship. This encouraging book also shows that with a little hard work and determination you can do anything you set your mind to. These critical life lessons are what set this book apart from all the rest. If all the books in the world were about to disappear, I would save *Soul Surfer* because it holds the knowledge of important life lessons.

Leana Yearwood
Grade 10
University City High School
University Community Library

If all the books in the world were about to disappear, but I could save one, it would be *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling. I would salvage this novel because it contains universal themes and truths that are applicable to every age. This book, through a world of fantasy, teaches children and adults alike about the importance of ignoring social and economic differences, the fact that where you've grown up does not define what you will become, and how man constantly mistreats others based upon those factors and how said mistreatment has damaging effects.

In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* J.K. Rowling makes the reader understand how it is important to ignore differences in social and economic status. She does this by creating an archetypal hero figure, Harry Potter, who has friends of varied backgrounds. Although he has fame and vast inherited wealth, Harry doesn't choose to align himself with the richest or most famous of his peers. Rowling demonstrates this through Harry's interaction with the pretentious character Draco Malfoy. "He (Malfoy) turned back to Harry. 'You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there.' He held out his hand to shake Harry's but Harry didn't take it. 'I think I can tell the wrong sort for myself, thanks,' he said coolly. (Rowling 108-109). By Harry reacting this way, it shows he doesn't care for what Malfoy believes are "right" wizarding families. Instead, throughout the story, Harry becomes friends with impoverished Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, who is born of muggle, or non-magical parents.

Both qualities are generally looked down upon in the wizarding world. However, with these friends Harry survived many difficult obstacles, and Rowling makes a point of having the reader understand that he would not have if he had more privileged friends. Harry ignored any difference. Whether economic or social, and because of that, he chose friends that enabled him to live.

In this novel it is made clear that the accomplishments of Harry and other main characters are not defined by their heritage or where they grew up. This is evident in the main characters Harry, Hermione, and Ron. The three of them succeeded in defeating the antagonist, Voldemort, even though they were not raised in the most comfortable of environments. Hermione Granger hadn't heard of magic prior to being accepted at Hogwarts, the most prestigious wizarding school in the world. However, she ended up being one of the most clever and talented witches. Ron Weasley came from a poor family and throughout his life had been overshadowed by older siblings. Ron ends up rising above this in his own way through defeating unique obstacles such as a giant chess set and therefore becoming recognized as his own person, not just as the sibling of another. Harry Potter grew up not knowing he was remotely special or even at all important. Harry lived with his magic hating aunt and uncle for the majority of his life; yet this does not define him. Harry still learns magic and overcomes the evils he is confronted with throughout the novel. Through these unique character developments, author J.K. Rowling expresses to the reader the theme that "where you've grown up does not define you." This is a theme and lesson that is important to know in today's society. Because this theme is taught in such a clever way in this novel, it makes this novel one worth saving.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone deserves salvation because it deals with the constant fact in today's society of how man mistreats man. Not only does the novel show this through the example of bullying, it also shows how said mistreatments are based primarily on aforementioned social and economic factors as well as where someone has come from. The damaging effects of these mistreatments are also expressed in the book. One example appears in the beginning of the novel by having a primary character be made fun of. This mistreatment is almost immediately shown to be wrong and hurtful. This whole situation occurs when Hermione is made fun of by Ron. "It's no wonder no one can stand her,' he said to Harry as they pushed their way into the crowded corridor, 'she's a nightmare, honestly.' Someone knocked into Harry as they hurried past him. It was Hermione. Harry caught a glimpse—and was startled to see she was in tears." (Rowling 172). Ron's mistreatment upset Hermione so much it caused her to go hide in the bathroom for the rest of the day. By hiding there she was almost killed by a mountain troll later in the story. Harry and Ron quickly understood the consequences of hurtful words, and Rowling makes sure it is understood that Ron's basis for making fun of Hermion was that she was merely different. This whole example and lesson on man's mistreatment of others is depicted clearly and to a wide audience, making this novel one that is incredibly influential and worthy of being saved.

J.K. Rowling teaches a wide audience life lessons that need to be taught to children and re-learned by adults. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* makes sure readers understand that mistreating others is incredibly harmful and that differences in heritage and social and economic status are not to be the sole basis

of friendship. This novel, spun with an incredible story of fantasy, is the one I would save because of how necessary it is for our world today.