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Book Talk on *Spliced* by Jon McGoran

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<https://www.jonmcgoran.com/meet-jon>

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The author of *Spliced* is Jon McGoran. The book is the first of a trilogy’ its sequel is *Splintered* which is succeeded by *Spiked*. Jon McGoran was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and he writes mystery and thrillers, young adult, and science fiction. He hosts a podcast called *The Liars Club Oddcast*, as well as being a freelance writer, developmental editor, and writing coach.

**Summary:**

*Spliced* delves deep into a near-future world as it follows sixteen-year-old Jimi Corcoran, the story’s female protagonist, as she goes on a rescue mission to save her friend Del Grainger from getting spliced. The near-future displays an organization called Humans for Humanity that pursues a goal that is easily recognized with our contemporary time: to strip chimeras from their rights as humans. Chimeras are youths or people who decided to physically modify themselves and splice their human DNA with animal genes, the procedure of which is feasible--and basically legal--to attain if one supplied enough money to a doctor willing to perform this. However, many of those who do get spliced go through procedures done under illegal and unsafe practices and circumstances. Much to Jimi’s horror, her mission shifts from saving Del from getting spliced to finding and saving Del from unspeakable horrors. On this mission, her perspective on chimeras change as she begins to respect and understand the struggle they go through.

**Quotes:**

1. “They were wrong, and I shouldn’t be afraid to say it. I still had doubts about the whole chimera thing, and I was devastated that my best friend had become one, but H4H wasn’t about protecting people from bad choices or saving them from dangerous splices. It was about legalizing discrimination, and capitalizing on hatred and fear, to attract new H4H members and to further Wells’s political ambitions. Looking around at them, I realized that, deep down, they probably didn’t even care about chimeras. They probably didn’t know any. They might dress up their motivations in Howard Wells’s fancy words, but really, they just needed someone to hate. Someone different. That’s what this was about” (162-163).
	1. This quote highlights the blatant discrimination against chimeras that can be likened to many contemporary topics, such as immigration, racism, and many more. Those who support Humans for Humanity (H4H) are depicted as those who are afraid of change, who are scared of differences. The organization itself is just a way for a rich man, Howard Wells, to remain in power and have control over others. The organization and supporters are riled up in blind belief that they are being compassionate in the name of the longevity of humanity when, in reality, they lack compassion and are too full of fear and disgust for something they do not completely understand. It reveals a meta horror that these people are puppets under the organization that they support and that they cannot see the flaws written all over it that, when applied contemporarily, strikes a resemblance to recent marches, such as Black Lives Matter. Additionally, this is reminiscent of when there were many who were fighting against undocumented immigrants. Further, it relates to the blatant discrimination and prejudice against minority groups. Before this point, Jimi remained in the same boat as people who think chimeras are trouble. She inserts her own opinion on the topic without really taking time to comprehend why Del or anyone would want to get spliced. This demonstrates her lack of empathy and compassion and her own submission to the norm. However, in this quote, she has come to realize that being a chimera and making that decision is difficult in and of itself. She presents an effort in trying to understand the other side of the story, even if she is not completely persuaded.
2. “[...] there were only a dozen other people in the car. The closest one was an old woman in a green hat with fake leaves on it. She got up and sat several rows farther away. The next closest passenger was a man in a suit. He got up and moved as well. Rex caught my eye and raised an eyebrow. *See?* I nodded and looked away from him, my face turning red. These people thought chimeras were weird or strange or gross. Not that long ago, I’d felt kind of the same way -- not in an H4H-crazy-hatred, they’re-not-people way. But they made me uncomfortable. Maybe they still did in a way, but they definitely weren’t *revolting*, for God’s sake. And they definitely *were* people. They were good people. They were my friends” (190).
	1. This quote reveals Jimi’s gradual change in perspective. This is important to note because she started out not being too keen on talking about or being near chimeras; they spelled trouble and she did not need to be bothered with it. This change in perspective is a commentary on the idea of changing one’s mind after being presented with more than one side of a story. Too often are people too set on their ways that they forget to try to understand the other people on the other side of the line. It also highlights the idea that there are two sides to a story which perpetuates a simple black and white division. This dismisses any gray area that may exist which is also valuable to learn and understand. In addition, it shows how Jimi changes as a person during this time as a result of widening her perspective. In the beginning, she is a lot more prejudiced towards chimeras, like the old woman, and guarded when handling her problems, but as she nears the end, she matures emotionally in terms of handling her problems, i.e she becomes more empathetic. She goes from being a part of indifferent normative mold to a human with compassion and a capacity to understand problems that are in front of her.
3. “‘I’m not a chimera,’ I said, ‘But a lot of my friends are. They’re good people, some of the best I’ve ever known. Smart, kind, generous. There are those who think chimeras shouldn’t have rights as people, that they’re less than humans. Across the country, there are efforts to strip chimeras of their rights. And in our own state, I’m ashamed to say, they’ve succeeded.’ Some of the people from Pitman cheered, while Jerry and the E4E crowd booed. ‘But look what has happened. Look what they’ve accomplished. In less than a week since the passage of the Genetic Heritage Act, those same people have tried to use this law to justify mass murder. They tried to kill my friends in cold blood, for their own sick amusement. Well, I say no.” [...] ‘This is *wrong*,’ I thundered. ‘We have to make sure no more of these laws are passed anywhere else in this country and that this law doesn’t stand in our state. Howard Wells asks why chimeras have turned their backs on humanity. Well, they haven’t, and he knows that. But the more he and his organization poison our society with hatred and bigotry, the more some might be justified in saying, ‘If that’s what a human is, then why would I want to be human, anyway?’ [...] ‘But humanity isn’t about DNA,’ I said. ‘It’s about kindness and decency and treating others with compassion. And the chimeras I know are some of the best humans I’ve ever met. It’s time to stop bickering about how is a person, who qualifies as human,’ I said, ‘and remember what it means to be human at all.’” (351-352).
	1. This is where Jimi stands her ground, even if it was a ruse for her chimera friend to escape from the police. In this, Jimi paints a picture of the reality her world is living in. She demonstrates that the actions taken by Humans for Humanity was not truly for humanity and that the definition of this term has long been forgotten. Through this, she poses questions that are able to be debated today: what is humanity and who defines it. She defends her chimera friends and defines them to be human despite the physical characteristics because they retained basic human empathy and she depicts the action from H4H to be animalistic and barbaric due to the lack of empathy towards others who differ from them. Additionally, this touches on the topic of chimera genocide and how a simple law made it possible to “justify” this action.

**Teaching:**

The book itself is easy to read and understand due to very clear uses of language and sentence structures. I would teach this at a high school level for every grade, particularly because of the sensitive topics that are touched upon in the novel. There is a level of emotional and mental intelligence that is not totally developed at the middle school level; there is a level of empathy, compassion, and maturity that needs to be present in order to fully comprehend the material being presented. There are mentions of a flu epidemic, deaths within families and friends, abuse, mental instabilities, genocide, discrimination, prejudice, the perceptible future, and so on. Because of this wide spectrum, it would be better to teach this book to high school students as these themes are quite heavy to unpack. Students should read this book because Jimi herself offers a way for them to approach a difficult conversation or thought process regarding immigration, racism, genocide, mental instabilities, and such throughout the book. She is a relatable character that readers will find themselves sympathizing with, and, if not her, then those she interacts with. I would introduce this book as an end-of-the-year reading that sums up topics that may have been touched upon previously that pertain to *Spliced*. I would have them take on different perspectives and write in that specific voice to teach them how to see different sides of the die. Additionally, I would have them fashion their own spliced persona as a fun project for them to do.