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Book Talk: *The Memory of Light*

1. Author Information/ biography
   1. The author of *The Memory of Light* is Francisco X Stork. Stork was born in Mexico who immigrated to the USA with his mother and stepfather in Texas. He was a brilliant student and studied Latino/Chicano literature before he pursued his studies to become a Lawyer at Harvard. Stork wrote *The Memory of Light* was written to reflect his own battle with depression. Stork lived most of his young life surrounded by Latino culture and the struggle his family lived through living in the US and has since written Latinx/Chicanx novels for young adults.
   2. Check out the Francisco Storks website for more info.
2. Summary of the Book
   1. Vicky wakes up in the psych ward at the hospital on the morning after her suicide attempt. She meets the kind and understanding Dr. Desai who helps her understand why. Vicky stays at the hospital until her suicidal thoughts are just words with no power. While Vicky is there she meets suicidal manic Mona, violent E.M and the saintly Gabriel. She starts to learn she is depressed, she learns from her newfound friends how to be brave to what is scary, and gains newfound wisdom from people being different. Her recovery means leaving the ward and facing the world that made her want to die. In this book of self-discovery, Vicky learns that no one is impenetrable from pain, no one is an exception. She learns to care for herself as she cares for the beautiful roses around the hospital for their thorns won’t stop her from reaching the beauty of the rose.
3. 3 quotes that Represent the book
   1. Quote“‘...They find strength, even just a little, to keep them going. I had...have, everything...’I picture my room at home, and I can’t speak for a moment,... ‘a family’, I manage to continue. ‘People who care for me. at home. much more than most... If I go home tomorrow I will need to pretend. I don't see any way around it. Maybe I can stay here and give the pretending a smell rest. ”(23-24)
      1. Explanation: This quote is important because Vicky is being honest with herself. She is trying to improve herself and her family. She recognizes her privilege and rather than ignore it she emphasizes her needing to be more courageous, on her needing to find strength for herself to get better. This scene really shows the beginning of Vicky’s journey to improve and acknowledge what is best for her and fight for what she needs, not just what everyone else tells her she needs, and putting down her walls to relax.
   2. Quote “depression. it's not like it's the first time I've ever heard the word. it's only that right then and there it becomes more than a word. suddenly, it is something I can feel in touch and taste. I can even picture. the heavy, text fog, yellow and pale purple, the color of a bruise, that fills up a room with no windows, No Air, no light, ‘ I'm depressed?’ I say. ” (42)
      1. Explanation: This quote is important because before this instant Vicky had not associated with depression and felt alone. She did not see her depression as an illness, she saw it as weakness in comparison to her sister and father who never seemed to get sad or stopped by anything unlike herself. This is important because she realizes that there is an explanation for her behavior and that she was not defective just because she wasn’t like her sister and father.
   3. Quote “My father is silent as our car zooms ahead and merges with the oncoming traffic. Once he's safely in the Middle Lane, he speaks again. ‘ maybe you're right’ he says. there's a resigned Acceptance in his voice. ‘ maybe there is something wrong with you. That's what Barbara says, but there has to be something wrong with you for you to take those pills. So we're willing to give you some leeway. Do you want to quit debate? Fine. Do you want to take a reduced load this semester? Ok. You're not going to get into an Ivy League. all right. we can live with that. we thought you had the brains to get good grades and it was a case of you not trying. but maybe you don't have the brains we thought you did, or maybe you do have a mental illness as you say, and this mental illness is keeping you from doing well. Okay, I will give you some space and time to work things out.’ he says. All throughout his speech, his boy has a tongue as a friendly authority. it's the voice of someone who knows he doesn't have to be out to be feared. ‘ You are not going to hang out with kids with mental problems who mow Lawns for a living. that's not going to happen.’ He glances over his shoulder and moves to the right lane. The exit to the office is a quarter-mile ahead. He said, ‘ and if you are going to take medications they are going to be prescribed by a good., So no. I will not take you to Lakeview.’ I don't care what he says about what my brains are like, or whether he thinks I'm a mule or even a jackass. None of this surprises me. What bothers me, what hurts me, is his attitude toward Gabriel and Doctor Desai.  *stand up to him. Don't be afraid of his anger,*...’”(284-285)
      1. Explanation: This scene is incredibly significant. Vicky grew up in a household where she was clearly being told she was defective and incompetent, this scene shows that part of her house. Vicky was scared of her father’s anger, that's the reason she had never fought with him before. This scene not only shows how she has progressed throughout her time at the ward in Lakeview she has gained courage, she has gained what she felt she hadn’t had before, a voice. This quote is a testimony of her development as a character, to not just think of herself, but also about others through her offense of her father’s description of Dr. Desai and Gabriel.
4. How might this book be used in a classroom setting (Ch 4-8 of Warner book)
   1. How might you use this book in a classroom?
      1. I might use this book for National Suicide Awareness Week (Sept 6-Sept 12) or Mental Illness Awareness Week (Oct4-Oct10). Young adults or I’d use this book for a Unit of Study as a supporting book for Identity, Struggles with Decisions.
   2. Include some ideas for presenting the book. For what age level is the book most appropriate?
      1. This book’s age level would be children 15 and older. The topic of this book is serious and heavy, but the way it’s presented as a is light, it doesn’t emphasize on the blood, it doesn’t make them look like terrifying monsters that are there, it makes the characters look human, and everything that happens in the book seems like normal healing for a person.
   3. Why should teens read this book?
      1. Teens should read this book because they might want to know they are not alone.
      2. They might want to understand other people and their struggles.
      3. They might need to know that no one is/should be alone and friends can come from everywhere.
      4. They might need to know that nothing will improve unless you make it improve.
      5. They might need to know that they can be brave and courageous through small acts and words.
   4. Which category of books (from Chapters 4-8 in Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story) might this book fit?
      1. The category this book fits is “Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions” from the book *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*’s Chapter 6.
5. Analysis of the text (completely)
   1. Quantitative Complexity: According to Lexile and Quantile Tools, the LEXILE RANGE complexity is 660L or above, revealing that the sentences are shorter, making the score lower. *The Memory of Light* is easy to follow because of its simplicity and because it is overall an easy read for younger readers. It fits grade levels 7-12. The Dale-Chall text complexity test of the book level for *The Memory of Light*(used a page of writing) is 92.8 for the Flesch Reading Ease test meaning that it is very easy to read. The words that are used are common and the sentences are short making it an easy read for students.
   2. Qualitative Complexity: The language of the novel consist of suicide, mental illness, family, friendship, courage, and bravery to face obstacles, acceptance, and understanding of oneself, this writing can appeal to young readers because they could feel less of an outcast. The language adds to the level of simplicity of emotions that Stork demonstrates. Emotions are complex, yet in the novel Stork is able to coherently explain what is people are thinking and feeling. There are 4 main characters in the novel all seen through the point of view of Vicky(the main character). The book can be compared to *It’s a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini because of the setting of depression due to school and the representation of a psych ward as a safe haven. This book is different from typical suicide books because it has not only to do with the suicide but Vicky’s recuperation process after. *The Memory of Light* is uniquely beautifully written to show a new type of depressed person and show how asking for help and having the courage of oneself can take people farther than anticipated. It allows for intellectual growth and engages with mental illness that sadly teens are facing more and more every year.
   3. Considering the “reader-task” considerations, *The Memory of Light* can be relatable to students and open the door for them to share their personal experiences. Suicide is a sensitive topic that has been overdone in the last decade, yet it is crucial for young adults to have space where they’re heard and can talk freely about what they are feeling and receive help when they need it. If students have not dealt with suicide or loss than this type of book will be able to give them exposure and a better understanding of why people would have depression and how talking about it can go a long way.