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Dr. Warner

English 112B

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*The Telling* by Alexandra Sirowy

Author Biography:

Alexandra Sirowy writes novels for young adults thrillers that tell the stories of “girls who rescue themselves, true love and friendship, secrets and lies, and monsters and heroes that look like you and me” (alexandrasirowy.com). Alexandra Sirowy is the author of *The Creeping* and *First We Were IV* and is represented by Brianne Johnson of Writers House.

Summary:

Lana McBrook is a highschool student who is grieving over the mysterious death of her stepbrother, Ben. Lana in grief begins to take up new adventures and attempts to live up to the bold Lana The Brave, the fictional character that Ben created for her in the twisted fairy tales they used to share. As Lana navigates moving on from her brother's death, a series of murders become the focal point in her life as the fairy tales her brother used to share bleed into reality and disrupt her wealthy and overly idyllic town. When the evidence points to Lana her and the core attempt to clear her name and search for the murderer. Lanas world drastically changes as she navigates a world after Ben, new friends, mysterious family secrets, and a potential love interest.

Quotes:

“Everything is the wrong color...dreaming of being a python” (2). Following her brother's death Lana is navigating what it means to live in a world without him. She feels out of place and does not fit into the Lana she was before his death. She struggles to express how she feels inside versus what the people around her see. Her emotional state's inner pull is compared to the inner pull between Lana and Lana the Brave. Lana strives to be brave and strong like the character created for her by Ben but calls herself “an earthworm dreaming of being a python”. This quote marks the beginning of Lana's shift into bravery and individuality aside from Ben. As we grow older, it becomes more difficult to be brave and strong when childhood bliss turns into harsh reality. While our lives may not be as traumatic and horrifying as Lana’s, it is still an emotional process of coming to reality one must face.

“Right after Ben’s death...contained it” (176). The story is told through Lana’s perspective and the lens of a broken hearted girl. This quote shows Lana’s inner pain and how she wishes to express that pain physically despite her ability to do so. This inability to feel physical pain is due to Ben’s body never being found. Ben’s death feels unfinished and unresolved to Lana and because of this she finds difficulty moving on. She cannot seem to get the possibility of Ben being alive and haunting the town of Gant. Self harm is a serious issue that plagues young adults as the transition between the bliss of childhood to the adult reality is harsh. This representation of her self-harm thoughts helps make Lana relatable and make her seem realistic and sympathetic.

“Mom wasn’t completely...that’s on me” (384). After discovering that Ben is the murderer and killed her friends to “save'' Lana, she decides to save herself. Lana realizes that she does not need to meet anyone's standards of who she should be, she just needs to be happy with who she is. Lana’s discovery of who Ben is broke her heart because she had idolized him and looked up to him. Upon discovering that he was capable of murder she realizes that the Brave Lana she was searching for in Ben never existsed and he became to villain of his fairy tales. The realization of who she is essential for Lana as she navigates through losing Ben all over again.

How to Teach:

This novel is appropriate for high school aged readers because there are some discussions of sexuality, suicide, drugs and alcohol use, and criminal behavior. A certain level of maturity is a requirement to comprehend the contextual basis of these topics. Lana is copping through her adolescent years and dealing with the trauma of her brother and friends murder. She is attempting to figure out how to be brave amidst the reality of adult life. This aspect is something that high school aged readers can relate to as they navigate troubling situations in school and homelife. Teens should read this book because it is a captivating thriller which keeps the reader on their toes while addressing social and emotional issues that continue to be relevant today. Many people will identify with Lana’s emotions and struggles in finding her bravery and who she is. The chapters are very alluring and capture the reader's attention while still being attentive to details. The book flows very beautifully and tells Lana's chilling story, The Core, and the murders flowing through Gant.

This book fits into three categories: real-life experiences, death and loss, courage and survival. It fits into real-life experiences because, while Lana tries to uncover the truth of Ben’s death and the murders plaguing the town, she is mourning his death. It fits into the category of death and loss because Lana, after losing her brother also traumatically loses her friend Becca and experiences Ben's death by her hand, in self defence. Lastly, it is a story of courage and survival because Lana is willing to sacrifice everything including her safety to figure out the murders and clear her name.

Text Complexity:

* Qualitative: Lexile.com gives the novel a rating of 780L. The novel contains some complex vocabulary however, a highschool aged reader would not struggle to understand such complex vocabulary. The sentence structure and length vary, however, tend to stray to the longer and harder side.
* Reader-task: The novel is a mystery/psychological thriller novel which may not attract readers that prefer more realistic fiction. The novel does not require any outside knowledge or research to appreciate the craft of The Telling. All of the main characters are teens and young adults navigating high school summer drama while simultaneously solving murders. Lana’s quest for bravery and finding who she is a universal message that all young adults can relate to.
* Implicit Complexity: This story deals with some tough themes of: finding oneself, death and loss, and suicide. Lana learns many lessons of the world outside her privileged bubble and faces the truth of her family's mysterious secrets. Lana connects with a group of peers, ‘The Core’ who accept her and change the way she sees herself. This novel showcases a wide range of complex humanity and severe emotional situations that Lana, along with readers, must learn how to navigate.