

***Bang* by Barry Lyga: A Story on the Complexity of Humanity**

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A question people like to ask one another is: “If you could go back in time and do something different, would you?” There are no perfect humans. We are prone to make mistakes and the desire to change things for the better lies within us. Barry Lyga’s *Bang* (2017) explores this desire of erasing misfortunes through the eyes of 14-year-old Sebastian in Brookdale, Maryland. Sebastian contemplates suicide because of an accident that occurred when he was four years old that negatively affected his life: He shot and killed his four-month-old sister and everyone knows about it.

This character feels trapped in his past and unable to handle his grief of his actions and deal with his estranged family. His journey is packed with lessons on the harsh judgments from society, the absurdity of political identity eclipsing the identity of humanity, the understanding of defining “accident,” and facing issues of suicide and discrimination. Despite the whirlwind of issues encircling him, Sebastian learns to handle his grief and understand the complexity of humankind.

This is an outstanding novel for young adults and speaks to their world (e.g., references to the platform YouTube and well-known YouTuber PewDiePie). Teens should read this book because of the deep issues they might be familiar with: suicide, discrimination, living with unfortunate events, alienated households, and falling in love with someone who does not reciprocate those feelings.

The language speaks to the audience in clear simple terms with beautiful descriptions: “And the next thing I know, the sun is low along the horizon, its light stretched deep pink like pulled tufts of cotton candy” (Lyga, 2017, p. 88). Also the text is written with insightful somber sentences: “The world is filled with invisible, theoretical assassins, armed projections of our deepest ids, bearing guns loaded with wish-bullets” (Lyga, 2017, p. 51). Young adults would love the novel’s use of space and short chapters. Some chapters are a single sentence, some a mere paragraph, while the majority are standard length. The use of space could encourage the reader and eliminate intimidation or worry of long reading sessions.

The fact that this could be a great fit for teens means that this could work well in the classroom setting. *Bang* offers opportunities to discuss hot topics in today’s world. The novel grants an entrance to examine society’s issues with media and politics. Tragic incidents are mocked by one group because of their affliction with the other political party. Media’s portrayal of different ethnicities and clear-cut reporting affects the minds of others. A common subject is the separation of humans crowding into groups that are then pinned against one another. The classroom would be an excellent area to deconstruct our concepts of identity and find at the center is the mutual characteristics of being human. This talk of media and division in politics could spark controversy in the classroom and at home. My goal would be to erase those barriers and let each side see that they are united in the fact that they are human.

Bang offers wonderful insight into the mind of a troubled teen searching for a way to erase his guilt and soul-crushing grief. Through his trials he finds friendship, understanding, and solace in his bravery to move forward from his haunting past.

Reference

Lyga, B. (2017). *Bang*. New York, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Author Biography

Kaylee Walker is a senior at Wichita State University (WSU) double majoring in Secondary Language Arts Education and English Literature with minors in creative writing and sociology. She currently works in the 259 Unified School District as an AVID Tutor and at WSU as a Success Coach for the Office of First-Year Programs. She volunteers at the Museum of World Treasures as an Education Facilitator during the summers. Her free time consist of filling her days with stories: reading, writing, and videogames. Most importantly she finds time for her family including her three dogs. Her ultimate career goal is to find work involving her love for literature and education while serving the community.