

#037 - Ally - Good Grief

A Monster Calls ... about yo' grief

Bouncing this around with Kurt, we kind of thought since grief is such a personal issue, it would be best to discuss our general ideas/feelings about the book and movie and then follow up at the end with "what professionals say" with a recap on how those ideas might change your feelings about certain characters or story elements / or confirm thoughts and feelings you had about certain characters or aspects of the story.

What we will discuss:

What do you believe is the moral the story? What takeaway(s) are important?

What were your thoughts on each of the Monster's stories? What was the overall purpose of each?

What are your thoughts on how adults treat Conner in this story?

What are your thoughts on children interacting with children in this story?

How adults treat children in reference to grief:

- Mother in the beginning: DO NOT LIE TO YOUR CHILDREN. They know more than you give them credit for.
- Mother in the end: Finally some honesty! This is what he needed to hear from you.
- Grandmother: Stoic bitch doing her best to keep it real while also "shielding the child" (product of her generation?)
- Father: Why are you even heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeere?? You suuuuuuck...
- Teacher: You suck too! What the hell? Send a kid to the HOSPITAL and it's back to class?? Surely there is an alternative in the "how to be a teacher handbook"?

Children interacting with children in reference to grief; ie. the friend (only in the book)

- Connor and the girl friend: I feel like there is a lesson here about helping your children empathize with friends who might be dealing with tragedy. I feel like media like this paired with a receptive and engaging adult is an excellent way for children to explore complex feelings in a safe and healthy way.
- "Grief Camps" - kids helping other kids grieve seems like one of the best ideas I've ever heard.

LINKS:

Handling grief in classrooms-

- 7 out of 10 teachers have a student currently in their classroom who is grieving, according to research by the [New York Life Foundation](#) and the [American Federation of Teachers](#).
- Avoid comparisons. Saying "my father died, too" shifts attention to a competing loss and away from the grieving student.
- avoid trying to comfort a student with any sentence that begins with "at least." Educators shouldn't try to make light of the situation or find good in the sad
- Saying nothing says a lot

<http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/01/13/376720559/grieving-in-the-classroom>

- Parent: A child is not going to talk about what you have not encouraged them to talk about.
- Student: Teachers are kind of the abstract part of the classroom, and unless they bring attention to themselves (like saying at the beginning of the year, you can come to me for personal reasons too), it's not something students naturally feel comfortable with
- Saying nothing communicates:
 - You are insensitive and don't realize they are confused and struggling
 - You don't care about something so important in their lives
 - You are incapable of providing support
 - You feel that they are unable to adjust and cope even with your assistance
- CHILDREN LEARN EVERY EARLY ON THAT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DEATH MAKE PEOPLE UNCOMFORTABLE, which may lead to them feeling like they did something wrong and are reluctant to bring up the topic again
- Being available and creating opportunities with simple questions
 - Express concern
 - Be genuine
 - Invite the conversation (direct open ended questions)
 - Listen and observe
 - Limiting personal sharing (this is about them and their experience)
 - Offer practical advice
 - Offer reassurance
 - Maintain contact
 - Reluctance is normal too, and being helpful can be as simple as you acknowledging them and their grief and advising them that you're available
- Biggest takeaway; Remain present and available over time

<https://grievingstudents.org/>

Younger children & grief/

<http://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/grief/>

Hmmm...

<http://snnla.org/resources/coping-with-grief-traumatic-events/>

GRIEF CAMPS / Experience Camps

#037 - Ally - A Kid's Guide to Dying - BLAKENOTES

Good Grief

What we will discuss:

What do you believe is the moral the story? What takeaway(s) are important?

- Dunno if there is much of a moral where loss is involved. Green man certainly implies that he doesn't care about morals.
- The central conceit, that you have to be honest with yourself first esp. when shit is piling up, is laudable.
- Loss is hard enough on its own--don't go searching for ways to beat yourself up (literally or figuratively) in order to avoid letting go.
- Being able to properly contextualize your thoughts & emotions is vital to surviving loss. (i.e. not feeling guilty over thoughts, regardless of what the Catholic church tells you.)
- Trying to shelter kids from the realities of life and death does more harm than good.
- Child's guilt is the non-moral part of this
 - Here it's about survivor's guilt and the guilt of letting go and also the guilt of a child embracing an identity without their parent
Pain of a lingering sickness, of emotional attachment to someone in a loving death state, grieving
Also the pain of having to be strong
- There is a version of this story in which Conner doesn't HAVE the green man to come help him deal with his shit, and that Conner will probably be very emotionally damaged.
- OTHER WORKS
 - Silent Hill 2 - VERY similar premise, though (SPOILERS) it IS James' fault that she died. (Like, REALLY his fault.) Depending on how you play, varies the endings between acceptance, drowning in grief, or obsession.
 - Guardians of the Galaxy -

What were your thoughts on each of the Monster's stories? What was the overall purpose of each?

- Structurally, they're interesting--they bother the MC because they're "wrong" or "lies" but they're better described as "complicated". They also conceal their relevance to Conner in that regard.
 - 1st story is presented (contextually) as helping him cope with his grandmother, but it seems more that the Prince is an allegory for Conner in some way, perhaps as the murderer he sees himself as
 - Also challenges the notion of objective guilt--moral relativism?

- The prince creates an ideology that he can live with--this is basically the same challenge as Conner's: to create an interpretation of the truth that he can survive.
 - 2nd story is likewise structured around a cruel and vindictive apothecary who appears to deserve punishment, but in turn it is the parson who has abandoned his hope and faith (Conner) who is punished.
 - The setting and the industrialization comes back in the end of the story: choking smoke of the nightmare.
 - (Similar to Grief Camp - volcano room, a safe space for physical outbursts and destruction)
 - 3rd story kinda felt like the Katayanagi twins in Scott Pilgrim - kinda tacked-on and filler. It lacks much in the way of detail, and maybe speaks to the green man's own actual existence as a figment of his subconscious?
 - Technically it does have the same paradoxical issues as the others--outlined by the monster itself--
- Two of the stories fit with Conner's own issues, in that they represent the failures of ideologies to conceal the truth.

What are your thoughts on how adults treat Conner in this story?

- Most of the adults are either assholes or distant or grieving themselves.
- There's not really much of an effort to give Conner any kind of healthy place to express himself. It's more just generalized pity or a very British "stiff upper lip"
 - Similarly, the adults in his life make it much scarier than it needs to be by building a big emotional wall around the whole thing, esp. his immunity to punishment. As much as HE'S avoiding his sense of guilt, THEY'RE even more in denial.
- Conner's mother is pretty guilty for leaving her son twisting in the wind so that he won't give up on her.
 - Good book called "Toxic Parents" by Craig Buck and Susan Forward - a lot of it deals with more serious issues like narcissism and sexual assault, but a case is made for the harm caused by a child being forced into an adult role due to illness in the household
- Grandmother joining in briefly on the destruction was a good, maginally-redeeming moment for her.
- Father was well-written; constantly using his chummy language that he reserves for his OTHER family here, a constant reminder that he'd really rather not be here anyway.
 - I suspect the monster is a surrogate father-figure for the purposes of the story.

What are your thoughts on children interacting with children in this story?

- The bully, Harry, I didn't really buy as much. A bully picking on a weak kid makes sense, but his performance in middle and end just don't mesh with the typical sadist.

- The other students, it makes sense they'd keep their distance. Conner doesn't know how to cope with this--how would they?
- Friend (Lilly?)

General thoughts

- Conner doesn't seem to have the usual kid-logic problems about grieving and understanding death--he's VERY aware. His problems seem to stem more from magical thinking (yeah, I guess so, huh?) and conflating his mindset/feelings with the reality of his mother's illness.
- He's also not so young that he has difficulty dividing himself from his mother, which would be an even more jarring experience: until a certain age, kids don't really understand the difference between self and other.
- Grief Camps - responsible, but also exemplifies the weakness in our society wherein we don't have healthy mechanisms for coping with death, aside from rituals specific to a few cultures.
 - Also makes sense because you basically lose your entire peer group to a negative experience.
 - (Recent re-aired episode of This American Life on camps echoed this, but with a positive communal experience--the inability to relate to others.)
- Movie - good actors, but the monster's lines have a really rushed delivery//rushing through the premise
 - Holy shit, I guess I know how Sigourney Weaver found The Ancient One in Cabin in the Woods.