Mae Dawkins

Teenage Misfits are Not Alone: The Exploration of Challenged Literature in Self-Identity

Young readers having access to challenged literature is a crucial role in development, self-understanding, and mental health. Imagine growing up in a toxic environment learning to self-navigate without guidance. Charlie, the main character in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower,* struggles with self-identity and the book explores challenging writing about mental health, sexuality, and substance abuse. This is a coming-of-age novel where an observant teenager finds himself lost in trauma. Even though these ideas are controversial they are what make the novel essential. Stephen Chbosky's writing offers teenage isolation, trauma, and healing. The book provides validation readers may feel unseen. Readers may feel they have been in Charlie's shoes and experienced his trauma, thus, making them not alone. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* should be available to students and readers, because it supports mental health awareness and encourages empathy and self reflection, despite its controversial content.

The compassionate depiction of mental health is an idea in the book that should be freely accessible to the world. Charlie struggles with depression and trauma that many people face, but regularly see represented in literature. Through Charlie's letters, readers can gain insight of people who may appear quiet and absent, but are deeply affected by surroundings. The book states, "I guess we are who we are for a lot of reasons. And maybe we'll never know most of them" (Chbosky 34). This acknowledgment of complex emotions helps normalize mental health struggles, which reminds readers that they are not alone. The restriction of this idea does not allow students the opportunity to find comfort and understanding freely available literature, like this novel connects as a bridge to self-awareness and encourages readers to seek help when they are afraid to.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower fosters empathy and emotional maturity by presenting diverse experiences without judgment. The exploration of friendship, sexuality, and identity encourages readers to consider different perspectives. Charlie's relationship with Patrick and Sam expose him to issues surrounding sexual orientation and acceptance. The book emphasizes compassion and understanding instead of promoting harmful behavior. This happens when Charlie reflects the idea that "we accept the love we think we deserve" (Chbosky 24). This line resonates with countless readers and reminds readers of their self-worth. When readers have low self-worth they will often associate themselves with people who mistreat them and do not deserve them. It reminds readers to remember who they are and have confidence. Allowing this text freely available allows students to engage in meaningful relationships and have self-respect, which are vital components of emotional development.

Despite these strengths, some argue that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* should not be freely available due to controversial references to drug use, sexual activity, and abuse. Exposing this content to run readers may encourage risky behavior. Drug use, sexual activity, and abuse can be inappropriate for school settings. These concerns overlook the content in which these issues are presented. The author does not glorify harmful behavior, but portrays the consequences and emphasizes personal growth. This allows readers to feel seen and learn to grow as well. Shielding students from difficult realities does not prepare them for the world. Responsible access in classrooms allows for discussion, critical thinking, and growth.

The uncomfortable, but realistic topics, in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* are vital in people's life. The literary work deserves to be freely available due to its honest explanation of mental health and promotion of empathy. People of today's society, especially teenage students, can see themselves in Charlie. The access to Charlie's ideas help with personal growth, identity,

and overall emotional education. Challenged literature plays an essential role in personal and emotional development which needs to be fully accessible in the harsh, realistic world.

Works Cited

Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Doddle Saeghim Publishing Co, 2012.