Looking For Alaska: Book Analysis

Looking For Alaska, written by the young John Green, brings forward some of the most concerning ideas in a high-schoolers mind. Love and Lust, Consequences, Friendship and Home. Green introduces a set of unique characters that most high school kids can see themselves hugging in between classes. Miles “Pudge” Halter, Chip “The Colonel” Martin, Takumi (who cannot stress enough that he is not good with computers), and the one and only Alaska Young.

The story follows Pudge through his first year at Culver Creek on his journey to find his sought-after “Great Perhaps”.

Culver Creek is a boarding school in Alabama with no shortage of intimacy, plagued with pesky mosquitoes, cigarettes, and enough used furniture to block out the scorching sun pounding on the aged walls of the dorms.

Pudge and his friends pull of pranks and constantly break rules under the beak of the Eagle. A teacher that lives in the dorms, that watches over the students, enforcing rules like “no smoking” and “past 7, if you are in a girls dorm, you must leave the door open”, etc. All rules they never cared to listen to.

As Pudge and co. make their way through another thrilling year at their isolated school in Alabama, pranks, sex, milk and vodka cocktails, fill Pudges inexperienced high school life as he takes interest in his stunning dorm neighbor.

Their relationship blossoms, from just being peers, to smoking, drinking, and talking almost all the time. As the story proceeds, both the reader and Pudge begin to love Alaska. Her laid-back but spontaneous and creative mindset makes her quite the character, but just as spontaneously, Alaska passes. This sends Pudge, The Colonel, Takumi, and even the Eagle, along with the rest of The Creek feeling incomplete. This is what really sends Pudge to search for his Great Perhaps.

He learns an important life lesson, after the loss of someone he loved, he realizes that life is short and that there isn’t just one Great Perhaps, he knows that he will discover new Great Perhaps’s, throughout his life.

Soapstone

Speaker - Miles Halter, dubbed “Pudge” by the 5-foot tall laundry bag full of meat, Colonel. Ironically, Pudge is a lanky student standing at 6 feet, with no muscle mass. His home back in Florida offered him nothing but uninteresting, and uninterested “friends”, and awkward family dinners. Pudge goes to Culver Creek because he wants to fit in, feel like family to someone, and make some real friends while also staying away from home.

Pudge is based on John Green himself, being tall, white, and introverted, this character and story was written strongly with the emotions and memories of the author.

Occasion - Looking For Alaska has no occasion, writing a coming of age story is always relevant as long as kids age into teenagers.

Audience- John Green writes primarily for young adults, his other well known writings like The Fault In Our Stars and Papertown, identify with strong emotions someone in high school might feel.

Purpose - Pure entertainment, to tug at the reader's heartstrings.

In a quote from the special edition version of Looking For Alaska, John Green states “The story I wanted to tell,, was about young people whose lives are so transformed by an experience that they can only respond by reimagining time itself.”

In Layman’s Terms, Green wanted his story to relate to the reader, using a traumatic experience. Specifically high school kids.

Tone - Looking For Alaska is split into two parts. ”Before” the time at Culver Creek Pudge experiences before the loss of Alaska. Then there is “After” the moments after the death of Alaska.

Both of these sections have different tones. Before, is not too far off of what mainstream media portrays high school to be like. Breaking rules while also having fun with friends brings a light-hearted feel to the section. Pudge experiencing sex with his girlfriend Lara, drinking “ambrosia”, The Colonels not so fancy cocktail of milk and vodka, breaking into the Weekday Warriors dorm rooms, then sending home fake progress reports to their parents. Each event then ends with laughter and good times, but as the constant mark of “_ days before”, laid throughout the book, Pudge and co., and the others at The Creek finally experience what the book has been counting down to.

After, is set the day after Pudge might have finally gotten together with Alaska, something obvious that he has been wanting ever since he saw her. He wakes up, to the Eagle. He is told of Alaska’s death, as all the progress of Pudge breaking out of his shell disappears.

It is this part of After, that you can see Pudge revert back into Miles. He gets quiet, he begins to start isolating himself, just like he did back at home in Florida. As Miles and the Colonel go to the spot of the crash, he gets his realization about the Great Perhaps he has been searching for.

This last half of the book is written with less bright moments, as if Alaska was the only good part at Culver Creek. To sum it up in a few words, After is depressing, solemn, and heartfelt. The reader can feel a connection to the characters in the book, reminding them of the pain that follows, when someone you love, or in Pudges case, someone who he wanted to love, passes.

Themes

Love & Lust - Love and lust is seen throughout the entirety of Before. There is a fine line between the two, love is an emotional connection, while lust is completely physical. After all, making love to someone's personality isn’t possible. Technology hasn’t made it that far yet.

Pudge in his short relationship with Lara, had no love nor lust. Apart from one sexual act, the two of them represent the sort of relationship you would see in grade school, holding hands, talking a lot, and maybe one or two kisses. (Keep in mind, what was previously mentioned, rarely happened anyway.) This relationship was not forged with the idea of lasting long, (to Pudge at least.) He got into this relationship mainly because he was told to. You can compare this to The Song of Solomon. Milkman and his cousin have sex, not because Milkman loved her, but because he wanted to experience sex. The same way Pudge wanted to experience a relationship as he has never really had one before.

Pudge and his wanting for Alaska was mainly for sex. From the first time he saw her, the only thing he could seem to notice was her body. “-but I barely heard him because the hottest girl in all of human history was standing before me in cutoff jeans and a peach tank top.” (Page 14, PG 8) He loves her as a friend, no doubt about it, but you can tell that by the way he describes her, he wants have sex with her. He was only drawn because of her body, then her mind. The ratio of love to lust was 40:60. When he loses her, that is when his actual real love for her shows, at this point he doesn’t wish she was back on the old couch, he just wants her alive.

The theme of Love & Lust is what drives his desire to be around Alaska, to stick around Colonel, Takumi, and Lara. If he never had seen Alaska, he wouldn’t have felt transformed after her death. In a way, his wanting of Alaska’s embrace, and the pain of her death, enabled him to make the best of his life.

Smoking & Fitting in - It is apparent that at the beginning of the book, the most exciting thing Pudge has ever done before Culver Creek was getting out of bed to head there anyways. He’s boring, someone you could see in the hallway on your way to History, and completely forgotten as soon as you took your seat.

It wasn’t until he arrived at The Creek, did he really begin doing crazy things. He smokes his first cigarette (poorly), all because he saw Colonel do it, and because he teased that Pudge wouldn’t smoke them. “I’d joke. I’d make a good first impression. Oh, he’s funny. That guy Miles is a riot.” (Page 8, PG 4) He wants to fit in, he tries so hard. He wants to change himself to feel accepted, to feel like he is actually likeable. His lack of friends in Florida makes it clear that he isn’t in fact a riot.

The smoking in this book can symbolize how comfortable Pudge feels throughout the story. When he first drags from the cigarette, he coughs a lot. He isn’t used to where he is, he feels panicked at the fact that the people he just met are nothing like him. As the days of Alaska’s life dwindle, so do the number of cigarettes in his carton. He begins to feel a connection with his surroundings. He gets addicted to Culver Creek and his Marlboros.

Friendship - Pudge and his first encounter with The Colonel is awkward. “Great. I’m meeting my roommate naked.” (Page 9, PG 3) For anyone, meeting someone for the first time while you cling to a towel is going to be a nightmare, not to mention being in high school at the same time. This trainwreck was nothing like how Pudge wanted his first interaction at The Creek to go, but the strong friendship between him and Pudge had already started off pretty strong, if someone was comfortable with you being half naked in front of them the first time meeting you, and still didn’t mind hanging out with you, seems to be a pretty strong relationship blossoming.

This first friend, leads to the rest of his friendships. Alaska, Takumi and Lara, all key parts of

Pudge finding his first Great Perhaps.

Conclusion

Looking For Alaska is one of the only books I have ever read, that by the time I finished reading, I felt like the main character. I can pick up The Hunger Games, The Outsiders, or a Dr. Seuss book any day of the week. I can assure you that I never felt like throwing over an unfair government while bringing freedom to the people of Panem, I never felt like a cute boy with greasy hair, and I have never in my life felt like one fish, two fish, a redfish or a bluefish. All jokes aside, I have read many books with cool and unique characters, but Miles “Pudge” Halter, a boring kid who obsesses over the last words of people, somehow connected to me the most. Not to say I’m boring, but his realness, the authenticity of his character, makes him come out of the book. I feel like I already know Pudge. So when he hurts, I hurt too. When Alaska died, I felt the same pain Pudge feels.

It isn’t because I have lost someone before too, but it’s because the idea of losing someone before you could truly tell them how you feel, or any traumatic event, can truly change you as a person. That feeling is written out perfectly in this book. It reminds you of what can happen at any given time.