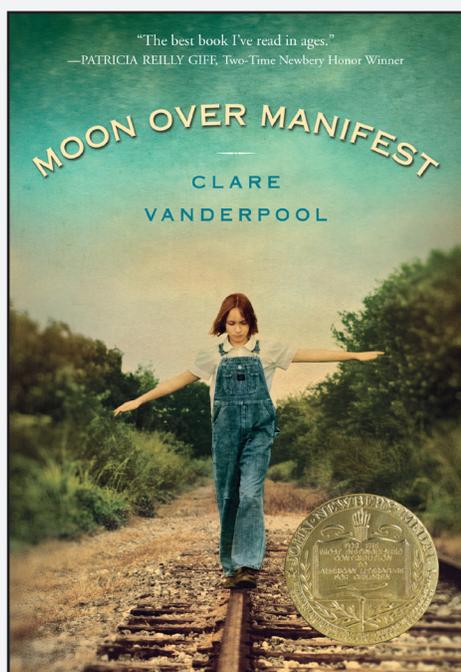


First Opinion: Moral and Social Truth through Storytelling

Vanderpool, Clare. *Moon Over Manifest*. New York: Delacorte Press Books for Young Readers, 2010.

Taylor Norman



In a story that is as thrilling as most adult novels, the young adult novel *Moon Over Manifest*, by Clare Vanderpool, has the potential to build and instruct moral growth as well as truth through fictional prose. By using a storytelling mechanism Shakespeare thought worthy, Vanderpool employs the story-within-a-story to teach of human suffering, injustice, pursuit, and survival. Based on historical facts, Vanderpool's story allows insight into social truth and myth as well as provides a wonderful metaphor for the necessity of storytelling. Her responsible word choice, sensible imagery, and narrative style create a story that calls on young readers' interpretative skills to dissect unexpressed meaning about the world around them. Abilene, Vanderpool's main character, is the embodiment of this call to action. By the end of her mysterious stay in Manifest, Kansas, Abilene knows there is power within something as simple as a story.

Vanderpool's novel is set in a small, rural town in Kansas, a town which Abilene knows of and is under direct order to reside in during summer vacation. She is to stay there while

her father, Gideon, works on the transcontinental railroad. His demands and his leaving surround Abilene in a fog of wonderment, leaving her fixated on why she was left behind and wondering if he is coming back. Once she arrives, this fog does not lift—except for brief moments—until the end of her stay in Manifest, Kansas. Then, Abilene is able to tell the story of her father and, consequently, herself. Abilene has heard her daddy’s stories about his home town of Manifest, Kansas before, and she is not surprised to find that the town residents knew her daddy and had heard of her. However, as the days pass, there seems to be no evidence of his physical “marks” on the town. This initial story resides in Abilene’s everyday existence. As Abilene recounts her events, she becomes confused by daily interactions with residents, relationships with two girls her own age, and close contact with three wise elders. Set in 1936, *Moon Over Manifest* is driven by Abilene’s confusion: “Was my daddy a myth, a ghost, or an actual member of this community?” This leads her to Miss Sadie’s house, a place where another story resides, and where the second tale, the story-within-the-story, is revealed. Vanderpool uses Miss Sadie as the storyteller for this secondary plot, and through her, she recalls a time period where Abilene finds her daddy. Miss Sadie’s oral recounting of the past is controlled by her ordering of the past. As Miss Sadie relives 1918, Abilene considers her questions about her daddy.

Vanderpool’s use of metaphor within Miss Sadie’s storytelling is important on so many levels, but most importantly, it allows young adults to comprehend the relationship to reality that is possible within literature (or a story). The story-within-a-story teaches Abilene the history of Manifest, Kansas. Through this, Abilene begins to see the necessity of knowing one’s history—the story “picked at” her long enough that the truth behind the myth become legible. This ability to distinguish truth from myth is suggested with Vanderpool’s adroit narrative within her narrative. In both Abilene’s narration of her story and the telling of the story-within-a-story, Vanderpool carefully develops her characters’ interactions until her reader understands there are several ways of determining good from evil, either mythically or truthfully. Human and social behavior teaches Abilene, as well as readers, about the human spirit while underscoring the importance of understanding the power of community reflected from experience. A valuable lesson, no doubt! And in the end, this idea is mapped for the reader through creative dialogue, wonderful word choice, and a careful revelation of each story’s mystery. It is no surprise, then, that this powerful novel was awarded the Newbery Medal. In terms of literacy and language, this young adult novel is many steps above the rest!

About the Author

Taylor Norman is a former high school English teacher. She is now pursuing her master’s degree in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Purdue University as well as mentoring preservice English teachers.