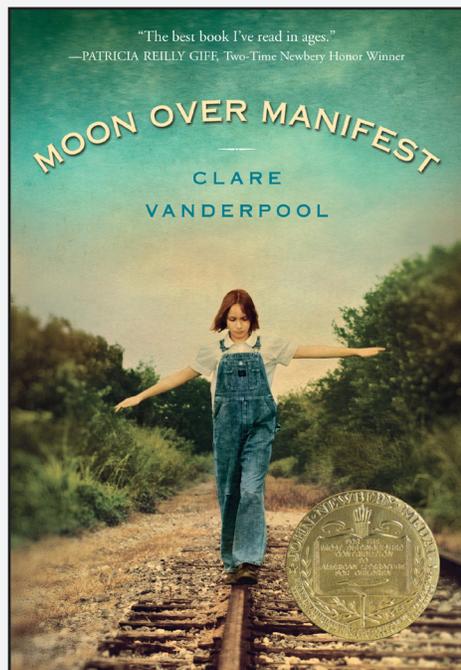


Second Reaction: A Manifestation of History

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

Chea Parton



At the prompting of Sister Redempta, Abilene Tucker informs us that “manifest” is both a noun and verb, meaning both “a list of passengers on a ship” and “to reveal, to make known” (Vanderpool 237-238). Traveling along with Abilene in Depression-era America, readers are made known of the passengers on their own personal ships. Although *Moon Over Manifest* is about a fictional town made up of fictional characters, Vanderpool does a brilliant job of reminding herself of her own personal history as well as allowing readers to reconnect with theirs.

Abilene, like so many of my teenage students and myself on any given day, is searching to discover who she is based on the world around her. She identifies cliques and personality types (which she candidly calls “universals”) the same way we develop our identities, by categorizing and labeling the things, people, and times that surround us. Our awareness of our own environments and the times that have come before us allows readers a kind of self-reflection and identity revision that is not possible otherwise; thus, Vanderpool’s

novel gives readers an opportunity to learn about their own histories and redefine who they are. Readers are never too old to embrace this opportunity for self-reflection and definition, and the experience was edifying for me as well as my students.

With my three sections of sophomore English, we have been studying *Night: With Connected Readings* by Elie Wiesel. During our study of it, I used pieces of Vanderpool's text to demonstrate that discrimination has been an appalling atrocity throughout all eras of history and all nations of the world. Using Abilene's "divining" of Miss Sadie's story as a text for focus in a Socratic seminar, my students were able to connect the Holocaust to other examples of racial and socioeconomic discrimination in America's past and present. Through their active reading of Miss Sadie's misfortune and their student-led discussions, each class discovered and took part in exploring how prejudice and discrimination have been, and continue to be, pervasive problems in their school and world. Without Vanderpool's exceptional characterization and plot structure, this learning opportunity would not have been afforded to them.

Because Manifest is a town composed of such a diverse history, it opens a door to racial and ethnic tolerance and acceptance that is sometimes difficult for my students to understand. Growing up in a homogenous rural community has unfortunately impeded their ability to identify with people who are unlike themselves. Looking at serious issues through the honest and discerning eyes of someone their own age offers them a connection to compassion that they are not usually privy to, even if that person is not their same gender.

Anyone who has ever worked with young readers has heard the terms "boy book" and "girl book." The fact that these terms even exist is evidence that young students have difficulty identifying with protagonists or narrators who do not share their gender. This becomes problematic because boys would rather perform their masculinity through football, video games, or defying the teacher than pick up a book with a pink cover, and girls would rather perform their femininity through cheerleading, giggling, or painting their nails than be caught with a book about hunting. While this is not always the case, more often than not students will choose books based upon the gender of the main character. Abilene is a girl with girlfriends, but she is also a tomboy—adventurous, secretive, smart, and interesting. She appeals to both girls and boys because she tells her own story through her eyes, Hattie Mae's column, Miss Sadie's divining, and Ned's letters from the war. There is a plethora of storytellers of both genders, offering a variety of perspectives (not to mention the use of several genres) to which readers can identify. *Moon Over Manifest* offers so many perspectives, it would be difficult to find a reader who could not identify with at least one.

Clare Vanderpool's masterful use of figurative language, characterization, description, multiple genres, multiple storytellers, plot structure, and her own personal history allows

readers to investigate Abilene and her father's history, the readers' own history, and even world history. As they relate to Abilene's story, students are able to discover connections to times and people they may not have identified with previously. I have no doubt that Abilene will delight other classrooms as much as she delighted my own.

Work Cited

Wiesel, Elie. *Night: With Connected Readings*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2000. Print.

About the Author

Chea Parton is a graduate of Purdue University and the happy instructor of high school students at Southern Wells High School in Poneto, Indiana. She is inspired by literature and works hard to pass that passion on to her students.