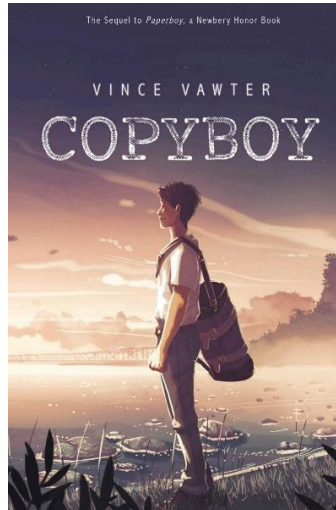


First Opinion: A Woven Life or The Many Threads of Who We Are

Vawter, Vince. *Copyboy*. Mankato, MN: Capstone Editions, 2018. Print.

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David Bowie, in the 1971 lyrics to *Ch-Ch-Changes*, says “Don't tell them to grow up and out of it. . . These children that you spit on as they try to change their worlds are . . . quite aware of what they're goin' through.” Victor Vollmer, main character in Vince Vawter’s *Copyboy*, sequel to *Paperboy*, a 2014 Newbery Honor Book, has been, at least metaphorically, spit on and is fast discovering the problems that come with changing his world.

“The obituary was the shortest one on the page that day” (Vawter 1), and so begins the tale of Victor’s journey into promise-keeping, strength-building, and soul-searching. Giving his word to Mr. Spiro (the mentor and confidant that readers meet in *Paperboy*) that he will spread his ashes at the mouth of the Mississippi River, Victor sets out on a journey that takes him beyond his hometown of Memphis, beyond his issue with stuttering, beyond his questions about who his “real” father is, beyond the dilemma of whether to play college baseball, and beyond his grief over the death of a dear friend. The journey, carried out to fulfill a promise, is more than one of physical distance and exceeds the premise of keeping one’s word. Rather, the primary journey at the heart of *Copyboy* occurs within Victor. It is one of self-discovery, of gaining

confidence in spite of a disability, of being a man of your word and of recognizing that bravery does not mean the absence of fear. Victor learns that “not talking about something is the easy way out and, in the end, everything just seems to fester” (Vawter 83). The lesson, though difficult for more than one reason, is a valuable one. Victor comes to realize that life is never black and white; there are gray areas with hidden secrets just under the surface. Using one’s voice, even one that is delivered with a stutter, is powerful. Some things can’t be ignored, Victor discovers; and sometimes you must take a stand even if it means you get knocked down.

While stuttering is a prevalent theme in *Copyboy*, it is not the main focus. Rather, stuttering, or sputtering as it comes to be called in the novel, is a by-product; a part of the story, much like it is a part of life for the author. But, it does not dictate the action of the plot or the life of Victor, the main character. It is simply a thread of who he is, woven into his life. Yes, he stumbles over words and “n---eeds” to be careful in word choices, but his voice is strong.

Readers, ages middle school into young adulthood, can, through a quiet, extraordinary main character, find their voice in *Copyboy*. They can, through self-reflection, discover that the possibility that “television and the modern world will soon have us all talking and acting just alike and destroy all the different birthrights that make this country” (Vawter 81) is just that, a possibility. It does not have to be an actuality.

Students with disabilities will identify with Victor as they see the struggles he goes through. They will witness first-hand how he deals with them and recognize that stuttering, or any disability, does not have to define who they are.

Another take-away from *Copyboy* for readers falls within this quote: “Mr. Spiro was right. We don’t own books. We borrow them and pass them on. What we own is what the books leave inside of us” (Vawter 232). Building on this statement, readers should be challenged to think critically about the lasting impact this novel, and others, have had on them while remembering that we are to “look not so much to the destination.... but always to the journey” (Vawter 236).

Works Cited

- Bowie, David. “Changes.” *Hunky Dory*, RCA Records: Ken Scott/David Bowie, 1971.
- Vawter, Vince. *Copyboy*. Capstone Editions, 2018. Print.

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