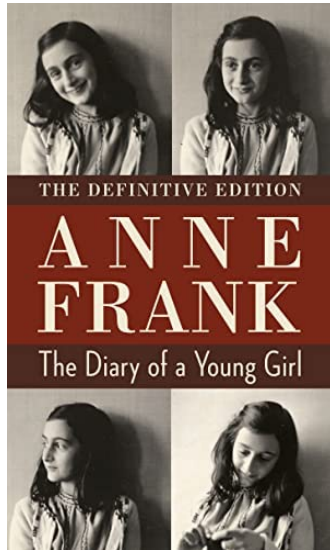


First Opinion: Anne Frank as She Was, The Value of An Uncensored Voice

Anne Frank. *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*. New York City, NY: Bantam Books, 1997. Print..

Audrey Taylor



In June 1942, Anne Frank, a German-born, Jewish girl living in Amsterdam, received a diary for her 13th birthday. In her first entry, she wrote, “I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support” (Frank et al.1). Less than a month later she, her family, and four others went into hiding to avoid arrest by the Nazi controlled government. With the help of trusted friends, they remained hidden in a small attic annex for two years and one month. They were discovered in a raid, arrested, and sent to Auschwitz. Anne didn’t survive. But her diary did.

For those two years, from June 1942 to August 1944, Anne wrote faithfully in her diary—confiding everything, just as she hoped, onto its pages. In *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*, the reader is granted a window into the life of a young girl in hiding during the height of World War II. We are given access to her innermost thoughts as she struggles with

the limitations her confinement places on her. News of the war makes its way into her diary, providing readers with important historical context, as Anne struggles with what it means to be Jewish during a time when she is persecuted for it. “I sometimes wonder if anyone will ever understand what I mean, if anyone will ever overlook my ingratitude and not worry about whether or not I’m Jewish and merely see me as a teenager badly in need of some good, plain fun” (Frank et al. 154).

Ultimately, however, it’s a book about growing up: navigating family relationships, longing for romance and connection, and contemplating her body and her desires. Anne wrote with the frankness of a teenager who didn’t intend for all her words to be read but in doing so, she invites her readers to connect to her in a powerful way. At times witty and whimsical, at others critical and sullen, sometimes optimistic and often insecure, Anne struggles with her identity and what it means to grow up in the world she lives in. It is the universal experience of adolescence, against a backdrop of Nazi occupation, antisemitism, and an undercurrent of near-constant fear. She provides a humanizing voice during an inhumane time.

This is the value of *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition* and what is lost when people seek to ban and censor her words. It has been banned around the world for its depiction of a Jewish family (Agence France-Presse). Evidence of the antisemitism that still exists and a desperate reminder of why voices like Anne’s are so important. Several schools in the United States have also sought to ban or censor the book, “mostly in regard to passages that were considered ‘sexually offensive,’ as well as for the tragic nature of the book, which some felt might be ‘depressing’ for young readers” (Youngblood & Beitzel). As recently as 2020, it was challenged at an Oregon public library due to candid talk of sex and sexuality (Banned Books 2020). To censor her words is to lessen her impact and deny her humanity all over again. “It’s

really her. It shows her in a truer light, not as a saint, but as a girl like every other girl. . . . She was an ordinary, normal girl with a talent for writing” (The things that Anne was really frank about).

There is power in the ordinary. When we turn people into heroes, exalting them to sainthood, they are out of reach, untouchable and unrelatable. When we see people as they are, we can see ourselves in them. And when we read books in their authentic voice, it leads to empathy and understanding – something Anne Frank, and the millions of ordinary people like her, could have used more of.

Her diary ends abruptly. In the final entry, three days before her arrest, she wrote that she wants to “keep trying to find a way to become what I’d like to be and what I could be” (Frank et al 337). Anne Frank was denied that chance but through her diary, she has been able to touch millions of lives and should be able to continue to do so without the threat of censorship.

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About the Author

Audrey Taylor was a middle school Social Studies teacher for 15 years. She is currently the Social Studies Instructional Coach for Wayne Township and a doctoral student working on her Ph.D. in Urban Education Studies at IUPUI. A lover of books, she has seen firsthand the power of literacy in fostering critical reflection in people of all ages.