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ENGL 112B
Professor Warner
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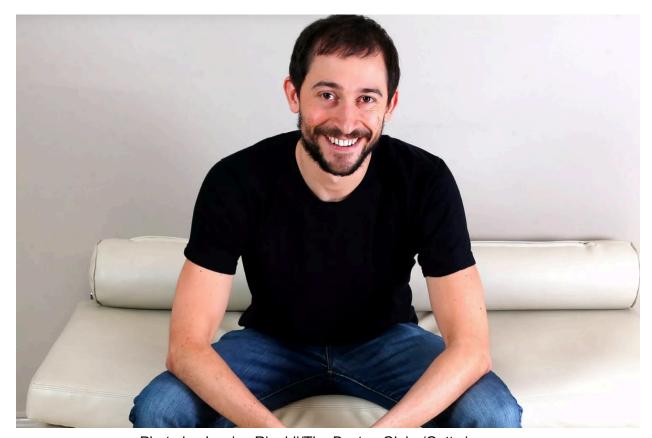*Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews

Photo by Jessica Rinaldi/The Boston Globe/Getty images

Background on the book & author

　　Me and Earl and the Dying Girl is a novel written by Jesse Andrews and published in

2012. Andrews, born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is a New York Times best-selling

author and screenwriter. *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* is Andrews' first novel and in addition to

his two other novels, Andrews co-wrote the screenplay of Pixar's *Luca* (2021) with Mike Jones.

In the novel, Greg Gaines enters his senior year of high school and hopes to keep a low profile

among the cliques and social groups at Benson High School. Greg doesn't really have any true

friends except for Earl, who he makes terrible films with in secret. He is forced by his mom to

reconnect with Rachel Kushner, a girl he went to Hebrew School with, after she is diagnosed

with leukemia. *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* received the YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant

Young Adult Readers and the film adaptation won the Grand Prize Jury Award and the Dramatic

Audience Award at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival. It also became one of the ten most

banned books in America after a conservative group, Moms for Liberty, petititoned for the novel

to be banned in Tallahasse, Florida.

Introduction to Quote #1

The following quote is from Chapter 25, "A Moron's Guide to Leukemia." Greg tells

Rachel about his mother's working definition of cancer in a childlike way because she compares

it to a city that has bad guys in it and chemotherapy is the equivalent of dropping bombs to kill

the bad guys. At this point of the book, Rachel goes through chemotherapy and loses all of her

hair.

Quote #1:

-   "So if this were a normal book about a girl with leukemia [...] First the more recent ones,

    then the older ones when we got tired of those," (196).

Significance to the overall book

It offers a realistic perspective on how cancer affects someone's life and how their

remaining days can be spent when they are really sick. Rachel doesn't do anything out of

ordinaryleading up to her death, but it doesn't mean she didn't live a fulfilled life and she never

insisted otherwise. Although grim at times, Me and Earl and the Dying Girl addresses the idea of

death matter-of-factly and skips past the gimmicks.

Introduction to Quote #2

A girl named Madison Hartwell at their high school, also takes an interest in becoming friends with Rachel after her cancer diagnosis. Greg has a huge crush on her and thinks she's hot so he agrees to make a film for Rachel because Madison told him he should. Greg and Earl are records their speech for Rachel without a script.

Quote #2

- "Uh … All right. Uh . You probably don't understand how grateful I am to have gotten to know you [...] So uh, yeah," (255).

Significance to the overall book

The novel breaks away from the traditional book format and some chapters consist of bullet point lists, newspaper headlines, and a really interesting part of the novel is that some of its dialogue are written as a screenplay with stage directions. This style makes the novel more engaging since the dialogue is faster to read. The way Earl delivers his speech is realistic to how teenagers talk since filler words, or vocal hesitations, are included.

Introduction to Quote #3

This quote happens after Mr. McCarthy, Greg and Earl's history teacher, brings up how Greg hasn't been completing his homework assignments in several of his classes. It offers readers a glimpse of Greg that he isn't necessarily a bad person for viewing Rachel as a burden, his flawed opinions makes him human because it strays from the correct way to grieve someone. Andrews paints Greg as a complex, sometimes self-centered protagonist that readers can resonate with because he's not perfect and doesn't always do or say the right things.

Quote #3

- "So you're probably reading all this, and being like [...] about to end," (205).

<u>Text Complexity</u>

According to the new Dale-Chall Readability Formula, it puts the novel at a reading scale score of 25.4, a fairly difficult reading level, grade 11-12, and an age range of 16-17. I agree that the novel might be better suited for young adults at the ages of 16-17 because the book discusses gender identity and sexually explicit descriptions of sex and women and there is a lot of profanity. However, as for the message of cancer, I do believe young adults under the ages 16-17 wouldn't have difficulty grasping the concept because some readers may have already encountered a death by a friend, family member, or someone they know. The flow of the novel is easily accessible to young readers because it breaks away from the standard format of a novel and addresses a serious matter such as cancer and death with humor. I read *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green in middle school and I think in comparison with *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, Andrews explains leukemia and chemotherapy in a way that can be easily absorbed by readers.

<u>How would I use this book in a classroom setting</u>

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl might fit in Chapter 4 of *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story* because it's a novel deals with real-life experiences. Many teenagers might not have ever experienced grief or a personal death in their lives, but they could relate to other aspects of the novel. For example, these teeangers could resonate with Greg's mission to keep a low profile for the rest of high school without drawing any attention to himself and relate to not having a lot of friends. Many teenagers could also have a secret hobby or passion that they are embarrassed or ashamed of, and many teenagers could use humor to cope with awkward situations or conversations. If I were to teach this novel in a classroom setting, I would assign individual groups of students to a scene from *Me and Earl and*

the Dying Girl for them to reenact and show off their editing and directing skills. Every group's video could be shown in class, similar to how Greg and Earl's film about Rachel was revealed to the entire school.