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YALit

LENS #6: Reader Response

***How Stories Become Real***

*The Orange Houses* written by Paul Griffin is the captivating stories of three unique individuals meshing together to form one story. Each character has something enthralling to add to the story; Tamika, AKA Mik, wants to shut the world out by the switch of her hearing aids, Fatima is an illegal immigrant who has escaped to the United States in search of freedom in the land of liberty, and Jimmi is a war veteran who has gone crazy and can only seem to find solace through abusing drugs. While reading the first couple chapters of this novel, it was hard to keep up on what was happening. Once I finished reading the novel, it almost made sense that I was confused as a reader in the beginning. If you believe in the saying that everything happens for a reason, you would be able to understand how Griffin portrays this thought through this novel. The characters in the story were meant to find one another, and they all help in saving one another in some unique way. Without each other, the life that they would be living, or not living, would have been very different.

I’ve read many books that I could relate to in my life, but this story really touched home. Reading about Jimmi’s story was like reading a story about one of my brothers. *Drugs, violence, displacement, depression…* this described what my brother’s life consisted of a mere four months ago. After a break-up, my brother lost it and drugs were there to make things feel better, or so he thought. Heroin was his poison, literally. For years my family and I were completely blind; I don’t know how we couldn’t read the signs. It suddenly became a suspicion that my brother was up to something terrible when he started getting into trouble; hanging out with the wrong crowd and doing reckless things that he wouldn’t normally have done years ago. This suspicion became real when he stole my step-mother’s wedding ring and pawed it for cash. This is when I knew things were *really* bad. At that point, it was out, we all knew that Derrick was addicted to drugs and would do anything at any cost to get a taste. Swearing up and down, he lied and said he would get help. He never found that “help”, things got worse, quickly. I prayed to God and asked him to save my brother and lift the devils grip off of him. I prayed so hard for a miracle, but it didn’t come instantly. A few weeks after the ring incident, the miracle that I believed saved my brother from killing himself, sounding like this, “pop, pop, pop”, if you’ve never heard this sound before it’s the sound of asshole thugs driving by your house busting out bullets. Yes, bullets. A situation that went bad caused these low-life scumbags to attempt to kill my brother. I or anyone else in my house could have lost their life that day. My brother wasn’t home at the time, but four of us were. Eight bullets were shot at my house; two of them pierced the outside wall and shot straight into my house. My brother, scared for his life, went into hiding. Things that were pretty shitty at the time, turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It was a wake-up call for my brother, a call that relayed the message that he needed to get his act together. It was then that I believe my bothers life was saved. If those thugs never shot at my house in attempt to kill my brother, he may not be alive today. It saddens me to even type that but I’m thankful that bad situations like that can really benefit for the good.

“Bringing it back to the text” as we would say in class, I can see my brother through Jimmi’s story. Jimmi, who was also addicted to drugs, was contemplating the idea of taking his own life. If it wasn’t for his friends and certain situations to ascend in his life, Jimmi would have taken that contemplation and would have made it a reality. Everything happens for a reason, those people and those situations were placed into Jimmi’s life and I believe they saved him. I also believe that the things that happened to my brother in the past year saved him.

I think young adults would be able to relate to at least one of the characters in the story, and if not the characters, I believe they would be able to relate to the situations that arose. I know at times as a teenager I wanted to shut the world out like Mik, hide like Jimmi, or search for peace as Fatima did. This is why I believe *The Orange Houses* is young-adult literature.