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Literature for Young Adults  
Reader-response  
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Lens 3 Reader Response True Notebooks

True Notebooks by Mark Salzman is an extremely powerful young adult novel. The parts of the novel I can relate to are the fact that some of these students are disadvantaged Latinos. I was by no means impoverished as a high school student but I did feel the slight hint of racism because of last name. Most of the people I went to school with were white, and they looked it. While I still looking white just a little darker was assumed to be Italian until someone would hear my last name. Like the students in true notebooks it was because of my environment that made me who I am. I remember being young in elementary school maybe third or second grade. I was so excited for the new Harry Potter to come out I think number three. I would ask the librarian everyday if the book came out. Every day she would tell me no, we haven’t gotten that book yet. One day I saw a student reading Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban in the library and just my luck he was returning it. I happily went up to the Librarian and asked if we had the new Harry Potter. She said no and went back to her work. I didn’t understand I saw the book I wanted to read it so bad and she let the other student read it. I asked a smart girl in my class if she could do me a favor. I asked her to go ask the librarian if she could borrow the book. The librarian to my surprise gave her the book to borrow. After a while I asked the girl if I could then see the book. She hesitated then after some reasoning she handed the book over. I went right up to the librarian and said can I take this book out? The librarian was in raged and said no. I asked her why and she didn’t have an answer for me. She eventually let me take the book out, but I couldn’t stop thinking that I had done something wrong.

It wasn’t until years later that I realized Jocelyn was white. I was Spanish, and my librarian was raciest. I never forgot that story till this day. I always feel no matter how nice someone is to your face you can never really know what they are thinking or who they really are. This caused me to get into some trouble in middle school and on because I simply couldn’t trust my teachers. Everyone lied to me in my head, everyone who was a teacher. The trouble caused my grades to fall and make me rebel even more. It wasn’t until high school I realized the only way to combat this blatant racism is to kill it with kindness. The librarians attempt to restrict me drove me to excel in high school and on.

I believe a lot of students today will identify with what is going on in True Notebooks and actually gain some perspective on life if properly taught the novel. Students can appreciate what they have and even strive to be better after seeing someone with so much less hope and chance still want what they might take for granted.

I think the most powerful passage of the novel is when Mark is arguing with Nathaniel a student and Mark comes to realize these students are different. They need different things then other students they are each individual. Nathaniel says “OK, I’m immature, I admit it, Why you think I’m in this place?...Anything else you wanna bust on me for? … You think I fuck everything up on purpose?” After which Mark begins to feel sorry for what he said. Nathaniel continues, “I need encouragement not criticism” (p 145). I think this is one of the most powerful scenes in the novel because Mark finally starts to see that these students need more. They need him to be their father, their teacher, their role model. They need someone to say good job or good try. Criticism is something they get enough of and really don’t respond to. This is Mark learning something from the student and it is a lesson I think many teachers need to learn. If a student is acting out maybe something is wrong. Maybe nothing is and the student just wants attention. But until the teacher finds out, they have no right to slam down a student for expression or anger. Growing is hard and unfortunately many people forget how hard it is. You have to think like a student if you want to connect with them.