

*Looking for Alaska*

By John Green

Dutton Books

Fiction

221 Pages

©2005

*Starting Over*

By Amanda L.

When given an opportunity to recreate yourself, most people do not think twice about taking the chance. A new start is a clean slate. In the book, *Looking for Alaska* by John Green, Miles Halter, also known as Pudge, seizes the opportunity by transferring from his public school in Florida to Culver Creek boarding school in Alabama, just as his father had done. His life switches from being ordinary into a life filled with drama, pranks, love, friends, cigarettes and wine.

Miles Halter is a scrawny and shy sixteen-year-old when he first arrives at Culver Creek Boarding School. His roommate, Chip Martin, ironically nicknames him “Pudge”, and the name sticks. Pudge attends Culver Creek with the ambition to make good friends, and the goal to discover what his father found so fascinating about the school. In the first encounter between Chip and Pudge, we are introduced to the slightly awkward and insecure protagonist. The encounter begins with casual conversation and obligatory introductions, but the reader is drawn away from the “Hellos and How are you’s” and enters into Pudge’s mind where he is questioning whether his replies to the questions seem and sound cool enough. The reader

immediately learns who Pudge is and sets the stage for two foil characters.

After meeting Chip, he introduces Pudge to his good friend, Alaska Young. Alaska Young is a loud and rebellious teenage girl who is passionate about books and pranks. In the first encounter, it is clear that Pudge has a crush on Alaska:

“And now it is a good time to say she was beautiful. In the dark beside me, she smelled of sweat and sunshine and vanilla, and on that thin-mooned night I could see little more than her silhouette except for when she smoked, when the burning cherry of the cigarette washed her face in pale red light. But even in the dark, I could see her eyes - fierce emeralds. She had the kind of eyes that predisposed you to supporting her every endeavor.”

Over time, the crush develops into true love and Pudge falls for Alaska Young, for the way she talks to him and makes him feel important.

Soon enough, Pudge finds himself not only falling in love with Alaska Young but with Culver Creek and the new life it brought him. Culver Creek gave him everything he had not had in Florida; friends, love, and adventure. Little did he know though, that his paradise would be threatened by a life-changing event.

The event is the basis for the structure of the book. The novel is broken down into two sections: the “before” and the “after”, which is separated by the event. Each chapter is marked by the number of days leading to the event or the number of days succeeding the event. This structure adds to the excitement and anticipation of discovering what the event is. The only downside

to this structure is that after the event has occurred the story is somewhat anticlimactic.

The story is relatable to high school students because it touches upon the subjects of

learning how to be a good friend, romance, coping with trauma, and managing schoolwork and stress, all while discovering who you are. These are life challenges we all face as we navigate through adolescence. I highly recommend the novel because it is a quick read, and a book with an excellent story. Each chapter is filled with a least one dramatic and important scene that will captivate you and make you want to keep turning the pages. John Green is usually known to cater to teenage girls, but I believe both girls and boys will find this novel enjoyable.

John Green's first novel, *Looking for Alaska*, received the 2006 Printz Award. However, he is most noted for his novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, which will be made into a movie and debut in this summer.