

The Side Effects of Dying

The Fault in Our Stars

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Fiction

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The title of *The Fault in Our Stars* comes from a line in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* when Cassius says, "The fault, dear Brutus is not in our stars, / But in ourselves." This means that people believed the stars determined fate, but Cassius is saying that the stars do not determine fate, but we do through our actions. John Green has characters reference this quote: "never was Shakespeare more wrong ... there is no shortage of fault to be found amid our stars."

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green is one of Green's many successful books. Green is also the author of *Looking For Alaska*, *An Abundance of Katherines*, and *Paper Towns*. Green was greatly inspired by Ester Earl, a girl who he had become friends with that had thyroid cancer and tumors in her lungs. The book is dedicated to her and on many occasions Green says that she inspired him in many ways and it was originally a completely different story. However, after Ester Earl's influence on this plot line and characters of the book, *The Fault in Our Stars* is focused on a girl named Hazel.

Hazel Grace, a 17-year-old girl from Indianapolis, was originally diagnosed with thyroid cancer and over time developed tumors in her lungs. Her lungs are not strong enough, so she carries around an oxygen tank that is connected around her nose through a cannula. Hazel went through many forms of treatment including attending a support group because her family and doctors believed that she was depressed. They told her that

depression is a side effect of cancer. However, Hazel believes that “Cancer is a side effect of dying. Almost everything is, really.”

Hazel’s belief that almost everything is a side effect of dying is an example of how the book revolves around the realistic perspectives on mortality and symptoms of existence with an expiration date. Although the book is based on people with cancer, it is not a “cancer book,” as Green would say. Truly, it is about the thoughts and results cancer has on the people affected by it. Also, it centers on mortality that everyone is going to die, and everyone has a different “side effect” they need to learn how to deal and live with. So really, it is about the expiration date that everyone is bound to meet, and how to live with knowing when it is, whether it’s theirs or someone they love’s.

John Green is a very talented writer and throughout *The Fault in Our Stars* he shows great strength in creating depth through metaphors. His use of metaphors extends the readers knowledge on the background of each character, such as Gus putting unlit cigarettes in his mouth, "They don't kill you unless you light them...And I've never lit one. It's a metaphor... You put the killing thing right between your teeth, but you don't give it the power to do its killing." John Green purposefully has Augustus do this to emphasize how passionate Gus is about beating cancer. Green also shows strength in his writing by putting a lot of thought into small details such as Hazel’s name. In one of his vlogs on YouTube he explains why he chose the name Hazel. His reasoning is that “Hazel is an in-between color, and she has an in-between life, in-between health and sickness, in-between adolescence and adulthood, in-between swimming and drowning, etc.”

The Fault in Our Stars is aimed at teens, but can be enjoyed by people interested in all different genres. High school students should definitely read this book because it is not challenging to read, but it can be challenging to comprehend the depth the characters bring to the story. Although it is about cancer, it is also comical, heartbreaking, and serious. In some schools this book is required to read, and it should be required in more schools, including Blind Brook. *The Fault in Our Stars* has so many layers of depth that can be interpreted in many thought provoking ways. It is definitely worth the time spent reading it.