

High School Student by Day, Suicide Solver by Night

Thirteen Reasons Why by Jay Asher
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Fiction
288 pages

By Allison

One moment, one action, or one word can have a profound impact on an individual's life.

Forever.

The life of Clay Jensen, a regular high school student, took an unforeseen turn after receiving a package in the mail from Hannah Baker, an acquaintance of his, whom he had been crushing on. The package contained 13 audiotapes, each delving into a different reason for Hannah's suicide. The first tape begins with Hannah saying, "I hope you're ready, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, the reason my life ended. And if you're listening to these tapes you're one of the reasons why."

Clay is aghast that he contributed to the suicide of Hannah. He spent all night listening to the tapes and follows her soft voice through his small town to find out how he contributed. What Clay discovers forever changes his perspective on life; he learns how discerning someone's actions may be on another's life, which is a theme prevalent throughout the novel. The story of Hannah Baker is important to read because it teaches a basic rule of life, treat others the way you want to be treated, and shows an example of an extreme impact of disobeying this; suicide.

Thirteen Reasons Why, by Jay Asher, instantly draws the reader in, beginning with the color. It is designed to resemble an audiotape providing a preview of the book. The title is compellingly designed: "THIRTEEN REASONS WHY." The image on the cover depicts a girl on a park swing. This is significant because everything that contributed to Hannah's suicide began when she first kissed Justin Foley in the

park. This kiss is the beginning of Hannah's end. Justin begins to spread false rumors regarding her, starting a spiral of atrocious events. In the inside cover there is a map with all of the locations Hannah describes. It is a good visual aid to engage the reader with Hannah's journey, and metaphorically takes you with her. Throughout the novel there are several "stop" and "start" symbols reinforcing the idea the story was being told through recordings.

Asher's story has a rapidly moving plot that is written in an intriguing format. The author switches back and forth between Hannah's voice on cassette tapes, and Clay's reactions to what she is saying. Thus making the reader feel like they are experiencing the same roller coaster Clay and Hannah are undergoing. Writing a story told through audiotapes is unique, and keeps the reader captivated. Though *Thirteen Reasons Why* is well written, the plot can be complicated to follow because of the changing perspectives between Hannah and Clay. There is also an abundance of characters, which at times can be perplexing.

Thirteen Reasons Why probes the issue of teen suicide and illustrates that "You never know what goes on in anyone's life but your own," which Hannah describes as a part of the snowball of events that led to her suicide. Asher agrees by saying; "Even though Hannah admits the decision to take her life was entirely her own, it is important to be aware of how we treat others...it's impossible to know everything going on in a person's life, and how we might be adding to their stress." He went on to say, this novel is a way to discuss teen suicide, an issue we as a society find arduous to talk about. This is the central theme of the novel.

The basis for Hannah Baker came from a family member close to Asher who attempted suicide when she was a junior in high school. An audio tour of a mock up of King Tut's tomb inspired Asher to use the literary device of audiotapes to tell the story. This turned out to be one of the best things Asher ever did. The novel won multiple awards including his favorite, The California Book Award, because it was given by teens.

Thirteen Reasons Why is a phenomenal read with a very relatable plot and I highly recommend it to all young adults. While, there has never been a suicide at BBHS, it is an issue prevalent in teen culture. The novel has so many unexpected twists and turns it kept my adrenaline pumping and left me always wanting more. A student who has read works by John Green would love this novel because they both use fiction to address problems that many struggle with. Throughout the whole novel I could really feel the emotional connection Asher had with the subject matter, which made it a much more meaningful story. The spine-chilling plot twists, and continuous search for why Hannah killed herself made me never want to put the novel down. What Asher is really trying to say is we all have the potential to become Hannah Baker. Any human being can make one single action, or say one word that will forever change someone's life, whether it be causing or preventing suicide. No matter what, actions have a profound impact on others lives.

