

The Story of Her Final Decision

By Skylar Z.

Thirteen Reasons Why

By Jay Asher

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Our bodies encompass many things. When we look past the solid matter, we find feeling and emotion. We can become numb to everything our bodies are made of and feel hollow or empty. *Thirteen Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher, brings us to Clay Jensen, a teenager in high school who receives a box of cassette tapes absent of a return address or a name. He began listening and a familiar voice came through the other end. Hannah Baker, a friend of Clay's, took her own life. Before she did, she sent out a set of cassette tapes to each person that influenced her decision to commit suicide. "I hope you're ready, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended. And if you're listening to these tapes, you're one of the thirteen reasons why." Each side of every tape tells a story and each story influences the next and affects her in some way. This thrilling and heartbreaking novel is one that I gladly got to read and I strongly recommend giving it a chance. It genuinely applies to the struggles of high school and has a realistic, relevant, and relatable plot.

The title is the basis of the plot, expressing the thirteen reasons why Hannah committed suicide. The novel is set up in order of the seven cassettes and each chapter is either a new cassette or a new side of a cassette, side A or B. The idea of cassette tapes might be outdated, but it makes the story even more authentic and different. Jay Asher was not trying to stay current or modern with his novel. He simply shared a story of a broken girl who was lost under her own skin, which he did skillfully. Aside from

Thirteen Reasons Why, Asher has co-written another novel entitled *The Future of Us* with Carolyn Mackler and has won awards for *Thirteen Reasons Why*, including the California Book Award. Asher is from California and got the idea for this novel while in a museum. After working at various bookstores, *Thirteen Reasons Why* was his first published novel.

Asher's novel is incredibly descriptive, using captivating imagery and description to reel the reader in. "And I walked for hours, imagining the mist growing thick and swallowing me whole. The thought of disappearing like that- so simply- made me so happy. But that, as you know, never happened." It is strong in its fluency and structure and the dynamic characterization is another strength of this novel. I find that there are often novels with plain characters used to simply tell the story, however in this novel, each person has an individual quality that separates them, helping the reader keep up. For instance, Hannah is poignant and emotional in her description, which highly contrasts compared to some of the antagonists in the story. The characters are developed and influential to the story, resulting in only meaningful, not meaningless characters. Not knowing the reason behind Clay's involvement in the tapes was a motivating factor and Hannah's voice, along with other characters' voices make the novel that much better from the resulting anticipation. The strong personality and sentiment behind the words are riveting. "Of course, if you're listening to this, I failed. Or he failed. And if he fails, the deal is sealed." However, the great things about this novel also come with flaws. There are many details in *Thirteen Reasons Why* that it became confusing. The text goes back and forth between the recordings and Clay's narrations, making it disheveled. It was

slow near the middle and it had many characters to keep track of, so it was a convoluted novel that demanded attention and concentration.

But, when reading, I was so wrapped up in the moment that I often forgot the inevitable ending. The ending is evident from the beginning of the story, however the reality of the story did not set in until I turned the final page. It put me in Clay's shoes. He had not come to terms with the reality of Hannah's life until the voice on the opposite end of the headphones stopped, forever. I think everyone in high school can somehow relate to this novel, whether it is relatable on the receiving end of the tapes, or the revealing end. The gender neutrality that stemmed from both Clays' narrations and Hannah's tapes made it appealing to both genders as well.

The idea of suicide, for me, is painful to think about. When someone puts up a wall blocking everyone out, it might be hard to help them or alter their decision. The reality of the situation is that someone might want to help, but the vulnerable person might not want any help. It's a tragically overwhelming thought, and this is what Hannah ended up deciding on her final day of life on earth. However, this is the most beautifully written part in the story. I could feel what Hannah felt and sense the things that were tearing her apart leading to her choice, and it is truly something to ponder.