

Thirteen Reasons Why

By Jay Asher

Penguin Books

Fiction

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The Snowball Effect

By Zoe S

Every day you interact with others, sometimes not thinking about those interactions or their effects. But a small action or conversation that may seem insignificant to you, could have a life changing impact on someone else. In the novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher, the compelling story of a suicidal girl is told through the eyes of Hannah Baker. Hannah decided to take her own life instead of experiencing everything that life had to offer, and having faith that things would get better. When Hannah didn't leave a suicide note, all the people in her life were left to wonder one question, why? This novel takes you on a suspense filled journey, and is impossible to put down.

Clay Jensen arrives home after a typical day of school to find a package waiting for him at the front door. When he discovers that there is no return address, he becomes curious as to what it might be. When he rips open the package, he finds seven cassette tapes with blue numbers, one through thirteen, neatly painted on each side. When he takes out his dad's old cassette player and presses play, his life will change forever. Through the static of the speakers, Clay hears a familiar voice and his heart stops. It was Hannah:

Hello, boys and girls. Hannah Baker here. Live and in stereo. No return engagements. No encore. And this time, no requests. 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 reasons why.

Clay is devastated by these words and he feels as if the world has collapsed around him. He has always had a crush on Hannah but had been too shy to approach her. Clay spends the next 24 hours traveling through town following a map that corresponds with Hannah's stories, and trying to figure out how he could have caused the death of someone he loved. As Clay listens to tape after tape, story after story, things that in the beginning of her story seemed insignificant, escalated. Each small action had a bigger and more damaging effect on Hannah's life. Each reason worse than the one before. While Clay is anxiously waiting to hear his story, he realizes that this is what Hannah calls "the snowball effect". The snowball effect is when one event causes another and each time the action and its effect increase in size and damage. Eventually it becomes a long line of events that have spiraled out of control. Hannah believes that the snowball effect is the reason for her falling into depression.

The snowball effect is a concept that is all too real in the average person's life, which is one reason why I found *Thirteen Reasons Why* so intriguing. Feeling out of control of your life is something that I think everyone experiences at least once in their life. This relatable concept was key to making the book feel so realistic. Asher also gives the main characters so much depth and complexity that it was easy to feel a personal connection to them. They all have flaws and downfalls just like real people, and I think that most readers would be able to see a little bit of themselves in one of the characters. By far the plotline itself was my favorite aspect of the book because it was unique and interesting and it really kept me engaged the entire time I read it; but the plot wouldn't have been as effective without being so realistic and having such well-developed characters.

Overall, *Thirteen Reasons Why* was very well written and had many positive aspects such as the well-developed characters, abundant plot twists, and details that keep you hanging onto every word. I felt that the one downfall of this book was in the format. *Thirteen Reasons Why* has a very unique format because it gives the first person point of view of two characters at the same time. Many books that have multiple points of view, give each character a section of the book. But through the concept of the protagonist listening to a video diary, you get to listen to Hannah's deepest thoughts and opinions, and Clay's thoughts and side comments regarding each of Hannah's stories. At first, I had a bit of a hard time differentiating Hannah's and Clay's

thoughts. This was only a minor downfall though, because once I adjusted to this style of writing it seemed to flow more naturally.

I would recommend this book to all readers because it has a little bit of everything, from suspense to romance. I applaud Asher for executing this perfectly. Even though the plotline was wildly detailed and intricate he was still able to convey such a strong message and teach an important lesson that I will carry with me forever. It is so important to be conscious of how you act towards others, because you never know what can trigger a snowball effect.