

# The lovely bones essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Alice Sebold's book, *The Lovely Bones*, recounts the death and life-after-death of the charming protagonist, Susie Salmon. Raped, murdered, and dismembered at fourteen by her neighbor, Mr.

Harvey, Susie gazes back at the Earth and family she left behind from a gazebo on her own slice of heaven. In her heaven, Susie need only wish for something and it would be hers instantly. However, this heaven, Susie knows, is only a rest stop on her way to the permanent heaven. In light of Susie's situation, this permanent Heaven that she is seeking for relates to the ultimate question her short life has failed to answer: Who am I, really? Because she died young, Susie missed out on a lot of opportunities to come to terms with herself.

Susie was just about to come-of-age when her life was violently ended; she just had her first kiss a few days before her murder with an Indian boy, Ray Singh. The end of her Earthly existence, though, was surpassed by the continuing development of her spiritual self. What Susie could no longer achieve, then, on the physical plane, is achieved on the metaphysical.

Sebold delves deep into her characters, shining light on the dark alienation that envelops each and every one of them. It is through Susie, though, that the alienation has reached a critical point. Susie is both physically and emotionally isolated, unlike the other characters who only withdrew within themselves yet were still very much subject to their surroundings.

Her situation presents an interesting problem: how could Susie, who continues to live albeit in an unusual manner, realize her true self if she is devoid of the interactions and experiences that are a must in forming one's

identity? Though most of the characters in the novel, save for George Harvey, undergo a process of growth in the novel, Susie's transformation is by far the most complex, as it not only chronicles a young girl's acceptance of her own loss, but also traces the establishment of her own character and identity. The novel begins with Susie introducing herself: " My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. " Salmon have only one goal in life - to reproduce. They accomplish this by swimming upstream against strong and dangerous currents, laying their eggs once they reach their destination.

It is a journey against nearly insurmountable odds, but it is a journey that the salmon must accomplish in order to ensure the continuation of its species. Susie, a " salmon" herself, goes through the same process in order for her to establish her own identity. Whereas a typical girl goes through common route of growing up - having their first kiss, their first date, their first break-up - Susie can no longer experience all of these. Hence, she loses a big chunk of the experiences that could help her determine who she is and what she wants with her life. Like the salmon, Susie must " swim" against odds, " growing up" by taking an alternate route to her desired destination, that of knowing and defining herself.

The alternative path that presents itself to Susie is her ability to spy on the activities of her family and friends. By constantly being able to see what the people she has left behind does when they think no one is looking, Susie notes how they change and fashion themselves. Initially, Susie tries to find the answers to all her questions on Earth through these people. However, as she slowly sees them easing back again into their lives before the " Susie-

fest” happened, confronting their grief and sadness by exercising their right to live, Susie is also forced to confront the answers she has been avoiding.

For Susie, this omniscience that she has been granted is invaluable to her own quest to know and understand herself. As she finds bits and pieces of clues through her incessant observations, she recreates the world she has left behind, a world that needs to continue moving despite her loss. By realizing and accepting this fact, Susie is also able to come to terms with herself. All of Susie’s realizations are precipitated by the return of Abigail, Susie’s mother, from California upon receiving news of her husband Jack’s heart attack. I was beginning to wonder if this had been what I was waiting for,” Susie ponders, “ for my family to come home, not to me anymore but to one another with me gone.

” Even her meeting with her grandfather foreshadows these realizations as he tells her not to worry because “ you’re so close. ” Susie, indeed, was close to answering her own questions about herself and the life that has been cut short by violence. The novel’s end, however, signifies that Susie’s transformation is not yet complete even if she has already reached a certain understanding and acceptance of her situation. This is seen in Susie’s rejoinder to the declaration that “ this little girl’s all grown up by now” by the couple who found her charm bracelet: “ Almost. Not quite. I wish you all a happy life.

” Susie is bidding good bye to her fixation on all things Earthbound as she knows that in her quest for identity, she could no longer find the answers on Earth. She knows that she must look someplace else, and that she must,

finally, take Franny’s advice “ to stop desiring certain answers...to give up on Earth. ”