

Crow lake – education



Education. A word that resonates differently with everyone, but resonates deeply nonetheless. To some it is seen as a means to maintain their current, comfortable lifestyle where to others it is seen as nothing more than a waste of time and yet to others still it opens the door to numerous opportunities for a better life. On the most part though, our society as a whole seems to agree that education is the pathway to success. Not coincidentally, this is also the stance taken by most authors in modern day literature.

This theme of education is clearly presented within two completely different texts: Mary Lawson's *Crow Lake*, and David Auburn's *Proof*, though not necessarily in the most traditional sense of the word. The characters in both texts are greatly influenced by education, both formal and informal, which in turn, becomes a key element in their overall success. Formal education takes a powerful position in both *Crow Lake* as well as in *Proof*, and is part of the reason the characters in both find themselves becoming successful.

Crow Lake From the very beginning of the novel, Kate Morrison, the main protagonist, informs the readers of how much her family truly valued education, starting with great-grand mother Morrison who "fixed a bookrest to her spinning wheel so she could read while spinning" (Lawson). Because great-grand mother Morrison realized the value of education, she instilled the same value in her family, which was then passed down from generation to generation. Finally, one child was able to complete his education- Kate's father.

Kate's father went on to become the most successful Morrison- the first Morrison to get a job in the city and escape the tough farming life (Lawson).

In the same way Kate was the only one of the four Morrison children to go on to post-secondary education and as a result, achieved a high level of success, from her job as a professor to her having escaped Crow Lake and moving to Toronto (Lawson). Similarly, the characters in David Auburn's Proof have excelled in life because of their formal education.

Catherine's father, Robert, was a world renowned mathematician by the time he was 25, Catherine's age, and despite succumbing to mental illness soon after, achieved stardom within the mathematical community (Auburn 10). His was a name that was seen as the epitome of success, with fame following him even after he went " crazy". Hal, one of his students, even goes so far as to call him the best, continuing on with: " my generation hasn't produced anything like him. He revolutionized the field twice before he was twenty-two" (Auburn 64).

Even once we step outside the realm of mathematics, we can see how a formal education can lead to a successful career as we look at Claire, Catherine's elder sister and arguably the most successful character in the entire play. Claire, having earned her University degree, was able to secure a job which allowed her to move to New York, the city that she loves and settle down with her fiancée, Mitch, the man that she loves (Auburn 26). With both Robert and Claire we can see the roads that would have been otherwise cut off to them, opened through a formal education.

Integral as formal education is, informal education is also a key element to a successful life, shown through how the various characters of both Crow Lake and Proof deal with their dysfunctional families and how they gained from

those experiences. In Crow Lake, Kate's earliest, most fundamental memories, the memories which would shape who she would become, were of the times she spent by the pond with her elder brother, Matt. Matt was the person who molded her entire life, without even intending to do so.

There is no image of my childhood that I carry with me more clearly than that, a boy of fifteen or sixteen, fair-haired and lanky; beside him a little girl... he is showing her things and he is telling her about them (Lawson 4-5). Matt is responsible for cultivating her passion for biology and inspires her dream of becoming a biologist. Furthermore, besides Kate, Luke, the eldest Morrison child, due to the family's circumstances, is forced to take on the role of "mother" for the younger children. Out of necessity he becomes the legal guardian for Kate, Bo and Matt and in order to keep them together, he gives up his own at a higher education.

Luke learns how to care for the children who, despite living in the same house, never really communicated with each other, and tentatively steps up to the plate of parenthood. He cooks cleans and cares for Bo, which up until the very day their parents had died, had never even held Bo (Lawson). These course of events, from the death of his parents to raising Bo, shaped who he was and how he turned out.

Now he is living happily, perhaps even happier than anyone else because he had never really wanted to be a teacher in the first place. Likewise in Proof,. Most of Catherine's success can be chalked up to the informal education she received at the hands of her father. As she barely even attended University, Catherine herself attributes her mathematical

proficiency to spending so much time at home, subject to the influence of Robert. Catherine: " I'm a mathematician too... he's the only one who could have done this? " Hal: "...I'm sorry Catherine but you took a few classes at Northwestern for a few months. " Catherine: " My education wasn't at Northwestern's. It was living in this house for twenty-five years"

Catherine was still able to write the proof, even With her limited amount of formal education, because of the extent of her informal education, not only from her father, but also because of her own drive to learn more. She achieved this with the help of numerous books, through which she was able to learn new, " hip" techniques, some of which Hal didn't even " think he [Robert] would have been able to master" (Auburn 79-80), and therefore attributed to Catherine getting credit for her work, no doubt leading to a more successful life than the one she had been previously living.

Thus, it is painfully obvious that in the case of these two texts, informal education has been an immensely important element of success for the characters. Education is vital in ensuring a bright future for ourselves, shown clearly in the way the characters in both Crow Lake and Proof learn to value traditional education but also in how they learn to live with the obstacles life throws their way. In dealing with the dysfunctional families found in each text, the characters in both Crow Lake as well as Proof learn valuable lessons, lessons they could never have learned through regular, classroom education.