

Al capone does my shirts by gennifer choldenko literature review examples

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



The book is a young adult's novel written by Gennifer Choldenko back in the year 2004 and published by Putnam's Sons with approximately 215 pages in the first printing. As a young adult's novel, the book is written for people ages 10 and up. Along with this, the protagonist is set to be 12 years old so that other young adults can relate to it more (Literature Circle) (Putnam Sons).

The book revolves around the life of Matthew "Moose" Flanagan and his family moving into the prison island of Alcatraz Island in the year 1935 as his father (Cameron "Cam" Flanagan) works two jobs there, an electrician and a guard whom Moose looks up to. The reason for their move is so that his parents can pay for the education of his sister Natalie "Nat" Flanagan who was autistic but was not diagnosed as such at the time.

The change of life is difficult for the 12 year old Moose and he faced the challenges of a kid moving into a new place; missing the life he once had, like playing baseball and finding recognition in his new school. He befriends a girl named Piper Williams, the daughter of the warden, who drags him along into her cloth washing scheme in school where she tells the kids in school that Al Capone is part of the inmates in Alcatraz that is on wash duty. Natalie does not get into Esther P. Marinoff School which crushes her parents but Moose takes care of her after school whenever her mother was, in turn, giving music lessons. Eventually Moose starts to find enjoyment in his life on the island and even makes a friend (Annie) who plays baseball with him. In the end, after the Flanagan's try and fail repeatedly to get Nat into the Marinoff School, Moose secretly writes a letter to Al Capone about his plight. A few weeks pass and to the delight of the Flanagan's, Nat finally gets into

the newly built Autism wing of the school. In the end, Moose is shown to receive a note in a newly washed shirt with the word “ DONE” written on it (Brown) (Putnam Sons).

The book is not the only one in the series of Alcatraz and Moose however, and his story is not the only book of the author. The Southern Californian based writer has written other novels which has around a total of 1 million in print worldwide. This list of books include the subject of this essay, Al Capone Does My Shirts, its sequel, Al Capone Shines My Shoes, a planned third book in the series, A Giant Crush, How to Make Friends with a Giant, If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period, Louder, Lili, Moonstruck: The True Story of the Cow Who Jumped Over the Moon, No Passenger Beyond this Point, and her first book that was published in 2001, Notes From a Liar and her Dog (Choldenko).

Defending the Book

The book can be considered as good piece of literary work as it was able to put the experience of moving for a 12 year old into a story that can be appreciated by everyone. The story also uses basic emotional ties and situations as a launch pad for more emotionally gripping situations which are as simple yet as heart wrenching as their foundations. These foundations include Moose’s love for his family, the care he exudes for his sister, the change in his mother about his sister and his good intentions.

There are some places that the book goes into that makes it seem for a more mature audience however. As with the case of the morality, why some people see gangsters as folk heroes, the ends justifying the means, the sexual overtones and Al Capone actually helping Moose out to attain a good

end despite the question of the infamous gangster's influence. These situations may have brought some more attention to the fact that the target audience is actually growing and will need to face these questions soon enough.

Despite this however, the book is still a coming of age book which shows just how much a change of scenery comes a long way in possible changing the outlook of a person. Furthermore, it wasn't only Moose that changed in his outlook, but the people around him too; his mother is a good instance of this while there were those that were, in a way, more than met the eye like Piper; in her case, Moose does befriend her, and she does help him out and changes in the end, but in spite of this, her obnoxious attitude in the beginning makes it hard for the audience to like her at first as a complex person (Literature Circle).

Despite the book being actually intended for young adults, it is still a good book to read for individuals who are at a younger age such as college students, as there are times when it is fun to remember what it feels like to be put in a situation where you have almost no control of something and be expected to come out of the other side unscathed. In a way, this is exactly what college is. Furthermore, the themes of the novel is universal enough in its nature that it does not mean that, just because it was written for people who are at least ten years of age, it cannot be read by people who are older, indeed, most young adult novels are read by people at least 18 years of age.

Numerous reviews of the book have placed warnings on the book for mild language, the look into violence from a different perspective to the point that

it may have glorified gangsters and the life of a criminal inside the prison. There were also numerous adult and sexual themes such as Moose being worried for Nat when he goes off to find his baseball and see her talking to Prisoner #105, the fact that he directs the attention of the audience towards his crotch when he was talking about Piper, the warden subtly telling him that some of the inmates have been sexually deprived for ten to even fifteen years and the fact that underwear is not permitted to be sent to the laundry as the inmates do it which hints at the question of what do the inmates do to women's underwear once they get their hands on it.

One such review was made by Matt Berman for Common Sense media who put the age of the book for 11 year olds and gave it three out of five stars. In the same review where parents also gave their reviews, they gave it four out of five stars and in turn, kids also gave it four out of five stars. The website of Barnes & Noble in turn gives it four out of five stars. These reviews were not "one sided" however as they also looked into the possible 'negative' aspects of the book such as its themes.

Other adult themes exist in the relationship between Moose, his mother and his sister which is thankfully resolved before the end of the book, again, the acts of violence within the island and the fear and intrigue that the residence of the island feels towards the inmates, especially the children and even the explanation of what a shiv is. This still did not hinder reviewers from calling it a children's book however as it does have the makings of a children's book, the target of its audience and the fact that even the adult themes are put into a mild perspective for those coming of age to not feel out of place or inappropriate (Brown).

The book is also unique in its style and genre. While it is not the only book that you will read that is about a person coming of age, or change, or having an autistic member of the family, it becomes unique because of the mixture of these three fields and the space and substance of the book itself. Being set in the 1930's, the Great Depression looming in the background, the dangerous job and location of the family, and even the inmates adds a brand and flavor to the book as, while the setting is different, even the moral basis of judgment and the rights of people were very different back then, it is still a story that most can relate to (Literature Circle).

It is also unique in its way of writing. Yes, a story from a first person's view is not new, neither is it new that the story comes from a child, but the fact that Moose faces a different façade to an age old problem makes the book a good read. The book even becomes more unique in its own right when the fact that he wishes to remain a good child—although he is obviously annoyed with the way how their mother treats his siblings, gets mixed with their uncommon way of solving the dilemma.

His sister's predicament is also another thing that makes the book unique. Again, autism is not a new topic, but the idea of Moose being the only person that could actually take care of her does add flavor and excitement to the book as it provides the audience a clearer picture what it actually feels like to live with an individual with autism. Furthermore, because autism was not known at the time, the way the family handles autism is also another element that made the book unique.

It showed that, while it was a common problem, the solutions were not known and this type of treatment towards autism at the time can be

paralleled to different problem solving solutions in this day and age (Brown). Moose is one of the factors that make the story and the book in general, unique. In another review also for the website of Common Sense Media written by Norah Piehl it has been stated that "What really makes this a winning novel, though, is not the setting but its main character. Moose, who narrates the story, is responsible and trustworthy in spite of himself" His way of thinking, his belief, his way of getting along with everyone on the island despite the challenges he faces (some of them heavy enough to crush a grown man) and the ingenious solutions he comes up with makes the book a very good read. The main highlight of this moment is when he goes off to ask for the help of Al Capone himself despite the fact that he did not know if the infamous gangster would even be able to help him or if the message would even get to him.

In all these things, the book makes a name for itself in its way of presenting a world that can be paralleled to almost any type of life that the reader may be leading in the present. From the feeling of being trapped, even when you are not a criminal, the moral ambiguity of life in general and the innocence of love when it comes to the desires of man. For these ideas to appear in a book written for ten year olds, makes this book one to read no matter the age of the reader.

Works Cited

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