

Michelle kuo's reading with patrick | rhetorical analysis



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

Michelle Kuo's debut memoir, *Reading With Patrick*, explores the disadvantage of black youth in the rural South from the perspective of an urban, Harvard-educated teacher. The author establishes a deep relationship with Patrick, one of her students, who is later jailed for committing murder. Michelle finds Patrick and makes it her goal to read with him every day so that he can continue his education. Kuo's memoir is a deep look into inequality, race, and the power of literature through friendship; it is as much about growing up Asian in America as it is about growing up black and impoverished, and the former is tied to the immigrant experience.

Purpose

In the book, Kuo delves into difficult questions about what it means for a teacher to develop a relationship with a student across lines of difference. The author is particularly familiar with racism in the face of the difficult situations her students face. As the child of Taiwanese immigrants, Kuo shares a similar experience with her black students in Arkansas in terms of racial discrimination given that Asian Americans are not seen as Americans because of their facial attributes. The writer narrates how her first encounter with the students was strange, particularly that most of her students had not met an Asian before and gazed at her in disbelief. "What you is?" they would ask and with a solemn expression, some students would question if she were related to Jackie Chan, a popular Hong Kongese martial artist (Kuo, 20). Therefore, Kuo finds it extremely challenging to build a relationship with the students having backgrounds different from her own.

Further, the author captures the unfavorable learning conditions that the impoverished black kids along with their teachers are subjected to in Helena, Arkansas. In particular, the Teach for America project was heavily criticized because several well-intentioned students such as Kuo are shoved into underserved schools with insufficient penetration (Kuo, 13). Similar to the students, the teachers are victims of more structural issues to include the absence of strong school and district leadership; the inadequate system of training and supporting teachers; and inequitable funding. The rate of attrition is increasingly high and affects not only the students and teachers but the community at large. Given the state of education, one grandparent conveyed sadness to Kuo, saying that the gloomiest day is high school graduation because those kids leave the town and never get back.

The Author

Michelle Kuo is a US-born daughter of Taiwanese immigrants who grew up in Michigan. The author labeled herself “obedient, sweet, and weak” until she discovered her “role models in books” (Kuo Bio). Kuo turned to writers such as Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, and W. E. B. Du Bois who came out as fearless to her as Asian Americans writers were either missing or silenced by a history that seemed predominantly white and black. At Harvard, she met activists to places that needed people, which led her to the Mississippi Delta under the Teach For America initiative. She says, “I went ... with a specific project: to teach American history through black literature” (Kuo Bio).

In 2004, Kuo went to teach at a school in Helena, Arkansas. The institution, she says, was a dumping ground for kids who had been arrested on charges,

kicked out, or who has become of age and therefore would negatively influence younger kids in the middle school. She then met Patrick, a quiet and introspective student, when he was 15 and in the eighth grade. According to Kuo, Patrick was eager to learn and had a feeling of being someone who was usually observing his peers instead of getting sucked into their world. Moreover, the teenager was naturally drawn to writing and poetry which he understood intuitively, and by the end of the year, Patrick received an award for the Most “Improved.” Kuo left the Delta after completion of her two years, and in her third year of law school at Harvard, she got news that Patrick had been involved in a violent fight and had been arrested for murder (Kuo, 43). The author was in the middle of classes, had exams coming up, and a fellowship in legal aid lined up, but she needed to head back to Helena and see Patrick and figure out what had transpired. Kuo then flew to Arkansas and visited Patrick in jail.

The Audience

One of Kuo's audience is Asian Americans since the minority population does not have stories where they fit into the black-white discourse (Evenchik and Jr). Asian Americans do not feel permission to discuss their position on race because they are made to feel ashamed of the notion that they have the privilege or the perception that they are the model minority. The author feels that stories about how difficult it is for Asian Americans to pursue social justice are hardly seen on the mainstream media because it is perceived as a risk to their immigrant parent. The other target audience, Kuo clarifies, is the elite liberal of any race who is self-congratulatory about their beliefs devoid of the necessary humility required as a country (Kuo, 11). The author further <https://assignbuster.com/michelle-kuos-reading-with-patrick-rhetorical-analysis/>

states that the lack of humility was profound especially after the election. These liberals know little about rural areas, and there is a significant divide between urban and rural, between the rich and the poor.

The Message

Kuo's enthralling message is the exploration of education along with its insightful glimpse into societal inequality. Her students are largely descendants of black families, who due to their "blackness," the quality of education delivered to them is completely substandard. The eighth-graders, for instance, were reading at a fifth-or fourth-grade level, and teachers had to find to look for suitable content for the students (Kuo, 21). Kuo could not believe that and admittedly, did not understand what that meant. As such, she went ahead and presented to the class a James Baldwin short story. The students, in response, got increasingly frustrated because the language was too complex for their comprehension. She also gave the class a Malcolm X's speech and no one was moved; instead, the entire class got bored. Kuo notes that the black students' academic failure was as a result of ancestral, edifying, and socioeconomic issues as well as lack of institutional readiness to help students obtain fundamental skills of literacy.

Further, Kuo's *Reading with Patrick* sends a powerful message about the power of literature through friendship. According to a recent study, "having one black teacher in elementary school makes children more likely to graduate in high school and enroll in college as well" (Rosen). The numbers of students enrolling in college increase when there is a black male added to the equation. However, Kuo's memoir deviates from the trend and colors the

general perspective on what is required from a diverse coalition; she was not male, non-black, and did not hail from Helena. In essence, Kuo's relationship with Patrick bridged all of the differences to the point where the black student became an incredible writer and reader. The author, therefore, affirms that she achieved the breakthrough by reading together with Patrick every day. The act of showing up, she says, should not be underestimated and that when two people read together, there is something about the text that links them, because both have something to admire, to cherish, to disagree with, to ponder and it does become a basis of a strong relationship.

Techniques Used To Advance the Message

In the book, *Reading With Patrick*, Kuo pursues her passion for racial issues and social justice. First, by adopting an easy and compassionate tone, she engages her audience in a serious issue without turning the reader off with too weighty a presentation or too somber a tone. The author is also careful to select easy-to-grasp but striking ways of conveying a message. She candidly explains how the ineffective education system and how social stratification has led to the exclusion of black teenagers in terms of obtaining quality education. Sentences appear to be reasonably short and use familiar vocabulary, such as "Before school began, the Stars principal had warned me that the eighth graders were reading at a fourth- or fifth-grade level" (Kuo 21). Some simple and direct stories are narrated about how the classroom environment. Kuo's description of individual students is unusually moving and perspective. She narrates, "A girl named Kayla, who had been removed from the district's regular high school for fighting, writes herself a

letter that says, “ I hope that when trouble comes your way, you would just hold your head high and walk away with a smile on your face” (Kuo 41).

There does not appear to be any deception involved in Kuo's memoir, and there is no reason to disbelieve any of the information presented. She talked about the unsanitary prison condition as told to her by Patrick, which was later closed (Kuo 154). Kuo also highlights how the judicial system is biased in relation to Patrick's murder case; had it been a white man who had trespassed, he would have argued on the basis of self-defense, but given that it was a black man, he is charged with a violent felony and sent to an overcrowded prison. The book is a raw, human account of a friendship between a teacher and a student. The sincerity and compassion employed in the account are touching.

Conclusion

When reading Kuo's *Reading With Patrick*, one would expect a story of one heroic teacher who saved a teenager from a life of violence through literature. However, the book is a human account of a friendship between a teacher, her student, and the books they read. The transparency of the author's storytelling is refreshing as she allows the reader to look through her idealism, her self-doubt, and her attempts to become the teacher she desired. The author also recounts how the school she taught in is a dumping place for the worst students in the region, staffed by mostly incompetent teachers and school administrators' count for transfer to another institution or the days to retirement. In the process, Kuo helped a black student, a

disadvantaged minority in the US, just as the American Asians to accept his troubled past and learn to look toward the future with greater hope.

Works Cited

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