

The book thief essay essay sample



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Many meaningful language features and techniques are used by Markus Zusak in the historical fiction novel; *The Book Thief* to develop the idea of humanities extremes. Throughout this book these techniques work together to demonstrate the utter distinction between man-kinds potential for both beauty and cruelty. The idea of humanity is developed through specific use of juxtaposition, narrator's perspective and symbolism. This idea is demonstrated frequently in literature which shows how the idea is universal; our capacity for cruelty and beauty isn't confined to time and place, and will always exist.

Many texts juxtapose our extremes in order to show the excessive variation of our potential. Isn't it strange how we use one extreme in order to gain another? It is like the concept of war; gaining peace through conflict. Markus Zusak also uses juxtaposition to show our confusing and illogical purpose of using 'ugly' to find 'beauty' and using 'beauty' to overcome 'ugly'. An incident where this is demonstrated is when Rudy places a teddy bear next to a dying soldier in a plane wreck. Using juxtaposition here is effective as it is slightly strange that two opposites are being placed side by side, but this highlights the confusing nature we have; the potential for so much evil and so much good.

The choice of narrative perspective in *The Book Thief* is very appropriate and effective when it comes to the development of the theme of the extremes of humanity. Zusak chose death as the narrator; a strange and unique choice, however it backs up his strange and unique perception of humanity. Most texts about the Holocaust in WW2 are from a Jewish perspective however to create a different effect Zusak appropriately chooses a different narrator.

Death, was a strong character and a very familiar occurrence in the time in Germany when Hitler was ruling. Therefore using narrative perspective helps develop a story line which also develops the idea of the extremes of humanity which was very prominent during this time.

The Germans during WW2 would have had the same potential to achieve both good and evil however because of the authority and charisma of Hitler, they were victimized and forced to display only one side of themselves. In amongst these people however there was the occasional exception who sacrificed compassion for peril. One family who did just this was the Hubermann's in *The Book Thief*. Death observes their kindness in the book after they take on Max; a Jew who says " Life had altered in the wildest possible way, but it was imperative that they act as if nothing at all had happened. Imagine smiling after a slap in the face.

Then think of doing it twenty-four hours a day. That was the business of hiding a Jew". The kindness shown by Rosa and Hans was stronger than their fear of being punished; their love was stronger than the hate of Hitler. This is all shown by the narrative perspective of death. Using this character as the narrator serves a very important role as it explores our extremes in an unbiased and removed way because it is an omniscient character. This combines to develop the idea of humanity; that we all have the potential for good and evil and whichever side we show depends on the situation we find ourselves in. The trick is having the values to know that good always triumphs over evil.

In addition, symbolism is another very effective technique used by Zusak in order to display the two extremes of mankind. He uses different symbols to represent different aspects of humanity. A very distinctive and effective symbol used throughout this novel to develop the idea of humanity is Hans' accordion. This symbol explores the beauty of mankind as it provides Max with hope and demonstrates the capacity for kindness in amongst such cruelty. He used this to overcome and escape the horrors of his life including the daunting and pressuring aspect of becoming a member of the Nazi's and the harsh treatment from his wife. Zusak also develops the symbol of the Nazi's and the swastika. Zusak possibly chose these symbols in *The Book Thief* to create a memorable effect; to help readers remember how simple symbols actually changed the lives of millions, so much so they are still powerful today. This shows how symbolism was used in *The Book Thief* in order to develop the theme of humanity.

The extent of our potential in terms of beauty and cruelty is extreme. As death observes in *The Book Thief*; " I'm always finding humans at their best and worst. I see their ugly and their beauty, and I wonder how the same thing can be both". This shows how each one of us has the ability to show incredible kindness and brutality. This also shows all how much more our beauty is valued and how much our cruelty is despised. And lastly it shows the need for more kindness and love in our world today. Wars are still being fought, crimes are still being committed. The fact is there will always be evil in man; in every country, in every race, in every age. However we can overcome this and replace it with good.

In conclusion I believe Markus Zusak is very successful in developing the theme of humanity using various techniques. Juxtaposition, narrator's perspective and symbolism are especially successful. They help readers understand the confusing and predictable nature we have because our potential to achieve two extremes is unbelievable.