

The tragic life of
oscar wao:
understanding the
downfall of a virtuous
protagonis...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the novel, *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz, the main protagonist, Oscar de Leon, is introduced to the reader as a despicable and a rather distasteful individual. He is characterized as an overweight nerd who is often avoided by the people, and particularly the woman, around him. However, Oscar's tragic life provides evidence that he can be considered an Aristotelian tragic hero. Oscar de Leon, in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz, is a tragic hero because he is naturally virtuous, possesses tragic flaws, and is faced with undeserved misfortune.

Oscar views himself as a hero and, by nature, is an individual of virtue despite some of his insensible behavior. Throughout the novel, Oscar often visualizes himself through these fictional heroic characters, showing that he desires being a hero. For instance, the moment before his death Oscar gives this speech: " He told them that it was only because of her love that he'd been able to do the thing that he had done, the thing they could no longer stop, told them if they killed him they would probably feel nothing and their children would probably feel nothing either, not until they were old and weak or about to be struck by a car and then they would sense him waiting for them on the other side and over there he wouldn't be no fatboy or dork or kid no girl had ever loved; over there he'd be a hero, an avenger. Because anything you can dream (he put his hands up) you can be" (Diaz 321). In his speech, Oscar views himself as a hero who will avenge his own death in the afterlife. In addition to Oscar's heroic inward view of himself, he also demonstrates heroic traits described by Aristotle. A tragic hero must be partly a good moral character: " Accordingly, Aristotle says that the tragic hero will most effectively evoke both our pity and terror if he is neither

thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad but a mixture of both..." (Abrams and Harpham 386). The first example of Oscar's kindness is observed when he meets Ana Obregon. Oscar listens to Ana talk about her life and even tries to protect her from Manny, Ana's abusive boyfriend. Another example of Oscar's thoughtfulness is seen when Lola runs away. Oscar was clearly worried about Lola because he asks about her on the phone and begins crying. Finally, while Oscar is teaching at Don Bosco, he sympathizes and tries to look out for the students who were being bullied. These examples show that Oscar possessed good moral character and proves that his was naturally virtuous.

Oscar's tragic flaw was his desperate search for love and his inability to accept responsibility. Aristotle's tragic hero must have some flaw or error in judgment which is unknowingly the character's reason for his or her demise (386). Not only did Oscar attempt suicide because of his blind pursuit of love, but that was what ultimately killed him in the end. However, Oscar was not aware that he was actually searching for the wrong thing all along. " But what really got him was not the bam-bam-bam of sex- it was the little intimacies that he'd never in his whole life anticipated..." (Diaz 334). Oscar was really seeking the compassion his mother never gave him as a child; Yunior realizes this lack of affection in his narration: " A heart like mine, which never got any kind of affection growing up, is terrible above all things" (185). In addition, Oscar is disillusioned by the stigmatism of Dominican masculinity. Being born into a Dominican family, Oscar is burdened with the expectations of getting all the ladies. Perhaps if Oscar made these realizations earlier, he would have avoided his tragic death. Oscar's second

tragic flaw was his refusal to accept that he had control over his life: “ Right before I headed out, he said; It was the curse that made me do it, you know” (Diaz 194). Throughout the novel, Oscar is constantly blaming his misfortunes on his family curse known as “ fukú” but, if Oscar decided to take responsibility, his life might have turned out differently. For example, Lola was affected by the fukú during the early stages of her life. However, once Lola started to change her life in the Dominican Republic, she started to have more “ zafa” or luck. Similarly, if Oscar had listened to Yunior and continued to better himself, Oscar might have been able to find love after all. Oscar’s misfortune might have been fukú or not; either way Oscar should have taken responsibility for his shortcomings. Clearly, Oscar possesses a tragic flaw of pursuing love and not taking responsibility.

Oscar’s undeserved misfortune is the fukú that has cursed his family for decades. Aristotle defines a tragedy as follows: “ The end or purpose of tragedy, accordingly, is the catharsis of pity and fear and similar emotions ... Fear is occasioned by the misfortunes of one like ourselves and pity by undeserved misfortune” (Reeves 186). From the title of the novel, readers are already aware that Oscar will have a brief life. This dramatic irony is what instills fear and anticipation in the reader. After the narrator explains the origins of the fukú that plagues Oscar’s family, the reader is forced to feel pity. Abelard Luis Cabral’s stubbornness in refusing to allow Trujillo to sleep with his daughter and his refusal to flee the island is what started the fukú. Eventually, this fukú will terrorize the lives of the de Leon’s, including the innocent Oscar. Oscar’s fukú comes in the form of the disdain that Oscar receives from women throughout the story. This rejection is unwarranted

because the readers know that Oscar would be a loyal and kind boyfriend. Regardless, Oscar's fukú prevents him from finding the affection that he was looking for. The destiny that Oscar is forced to live with is daunting to a reader and raises questions about the argument of fate versus free will. In the end, Oscar's undeserved misfortune is the fukú that has tragically led to his death.

Oscar de Leon, in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz, is a tragic hero because he is naturally virtuous, possesses tragic flaws, and is faced with undeserved misfortune. Perhaps, Oscar isn't the "knight in shining armor" we may like him to be, and his death might not be considered the most honorable, but he does portray characteristics of an Aristotelian tragic hero. In fact, Oscar de Leon may just be a modern-day Oedipus.